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The reception at the Boca train stop was underwhelming. No one was there. There was no station building. The vegetation was strange. No telephone. No civilization in sight. The train ride from Boston to Boca Raton, FL had been long. I was a third year student at Northeastern University until August 1943 and had signed up with the Army Air Force almost a year earlier. During that time, my rides on the trolley and subway from home to NU were occasionally accompanied by stares from other passengers and sometimes questions from motherly looking ladies about why I was still attending school while their boys were off fighting the war.

A jeep finally showed up to transport me to the Boca Raton Club. The Club was very impressive with a wide drive lined with tall palms and backed by a green golf course. Living there as a cadet was less than luxurious, though, as we policed the area for cigarette butts, and made sure there were no wet spots in the shower or dust above the doors. We marched every day on the golf course, me for the first two weeks in my blue suit because there were no fatigues of my size available. This was the beginning of training to be an Aircraft Maintenance Officer?

After a few weeks at Boca Raton we were transferred to Seymour Johnson AAB in North Carolina for more of the same basic training. Then to Yale University in New Haven, CT for aircraft and engine technical classes, maintenance procedures and engine changes plus more marching and a formal retreat on the village green every week. I still hang my shirts in the closet with the fronts facing left. Also, I got “washed back” a week when in charge of an engine change I allowed a cadet to skip tightening a screw on the cowling that was “too hard to reach”.

Graduation and commissioning took place at Yale and I was assigned to a P-40 fighter training unit in Marianna, FL. The first day there I sat at an empty table in the crowded mess hall, a brand new second lieutenant, wondering why no one else took advantage of it. Very soon it was apparent why it was empty when the base CO came in and sat across from me.

After Marianna came the duty of maintenance officer for a squadron of P-51s in Bartow, FL. Actually that was the first time I had been close to a P-51 and had a lot to learn. But my biggest problem was watching those fellows run out to the planes, taxi out in file and take off into the cumulous-filled Florida skies. I was passionate about getting flight training but the CO said no. However, not thinking about how the Army works, I persuaded my medic friend to give me a flight physical which was sent directly to Washington, DC with a request for flight training in grade. The negative answer came back through channels (the CO) and he became unreasonably upset about my leaving him out of the loop. After that, there didn't seem to be much future at Bartow AAF until another buddy in the orderly room told me about a recent request for B-29 flight engineer volunteers. Without delay my application was on the way (through channels) and I soon shipped out to Alamogordo, NM (another train).

The first time I saw B-29s parked on the ramp at Alamogordo AAB I was amazed. What a magnificent aircraft! The ground and flight training were intensive and we soon shipped out to join B-29 units for crew training, some of us to the 330th Bomb Group at Walker AAB near Hays, KS. Before being assigned to crews we were sent away again to Lowry AAF in Denver for advanced cruise control training. Upon return to Walker, the routine in frigid Kansas was formation flying, low level gunnery and navigation flights locally and from Batista Field, Cuba, over the Caribbean. The B-29s were still having engine problems.

Finally we left Walker for Lincoln, NB to pick up the future K-7. With Jim Bradford A/C, the other 10 of us in the crew and Guy Hall, our airplane crew chief, we flew to Sacramento, CA, received our orders and a flight lunch, and continued to Oahu then Kwajalein and to Guam where we arrived on April 3, 1945.

Quonset huts were ready for us on Guam but the only water was from a Lister bag, usually as warm as Guam for drinking, shaving and bathing (from a helmet). Clever scheduling would allow rinsing the body in the usually dependable afternoon rain shower. After a couple weeks of drinking that warm Lister bag water, the brass arranged a serving of one cold beer a day (probably got it from the Navy). I had never liked beer but immediately acquired a taste for it that persists to this day. On a scale of 1-10 the mess tent/mess hall food rated an honest 1.5. The canned kangaroo smelled like dog food. We did our best to befriend Navy personnel on the north end of the island who dined on great stuff from their refrigerated ships. I admit to stealing K-rations from the supply tent. When missions were scheduled for post-midnight take-off, the crews were treated to special food (pancakes, syrup, coffee) at 0100 or so and we would don our flight suits and crash the breakfast even when not tagged for the mission.

The flight engineer's duties included preflight of the aircraft, engine start and knowledge of the aircraft's systems, emergency procedures, fuel transfer and cruise control. The long flights (about 15 hours) required a couple of Benzedrine tablets to stay awake and careful rationing of fuel. This meant a plan of power settings (fuel flows) for climbs, cruise, target maneuvering, descent and contingencies taking into account the aircraft weight and flight altitudes. Most missions were at night over the target which, if we were not the first to hit it, would be a glowing conflagration with anti-aircraft tracers and smoke billowing to great heights with associated turbulence. Having a searchlight fix itself on our aircraft raised considerable concern and we would urge the radio man to push out more chaff. In daylight there was the additional haz-



ard of suicide fighter pilots intent on ramming B-29s. My estimate early on was that we would not survive more than 5-8 missions. I remember one of the gunners being sick on the hardstand each time before we loaded up for take-off.

The engines on the B-29 had a remarkably short life, especially when compared to the 6000+ hours of today's jet. About 400 hours was considered good. On a daylight formation mission one of our engines just stopped, without warning, and we had to drop out and hit a "target of opportunity". The next morning I was summoned to a Review Board that wanted to know why we let the engine stop. No one yet knew but I surmised that it lacked fuel or spark even though there was plenty of fuel available. The Board was skeptical but agreed to wait for a report from Guy Hall who later informed them the fuel pump had failed.

We cut our flak jackets into seat-sized pads for added protection and avoided using the relief tube/tank until Shack, the bombardier, did. The first to use it was required to empty it and Shack probably emptied it 24 times.

After 24 missions we were offered the opportunity to go to rest camp for two weeks or to stay and finish the 30 missions which would qualify for return to the States. A few of us believed, because of the lack of resistance we experienced on the last few missions that Japan would surrender while we were at rest camp and we could thus avoid additional enemy and operational hazards. We convinced the rest of the crew and spent quiet time (and laundry time) on Oahu. The people in Hawaii seemed far removed from the war. During the flight back to Guam we learned of the atomic bomb drop on Hiroshima.

Later we flew an 18 hour tour to Korea (no bombs but with guns loaded) to parade along the 38th parallel to impress Russia. I flew to Japan again but with another crew to drop supplies to a PW camp. Although we buzzed across the camp at just a few hundred feet, our drop was into the rice paddies that surrounded the camp and the men could be seen slogging through the muck to get at the stuff on the skids. Japanese civilians were walking and bicycling on a nearby road and it was curious to note that none seemed to be paying any attention to our roaring B-29 skimming across the paddies.

In early November 1945 we flew K-7 back to the U.S. Several fighter pilots who came along as passengers were very uncomfortable during the storm we encountered west of Johnson Island. The sky was dark, visibility zero and the aircraft was tossing in the turbulence. One of these pilots, sitting on the nose wheel hatch beside me, was so nervous I decided to put him at ease by appearing nonchalant, as if we flew through this stuff all the time. I unbuckled my chute and casually leaned back smoking a cigarette. Almost immediately there was a loud thud and the cabin lit up. We had been struck by lightning and I expected momentarily the aircraft would swerve and spin having lost one wing and me with no chute and after living through 24 missions! Fortunately, the damage was minor and we reached Oahu in good time. From Hawaii we flew to Tucson where we said farewell to K-7. I returned to Northeastern University in December 1945, graduated in April 1947 and went to work as an aerodynamicist at Chance Vought in Connecticut. Later it was missiles and rocket motors at the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory in Maryland and later at Aerojet in Sacramento. I retired from Comsat, involved with communication satellites and worked with customers in Mexico, Indonesia, India and Korea.

