WINGS OF THE MORNING

Robert H. Gaddy

If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

Psalm 139, verses 9,10

PROLOGUE

From boyish-faced Flying Cadet of twenty to graying business-man pilot of sixty ---it really doesn't seem that long; but a sober look in the mirror and an incredulous look at the calendar both confirm that forty years of flying have come and gone. During that long period of time, you look down a lot of runways, make a lot of mistakes, and finally realize with absolute conviction that there has to be Someone up there looking after you with a spirit of forgiveness that mere man does not understand.

For all pilots of a more recent vintage than I, this account may throw some light on the way it was when life was simpler, and so was an airplane.

CHAPTER ONE

HOW IT STARTED

In the spring of 1940, I was no different from all the other seniors in my college. We had in a vague way begun to realize that soon we would be expected to make our own way in the cruel world outside the classroom. Consequently, we dutifully showed up for interviews with recruiting representatives sent by various companies in search of employees. None of these left me very excited until one day a representative of the Army Air Corps appeared on campus, literally out of the wild blue yonder.

I attended his presentation more out of idle curiosity than anything else, but when Lt. Zemke stepped into the room and strode to the desk in front, my attitude changed immediately. The Air Corps could never have selected a better recruiting representative. Trim, erect, neat, clothed in an officer's uniform so perfectly fitted, complete with silver wings on his chest, Lt. Zemke was a picture of what any adventurous youth would like to become. He was also one of the most persuasive speakers I had ever heard. Within ten minutes, I was panting to fill out an application. When I completed it and handed it to him he scanned it quickly and said they would notify me when and where to report for the physical examination.

Shortly after graduation, an official letter arrived, directing me to report to Fort Bragg, N. C., for various physical and mental tests. It is impossible for present-day flyers to believe what a big deal this initial physical exam was in those days.

To start with, I was ordered to report at 4:00 P.M. Wednesday afternoon, prepared to spend Wednesday night, all day Thursday, and possibly Thursday night at Fort Bragg. What could they possibly do to me in all that length of time? Nevertheless, I dutifully motored up there and gave my letter to the sentry at the gate. He directed me to a large two-story barracks, where I was met by a noncom who led me upstairs to a large dormitory room, containing about thirty army cots, one of which he assigned to me. Then he gravely informed me that supper would be served at six p.m., that I was to be back in my cot at nine p.m., all of which was to insure a normal night's rest preceding a rigorous physical examination. During the next hour or so, other candidates appeared, received the same lecture, and were assigned cots.

Promptly at six a.m. Thursday, we were all routed out of the sack and taken to breakfast, and then returned to our barracks to await our fate. It was soon to begin.

About eight a.m., a soldier appeared and herded us all to the hospital. We were placed in a large room and told to strip down to the skin. This we did, and I furtively sneaked a look at my companions. At that time, I was six feet tall and weighed all of 150 pounds. My heart sank to my toes when I saw all those magnificent physical specimens. What chance did I have—a skinny rat looking more like a toothpick among oak trees?

The flight surgeon arrived and took a chair at the front of the room. We were told to form a line, in alphabetical order. I was so thankful my name started with a "G" so I had a few in front of me to show me the ropes. First order of the day was the "short arm inspection", which any army man knows is designed to detect gonorrhea, syphilis, or other venereal disease resulting from a wild and misspent youth. My turn came, and I stepped up to the surgeon. He ran those cold grey eyes up and down my apprehensive figure, and then brusquely ordered, "Skin it back and milk it out." Had I not seen the man in front, I wouldn't have known what the hell he was talking about. Next, he walked around behind me, and ordered, "Bend over and pull the cheeks of your tail apart." This is a most undignified posture, especially with a very unsympathetic doctor peering intently up your rectum, but it sure eliminates those who suffer from hemorrhoids. Next he placed his finger firmly under the right side of my scrotum and said, "Turn your head and

cough". He repeated the same procedure on the left side. I know now that he was testing for hernia, but at that time I had no idea what his purpose was.

Evidently I survived these tests, because I was moved on to be weighed and measured. This posed a problem, because I knew I was painfully underweight. The thing to do, I figured, was to "scrunch" down on the height measurement as much as possible. This I did, and managed to cut off all of half an inch from my height. Evidently it worked; at least they didn't send me back home.

Next we moved on to the heart and circulation testing department. Here I was introduced to the infamous Schneider Test. I'm convinced that it has done more than any other test to keep a lot of perfectly-qualified men out of the Air Corps. Even a year after finishing flight training and serving as rated pilots, many have had to go back to the Flight Surgeon day after day, for re-take after re-take to pass their Schneider; but for your initial examination, you had to pass it the first time, or you were out. My understanding is that the Schneider has long since been discarded as a test, simply because its results vary so much with an individual's emotional state at the particular time of the test. At any rate, this is the way it worked: The Flight Surgeon first took your blood pressure and pulse rate while you were

seated. If these figure fell within a very narrow range, you would receive +2; if they varied from this narrow range, you would receive +1, or 0, or even –1, or –2, if the variation was large. The same tests were repeated when you were reclining, when you were standing, when you had just finished vigorous exercise, and two minutes after exercise. There may have been additional positions which I don't recall, but when all was done, the plusses were totaled, the minuses were totaled, and you had to end up with a net of +8 or better: otherwise, you were summarily flunked and dismissed. I squeezed by, probably because I was too dumb to get upset; but I noticed as we moved to the next department that our group of applicants had shrunk to a smaller number. Eyes, ears, nose, and throat came next. Vision, both near and distant, had to be 20/20, each eye, with no correction. A few more applicants flunked. Then the color vision test came along, wherein you had to read those obscure numbers cleverly concealed in a page of multicolored dots. Surprisingly, quite a few candidates flunked this test and were disqualified.

Depth perception was really a breeze for me. In all the years of flight physicals since I left the Air Corps, I don't recall taking a test similar to this one. It was set up like this: In a rectangular, lengthy box, two vertical rods were installed, about four inches apart, and each about a half-inch in

diameter and four inches in height. Each peg was mounted on a rail, and was attached to a long cord. The Flight Surgeon would move one peg forward, and the other rearward, then hand you the cords. From your seat about twenty feet away, you would pull the appropriate cord until you judged the pegs were dead level with each other. This was repeated several times and the average error then computed. Of course, this error had to fall within a specified maximum. I found the test ridiculously easy; others sweated blood and still failed. I found an even easier way to succeed without trying. If you did a good job on the first effort, (and you could tell by the position of the Flight Surgeon's hand when he moved the pegs for the second try), all you had to do was observe the relative position of your hands, hold onto the cords, and then put your hands in the identical position on the next go. Voila! Perfect depth perception without even looking at the pegs! Occasionally, you encountered a Flight Surgeon who knew this little trick, and after each effort, he would order, "Drop the cords on the floor." Killjoy.

As a final eye test, drops were placed in your eyes to dilate the pupils. The Surgeon then took that obnoxious little flashlight and peered up, down, and sideways into each eye.

By this time the day had crept on toward four o'clock in the afternoon, and we faced the final hurdle: psychological evaluation.

Three Air Corps pilots sat behind an imposing table to administer this phase. Just exactly what their qualifications were for this evaluation remains unclear to me even to this day.

As each applicant returned from this interview, those of us awaiting our turn eagerly pounced on him to find out what it was like, what questions were asked, and any other help we could glean from him. Apparently, the standard technique of the Air Corps pilots was to rattle the applicant as much as possible to see how he would react to pressure. In particular, I remember the account of Jimmy McDill of his interview. McDill was the picture of an all-American boy: very young, very blond, rosy-cheeked, naïve, and innocent. He told us that the senior pilot, with no preamble, barked at him, "Mr. McDill, have you ever slept with a woman?"

McDill swallowed his Adam's apple a couple of times, and then stammered, "N' n' no, Sir, not all night long."

The officer grinned and then said to his fellow-pilots, "Well, at least he is honest. Let's let him in."

My turn finally came, and I marched in to face those three hawks. Most of all, at that stage, I was thinking: Gaddy, don't blow it now, at this

final step. To my vast relief, it was a breeze. The senior officer shuffled all my papers, looking at my college transcript, recommendations, and physical exam reports, and then he said, "Mr. Gaddy, you seem to have done very well in college."

"Thank you, Sir," I replied with abject humility.

"Do you think you can do as well as an Air Corps pilot and officer?"

"I'll give it my best shot. I believe I can."

He turned to the other officers, and asked if they had any questions. To my vast relief, they did not.

"Mr. Gaddy, " said the senior officer, "You are qualified and accepted."

I was so stunned that I sat there like a knot on a log, and murmured, "Thank you, Sir."

"You are excused. Send in the next applicant."

I walked out in a daze, and was again collared by the inevitable noncom. He told me I would be advised when and where to report for flight training. Flight training! How sweet the sound of those words. He also said I was free to leave, but The Air Corps recommended that all applicants driving their own cars stay overnight so that the dilation of their eyes could return to normal.

Stay overnight? Hell, no! I wanted to get home and bask in the envy of my classmates who were destined to be shoe clerks. I was going to be a pilot!

CHAPTER TWO

PRIMARY FLIGHT TRAINING

Finally it arrived: a letter from the War Department directing me to report to Fort Bragg, N. C., on September 9, 1940, for the purpose of enlisting in the U. S. Army as a Flying Cadet, and thereafter to proceed to the Air Corps Training Detachment, Hatbox Field, Muskogee, Oklahoma.

Wow! Muskogee, Oklahoma! It might just as well have been to the other side of the world. I had once been as far from home as Washington, D. C., but that was the greatest distance I had ever ventured from South Carolina.

So the great adventure began.

By the next morning, I had received phone calls from three young men living in neighboring towns, all of whom had received identical orders. How the word got around, I'm not sure, but I was glad to hear from them. They wanted to know if I had a car; if I planned to drive to Muskogee; if I had room for them. As it happened, I had a new 1940 Ford convertible, a graduation present from my parents. It had white sidewall tires, a heater, and a radio. As far as I know, these items comprised all of the options available in that day and age. It was truly a splendid little car, and I was inordinately proud of it.

I arranged to pick up these other wannabe pilots in Dillon, S. C., at the corner of Main Street and U. S. Highway 301, which was directly on the way to Fort Bragg. The agreed hour was eight a. m., September 9, 1940. All went exactly as planned, and we arrived at Fort Bragg around 9:00 a.m. Then began the usual delays, paperwork, and wasted time of the Army bureaucracy.

First, we had to take another physical exam. Fortunately, this was very cursory, compared to the extensive exam to qualify as Flying Cadets. This one was apparently designed to make sure we had not lost an arm or leg in the meantime.

Then we met in a large room, raised our right hands, and repeated after the officer the enlistment words. Suddenly we were Flying Cadets! But it was not yet time to crank up the Ford. Orders for the trip had to be prepared and in our hands. I suppose orders were not prepared in advance simply because they never know if all who were supposed to report for enlistment would in fact show up. Whatever the reason, it was at least four o'clock in the afternoon before we were cleared to depart for Muskogee.

Westbound and down! We drove all through the rest of the day. Remember, in those days we did not have interstate highways, and the roads we traveled usually ran through the dead center of towns and cities. Some of

the cities - - Memphis, for example, - - really amounted to twenty miles of stoplights. Hence, trips took longer, even though we only stopped for gasoline or an occasional coke and hamburger.

About four o'clock the next afternoon we had reached Fort Smith, Arkansas, just across the river from Oklahoma, and some sixty miles from Muskogee. Since we were to report in Muskogee the following morning, we decided to check into the hotel in Fort Smith and get a good night's rest.

The next morning, bright and early, we arrived in Muskogee after an hour's drive. In 1940, primary flight training was handled by a civilian school under contract to the Army. In the case of Muskogee, the civilian contractor was Spartan School of Aeronautics. They furnished the civilian flight instructors and ground school instructors. I was told that the charge was fourteen dollars per hour for flight instruction ---- quite a sum in those post-depression days. The Army furnished the airplanes, maintenance, fuel, hangars, and other facilities.

At Muskogee these facilities consisted of a mess hall building, which also included offices for the two Air Corps pilots stationed there, Capt. Arnold and Lt. Schmidt. There was a small classroom building for ground school, and a barracks building which had a large communal room where we

all slept on cots, and there was an additional room containing showers and a latrine.

We reported in to Capt. Arnold, and were assigned to our respective cots in the barracks, and told to be ready at 1:00 p.m. to meet our instructors. Things were indeed beginning to move quickly!

There were only thirty-two cadets in my class at Muskogee, so we soon knew everyone by name. At l:00 p.m. we formed up in a unit outside the barracks, and Capt. Arnold read out our instructor assignments. Bacon, Davidson, Dodd, and Gaddy were assigned to Mr. Jerry Smead. This assignment was one of the luckiest things that ever happened to me in the Air Corps. You see, Spartan was recognized as one of the finest flight schools in the nation, and Mr. Smead was the Chief Flight Instructor for Spartan. So I had been assigned to the best of the best!

We marched down to the Flight Line, where each instructor stood by an airplane. The four of us came to attention in front of Mr. Smead and saluted.

"Sir, Flying Cadet Bacon."

"Sir, Flying Cadet Davidson."

"Sir, Flying Cadet Dodd."

"Sir, Flying Cadet Gaddy."

Mr. Smead was every inch a pilot. Tall, slender, dark eyes and black hair – a very handsome man, probably in his late thirties. He gravely inspected us, sizing up each man with a glance, and then said, "This is a deadly serious business. If you don't approach it with that attitude, you won't be here long. Follow me around the airplane." We dutifully fell in behind him. As we approached the nose, the airplane seemed to grow in size. In fact, I thought it was the biggest airplane I had ever seen! It was the Stearman PT-18, a bi-plane with two open cockpits, front and rear, and a radial engine made by Jacobs.

Mr. Smead in front and pointed to the propeller. "That thing," he said, "deserves a lot of respect. Never get careless with it. It will hit you hard --- and frequently."

He moved on around the plane, pointing out the struts which joined the wings together at the tips, and the cabane struts which joined the top wing to the fuselage at an angle of forty-five degrees. Then he had each of us in turn, climb on the lower wing and look at the controls in the cockpit.

"Look at the joystick", he said. "Visualize an imaginary rigid rod leading from the top of the stick to the nose of the airplane. Visualize another imaginary rigid rod leading from the top of the stick out to the right wing tip, and still another leading from the top of the sick to the left wing

tip. As you handle the stick, I want you to think in terms of pressure, not movement. Thus if you exert forward pressure on the stick, the imaginary rigid rod leading to the nose will force the nose downward, and the airplane will begin to descend. If you exert rearward pressure, the rod will pull the nose upward, and the airplane will begin to climb. If you exert right pressure on the stick, the rod will exert right pressure on the wingtip forcing it downward, and the airplane will bank to the right; exert left pressure and the opposite bank will occur."

He pointed to the rudder pedals, and said, "The rudder pedals are simplicity itself. On the ground, push right to go right, push left to go left. In the air, I will expect you to exert the same pressure on the rudder with the foot that you exert on the stick with your hand. Always position your feet so that the ball and toe of your foot rests on the rudder pedal. This gives you a much more sensitive feel than the instep or heel."

He pointed to the throttle. "The throttle is also simple. Push forward to go faster; pull back to slow down or stop. When you are in the airplane, I will expect you to always keep your left hand on the throttle and your right hand on the stick. Always. Is that clear?" The four of us replied in unison, "Yes, Sir."

By this time we had returned almost to the nose of the airplane, so Mr. Smead explained the cranking process. This airplane had no self-starter. In fact, it had no battery or electrical system. The engine functioned on a magneto. So it was necessary to crank it by hand. To do this, a long crank was inserted into an opening. This crank was made so that two men (read that two cadets) could place both hands on it. They began to turn the crank, which in turn began to spin a heavy flywheel. When this flywheel had attained a high speed, the crank was withdrawn and a signal given to the pilot, who would then pull a knob which engaged the spinning flywheel to the engine crankshaft. The momentum of the spinning flywheel would then cause the engine to turn over one or two revolutions. The pilot meantime would rapidly move back and forth a knob which would cause the engine to belch and fire. The pilot, by skillful manipulation of the throttle, would "catch" the engine and keep it running until it had reached a fast idle for warm-up. Woe betide the cadet pilot who failed to "catch" the engine, because he would then become the instant recipient of baleful glares and muttered curses from the crankers, who would then be forced to repeat the whole process. This provided a strong incentive for all concerned to "catch" the engine on the first attempt.

Mr. Smead said to us, "We start flying tomorrow afternoon. Dismissed."

The flying activities at Muskogee were well planned and organized. In addition to Hatbox Field in town, we had two auxiliary fields, one about fifteen miles west, and the other about ten miles north. Each field was simply a square mile of grassland, a windsock, a large wind tee, and a shack in the center of the field. The shack contained a blackboard and several benches where the cadets could sit while awaiting their turn to fly.
Each instructor had four students. One would board the airplane, with the instructor at Hatbox Field, take off for an hour's lesson, and land at the auxiliary field. The other cadets would board a bus and ride to the auxiliary field, there to await lessons. The last cadet would board the airplane at the auxiliary field, have an hour's lesson, and land at Hatbox Field. The other cadets would return to Hatbox on the bus.

The next afternoon, it all began. Among my group of four cadets, I was scheduled to fly last, so I boarded the bus along with all the other cadets, and rode to the auxiliary field, there to await my turn.

Finally, it was time. I hurried out to the plane, parachute bumping the back of my tail, climbed in, fastened the seat belt, and pulled the goggles down over my eyes. In an open cockpit plane, we always wore goggles and

a helmet. We also hooked up the gosport tube to the helmet. The gosport was simply a rubber tube, one end of which was connected to the helmet at our ears, and the other end of which was fitted with a cuplike shape which the instructor could hold to his mouth and talk to the students. It was readily apparent that this was a one-way deal. The instructor could talk; the student could listen; But there would be no talking back. Our response was limited to a nod if our answer was "Yes"; a shake of the head if our answer was "No."

Mr. Smead picked up the gosport and asked, "Is your seat belt fastened?" I nodded. "O.K.", he said. "Let's go."

He taxied out, lined up the airplane in the proper direction, and smoothly advanced the throttle forward to maximum power. That wonderful round engine roared, the plane accelerated, the tail came up, and suddenly we were airborne, climbing into the sky.

I could never fully describe the joy of that first take-off. I was filled with a sense of awe, and wonder, and exaltation. Even today, after countless thousands of take-offs, it is still the same superbly marvelous experience for me.

The joy has never dimmed, never faded, and never will.

I was entranced by the beauty of the Oklahoma prairies --- the precise section lines, running due north-south and east-west, outlining exact square miles. Everything looked so neat and orderly.

We climbed to 3000 feet. Mr. Smead picked up the gosport tube and said, "I'm going to show you that this airplane will literally fly itself. Don't be worried or afraid. I'm going to intentionally stall the plane." He retarded the throttle and lifted the nose. The plane slowed, shuddered, and stalled. Mr. Smead lifted both arms above his head to show me that he was doing nothing. The nose dropped down, the speed increased, the nose rose to just below the horizon, the plane recovered, and entered into a beautiful glide. It was a great confidence builder.

Then he said, "We are now going to do some medium turns. Notice ahead of you where the earth seems to meet the sky. That, of course, is the horizon, and that's the reference we use to fly the plane." Then he pointed to the cabane struts which joined the upper wing to the fuselage at an angle of forty-five degrees. He began to bank the plane until the cabane strut was parallel to the ground, and just above the horizon, which is a medium bank. Then he said, "As the airplane settles into the turn, you will have to exert a slight back pressure on the stick to keep the cabane strut slightly above the horizon. To make a turn of ninety degrees, notice the section lines below.

We are now flying parallel to the north-south section line. So we will turn until we are parallel to the east-west section line, and then roll out. We use a similar technique for a turn of one hundred eighty degrees; that is, holding the turn until we are again parallel to the section line, but headed in exactly the opposite direction. And so on. Have you got that?" I nodded.

"O.K.", he said. "If I hold up one finger and gesture to the right, that means a ninety degree turn to the right. Two fingers, a one hundred eighty degree turn. Three fingers, a two hundred seventy degree turn; and four fingers, three hundred sixty degrees. One final word: Never make a turn without first twisting your neck and looking back into the turn. It's the unseen airplane behind you – into whose path you turn –that will kill you. Got that?"

I nodded.

"O.K.", he said. "Put your right hand on the stick, and your left hand on the throttle, and your feet on the rudder pedals." I did so, even though I could not believe that I was actually going to fly the plane.

Mr. Smead held up one finger and gestured to the right. I looked back, banked the airplane until the cabane strut lay just above the horizon, and held it there until we had turned ninety degrees, and then rolled out. He

then held up two fingers and gestured to the left. I started to bank the airplane to the left, and found the controls were frozen stiffly in place.

"Didn't I tell you never to make a turn without first looking into the turn?" I nodded.

"Well, then, I do not expect to have to tell you things twice. We have too much to cover. Got that?" I nodded.

So he held up four fingers, and gestured to the left. Believe me, I nearly twisted my head off before rolling into that turn! We executed several more turns before he said through the gosport tube, "O.K. Now take me to Hatbox Field."

"Aha", I thought. "He's testing me to see if I can think while I'm in the air. So I'll prove that I can. I know that the auxiliary field is west of Muskogee, and that we are somewhere in the vicinity of that field. Since I was the last student of the day, it's getting late, and the sun is already sinking low on the horizon. So I thought, all I have to do is turn the airplane until the sun is on my tail, and then I will be heading east toward Muskogee."

So I did just that. In six or eight minutes, I could see the buildings of Muskogee and the landing area of Hatbox Field.

Mr. Smead said, “I’ve got the airplane now.” He took over the controls, executed a smooth approach, a velvet landing, taxied to the line, and shut down the engine.

We both climbed out and stood on the ground.

“Well,” he said, “You sure did fine.”

I was astounded. I never dreamed that a serious-minded chief instructor would stoop to compliment a raw, first-time student. I couldn’t have felt happier if he had just told me that I had won the Nobel Prize for aviation. Walking back to the barracks, I don’t think my feet even touched the ground.

We quickly fell into a routine: ground school in the morning; flying in the afternoon. In between, the few spare hours were devoted to drilling and small duties, such as flag detail. In this latter duty, two cadets were designated to raise the flag in the morning, and lower it at sunset. The two cadets served for a week, and then were replaced by two others.

Each pair was first instructed by a grizzled old master sergeant. We stood before him as he said, “When you raise the flag, you will run it up smartly; when you lower it, you will do so deliberately and with great respect. And if you allow so much as one thread of this flag to touch the ground, I will personally see to it that you are shot."

We didn't exactly believe this, but if his intention was to impress us with the serious nature of this duty, he certainly succeeded.

Ground school was composed of subjects which were directly related to our activities: engines, theory of flight, meteorology, civil air regulations, and elementary navigation. So it was easy to be intensely interested in all that was being taught to us. In other words, it was highly relevant!

Flight instruction proceeded very rapidly. After making turns, we began learning climbs and glides. Climbs were particularly difficult and challenging. In a single-engine bi-plane with a large radial engine, and the nose elevated above the horizon, you simply cannot see in front. Everything is blocked out by the nose and that large engine. So we had to climb in a series of shallow turns, ninety degrees to the right, followed by ninety degrees to the left. The degree of bank was established by lowering the appropriate wing until the top of the vertical strut at the wingtip was precisely on the horizon. This way, the nose was constantly moving, and we could see ahead. To add to the complexity, we had the factor of torque to deal with. When the nose is up, and the engine is delivering power, the airplane will try to turn to the left. This must be corrected by applying the precise amount of pressure to the right rudder pedal. We had to learn to do this by the "feel" of the airplane, a matter which was constantly drilled into

us. This meant that there was to be no slipping or skidding, and the airspeed was to be held precisely on the dot. To make certain that we did this by "feel", the airspeed indicator in the rear cockpit was covered by black tape!

In power-off glides, we quickly learned to use all our senses to establish the correct gliding speed. Believe it or not, the ears were a great help in doing this. The guy wires between the wings gave off a whistling noise in a power-off glide. If you were gliding too fast, this tone rose, and the noise increased. If you were gliding too slow the pitch of this note fell, and the noise began to die away.

I came to like all the cadets in my class because they were really outstanding young men. Of the three other cadets assigned with me to Mr. Smead, I suppose that Dodd was my favorite.

Dodd was a Texan, tall, lean, broad-shouldered, bronzed, slow-talking, and a man of few words. But when he said something, it was important. One afternoon, after about the third or fourth day of flying, he sidled up to me and said, "Gaddy, you are going to catch hell today from Mr. Smead."

"Why?" I inquired. "I haven't done anything wrong – yet."

"I know," Dodd replied. "But my flying today was so bad that I really give him the red ass, and he's gonna take it out on you."

I approached my lesson with some trepidation, but Dodd was wrong. Mr. Smead was not the kind of man who would allow the poor performance of one student to affect his treatment of the next student. Still, I was apprehensive enough to take extra pains with my performance in the plane that day!

And that brings me to the saddest events of life as a flying cadet: washouts. I suppose there were many reasons for washouts. One of the most obvious ones was air sickness. A few cadets overcame this after a day or so, others never did, and hence were doomed to wash out. After all, you can't fly an airplane if you are puking all over yourself and the cockpit. I think the greatest cause of failure was this: You have to love flying above anything else, and you have to be aggressive and determined to learn it and to do it. Some cadets simply did not have this burning desire, and without it, could not survive the rigorous demands nor attain the high standards. Others simply did not every understand the required precision. If the instructor called for a ninety degree turn, that meant ninety degrees, not eighty-nine, not ninety-one, but precisely ninety. Period.

Some cadets encountered particular, individual problems. For example, some could never learn to land the airplane. Others never mastered lazy-eight maneuvers, or spins, or chandelles, or simple climbs.

Some washed out from simple carelessness. For example, we were told that taxi accidents were the most inexcusable of all airplane accidents. There were only two reasons which could cause a taxi accident, they said. One, you were taxiing too fast; or, two, you weren't looking where you were going. Despite this, one or two taxi accidents occurred, sadly the guilty cadets were instantly washed out.

Some were washed out for bizarre reasons. For example, I recall the case of Mark Mason. The day came for Mark's first solo flight, which would normally be a take-off, fly around the field, and land. All went well with Mark until he lined up to land, and then, for some unknown reason, he simply could not bring himself to close the throttle. He did lower the nose into a gliding position, but by the time he touched the ground with full power still on, he probably had an airspeed which was at least double what it should have been. The result was predictable: the instant the wheels touched the ground, the airplane bounded back into the air like a gazelle on super-charged springs, instantly gaining an altitude of fifty to seventy-five feet. So Mark continued the climb to pattern altitude, and started another circuit. Again, he would not close the throttle on approach, and again the same result ensued. After three or four such performances, he had attracted quite a large audience. We gravely discussed alternatives and solutions for this situation.

Some wondered out loud if we would have to shoot him down. Finally, Mark did regain his senses, and closed the throttle, making a horrendous landing of numerous bounces until the airplane mercifully came to a stop. Before nightfall, Mark had been washed out, packed his bag, and left for home, leaving one more empty bunk in the barracks.

Most of the washouts occurred in the first ten or twelve days. They were quick, and they were ruthless. I suppose it was best that way. At least, the cadet who had failed did not have to hang around and endure the shame of facing the inquisition of his fellow cadets.

At any rate, whatever the reason, the number of empty bunks increased rapidly, and then by the third or fourth week had stabilized.

Meantime, those of us who had survived the cut progressed rapidly. After about five days of instruction, I was practicing landings. Strangely, I always found it very easy to land the airplane. Perhaps I was just lucky to be gifted with excellent depth perception; more likely, it was because of the way Mr. Smead taught, explained, and demonstrated. He said, "To land an airplane, you do your best to keep it from landing. Set up a precise gliding approach at exactly the proper airspeed. As the airplane nears the ground, gently bring the nose up slightly so that you are level, at a height about two feet above the ground. With power off, and flying level, the airplane will

lose speed and begin to settle. Do your best to keep it from settling. Raise the nose a trifle to get more lift from the wings. Hold the airplane off the ground. As it settles, raise the nose. Soon the airplane will necessarily stall. You want this to happen when you are six inches above the ground. The result will be a perfect three-point landing, and the airplane will stick to the ground. Above all, remember that a landing is never completed until the airplane is taxied to the ramp, the engine is shut down, and the airplane is chocked or tied down. Then, and only then, you are through with the landing." These were true words of wisdom, distilled from many years of flying experience, and I have never forgotten them.

On or about the eighth day of my flying instruction, I was scheduled to fly with Mr. Smead out to the auxiliary field. On the way out there, he was unusually genial and pleasant, even cracking a joke or two. This greatly puzzled me because he was ordinarily so deadly serious. Why was he suddenly acting like one of the boys? Then the answer dawned on me: He was doing his best to keep me cool and relaxed because he intended to let me solo today! It turned out that I was exactly right.

He told me to make a full-stop landing at the auxiliary field, which I did. Next he said to taxi back to the takeoff point, and I began to do so. About halfway there --- opposite the shack ---he told me to stop the plane.

Then he climbed out, stood on the ground opposite me, and nonchalantly said, “Take it around the field, shoot one landing, and taxi back to the parking area.” Having said that, he turned his back to me, and walked toward the shack.

I suppose you think there should be some great and momentous thoughts as you face your first solo. I had thought so, too, but this was not the case. I had flown so many circuits, and shot so many landings that it was almost something I could do by reflex. One predominant memory does stand out: It felt so strange to look forward and not see the back of Mr. Smead’s head and his shoulders in the empty cockpit ahead. Other than that, the five-minute flight was as normal and routine as any of the dual flights I had made. Well, I guess I did walk a little taller in the barracks that night!

Flight instruction began to change from that day. Usually, now, it would be thirty minutes of instruction followed by thirty minutes of solo flight to practice what we had been taught. This began to include more advanced maneuvers: precision spins, vertical turns, pylon eights, lazy eights, loops, snap rolls, slow rolls, split-s, and other maneuvers.

One particular challenge was spot landings. For this exercise, two white lines were drawn across the field, one near the touchdown area, and the other three hundred feet further down the field. The objective was to

approach the field at an altitude of five hundred feet, close the throttle at the proper spot, make a turn of one hundred and eighty degrees, and then touch down beyond the first line, but before reaching the second line. To touch down before the first line was automatically a failure. Likewise, to touchdown beyond the second line was also a failure. They told us to consider the first line as a big ditch, at least a thousand feet deep. Obviously, if you touched down short and ran into that ditch, you were dead. If you landed too long, that is, beyond the second line, you would run out of space, which could also be fatal.

We were not allowed to use the throttle, once we had closed it. We were allowed to make one gentle slip maneuver on final approach. A slip is simply a way to get rid of excess altitude, and would help only if you were too high.

So, those were the perameters. You were allowed the first landing attempt "for free", so that you could get a feel for the wind and gliding distance. Thereafter, the rules were very simple: Make five consecutive landings beyond the first line, and touch down before the second line, or you failed the exercise. Two such failures and it was "Goodnight, Irene". Pack your bags and go home.

This may seem unusually cruel, but there were good reasons for it.

One reason was that we were constantly being given simulated forced landings during our lessons. The instructor would, without warning, close the throttle and say, ”Forced landing.” The student then had to quickly find a suitable field, plan an approach to it, set up a glide, and go down to the selected field until the wheels were about ten feet above the ground, at which time the instructor would advance the throttle to full power, and climb out.

A second reason was this: For the rest of our flying careers we would constantly be making approaches and landings, so judgment of height and distance to touchdown simply had to be accurate. In many cases, there would not be any second chances.

Some of the practice forced landings, despite their serious purpose, had droll aspects. Shipp Daniel, for example, on his first attempt, selected a field which was entirely too short for the purpose. The instructor almost instantly advanced the throttle and climbed out. When they landed, the instructor asked, “Mr. Daniel, how long was that field you selected for your forced landing?”

Shipp, being a South Carolina farmboy, like me, furrowed his brow and replied, “Oh, about eight or ten acres.”

His instructor screamed incredulously, “Acres? Acres? An airplane doesn’t know a damn thing about acres. I mean, how long was the field in feet?”

Shipp replied, “About six or seven hundred feet, Sir.”

“Exactly”, said the instructor. Next time, pick one at least three times that length, or more, if possible. You got that?”

“Yes, sir,” Shipp said . . . So the farm boy was becoming a pilot.

About two-thirds of the way through Primary School, Mr. Smead assembled his four students, and announced, “Today will be the last day I will be giving you lessons. As Chief Flight Instructor, I must now begin my duty to give a flight check to every remaining cadet. I cannot do this and maintain my lessons to you. There is simply not that much time in the day. Each of you will be assigned to an instructor who has lost a student through washouts. I will see you again when I give you your check ride.”

This was a stunning announcement. It is not easy to describe the feeling, the chemistry, the relationship, between a flying cadet and his instructor. It is one born of deep respect and confidence on the part of the cadet. Besides that, there was the uneasy question, “Who will I get for an instructor? How will I get along with him?”

Once again, fate smiled on me. My new instructor was to be Mickey Disney, one of the most likable men I have ever known. He was simply everyone's picture of what a pilot should be. Twenty-eight years old, a bachelor, handsome, mustachioed, surrounded by adoring girls, and --- he commuted to the field from his apartment on a Harley-Davidson motorcycle. I could hardly wait!

My first flight with Mr. Disney was a joy to experience. He called on me to execute just about every maneuver I had learned, and all went extremely well. When we landed and climbed out of the airplane, he said, "Well, Gaddy, you gave me a pretty good ride today. If you continue to perform this well, we will get along just fine." High praise, indeed! I resolved to do my damnedest never to disappoint him.

As the days went by, I came to look forward to every lesson with Mr. Disney. He simply portrayed the joy of flying. One afternoon, it was obvious that I was going to be his last student of the day, and would depart from the auxiliary field to return the plane to Hatbox Field at the end of the lesson.

Mr. Disney seemed to be deliberately killing time until he began my lesson. In fact, everyone had departed from the field before he signaled me to climb into the airplane. He said, "I've got it." Then he started opening

the throttle, heading about ninety degrees off from the direction we should be taking off. As the airplane gained speed, he lowered the left wing until the tip was about ten or twelve inches above the ground. So there we were, in a screaming left turn, engine at full power, and the airplane gaining speed. As the turn progressed until the nose was into the wind --- in the exact direction we should be taking off --- he rolled the wings level, pulled back on the stick, and off we soared into the sky. When we had reached an altitude of three thousand feet, he picked up the gosport and asked, "Is your safety belt tight?"

I nodded.

"O.K.," he said. "Hang on. We're going to shake a little dust out of it." In the twinkling of an eye, he executed one-half of a snap roll, stopping exactly upside down. There I was, totally surprised, suspended in the cockpit, hanging only by the safety belt. I am, to say the least, rather long-legged, so that my knees were now somewhere in the vicinity of my ears. Before I could draw a breath, he split S'd out of this maneuver, pulling back on the stick, and as we roared toward the ground, gaining speed every second, he roared into a gorgeous loop, half-rolling at the top to complete a perfect Immelman. This was followed by just about every maneuver that a man could dream up and perform in that airplane, Slow rolls, Cuban-eights,

vertical reversements, spins, chandelles, and a few others which defied description.

At last, he said, "O.K. You've got the airplane. See if you can take me back to Hatbox and land this thing."

So I did just that, in a very sedate manner. After we landed, he gave me a lopsided grin, stalked over to the parking lot, kick-started that Harley, and rode off toward town in a welter of dust and gravel. I could only think: I have seen a free spirit in action, one who truly loves his profession.

The days and weeks sped by in the beauty of an Oklahoma autumn. I was now flying solo more than dual, which added immensely to the pleasure of this activity. Each time I was sent to fly solo, Mr. Disney would carefully outline the maneuvers I was to practice, and the areas in which I needed to improve. Always he concluded his orders with these words, "O.K. Keep your nose clean." His admonition was terse and succinct, and we both understood exactly what he meant.

In early November, it began to get quite cold in the Oklahoma plains. There is nothing colder that an open cockpit airplane in winter, probably because there is nowhere to go and get warm. Also, we were rapidly approaching the final two hurdles: one, a check ride by Spartan's chief flight

instructor, Mr. Smead, and two, a check ride by an Air Corps pilot, either Capt. Arnold or Lt. Schmidt. Both tests had to be passed.

The day came for my final flight with Mr. Smead. It went exactly as I knew it would. He was very thorough, deadly serious, and totally demanding of perfection: but as always, he was also completely fair. When he finally said, "O.K. I guess I can pass you on to the Air Corps check ride. Take me home," my joy literally knew no bounds. In fact, I was in a slight daze. I made a good landing and taxied into the parking area. In my haste to pass the good news on to my fellow cadets, I did not line the airplane precisely square to the parking line when I parked. Mr. Smead sat in the cockpit, his arms atop the coaming, and said, "Mr. Gaddy, this is sloppy parking. I'm embarrassed for you. Can't you see the airplane is at least five degrees off square to the parking line?" Since he was dead right, all I could do was nod. "O.K.", he said. "Get out and push the tail to the left until I tell you to stop."

So I did. Now I was the one who was embarrassed. I moved the tail ten or twelve inches to the left, and he signaled me to stop. Then he climbed out and faced me. To my amazement, he was wearing a broad smile. I had never seen him smile before. He said, "Now you won't forget that, will

you?" Then he actually extended his hand, shook hands with me, and said, "Good luck to you as you move forward to become an Air Corps pilot."

I was struck dumb, but I thought: Wonderful! God's in His Heaven. All's right with the world.

The next day, I was scheduled for my check ride with the Air Corps. Lt. Schmidt was to be the check pilot.

We took off and headed for the practice area. After several maneuvers, he said through the gosport tube, "Now give me a two-turn spin to the right."

I looked at the altimeter and saw that we were only fifteen hundred feet high. Aha, I thought, he's testing me to see if I've got sense enough not to try a spin at this low altitude. So, I pointed upward with a questioning look on my face. "No," he said, This is high enough." I thought to myself: O.K. You're the boss. Then I raised the nose, closed the throttle, and as the airplane stalled, pushed the right rudder all the way to the stop. Whoosh, whoosh, we spun. Then, I pushed the left rudder to the stop, popped the stick forward to neutral, and recovered at an altitude of five hundred feet. I was congratulating myself when, through the gosport he ordered, "Forced landing."

Then it all dawned on me. His whole action was a plan to see how I would react to an emergency --simulated though it was --under extreme pressure. Believe me, at five hundred feet, you don't have any time to waste! I established a glide, banked slightly to the left, and looked down fore and aft.

Nothing suitable. I banked slightly right, and looked fore and aft. There was a field ahead and slightly to the right, dead into the wind. At three hundred feet, I made a ninety-degree turn to the right, rolled out and glided down toward the field. Just above the ground, Lt. Schmidt advanced the throttle, and said, "O.K. Take me home. You've passed, and soon you'll be bound to Randolph Field for basic flight training."

So I had completed primary school, and the first part of my dream had come true.

CHAPTER THREE

BASIC FLIGHT TRAINING

We received orders transferring us to Randolph Field, San Antonio, Texas. Even these words evoked marvelous and magic feelings. So three of us - - - Eddie, Shipp, and I - - - set forth in my little Ford for this new destination. We had an extra day when we arrived in San Antonio, and checked into the Gunter Hotel.

Next morning we arose early. I used the extra hour to obtain a haircut in a nearby barber shop, and then we drove to Randolph Field. As we entered the gate, uniformed upper class cadets beckoned us in, directing us to a parking area, with cries of, "Welcome to Randolph Field." We all thought: "What a nice place."

But when we parked, everything changed. Blitzkrieg! Upper classmen yanked the door open. "Get out of that car, Mister. Grab your bags and put them in that stack over there, and come back here."

I was so stunned and shaken up by the change in attitude that I dropped the car keys along with my bags, and rushed back. Wouldn't you

know it? An upper classman shouted, “Move that car over to the dodos’ parking area.” (A dodo is a bird that cannot fly, and hence was the term applied to all lower classmen.)

So there I was on my hands and knees, pawing through that mountain of baggage, looking for my car keys, while being thoroughly chewed out for being so stupid. Wonder of wonders, I found the keys and rushed back to move the car, only to be greeted by another upper classman.

“Take a brace, Mister,” he said. I was at a loss to know what this meant. Of course, he knew that and proceeded to explain.

“Come to attention when an upper classman addresses you. Now pretend you’ve got a heavy suitcase in each hand. Suck up that horrible gut off the ramp. Pull in that chin. How old are you, Mister?”

“Twenty-one, Sir.”

“Then get twenty-one wrinkles in your chin. May I touch you, Mister?”

“Yes, sir,”

He placed his extended fingers in the center of my back, between the shoulder blades, and said, “Now pinch my fingers.’

He stepped back and surveyed his work. "Make a nasty move, Mister, and hold it." (This meant to roll the hips and buttocks forward, as a hoochy-koochy dancer might do.)

"And keep your eyes on a point."

Now I knew what it meant to take a brace. It's an exaggerated, extremely exaggerated, position of a soldier at attention. It was to be the first of many.

Then he said, "Move that damn car, and come back here, on the double. Take off."

So much for my welcome to Randolph Field. At that time, it was called "The West Point of the Air." Sometimes, I thought they leaned over backwards to make sure that the name was well-deserved. All the officers in charge were not only pilots, but also West Point graduates. This is a powerful combination.

I parked my car, and ran back to the designated spot. Here we were assembled and marched to the supply room, to receive uniforms and other materials, then back to the barracks, where we were assigned to rooms, three cadets to a room.

Back out of the barracks, we were marched to the Post BarberShop. Do you think I told them I had just had a haircut? No, Sir! I did not even

open my mouth, but when my turn came, I meekly climbed into the barber's chair, and received my second haircut within two hours. I was learning.

For the first two weeks, I thought there must be some terrible mistake. All we did was march and drill, hour after hour. Oh, I could hear airplanes, but I did not dare look up and see them. To do so would have resulted in another chewing out.

The bane of my existence was that Springfield rifle. We learned the manual of arms, of course, but it was the Saturday morning inspections that did me in. I could never get that rifle to suit the inspecting officer, even though the night before I had taken a toothbrush and meticulously cleaned even the grooves in every screw. It was always good for a couple of gigs, which meant marching a couple of hours on Saturday afternoon when everybody else was already in San Antonio or Austin.

Finally, after those two weeks, the day came to select the cadet officers.

Lt. Samuel, a West Pointer, was in charge of my platoon. Each cadet was given an opportunity to put the platoon in action under the watchful eye of Lt. Samuel.

My turn came. I had them wheeling and dealing in good fashion. Lt. Samuel said, "Give the men Right Oblique." This was a term I had never

heard before. Even my friends, Citadel graduates, had never covered this formation. But I was thinking fast. I said to myself, "I'll pretend that I simply misunderstood and will give the men "Right Flank" (Famous last words: It seemed like a good idea at the time.)

So I did give that order. Lt. Samuel said, "Halt the troops."

I halted them. He said, "Mr. Gaddy, you don't know what Right Oblique means, do you?"

"No, Sir."

"Then get back in ranks."

I did so, and thus ended my effort to become a cadet officer.

Meals at Randolph Field were quite an experience, although for several days, I was too scared and tense to eat very much. We marched to the Mess Hall and always sat at our assigned chairs, three dodos and two upperclassmen at each table.

Dodos sat on the first four inches of their chairs, always at attention, and ate square meals. That is to say, a fork laden with food was raised vertically until it was level with the mouth, then moved squarely to the mouth, then back to the table by the same route.

The lower classman on the end of the table next to the aisle was always designated as "the gunner." If, for example, a dish of peas was

nearly empty, one of the upperclassmen would order, “Gun the peas.” The gunner would raise the dish with his extended fingers under the bottom of the dish, holding it aloft, and sit at rigid attention until a waiter came and took the dish. When the waiter returned, the gunner would announce, “Sir, the peas have arrived.” The upperclassman, depending on his mood, would either say, “Pass them down,” if he wanted some, or “Eat ‘em up,” if he did not. The latter phrase, of course, gave the lowly dodos permission to eat peas.

Also, there were numerous questions which the upper classmen could direct to the dodos. Each question required a specific answer, and no other answer would do. For example, “What are we having for desert, Mister?”

Answer: "Ice cream, Sir.”

Question” “Why, Mister?”

Answer: "Because it isn’t breakfast, Sir.”

Another favorite question was this: What’s playing at the Post Theater?

The dodo had to respond with the name of the movie, the stars, the time the main feature commenced, and an evaluation of the movie. Woe to the unprepared dodo who could not make this report!

The food was excellent. We understood that the monetary allowance for this food was very generous. Sometimes they simply could not expend all of the allowance on food, so they would use the excess funds to give us free packs of cigarettes, chewing gum, and candy bars.

At last they decided that we were ready to resume flying activities. What a joy it was to escape the earth again!

The facilities were far different from those at Hatbox Field. Permanent masonry buildings, large and wide paved ramps, and a new airplane indeed!

The plane was the North American BT-14, and it was outstanding. So was the engine, a Pratt & Whitney radial engine, Model R-985. This may well be the finest radial engine ever developed in the world. It produced four hundred and fifty horsepower, was totally dependable, and had a two-position propeller, controllable from the cockpit. Even today, many of these engines are still flying, and they have gotten better over the years. Of course, they now have decades of improvement and refinement. No wonder they are so good.

The airplane was a low-wing monoplane, all metal, had flaps which were manually rolled up or down from the cockpit, and had a sliding canopy to enclose the cockpit. The plane also had a full electrical system, self-

starter for the engine, a two-way radio, running lights, plus landing lights for night flying. I also thought it was a beautiful plane and a joy to fly.

It was faster, more powerful, and more complicated than the Stearman PT-18, yet it was amazing how quickly we adapted to it. After a period of several days, all of the maneuvers we had learned in primary school were easily mastered, and we advanced to instrument training. Our first training was confined to needle, ball, and airspeed. A canvas hood was placed over the front cockpit, totally blanking out any outside vision, and we had to control and maneuver the plane strictly by reference to these three instruments. Later on, we were to be allowed the luxury of artificial horizons and gyro-stabilized compasses, but not initially. We learned to make turns of pre-determined magnitude simply by counting the seconds. One-uh-thousand, two-uh-thousand, three-uh-thousand, and so on. We turned three degrees per second. Thus, a ninety-degree turn required thirty seconds of counting. We even learned to execute spins and recover from them, solely by reference to these instruments.

Meantime, ground school continued apace. It offered the same subjects as primary school, but with more emphasis on military regulations and customs of the service. Also, a new course was introduced: Morse code. This was necessary because all the radio ranges were identified by this code,

and in addition, the rotating beacons which aided night navigation were identified by a light in the center which flashed a letter in Morse code. Each beacon had a different letter, but the letters came in a sequence as you proceeded along the airway. The sequence was this: W-U-V-H-R-K-D-B-G-M. Where these letters came from, I do not know, but we learned the sequence very simply by remembering this sentence: When Undertaking Very Hard Routes, Keep Directions By Good Methods.

So, we had to learn the code. The standard required was the ability to send and receive eight words per minutes. After two or three weeks I realized the solution: You cannot hear the code, consciously translate it into a letter, write the letter, and attain the required rate of speed. Instead, it's almost as if the code reaches your ears, bypasses the brain, and goes directly to the fingers, which automatically write the letter. At least, this worked for me.

One thing that was never tolerated at Randolph Field was any infraction of rules or discipline. A cadet could answer an officer: "Yes, Sir" or "No, Sir," or "No excuse, Sir." That was it. The saying was: If you get into any disciplinary trouble, your flying will get worse every day. Which, being interpreted, meant that you might fly like the Ace of Aces, or Rickenbacker, or Richthofen, but were surely going to be washed out.

As an example, we were forbidden to fly solo above cloud cover, or to smoke cigarettes while in the airplane. The highest ranking cadet, the one who gave commands during Sunday Parade, who told us when we could sit and eat in the mess hall, who ruled in many ways, was called by all cadets "The Big Dog."

One fine morning when we were midway through Basic, The Big Dog was soloing. He was above the cloud cover, smoking a cigarette, enjoying life, when an instructor pilot flew up alongside. The officer patted the back of his head, which meant, "Follow me," and pointed downward, which meant, "Land." A crestfallen Big Dog followed him, and upon landing, was sent straight to the barracks, where he packed his belongings, was washed out, and sent on his way back home before the sun had set. Truly, justice was never delayed at Randolph Field.

Soon, we began night flying. This was wonderful. The air was always smooth and cool at night. From an altitude of five thousand feet we could easily see all of San Antonio, and the myriad lights of this old city glittered and sparkled like a million jewels, and it was all beautiful.

Almost before we knew it, the winter of 1940 had come and gone. The glorious sunshine and mild temperatures of that area prevailed day after day after day.

So the time arrived for our final checkrides. The thirty cadets remaining in my flight group would be checked by Capt. Disosway, who commanded this group of cadets and their instructors. He was a pilot, a West Pointer, and a no-nonsense strict disciplinarian. Even the instructor officers were scared of him. So it was with some trepidation that I faced the checkride.

At the appointed hour, the two of us walked silently to the airplane parked on the ramp, and climbed in. I got everything fired up, checked, and began taxiing along the ramp to reach the take-off point. About fifty yards away, I could see another plane doing the same, and it was obvious that our paths would intersect, so I was keeping a close eye on him, and taxiing very slowly and carefully. Suddenly my throttle was closed, my brakes applied, and my plane came to an abrupt halt. Then, over the interphone came Capt. Disosway's voice: "Well, Mr. Gaddy, somebody's got to make up his mind. It might as well be you."

So I sat there, immobile, until the other plane had passed, then followed him at a safe and sedate pace.

After takeoff, I established a climb to reach five thousand feet, as Capt. Disosway had ordered. His voice came over the interphone, "Mr.

Gaddy, you are supposed to climb this airplane at eighty-five miles per hour." Well, for two months I had been instructed to climb at ninety miles per hour. Do you think I told Capt. Disosway this? Absolutely not! I kept my mouth shut, eased the nose slightly up, pegged the airspeed at eighty-five, and continued the climb at that speed to five thousand feet.

There I ran through all the maneuvers he directed, and he then told me to put up the hood. I did so, and performed, on instruments, climbs, turns, glides, stalls, and finally a spin and recovery.

Capt. Disosway said, "O.K. Take me back to the field." I did so, made a good landing, and parked the airplane precisely square to the line. We climbed out, and he simply said, "Good luck, Mr. Gaddy, in Advanced Flight Training."

Two more things I must mention before leaving Randolph Field. One was Sunday Parade. For this, we had to wear a uniform which was fresh from the dry cleaners, plus we wore white gloves and had white gunslings. But the most entrancing sights of all were the sidelines of the parade field, which were literally lined with beautiful girls. San Antonio, of course, furnished her share, and the University of Texas at Austin, some forty miles away, was also a source. Talk about inspiration! This was it in spades!

The second thing was perhaps the happiest event of my life at Randolph Field: I went to the Supply Room, turned in that damn Springfield rifle, and got a receipt for it. I felt like I had been emancipated.

CHAPTER FOUR

ADVANCED FLIGHT TRAINING

Orders arrived which transferred us to Advanced Flight School. To my amazement, my new station was to be Barksdale Field in Shreveport, Louisiana, not Kelly Field, San Antonio, as I had expected. What in the world did this mean? Then they explained the deal.

Thirty of us had been selected to go directly from Basic Training into twin-engine training, for which a new school had just been established at Barksdale. This had never been attempted before, but the Army Air Corps, in all its wisdom, was not to be questioned. Frankly, I was very pleased because secretly I had always hoped to finish my required three years of service in the Air Corps, and then get a job flying for the airlines. What could be more fitting than to have twin-engine ratings? Alas, how was I to know that in less than a year, we would be at war, and all those plans went out the window.

So, once again, we fired up my little Ford and headed to Barksdale Field; but this time, there were only two of us aboard: Eddie and I.

When we had arrived and been settled into our new quarters, our greatest question was this: What kind of airplanes would we be flying? The answer came immediately. There were three planes: the B-18, the B-10, and the B-12.

The B-18 was built by Boeing. It was fat, big-bellied, slow, and ponderous. The cockpit had side-by-side seating and controls; the panel was full of instruments; the gear was retractable. It had two engines, each developing six hundred and fifty horsepower. It also had constant speed props, flaps, and a long typewritten checklist, which the instructor handed to each of us and commanded us to memorize. We had to learn this checklist and be able to sit in the cockpit, blindfolded, recite the checklist, and reach out and touch each item as we called its name. The cruising speed was about one hundred and forty-five - - - only slightly faster than the BT-14 we had flown in Basic Training. All in all, I would have to say that the B-18 was somewhat of a disappointment in appearance and performance.

But the B-10 and the B-12 were different! Built by Glenn Martin, these were performing airplanes! Basically the same, there were only minor differences between the two models. Each had two radial engines, each developing six hundred fifty horsepower, retractable landing gear, flaps, and two-position props. They were beautiful in appearance: long slender

fuselages, slender wings. Someone said that as the B-10 approached you head-on, it looked like three knots on a string! The fuselage was only wide enough for one person. In the nose was a seat for the bombardier, then in the front of the cockpit was a seat for the pilot. Directly behind him was a single seat for the navigator. That was the total crew.

The airplane was a joy to fly. It was well mannered and spry. You could do almost anything with it. But the most marvelous thing was its performance. When it first came out, which I think was in the early thirties, it was forty miles an hour faster than our fastest pursuit plane! Cruising at one hundred eight-five, it easily outran any peashooter (pursuit) plane the Air Corps possessed.

Many Air Corps pilots had serious mental reservations about the new program of putting advanced cadets directly into two-engine planes. After all, up until that time, an Air Corps pilot had to have a minimum of two thousand hours of pilot time before he was allowed to fly a multi-engine plane. And here we were, each with the magnificent total of one hundred and fifty hours! No wonder they had reservations. Yet the program was a complete success. We all soloed after a few hours, and encountered no problems at all.

Now we began new phases in our training as military pilots: cross-country flying, both day and night, and Link trainer instrument flying.

Formation flying was great fun, after you got the knack of it. It was also a source of great pride to be a member of a team regarded as the best of the group.

Yet this activity was soon to bring me a unique experience: my first engine failure! One morning there were three of us flying Martin B-10's in formation, about six miles south of Barksdale field at an altitude of five thousand feet. Lt. Keith Wood, our instructor, was leader of the flight.

I was on his right wing, and Cadet Jerry Gamill was on his left wing. Lt. Wood had just started a turn toward my side when the right engine on my plane gave out a loud "poof", belched a cloud of black smoke, and quit as dead as a door nail - - - no symptoms, no warning, no nothing. When an engine quits on a conventional twin-engine plane, the plane will yaw into the dead engine. This was fortunate for me because it yawed the plane away from the formation, and negated any chance of a mid-air collision.

Lt. Wood immediately recognized the situation, and was on the radio, calling the tower, and instructing me to switch to tower frequency. I heard all this very clearly, but at the moment was a little busy with other pressing matters.

I did all the tasks I had been taught to do in this situation: Trim the rudder to eliminate yawing tendency; change the prop on the good engine to low pitch; advance the throttle to climbing power; shut off the fuel, ignition, generator, and mixture control of the dead engine; and, above all: Fly the airplane, fly the airplane, fly the airplane.

Then I called the tower, advised them of my position and situation, and told them I was returning to the field. The tower promptly replied that I was cleared to approach and land, and had number-one priority. All of this was very reassuring – for the moment. Then slowly and surely a disturbing situation began to arise; the airplane was not maintaining altitude. I added a little more power, and lifted the nose a trifle. Still we descended. By now we were down to four thousand feet, and slowly losing more. I did not dare reduce the airspeed any more, because I knew it positively had to be maintained with a safe margin above stalling speed.

Still we descended. After all I had been taught, was it possible that this airplane could not safely fly on one engine? A terrible thought occurred to me: Have I got to bail out and drift down in a parachute to the Red River swamp below, knowing that it's jamb full of slithering and vicious cotton-mouth moccasin snakes? Mentally, I made a resolution that I would stick

with the plane until it lost altitude down to one thousand feet and then bail out.

Miraculously, when we had descended to two thousand five hundred feet, it was almost as if we had hit a solid floor! The wings took hold, the airspeed began a slight increase, and the airplane was maintaining altitude and flying very solidly. I suppose we had simply reached an altitude where the air density and pressure were sufficient to support the weight of the plane. Nevertheless, I did not intend to throw away one foot of that precious altitude. I called the tower and advised them that I wanted to fly the pattern with the downwind leg of the pattern at an altitude of two thousand feet. Tower approved instantly. After all, Barksdale at that time was the longest field in the world, and I intended to land on the grass area, rather than the concrete runway, as we often did. I wasn't worried about overshooting the field; instead, my mental command to myself was: "Don't be short."

I turned on the base leg, descended to one thousand feet, and turned on to final approach. Everything looked good, with plenty of room before me and behind me. I closed the throttle on the good engine, and now the airplane behaved exactly as it would in a normal approach, and I greased it into a perfect landing. My intention was to taxi it back to the ramp, but this

proved to be impossible on one engine. So I called the tower to send out a tug.

This they did, and we were towed to the ramp, where, by now a small delegation awaited us. I disembarked to a small smattering of applause. I really didn't understand why they made such a big deal of it; after all, I had only done what I had been taught to do; still, I was human enough to enjoy all the praise and compliments.

Soon we began cross-country flying, both day and night. This was a welcome change from the daily grind of take-offs, landings, and formation flying practice. Our navigation was very elementary. Mostly, we kept an aerial map spread on our laps, looked out the window, spotted a river, or a railroad, or a town, then put a finger at the corresponding feature on the map, and mentally said, "That's where I am."

The greatest leap forward in our skills was the Link Trainer. It looked like an airplane, sort of, made of plywood, with stubby wings, but the instrument panel was as complete as any real airplane. So also were the controls. True, they did not have the "feel" of a real airplane, but their functions and results were the same. There was also a covering hood, which totally shut out the outside world, leaving the pilot isolated in the cockpit with nothing to see except controls, instrument dials, and radio knobs. After

a few weeks, we were actually putting in one hour a day, three days a week, in the Link.

The Link instructor sat at a control console outside the “airplane”, and dictated various situations and problems. It was amazing how engrossed you could become flying the Link. Your concentration had to be total and complete, so much so that the illusion of flying a real airplane became a virtual reality. One student, in fact, became so wrapped up in a problem of flying the radio range that he inadvertently let the Link trainer fall into a spin. In a panic, he threw open the hood and bailed out! Fortunately, he was actually only two feet above the floor, so no bodily injuries occurred. The damage to his pride, however, was considerable.

A great deal is owed by many, many pilots to the Link Trainer. It was excellent training; it was very inexpensive to operate, compared to a real airplane; and it was safe. Despite the incident cited above, no one has ever lost his life in a Link Trainer.

So the weeks and months sped by, and soon it was April, and graduation time approached. This was an event looked forward to for many reasons, one of which was that we were slated to get a week of leave. A whole week!

One night we had all gone to bed. Eddie slept in the cot next to mine. Without any preamble, he asked, "How far is it from here to there?"

I did not hesitate a minute to reply, "One thousand and twenty miles." I knew his question meant, "How far from Shreveport, Louisiana, to Latta, South Carolina?"

Graduation day finally arrived. My parents drove all the way from South Carolina to be present for this event. I was so proud of them for doing this, because I knew it was by far the longest distance they had ever been from home. On the morning of graduation, we were allowed to take our parents to the flight line, and on an actual visit inside the B-18 bomber. This was followed by an air show, in which we flew in formation, performed aerobatics, and made a high speed, high noise, low altitude pass across the field. Yes, we hammed it up a little, but could anyone really blame us?

Then we all went to a large auditorium where, after a short speech by the Commanding General of the Training Command, we were commissioned Second Lieutenants in the Air Corps Reserve, rated pilots, and handed our bars and wings. My mother pinned these on my jacket, and we walked toward the car. An enlisted man saluted me. I returned his salute, reached in my pocket and gave him a crisp new one-dollar bill. This

was a time-honored custom for an officer to do for the first enlisted man to salute him.

Mom and Dad decided they would begin their trip home after lunch, since it would be at least a day or so before I could get through the usual red tape to start my leave. So I trailed them back to their motel, had lunch, waved goodbye, and returned to the base.

Next morning I received my orders. To my complete amazement I was assigned to Barksdale Field as a flight instructor! Was I proud? You bet! It also simplified the moving process. All I had to do was grab my few possessions, carry them to the BOQ (Bachelor Officers' Quarters) and stack them in the allotted apartment. This involved a travel distance of about three hundred yards. Then I had to await the printing and delivery of the order granting me one week's leave.

So, with one thing after another, it was about four o'clock in the afternoon of the next day before Eddie and I could get on U.S. Highway 80, eastbound. So what? When you are twenty-one, you are supposed to drive a car all night. Aren't you?

It was wonderful to be back home, if only for a few days. True, only eight months had elapsed since I had left home, but it seemed so much

longer. This, I think, was due to the tremendous changes which had occurred in my life style in those months. I guess I had grown up.

CHAPTER FIVE

BARKSDALE FIELD

We were back on the road to Barksdale after a stay at home of five days --- back to assume our positions as exalted flight instructors.

When I had first begun my flying career as a student, I had often said to myself, “If I ever become an instructor, I will always be very patient, very soft-spoken and courteous, and a truly nice guy to my students.” This fine resolution was to last about two weeks.

There are several reasons for this change in demeanor. One, every student makes the same mistakes. Two, they do it again and again. Three, you ask yourself: Why is he so stupid? After all, we are talking about life and death when you are flying an airplane. Anybody should have sense enough to understand that, and hence the necessity to listen and heed. So I found myself shouting, and cursing, and growling --- whatever it took to obtain excellent performance.

We began training new students in the Martin B-12. The student sat in the front seat, and the instructor in the rear seat. This worked fine in the

air and even on the approach to a landing. But, when the student flared for a landing, that is, raised the nose up to level when just above the ground, the downward visibility for the instructor vanished. This was because that big wing came up and blocked the instructor's vision of the ground, and hence his depth perception. The hazard here was that if the student had the airplane too high off the ground, it would stall in, with dire results. So, I evolved the Gaddy system to prevent this. When the student flared the airplane, I would allow three seconds for the plane to touch the ground. To do this, all I had to do was to count, "one uh thousand, two uh thousand, three uh thousand." If the wheels had not touched the ground by the last count, I simply advanced the throttle to full power, and climbed out again for another circuit of the field, and a second attempt. This system worked like a charm!

After a few months, we received more modern planes to use in training cadets. One of these was the Lockheed Hudson, a much more powerful, faster, roomier airplane. In this one, we evolved a system whereby the instructor sat in one seat in the cockpit, a student sat in the other seat in the cockpit, and a second student stood between and slightly behind the two seats, so that he could observe and learn until his turn came to take the controls.

One fine day I had this setup in place. We were at an altitude of eight thousand feet, and I was working hard, explaining and demonstrating various maneuvers. I looked back to see if the standing student had also grasped the instructions. To my amazement, he had sat down on the floor and gone fast asleep!

This was the last straw, and the last iota of my patience. I took over the controls, and pushed the stick forward to begin a screaming power dive. Of course, the sleeping cadet simply floated upwards off the floor, and up to the ceiling, while he unsuccessfully clawed at getting down. It was a hopeless and fruitless effort, because as long as I kept the descent accelerating, he was effectively glued to the ceiling. Then, to my consternation, he bumped his forehead on a small metal projection which cut a one-inch slit in the skin of his forehead, causing him to bleed like a stuck hog. There was nothing to do except recover from the dive, get out of my seat, and stanch the flow of blood with my handkerchief. I landed and took him to the base hospital, where they took a few stitches and pronounced that he would be as good as new in a few days. We both reported the matter as an unfortunate accident. In a way, it was, but it never should have happened. Nevertheless, I guarantee that was one cadet who never again fell

asleep when he was supposed to be taking in the instructor's words of wisdom.

CHAPTER SIX

TURNER FIELD

In November I received orders transferring me to the Navigation Training School at Turner Field, Albany, Georgia. This proved to be another wonderful break for me in the Air Corps. A little background is necessary to explain this.

In the late 1930's the military suddenly awoke to the fact that we had airplanes quite capable of flying across thousands of miles of ocean to international destinations. The only problem was that we had few people with the knowledge and training to navigate on such flights. So, with typical military subtlety, the Air Corps hit on a solution: Draft a few of Pan American's navigators. After all, they had been navigating PBYs around the world for ten years. Then use them to train a nucleus of military navigators, who would in turn train more military navigators, and then use these as instructors in a newly-formed Navigation Training School. This was done, and it was to this newly-formed school that I was bound. My job would be

to fly the airplanes in which the aviation cadets slated to become Aerial Navigators would do their training missions.

Truly, this opened a new world for me. All training missions were about four hours or more in length, so this meant flying some six hundred miles or more, day and night. All at once, then, we were using an airplane for the purpose it was intended: carry people or things a long distance in a short time, and do it safely and consistently. So I no longer had to fly around the pasture, instructing students. Instead, I would be flying long distances, seeing new places, new country, new airfields. Plus, I would be building up my flying time at a wonderfully fast rate.

So once again, I cranked up my little Ford and headed for a new destination. This time, however, I was the only occupant. Of course, it had long ago become apparent that in the Air Corps, you learn that you must say "Adios" very frequently, and hope to meet again; and sadly, sometimes you don't.

The assignment at Turner Field was just as I had pictured it, and I loved it. In fact there were many times when I sat in the cockpit on a long flight and thought incredulously, "Here I am, doing something I love to do, and getting paid for doing it." How good can life get!

On the other hand, it was while I was at Turner Field that the attack on Pearl harbour occurred, an event which was to have a profound effect on the lives of millions of people, including me.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SELMAN FIELD

After a few months we began to hear rumors that a new and expanded navigation training base would be established at Selman Field, Monroe, Louisiana. Suddenly the rumors came true. Six of us were designated to be squadron commanders at the new field, and, wonder of wonders, promoted accordingly. So, there I was twenty-two years old, and a captain. Let me hasten to confess that these rapid promotions were not due to miraculous merit and ability. The simple truth is that the war had started, the Air Corps had to be rapidly expanded, and we were all we had to underpin this expansion.

I will never forget one day when we had just arrived in Monroe, and I had to transact some business at the Railway Express office in town. I went there, accompanied by another of the new squadron commanders. We stated our business to the elderly clerk. He raised his green eyeshade, looked us over very deliberately, and then turned to a fellow employee behind the counter, and said very clearly, "Somebody told me them captains weren't

nothing but boys." I wonder what he would have said a few months later when we had become majors?

Shortly after we made the move to Selman Field, Col. Mosely, who commanded the entire school, decided that the squadron commanders would be able to better perform their duties if they possessed the additional rating of Aerial Navigator. Well, what Col. Moseley wanted, Col. Mosely got. We found ourselves enrolled in the Navigation School, doing the identical things the aviation cadet students were doing, both in flying training and in ground school.

Frankly, I found that Navigation School was much more difficult than Pilot School. It required a great deal more studying, and a great deal more mathematics; but it was one of the most interesting endeavors I have ever undertaken.

I was especially fascinated with celestial navigation. It just seemed wondrous to me that we were using the same wonderfully precise movement of the stars as they pursued their unvarying course through the heavens – the same stars which the captains of sailing vessels had used for centuries before our time.

I have flown the North Atlantic many times. In the early forties, we did not have today's wonders: inertial navigation, satellite navigation, and

Loran. So, on long overwater flights, we had to use celestial navigation. Often I have left the cockpit, picked up a sextant, and scrunched my head and shoulders up into the observation dome in the fuselage. As I focused on Sirius, or Procyon, or Betelgeuse, this thought often occurred to me: In just a few minutes, if I take these shots accurately, and do the math correctly, I will know exactly where I am, even though it's only a tiny dot on the vast uncharted surface of the North Atlantic Ocean. Another thought also occurred to me: How wonderful of God to arrange it all this way.

So the days went by at Selman Field, and they were happy days. Sometimes I flew the planes in which student navigators did their training missions, and sometimes I sat in the back seat, chart and pencil in hand, and did my training missions. Sometimes I went to ground school. In my spare time (ha! ha!), I looked after my duties as squadron commander. It is a saying that squadron commander is the best job in the entire Air Corps. Believe me, it's true.

Almost before I knew it, I had finished the navigation school, graduated, and was officially rated an Aerial Navigator, complete with a navigator's special wings. It was an additional skill, an additional education, which was to serve me in good stead throughout my career as a pilot.

I have many happy memories of my life at Selman Field. Many times we were allowed to use an airplane to maintain our proficiency. So we became proficient by flying on weekends to attractive towns and cities: Dallas, Atlanta, New Orleans --- the list is endless. Of course, upon our arrival there, we did our best to insure that the bars, taverns, and dance halls did not suffer because of a lack of our patronage. One Sunday afternoon, we took off from Atlanta to return to Selman Field. I was really worn out and sleepy, so I went to the rear of the plane, and stretched out in a seat to take a nap, leaving Lt. Ford and Lt. Fly in the cockpit to fly the airplane. After about half an hour, I awoke and looked forward toward the cockpit. Lt. Ford, in the lefthand seat, had his head flopped over and resting on the left side-window, sound asleep; Lt. Fly, in the righthand seat, had his head flopped over and resting on the right side-window, sound asleep. The crew chief, Sgt. Taylor, was standing between the two seats, and leaning forward, hand extended, to make a slight corrective adjustment to the automatic pilot, which was flying the airplane! Oh, well, I thought, the Air Corps is based on mutual trust and teamwork.

Lt. Fly was involved in another amusing incident. When he first came to Selman Field, a small error was somehow made in his initial paycheck. About three weeks later, he received an additional check in the magnificent

amount of twenty-seven cents. Fly thought this was a marvelous souvenir, so he took a thumbtack and stuck the check on the wall of his quarters. Several months later, he received a call to report to the Finance Officer, Major Gilchrist. So there he went, entered the office, and stood stiffly at attention. Major Gilchrist was seated at his desk, looking disgustedly at a thick and voluminous stack of correspondence. Fly said that he could see that some numbers were on the letters, and also that his own name was prominently mentioned. (In the Air Corps, you soon learned that it was a great advantage if you could read upside down.)

Major Gilchrist said, "Lt. Fly, did you receive a check for twenty-seven cent several months ago?"

"Yes, Sir."

"What did you do with it?"

"I stuck it on the wall with a thumb tack."

Major Gilchrist put both hands on the top of his desk and propelled himself upward to his full height, and with his eye flashing fire, bellowed. "Cash that sonofabitch!"

Fly retreated backward to the door, mumbling, "Yes, Sir. Yes, Sir" until he had managed to escape that irate presence.

Ah, well, who else but the military would spend a hundred hours and a dozen letters to straighten out an error of twenty-seven cents?

After a year and a half at Selman Field, a request came down from Headquarters seeking volunteers for four-engine training, to be followed by combat duty. So I volunteered.

I have often tried to analyze my exact reasons for doing this. To some extent, I suppose it was because of the adventure offered by the change; but mostly, it was because, deep down, I knew that I had to find out what kind of man I really was, and the only way to do this was to fly in combat.

CHAPTER SEVEN

TARRANT FIELD AND MARCH FIELD

So, the little Ford and I motored westward to Tarrant Field, Fort Worth, Texas. (Sometimes I wondered if I was destined to spend my entire military career on U.S. Highway 80.)

For two months I simply became an integrated part of the B-24 Liberator bomber. During all this time, we flew the airplane about four hours each day, and went to ground school for the same length of time, learning all the systems of the plane: fuel, electrical, electronics, and hydraulics. It was a complicated machine, and there was much to learn.

When all of this had been mastered, I received orders transferring me to combat training. Once again, the Ford was pointed westward to go to absolutely the last state remaining before driving into the Pacific Ocean: California. March Field. Here I met for the first time the men who would become members of my crew for the duration of the war. The B-24 carried

a crew of ten men: Pilot, Copilot, Navigator, Bombardier, Flight Engineer, Radio Operator, left waist gunner, right waist gunner, ball turret gunner, and tail turret gunner. The plane had a total of ten 50-caliber machine guns, and could carry about six thousand pounds of bombs. From that point on, every flight we made could carry the full crew, each at his station. It was essential that all of us work as a team. In fact, it was to become a matter of life and death.

No one could have had a better crew. They were truly the finest examples of young manhood that America had to offer. They were very young, and they were very brave. Truly when you thought "“Duty, Honor, Country"” these men were the very embodiment of these words. I have often thought back to the days of actual combat in England, when I would walk around the airplane just before takeoff on a mission. There they were, all nine of them, and there was never the slightest hesitation, never the slightest doubt, never any intention except to climb on that airplane, man their assigned stations, and do their jobs. And they did this time after time after time. Even now, it’s an inspiration to me to remember their bravery and their dedication. I salute each one.

At March Field, we practiced daily the kind of flying we would be doing in actual combat: Formation flying and practice bombing, all at high

altitude. The practice bombing range was a deserted stretch of wasteland desert in Arizona. Believe me, there was never any question of about people being on the ground in that area! It was an ideal site for the purpose.

The gunners also practiced their art, firing at a sleeve towed by another plane. A sleeve was on a very long cable, strung out behind the towplane. The pilot of the towplane had my deepest sympathy. Believe me, if I had been faced with his job, I would have demanded a tow cable at least ten miles long!

We spent two months in these activities at March Field, and then were pronounced combat ready. Obviously, it was time to prepare to go overseas.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ENGLAND AND COMBAT

And so the orders came: Pick up a plane in San Francisco, fly it to a base in Illinois, and thence to a further un-named destination.

So, I had to part with my little red Ford. Regretfully, I sold it to a dealer, and boarded a train to San Francisco, along with the other members of my crew.

At San Francisco, we picked up a new B-24, and flew it to Illinois, as ordered. There we were given sealed orders, to be opened only after takeoff. So, just as soon as we were airborne, we opened the envelope. It directed us to fly to Goose Bay, Labrador; thence to Reykavik, Iceland; thence to Wales, England. Thus, the overall trip was to be divided into these three legs. The trip went very smoothly and posed no problems. After landing in Wales, we were placed on a train to go to Cheddington, England, which was some thirty miles northwest of London.

Upon arriving at Cheddington, we were met at the station and transported in a military vehicle a few miles to the Air Base, where we went directly to our assigned quarters.

I unpacked and sat on the edge of my bed, wondering how all this had happened. Soon a messenger arrived and gave me a note directing me to report to the Squadron Commander the next morning.

So, bright and early, I did so. Lt. Col. Aber was seated at his desk, poring over an open file which I could plainly see contained all my military records and history. He asked me my purpose in being there, and I modestly replied that I had come to help him win the war.

He said, "That's fine and commendable, but I see you are a B-24 pilot."

"Yes, Sir," I replied.

"Well, just look out the window toward the ramp and parking hardstands. We fly the B-17 in this squadron."

I looked out and was stunned to see that he was 100% correct.

He stood up and motioned me to follow him outside to his jeep. We drove to the flight line, directly to a B-17, got out of the jeep, and climbed into the airplane. He indicated I was to take the left-hand seat. He took the right hand seat. We fastened our seat belts, and under his tutelage, I

managed to get all four engines fired up, went through the checklist, and taxied out. He told me to take off, fly around for about ten minutes, and then shoot a few landings. I did so, and then taxied back to the parking area.

"O.K., he said, "You'll do,"

Believe it or not, the next time I got into a B-17, I was flying it on a combat mission! And this, if you please, after I had spent some four months training, studying, and flying the B-24! Ah, well, the military moves in mysterious ways, its miracles to perform.

The change in airplane was another of the happiest things which occurred to me in the Air Corps. I don't mean to "trash" the B-24. It was a good airplane, with speed, range, and load-carrying ability; but frankly, it was a homely, dowdy, ungainly old girl, and hence just never appealed to me. The B-17, on the other hand, was a beautiful airplane, flew like a dream, and could take incredible punishment and still stay in the air. I loved it.

I have never really liked to dwell too much on combat experiences. I find, though, that nearly everyone is interested in that aspect, so I will relate some of the thoughts which are relevant.

Everybody asks, "Were you scared?"

I can only truthfully reply, "Yes, I was scared." In fact, the first time that the tail gunner called out, "Enemy fighter coming in at six o'clock." I could actually feel the hair on the back of my head prickle and stand on end. Have you ever seen the hair on a dog's back do this? Well, it was the same experience for me. Strangely, though, after a time or two, instead of being scared, you get mad as hell, and your reaction is to say, "Shoot him. Kill the SOB before he kills us." And that is the terrible nature of war.

I flew many lone night sorties – no fighter escort, no accompanying bombers to add their protective fire – just me, my crew, and my airplane. We called these lone night sorties "Root, hog, or die. Just get the job done." I have known the terrifying experience of being "coned" by searchlights over Germany, of being the target of voluminous flak, of hearing the sound, as we called it, of rain on the roof, meaning bullets and pieces of flak tearing through the thin aluminum skin of the airplane. But I have also known the indescribable thrill of re-crossing the English Channel on the return trip, of seeing the moonlight reflected on the white cliffs of Dover, of knowing that in just a few more minutes, God willing, I would be back at the base, on the ground, safe again, one more time.

There were some pleasant surprises, however modest, in combat flying. For example, when we had finished a mission, we went to the Flight

Room for de-briefing. As we entered, there sat the Flight Surgeon, offering every crew member a double shot of high quality bourbon. My co-pilot, Clint Nash, and I led our crew in, and being first in line, eagerly accepted the bourbon and gulped it down. Then, to our surprise and dismay, each remaining member of our crew said, "No, thank you, sir, I don't drink."

We quickly had a serious conversation with those airmen. After every subsequent mission, each of them would accept the plastic cup of bourbon, and holding it carefully, would turn and go to the Locker Room. There, Nash and I stood, holding a large empty bottle and a small funnel. Into the bottle went the bourbon, and after a few missions we were well stocked. This was a great advantage for many reasons, but the prime reason was this: Every member of a combat crew received two days of leave every fortnight. So when we went to London for those long weekends, bourbon was in plentiful supply.

Another question which everybody asks is: "What was the closest call you ever had?" This is difficult to answer, because, for all I know, a bullet or a piece of shrapnel could have zipped by just outside my window, within inches of my head, and I would have been totally unaware of it. But I do know the most harrowing experience I had during the war. We were on a night mission to Bad Neuheim, Germany, and were within minutes of the

target, when suddenly and without warning, the propeller on the Number 1 engine (the left outboard engine) ran away. This means that the blades flattened out and the revolutions per minute increased to a frightening speed. What caused this, I do not know, even to this day. It could have been a stray piece of flak, or a bullet which severed critical oil lines, or it could have simply been a mechanical failure. I pressed the button which was supposed to feather the propeller. Nothing happened. I cut off the ignition, the mixture control, the fuel line. Nothing happened. By now, the rpm was so high that the airplane started vibrating. The only course was to slow the airplane down to just above stalling speed, which reduced the windmilling of the runaway prop to a tolerable level. This stopped the shuddering and vibrating, but suddenly a new peril emerged: the front of the engine caught fire. Now, a fire in an airplane is a terrible thing because there is no place to go. You're like a rat in a cage. To add to the problem this was in December, during the Battle of the Bulge, which was in the exact area we were traversing as I headed the plane toward our side of the lines. I remembered the intelligence officer telling us at the briefing before takeoff: "Whatever you do, don't bail out over the bulge. Both sides are shooting anybody who comes down in a parachute." So that did not seem like a very

attractive alternative. On the other hand, a fire at night was so plainly visible that it almost beckoned attack.

Suddenly the fire became intermittent. It would flare up and then die away, depending, I suppose, on the supply of oil or fuel available to it. I asked the navigator for the closest field on our side of the lines. He said there was a fighter field at St. Trond, Belgium, just six miles on our side of the lines, which our forces had taken only a week prior to that time. I got the compass heading and turned the plane for this new destination. Meantime, I contacted the tower on emergency frequency, and described our situation. Tower said the field lights were very poor. (That was understandable; after all, our single-engine fighters did not fly at night.) However, the tower added that they would immediately put some flambeaus on the left side of the runway to delineate it. The runway, Tower said, was only 4000 feet long. No matter, I had no choice.

I think it took about fifteen minutes to reach the field, but it seemed like fifteen hours. Then I spotted the flambeaus, and turned on approach. I closed the throttle on the right outboard engine, and this eliminated the problem of yawing toward the dead left outboard engine. Then, by grabbing the throttles for the two inboard engines, I could add a great deal of power without changing the characteristics of a normal approach. Wheels down,

flaps down, with the airplane "hanging" on the propellers, we came down and touched the runway softly. I closed all the throttles, shut down the engines, and braked to a stop, right by the waiting fire truck, which immediately put out the fire.

An interesting event added to my memory of this episode. My flight engineer was Sgt. Andy Thompson. He was excellent in every way, and totally military. Everything he said to me was always "Yes, sir, " or "No, sir", and that was about the extent of any conversation we had ever had. As we approached for this landing, he was standing to the rear and slightly behind the two cockpit seats, as was his habit, so that he could monitor the engines and instruments. As I landed and braked to a stop, Thompson leaned forward, threw both arms around my shoulders, and shouted, "Man, you are all right."

I thought: Well, I have finally thawed Thompson out. I also thought that this might be the most sincere compliment I had ever received.

The next night, they put us in an army truck and transported us to Brussels, where we were given another B-17, which we flew back to England.

I will not say that I woke up screaming after this trial by fire; but I do confess that for several nights, my sleep was fitful and scanty. Even years later, there were moments of half-sleep when the horror of that fire returned.

One of the very interesting features of the war was the super-safe runway. Few people, even in the military, knew about it. We had one located on the northeast coast of England. It had a runway twelve thousand feet long, and three hundred feet wide, truly a tremendous size in those days. Each side of the runway was lined with a four inch pipe into which gasoline could be pumped, and emerge at jets spaced at intervals along the length of pipes. In an emergency, this gasoline was ignited, and the heat thus generated would disperse the fog. England is a relatively small island, and it is not impossible for the entire island to be fogged in, especially at night in the winter. I was forced to use this runway a few times because of this condition. Believe it or not, I have seen the rectangular orange glow of that burning gasoline through four thousand feet of fog, cloud, and darkness. So an approach and landing were as simple as they were on a bright sunny day.

The heat generated was so great that when you reached an altitude of about three hundred feet, the turbulence generated by this heat was very noticeable, and sufficient to bounce the airplane around.

The agreement on this super-safe runway stipulated that it was to be used only in an emergency, and further, that no operational combat flight would ever be dispatched from this runway or field. In return, the Germans agreed never to attack it; likewise, the Germans also had their super-safe field, where the same agreement pertained.

This agreement was scrupulously observed. The minute you landed, and the airplane was stopped, ground crews swarmed aboard and removed every vestige of ammunition, bombs, or other offensive material. It was in this condition that you flew back to your home base when the weather permitted.

In so many ways, my experiences in combat flying do not have a feeling of reality. It is almost as if they happened --- not to me --- but rather to someone I knew very well. I can remember thinking, while flying a mission, "What in the world are you, a South Carolina farmboy, doing up here at 25,000 feet, sucking on an oxygen mask, flying over Germany, while people are free to shoot at you?"

Another unusual feature of the war was simply the strange life for an airman. Obviously, I had a clean place to sleep each night, relatively decent food, and a dance at the club every two weeks. Moreover, if I was not scheduled to fly on a particular day, I could get on my bicycle and ride a

couple of miles to an inn on the canal, and there have a serene hour for a sausage biscuit and a cup of tea. Often I did this on a morning, returned to the base in early afternoon, and when night arrived, I would report to the flight line and go to war again.

Some of the smaller events which occurred still bring me pleasure to recall, even now, so many years later. For example, often before a mission, the Red Cross panel truck, manned by three or four Red Cross girls, would drive around the field, and stop for a minute at each airplane, where the combat crew awaited the signal to board the plane and begin the mission. The girls would give us a smile, a pack of cigarettes, and a candy bar. Most of the crew would slip the cigarettes and the candy bar into the pocket of their flight coveralls. But not me! I can remember very gravely and matter-of-factly thinking: I'm going to eat this candy bar right now, so that I can be sure that I get to eat it. And so I did.

I mentioned my bicycle. Every airman had a bicycle. It was the only way to get around on relatively short distances. No one had a car. If one had, there was not a drop of gasoline available for this purpose. On the other hand, bicycles were in good supply. As one crew finished their tour, the incoming crew would simply buy their bicycles from them. I think I paid

five pounds for mine, which in those days would have been about twenty-five dollars, probably a fair price for a used bicycle at that time.

As a crew approached the end of their hour, each airman had mixed emotions. On one hand, you thought what a cruel fate it would be to get shot down with only two or three missions left to be completed, so you dreaded to get on that plane. On the other hand, you wanted to fly those few remaining missions just to get the damn things over with! Usually, this last emotion prevailed. After all, in your early twenties, you think you are immortal.

Finally the night for my last mission arrived. We all approached it with apprehension, but fortunately it went as well as could be expected, and we returned safely to Cheddington.

It was the custom, when a crew completed their final mission, and had returned to the base, for the pilot to make a victory pass over the field, during which the crew was free to celebrate the occasion by firing flares out of the plane with verry pistols.

We had made mighty preparations for this occasion, and had the airplane well stocked with pistols and flares. When I made the low pass down the runway, it was a sight to behold! As I pulled up after the run, the tower said, “Good show, mate.”

Well, flattery could always get you everything from me, so I said, "Thank you. Would you care to join in the second chorus?"

"Thank you kindly for the invitation. Don't mind if we do," they replied.

So I made a second pass. This time we really lit up the sky, because my crew was firing through every opening they could find in the plane, and they were aided and abetted by the tower personnel firing through every open window in the tower. I hope the few residents of Cheddington didn't look up and wonder if the world was coming to an end; but since it was already long past midnight, I feel sure they were all sound asleep.

So I finished my tour and became a happy warrior, which by definition, was an airman who had completed his tour of combat missions. What an apt sobriquet indeed! No name could have fit better!

I was granted the magnificent total of a week's leave; the rest of my crew, bless their hearts, went back to the good old U.S.A. Soon after returning to Cheddington, I received orders transferring me to Wing Headquarters for administrative duty. Then, sadly, one day before I was scheduled to make this move, Lt. Col. Aber was shot down and killed. Col. Goodrich, commanding officer of the base, summoned me and asked if I would be willing to stay on and assume command of the squadron, provided

he could secure revocation of the order transferring me to Wing Headquarters. Of course, I said, "Yes, sir"; what major says "no" to a colonel? Thus, it was the tragic loss of Lt. Col. Aber which thrust me into command of the 406th Bombardment Squadron.

We continued the usual work of the squadron for a few weeks, and then I received orders to move the entire squadron to a field at Northampton.

Moving just a small family is no easy job; but moving an entire squadron is a daunting task. Just think of it: six hundred officers and men, twenty of our four-engine bombers, vehicles, supplies, and personal possessions; but, somehow, we did it all in one day. While at Northampton I received my promotion to Lt. Colonel. Again, I beg you not to attribute great merit to this; after all, there was a prominent placard in the Officers' Club which proclaimed: "No alcoholic drinks served to Lt. Colonels unless they are accompanied by both parents." Hopefully, this served to keep a few egos in check.

We continued flying our missions until that remarkable day when Germany surrendered, and the war in Europe ended. So, after years of blackout, the lights came on again in England, in the storefronts, on the streets, from the windows of the homes.

Then after a few weeks, the 406th Squadron ceased to exist as an operational unit. The flying crews flew home to the U.S.A., known to us as the Z.I., (Zone of the Interior). The ground personnel went home by ship.

I was given thirty days R&R, (Rest and Recuperation). How wonderful it was to see my family again, to eat delicious food prepared by my mother, and to sleep in my own bed.

When my leave was over, my orders were to report to Sioux Falls AAF, there to await further orders for training in the B-29 Bomber, after which I could expect combat duty in the Pacific theater.

I was at Sioux Falls when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, and all at once, the war with Japan ended, and the world was at peace.

I had more than enough "points" to get out of the service, so I opted to leave. I had never seen myself as a candidate for a lifelong military career, and besides, I felt as if it was time to accomplish something else.

So I became a civilian pilot, a businessman, and a family man. I have been fortunate to own several airplanes, and to be active in general and corporate aviation for a long time. In all, I flew quite actively for forty-six years, and that is a long time to herd an airplane around the skies. It has all been beautiful! But the time came, after so many years, that I knew I had to

give up flying. Many have asked if I miss it. I can truthfully reply, "Only when I'm awake or asleep."

I further realize, with the inexorable passing of the years, that the day must sometime come when I will have to takeoff on that final one-way flight. I do not fear death; although there is no thought more fraught with pain and sorrow that the thought of being separated from my wonderful family, my beloved wife, my children and my grandchildren, all of whom have brought me so much pride and joy. Yet I am comforted by the sure and certain knowledge that there will be a day of re-union, in a better place, a place where there will be no more pain, no more sorrow, and no more parting.

So, at the risk of being deemed repetitious, I will simply say it again, "How wonderful of God to arrange it all this way."