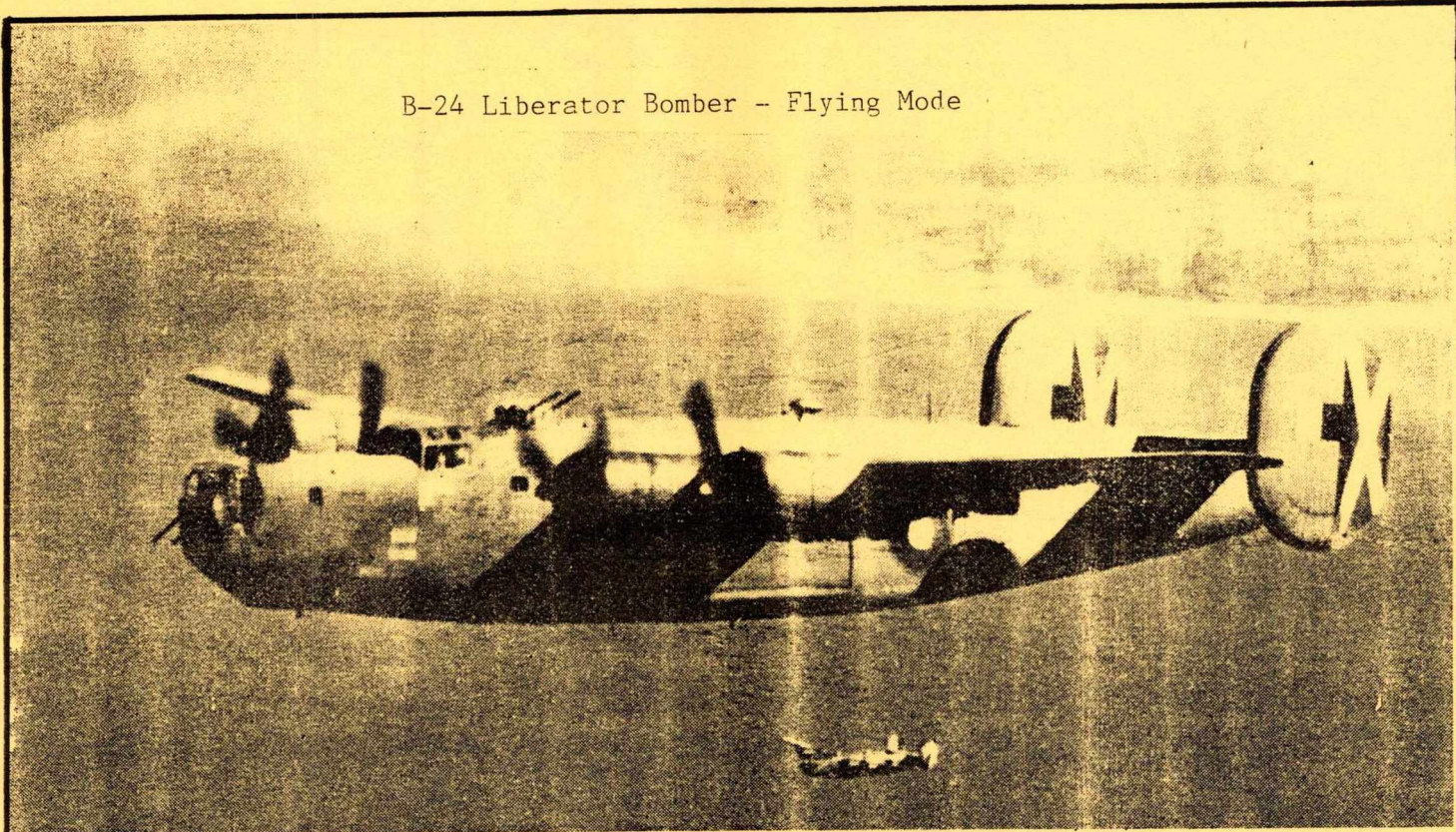


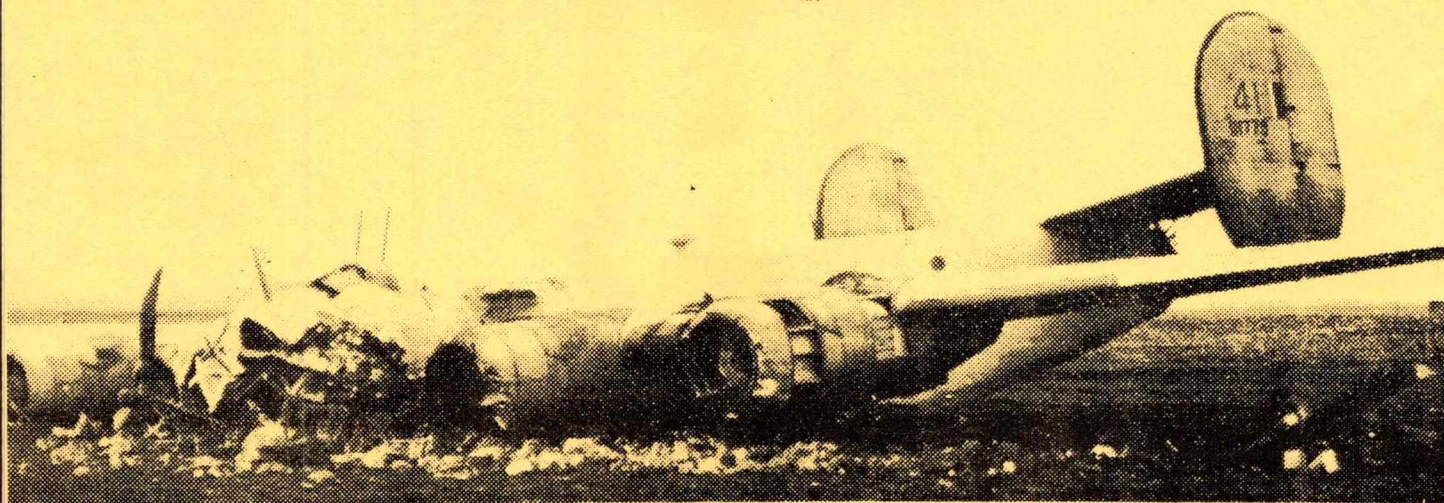
# Grandfather Stories

BYLINE BIG HEARTED HOWARD DEVORE

B-24 Liberator Bomber - Flying Mode



B-24 Liberator Bomber - Landing Mode



B-24 crackup on return to North African base. (Courtesy Capt. John D. Craig.)



## Howard Flies The Big Birds

In an earlier FAPA mailing I mentioned that with a little encouragement I would continue to tell war stories and at least a couple of people responded so here we go again ¶

War Wounds ? Of course I have war wounds § Here, let me show them to you. You see that place right next to the pimple ? No, No, that's the pimple, its right next to it. Its late summer of 1944 and I'm with a bomber group in England. I've been told I'm leaving, so my radio man and I go to the local pub to celebrate. There's several fly boys there and the usual local people, none of whom speak decent English. Two of the friendlist are 'Jessie The Jinx' who doesn't appeal to me in the slightest. Rumor has it that she's slept with five flyers -- none of whom made it home from their mission to Germany or wherever. There's another young lady present who probably had another name but mostly she's known as 'Mule Nose'. We throw a few darts and drink a lot of beer.

Finally its time to leave and the bartender urges us to do so. The air base is at least a mile away, down a country lane. In our condition it may take most of the night to get there but some kind soul had left a bicycle leaning against the wall of the pub. We're not stealing it, we're just going to borrow it for the evening, so we climb aboard and start peddling down the lane. Quite likely we were both trying to peddle it at the same time and it didn't have four pedals.

At the base of the hill it threw us off and as we lay there it reached up and bit me-- that's where the war wound came from -. A disobedient bicycle must be taught a lesson and neither of us were carrying a gun but fortunately there was a creek just feet away, so we lugged it to the creek and held it under water long enough to drown it. We made it back to the path and strode forth singing, "PaddleFoot, all we do is Paddlefoot". [ A 'paddlefoot is a large ungainly bird that does not fly ]

Eventually I got my orders to leave and traveled to the Replacement Dept. I beleive this was in Blackpool, England and seem to recall that Eric Frank Russel lived there throughout the war but I was not aware of it at the time and missed my chance to meet him. Something I've always regreted.

This time the base was located in what was originally a park in the middle of the town. We could walk out the gate and two blocks later were on the main street. We could get a pass every evening and I took advantage of it. I'd sleep all morning, wake up about noon and drink two quarts of beer through the day, then go back to town. When I returned I'd have two quarts of beer in my coat pockets for the next day's refreshments. I suppose I was there some six weeks or so and must have been to the mess hall at some point but don't remember it. My chief norishment was the beer and chips ( fried potatoes ).

Curfew was midnight and created a problem. The base was surrounded by a simple wire fence and patrolled by guards. The Air Force had a sorta happy go lucky attitude about curfew and several guards had been court martialled when they were caught holding the fence up for their fellow birdmen to slide under. A court martial did not appeal to me so when my turn came for guard duty I solved it the simple way. If I heard a rustling in the bushes or someone whispering to me I ignored them but immediately walked to the far end of my duty station and stayed there with my flashlight pointed at the ground for ten minutes or so. When I returned to my orginal position whatever had made the noise was always gone and I didn't catch a single person sneaking under the fence.

Why was I pulling guard duty ? That's another story and here it is. The barracks was a long building with central hallway and perhaps 10 rooms on each side and maybe six people to a room.

One of my roommates was a bad boy and got drunk one night. It seemed an imposition to walk around the building to enter so he picked up a rock and broke a window to unlatch the window and crawled in.

He could have tapped on the window and we would have let him in but he was self sufficient, moments later the corporal in charge of the building came charging in, wanting to know who had broekn the window. The culprit felt put upon and made noises of about shooting the corporal & started going through his luggage, "I know I've got a gun somewhere". He wasn't really going to shoot the corporal, he was going to pass out on his bunk and did so within minutes but meanwhile the corporal decided he had business elsewhere and left in a hurry.

The next morning we cleaned up the glass and forgot the incident until the corporal returned with a captain. The corporal had left so swiftly he'd forgotten which room he was in and the Major just asked if we'd heard any noises about midnight. We denied hearing anything and since all of the glass was removed they apparently thought the window was just very clean. An hour later they returned and this time they looked carefully at all of the windows - one was not clean, just missing.

Shortly thereafter we all appeared before the Captain. The man who broke the window was fined the cost of the glass ( 15 cents ? ) and ordered to cut the grass around all of the barracks for the next week. Co-consirators were put on gaurd duty for 72 hours, four hours on, then four hours off. For three days I pulled guard duty- 4 on, 4 off and it rained every minutes of that three days. Matter of fact it rained for a week and since he couldn't cut the grass in the rain the man who caused the trouble set in a nice warm barracks while we pulled guard duty ... but he did pay the 15 cents.

Worst of all none of us have known him previously, we'd simply followed the army principle of covering up everything and never admitting to anything until its proven against you.

That's where I lost my .45 too ¶ A .45 automatic is a nice thing to have when you get out of the Army. You never know when you'll wanta shoot something. Army records of course record the serial number of the gun that's issued to you but if you happen to find one that belonged to somebody that's shot down over Germany, well that's a nice spare and maybe you can hide it in your luggage and take it home. It seemed that half the aircrew going home had one or more spare guns.

So, at the replacement depot we attended a meeting where a sgt spoke to us on the subject. He explained that he knew most of us had guns and since it was time consuming to hunt them the air force wasn't going to bother ... however, returning soldiers had been smuggling drugs into the USA and when we reached NY everything would be searched and every gun would be found. We could carry the extra four pounds on to the boat if we wished or we could just take them down the hall and toss them on the floor of room 102. They weren't even keeping records.

It certainly sounded sensible. I unburied the gun from wherever I had it took it to room 102 and tossed it on the floor. There musta been 500 automatics on the floor and a couple of sub machine guns. There wasn't even anyone in charge of collecting them. Needless to say when we reached NY noone even looked at our luggage for dope or guns. I coulda brought 30 of them home §

I wonder if the army used the same pyschology in Korea and Viet Nam ?

Then there was the dope I did acquire ¶ Summer of '45 I was working as a medic in Miss. and they were flying back 2 engine bombers from the Pacific to be cleaned up, refitted and then stored for use when we went to war again. [ I believe this was the A-26 ]. In any case one of my jobs included removing the first aid kits from the returning bombers. They'd have anywhere from none to maybe 15 first aid kits and some included serettes of morphine. I stored the kits but removed the morphine and gave it to he Major who stored it in his safe. At one time the safe ontained over 3,000 doses of morphine and there was no existing record until I turned it in.

I knew what morphine was and had no intention of selling it on the black market for addicts but perhaps I'd find a legal way to convert it into cash so there were 100 doses of it in the ceiling of an empty barracks. When I got discharged in March 1946 it was still there and I suppose someone found it years later when they tore down the barracks.

Sometime in 1946 there must have been suspicion of me. I'd been doing a bit of drinking and was doing some of it with two of the civilian post engineers. One of the engineers was the camp refrigeration expert. He was especially friendly but he was an expert on refrigeration and on whiskey, eventually he left the base and I later learned that he was also a plant. It seems that there was more dope than expected among the civilian population of Grenada, the nearest town. He'd been sent to track it down and thought that the acting first sgt in the medics was a likely choice. I can't recall that he ever mentioned the word dope but he'd concluded that I wasn't involved and gone away. It's also possible that it was coming from the infantry camp on the other side of Grenada. Even if offered I doubt that I would have had any interest in taking it. I couldn't imagine anything better than whiskey at that age.

Acting First Sgt ? Of course, didn't I tell you about that one. The airbase at Grenada had been used for some sort of training program early in the war, then closed down but by 1945 the war in the Pacific was slowing and they needed a place to store the A-26's they were bringing back, so they opened the base again and manned it with ex bomber crewmen returned from overseas. I was one of the 500 people picked to reopen it.

Few of us were trained for anything except bomber crews so they just lined us up and assigned us to various duties. I worked my way to the front of the line and was asked how I would like to work with the medics at the base hospital. I told them I didn't think much of it and the officer assigning people said they could always use more mechanics on the flight line. At that point I decided that the medics looked real good and that's where I went.

Rank meant very little, during training we received stripes regularly and on your third combat mission you were automatically a staff sgt and perhaps eventually working up to Master sgt. You could also lose these stripes pretty easy but fly three more missions and you were a staff sgt again. Of the 500 people brought in there was one corporal, two buck sgts [ I was one of them and that's another story ] and all the rest were staff or better.

The hospital had a Major, 2 warrant officers and 6-8 sgts plus I think three regular medic personnel and one female nurse. The nurse trained us to give shots using oranges and where to empty bedpans and which bottles contained the four various forms of aspirin. By that time she'd been transferred elsewhere.

Then the war was over and the army was dumping people into civilian life by the millions.

Within three months all of the medic personnel and the Staff Sgts were on their way to discharge, as a Buck Sgt I was the top ranking medic left, we got a few privates recently drafted but soon they were transferred also. I was made acting first sgt, no money, just the honor. Within six months there wasn't even much honor left. We were so short on personnel that any patient seriously ill was transferred to the hospital at the nearby infantry camp and we had the gonorrhea cases and athlete's foot cases.

We really did have one with that that stayed in the hospital for a month.

I'd hold sick call every morning, then place my second in command in charge of watching the place & I would take one of our two ambulances and go stay with the civilian firemen as driver of the crash ambulance.

Why didn't I send my #2 man on the crash ambulance ? It would have looked funny ¶

My #2 man wore army fatigues like the rest of us but his had a big black PW stenciled on the back. Camp McCalin, the nearby infantry camp was also a Prison of War camp. The prisoners were Germans captured in Africa or Italy and many of them were sent out on work details during the day. Many of them worked for the civilian farmers in the area but we had maybe 40 or 50 assigned to the air base and with one exception there were no incidents.

When the base first opened there were a half dozen working to clean up the PX and the officer in charge asked them what they had done in the German army. Several said that they had manned anti aircraft guns. At that point the officer locked them in the building and called Camp McClain, screaming " You sent me Flak gunners. Get them off my base this minute or my men will kill them". They left and never came back.

To get back to the tail. I was assigned two German Prisoners. One wasn't even in the German army. He was a civilian fireman on a German train. The train was taken over by the SS and run into France with supplies. Then dynamited and the civilians handed guns and told to fight. My man was in his seventies and he told me he was too old to fight, so he threw the gun away and hid in a ditch till the Americans came and captured him. Not knowing what else to do they'd classified him as a PW and shipped him to the states. I had him fire the furnace and do a little moping up if he felt like it and he was just sitting out his time till he got sent back to Germany.

The other man was Gerd, a young German, perhaps twenty years old and he'd been training for a medical career when he was drafted and made German medic. He spoke excellent english and knew vastly more medicine than I did so he helped me and if noone was watching practiced a little medicine on the side. After my discharge I came back to Detroit but visited the base a few months later. It was being closed down again and Gerd was in charge of a group pf PW's cleaning up the place. He even had a 6 x 6 truck assigned to him and drove it himself on the base .... then at 4:30 he went back to the infantry camp again and became a prisoner once more.

Oncet I had to make a trip to Kennedy General hospital in Memhis, 100 miles north - for reasons too complicated to explain I had to take Gerd along. Mississippi was a dry state, no legal whiskey anywhere and some counties banned beer ... so we're bringing back a case of whiskey and the cheapest place to buy it is downtown Memphis. So, we're walking down the main street, gerd has a case of whiskey on his shoulder and big black PW stenciled on his shirt. We went to the ambulance down the street and loaded it and noone even said a word about this strange occurance.

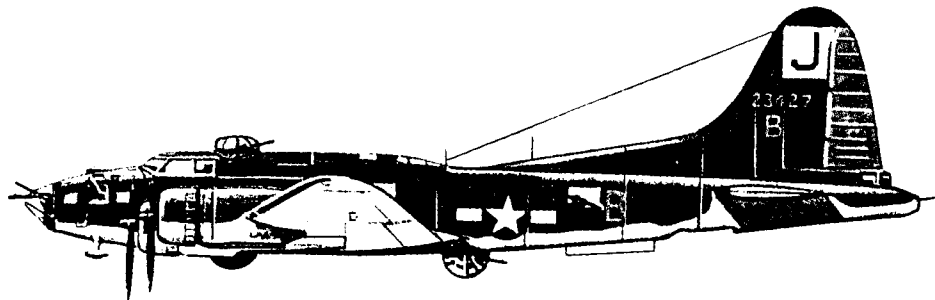
However .... we were gonna talk about airplanes, right ? Let's talk about the big birds for awhile.

Now, its about Oct or Nov of 1944. I've been overseas and done a little bit of work when I wasn't having fun. The army in its infite wisdom had sent me home. I had the usual 30 days at home and then was to report to Santa Ana Calif for rest and relaxation .... and boy did I need it. I was allowed maybe 5 days for travel time after my furlough ... or if I was driving to the west coast I could get another week or ten days. So, I told 'em I was driving amd spent the extra ten days at home, then rode the train to Calif. Oh boy §, I get about thirty days of rest again before I'm reassigned.

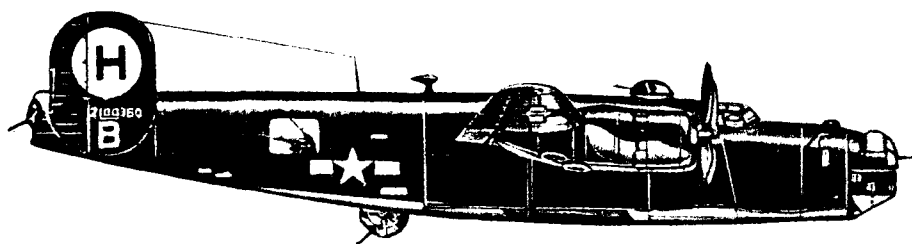
Somewhere in that thirty days it occurs to me that I haven't done any flying for about three months.

Flight pay is an extra 50% over your regular pay and if I got some flying time in I could collect back pay for that three months. That's 100 bucks free money and by now I needed it.

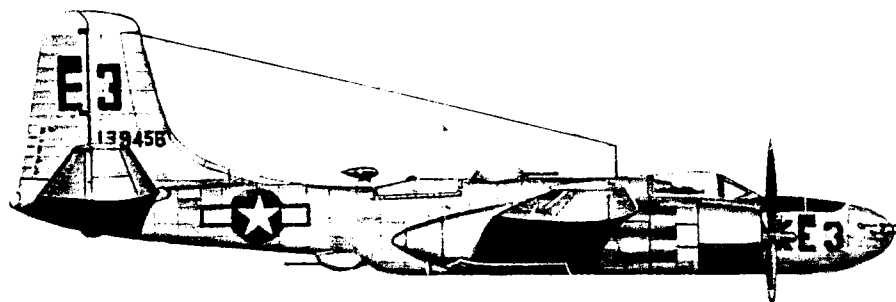
Santa Ana has a county airport that was taken over and run by the army and they flew military planes from the base ... if I can get on one . So, I hitchhike to the airport. Operations tells me a B-25 is about to take off. I can check out a parachute and they'll send me down the flight line in a staff car. They'll hold the plane and I can go along for the ride.



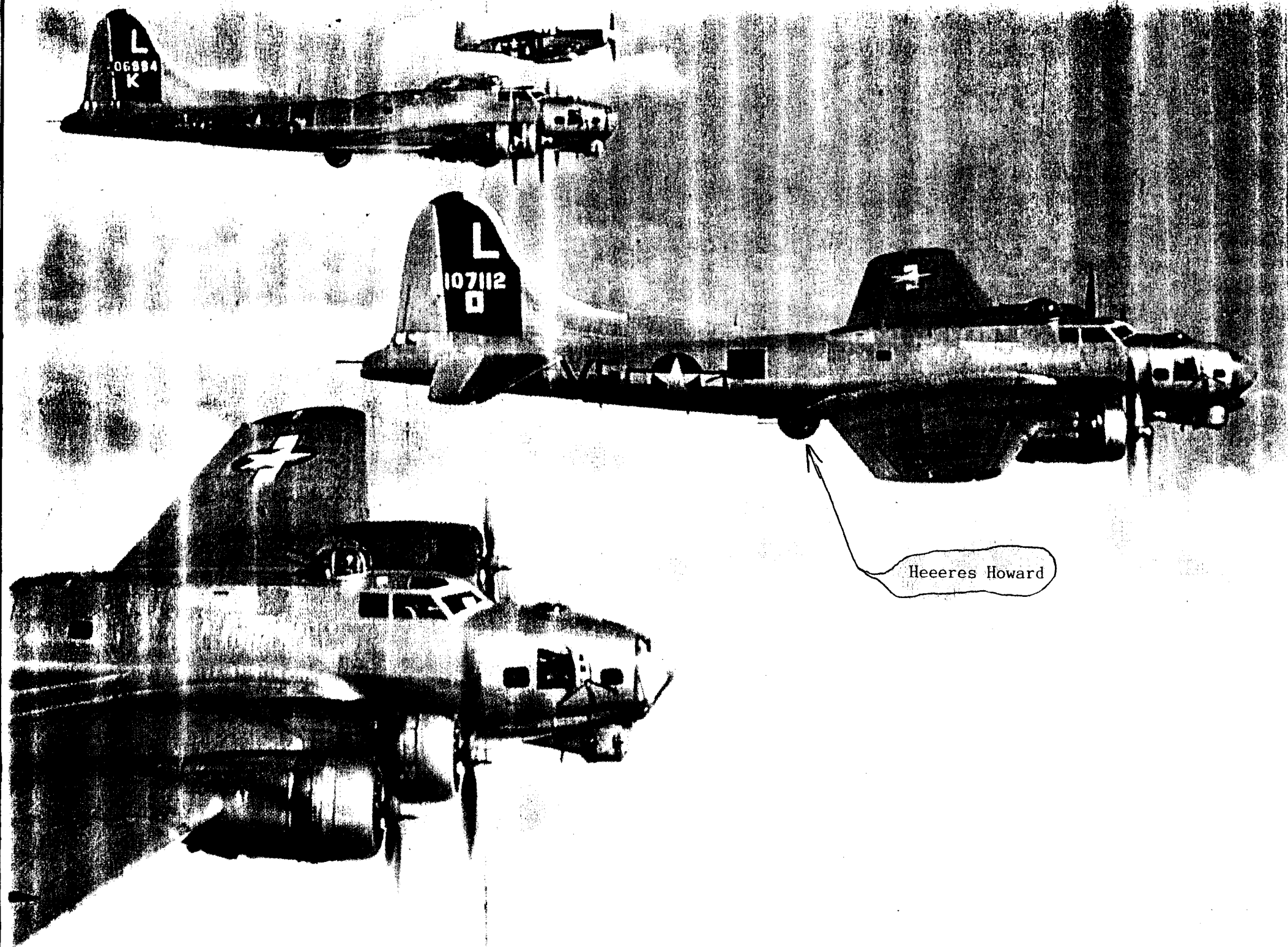
Douglas-built Boeing B-17F-60-DL of the 390th Bombing Group, US Eighth Air Force, UK 1943-45. *Engines:* Four 1,200 h.p. Wright R-1820-97 Cyclone radials. *Span:* 103 ft. 9 $\frac{3}{8}$  in. (31.63 m.). *Length:* 74 ft. 8 $\frac{7}{8}$  in. (22.78 m.). *Height:* 19 ft. 2 $\frac{1}{2}$  in. (5.85 m.). *Normal take-off weight:* 55,000 lb. (24,948 kg.). *Maximum speed:* 299 m.p.h. (481 km./hr.) at 25,000 ft. (7,620 m.). *Operational ceiling:* 37,500 ft. (11,431 m.). *Range with 6,000 lb. (2,722 kg.) bomb load:* 1,300 miles (2,092 km.). *Armament:* Eight or nine 0.50 in. Browning machine-guns (two in forward dorsal turret, one in rear dorsal position (optional), two in ventral turret, two in tail turret and one in each beam position), and one 0.30 in. gun in nose; maximum permitted short-range load of 12,800 lb. (5,806 kg.) of bombs internally and 8,000 lb. (3,629 kg.) externally.



Convair B-24J-95-CO of the 448th Bombardment Group, US Eighth Air Force, UK ca. spring 1944. *Engines:* Four 1,200 h.p. Pratt & Whitney R-1830-65 Twin Wasp radials. *Span:* 110 ft. 0 in. (33.53 m.). *Length:* 67 ft. 2 in. (20.47 m.). *Height:* 17 ft. 7 $\frac{1}{2}$  in. (5.37 m.). *Normal take-off weight:* 56,000 lb. (25,401 kg.). *Maximum speed:* 290 m.p.h. (467 km./hr.) at 25,000 ft. (7,620 m.). *Operational ceiling:* 28,000 ft. (8,534 m.). *Range at maximum overload weight of 64,500 lb. (29,257 kg.), including 5,000 lb. (2,268 kg.) bomb load:* 2,100 miles (3,380 km.). *Armament:* Ten 0.50 in. Browning machine-guns (two each in nose, tail, dorsal and ventral turrets and one in each beam position); normally up to 5,000 lb. (2,268 kg.) of bombs internally.



Douglas A-26B Invader of the US Ninth Air Force, ETO 1944-45. *Engines:* Two 2,000 h.p. Pratt & Whitney R-2800-27 or -71 Double Wasp radials. *Span:* 70 ft. 0 in. (21.34 m.). *Length:* 50 ft. 0 in. (15.24 m.). *Height:* 18 ft. 6 in. (5.64 m.). *Maximum take-off weight:* 35,000 lb. (15,876 kg.). *Maximum speed:* 355 m.p.h. (571 km./hr.) at 15,000 ft. (4,572 m.). *Operational ceiling:* 22,100 ft. (6,736 m.). *Range with maximum bomb load:* 1,400 miles (2,253 km.). *Armament:* Ten 0.50 in. machine-guns, six in nose and two each in dorsal and ventral turrets; up to 4,000 lb. (1,814 kg.) of bombs internally.



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I get a chute and go rushing out to the plane. I don't know anything about B-25's but hell a plane is a plane. They've all got big fans on the front and they go places. You just sit down there somewhere and later an officer gives you \$100.

I look up at the front of the plane § There's a woman sitting in the chair where the pilot is supposed to sit and it doesn't look like she's gonna get up and give the seat to a real pilot. Do women drive airplanes ? Do I want to find out ? Even if she manages to get it up in the air does she know how to get it back down on the ground ?

Well, Hell § A hundred bucks is a hundred bucks and I sure do need the money. The crew chief hits the release, the door opens and I get in the back of the plane. She guns the engines and away we go. She did get it up in the air § Now, she seems to be holding it steady, I don't think we're gonna crash on the take off. After awhile we're going into some mountains, the passes are a little small so she stands the thing on one wing, guns it and away we go. Now, we've been swinging thru the mountains fifteen minutes.

Goddamn § She's better than any pilot I've ever flown with § She can make that thing stand up and whistle. I put the chute on the floor, lay down on it and take a nap ... that doll baby is going to get me down just fine. I spend the next 2,3 hours admiring the scenery or sleeping.

Eventually she lands the thing and I go to get out. The hatch is over here, then the release for the hatch oughta be over there .. but it isn't and its not over there either. There doesn't seem to be any way of getting the hatch open. Maybe five minutes later I find the thing and pop the release and the hatch opens. It seems that there wasn't much point in taking a chute along since I would have never gotten out of the plane if anything had happened.

If my memory is correct we had to fly two hours per month to qualify for flight pay, which would mean that I needed six hours to make it up. In any case I still needed a couple of hours so I went out there again a few days later .... oops, let me add something here .....

After the B-25 flight I asked at operations and discovered that the woman pilot was one of the women hired as WAFFS (?). These were fully qualified as pilots before the war broke out, many of them had been race pilots or stunt flyers and had hundreds of hours in the air. They were used to deliver planes or anything else the air force needed. A few years ago Congress passed a law that allowed them to qualify for veteran's benefits etc. Something they had always been denied.

To continue .... Operations told me some lieutenant was going to take up an AT6, a single engine trainer with cockpits where one passenger or pilot sits behind the other. This is a very simple plane and the first thing a pilot was trained in. In any case the pilot had no objection and would take me along for the ride. Now, this was a real airplane controlled by a 'stick' like Flying Jack used ... not a steering wheel as they use on a steamboat.

I get a chute and we take off, we fly around for an hour or two. Then the pilot asked if I wanted to fly it awhile from the dual controls. Of course I did § So I flew it level awhile, then a slight bank etc. I'd had a hour or so on a B-17 holding it level etc but did not consider myself a pilot.

Pretty soon I see the pilot lean forward, then the engine started slowing down ... at the same time he yelled " The engine's dead. What are we going to do ?" He'd assumed that I had no experience and was going to scare me.

I screamed back " We're gonna crash", then I pushed the stick forward and held it. The nose started to dip down. He took hold of his 'stick' and started to pull it back but I had a good firm hold on it and it was obvious that I had 'froze' on the stick. He flipped the switch back on and really started to pull back.



We were probably at 5,000 feet or so. It would take a long time to get down but if he didn't get me loose I was going to nose that thing right into the ground. I gave him maybe 5 or ten seconds, then let up on my grip and both of us pulled the nose back up. I asked, "Oh, you wanta go back up?". He turned around and grinned, he wasn't sweating now - "You've flown before?" he asked. I spent some time with the eighth air force I admitted. Now, I wasn't some punk kid that came over from the air base to see what flying felt like. I'm glad to say he didn't resent the fact that I'd turned the tables on him.

People who know tell me that the AT6 was so simple that if you happened to fall asleep it would eventually land itself but that was my only experience in one. When I had my six hours in I made no more attempts to fly - I was interested in the money, not the adventure.

By co-incidence this is Memorial Day and the TV just had a couple of minutes concerning the women pilots. They were called WASPS and there over 1,000 of them eventually, 38 of them died in plane crashes during WW2

At the air base hospital in '45 we would occasionally loan a bed to some pilot who had flown in one of the A-26's. I recall that one of them offered to take me up for a ride and I refused, saying "I looked at the instrument panel. That ting is redlined at 425 and I don't ride in anything that goes that fast" ..... and I never have §

After a few weeks in Santa Ana they assigned me to a gunnery training school at Laredo, Texas. Meanwhile I got a couple of weeks home first, delay in route. Some people want years without a furlough. I only recall one actual furlough but it seemed that every time I changed bases I got a week or ten days at home. Anyway, I showed up at Laredo. This would have been at the very end of '44 or early '45. They were still sending bomber crews overseas mostly because they kept using them up.

A number of us were going to train new gunners, using the vast experience we had gained in our time in combat. If they'd realized how little I knew they wouldn't bothered but they did - so we were working with the regular instructors. Eventually we would learn the training methods and they would put us in charge of a class.

I couldn't seem to take all of this real serious. One day the instructor was giving the students details on the ball turret and he explained that the plastic ( plexiglass ) windows were curved that this helped deflect flak ( anti-aircraft shrapnel ). Because it was curved the chunks of metal would bounce off. At that point I took a piece of flak ( maybe an inch square ) out of my pocket and mentioned that sometimes it comes right thru the plexiglass and ricochets inside the turret.

The instructor downplayed this slightly and that afternoon I spoke with an officer who convinced me that morale among the new gunners was more important than detailed descriptions. I promised to be good and not scare the students. I really was a good boy for a few weeks, then one morning we were to take students up for a training flight. All of my time had been spent in B-17's and this flight was being made in a B-24.

The talk was that a B-17 would take a tremendous amount of damage and still fly, whereas a B-24 was " the box they used to ship a B-17 in ". The B-24 did look like a big box but it carried more gas and much higher bomb tonnage ... but if you wanted to come home you took a B-17

So, I've got my 3 or 4 students in the back of this lousy box and we're ready to take off. I tell the students, "When you take off in a B-24 you strap your chute on and stand near the side windows."

One of the students asked why we did that and I replied, "Sometimes the B-24's blow up on takeoff and if it blows you thru the window you might get your chute open and live". One of the regular instructors heard this on the intercom and the next day I wasn't a student instructor anymore.

I joined a group of screwups in a separate barracks and we waited to see where we would go next. The wait wasn't too bad, some weeks earlier I'd worked CQ one night and just happened to walk off with a whole pad of passes to Mexico. I think we were supposed to get one every two weeks so we could go over and get our ashes hauled and buy quarts of tequila for 75 cents.

I guess I had 100 passes and had acquired a new friend. We went nearly every night, filling in whatever name seemed appropriate that day and a serial number that we concocted. We had a great time for the few weeks we had left there. One Sunday morning I woke up with a hangover and asked if anyone in the barracks had something to drink. Someone offered me a half quart of wine and I drank it.

What I did not know was that he had dumped in the Spanish Fly he'd bought in Mexico the previous week. That afternoon 3 or 4 people suggested we all go to town and then to Mexico and spend two bucks at one of the numerous cat houses. I said that I wasn't in the mood. Then and now I don't have much desire to spend ten minutes with some complacent 14 year old girl. In any case about 4 O'clock I announced that maybe I'd go to town after all. They all insisted on coming along to watch the fun- finally the stuff was starting to work on me. So, I went to town, drank two beers, then announced that I was sleepy and I was going back to the base and go to bed early.

About then the man who furnished the wine realized that he'd paid \$2 for a half ounce of powdered sugar as so often happened.

A day or two before I was shipped out I did meet a young woman tourist and talked to her a couple of hours, then we parted. Some six months later when I was in Florida I got a bill from Customs declaring that 'my wife' had made three trips to Mexico that month, bringing back merchandise over the free limit value and I owed maybe \$25 duty. Eventually I cleared this by explaining that I had no wife and while I thought I knew who she was I wasn't sure she'd even given me her right name.

Well, it was time to leave Laredo. Screwups have to be punished so they sent me to Montgomery, Alabama for reassignment and then to Panama City Florida. The good boys who passed the course got to stay in Laredo, with its stinking desert and 120 degree summer. Montgomery sent me home for another ten day delay in route ('Hi, Mom, I'm back again') and then to the airbase on the gulf of Mexico.

Panama City wasn't going to let me ruin their students, so I got assigned to a B-26 operating the tow target reel. The students are in B-24's firing machine guns at a target towed by the B-26.

As the pilot put it " You're supposed to let the target out on 1,000 feet of wire but we've been hit a couple of times. You could give 'em 1200 feet and no one would mind". I replied that they were using real bullets and I thought 1500 feet was even better and that's what we used.

It wasn't a hard job, we flew twice a week, about two hours at a time. The rest of my time was my own except for some emergency when they would come to the barracks and get me, so I saw to it that my barracks number didn't appear on the form sheet and was never bothered.

Money was a problem for awhile. I'd been shifted so many times that my pay records were not catching up with me. Someone in the next barracks had a small business going. He bought loafs of bread and jars of peanut butter then sold sandwiches that he made up. There was hefty profit.

I worked for him a couple of days, then went in business for myself in my barracks. This lasted until my pay finally caught up with me.

During my three years in the Air Force money would occasionally become a problem but I'd find some way to exist until some more showed up. Spring of '45 at Panama City my money caught up with me. Three months pay with flight pay and three months back flight pay — I had a bucket full of it and started spending it. I'd acquired a local girl friend and then got myself a place to stay right on the Gulf, about twenty miles from the air base. This took some maneuvering

Marrird men could stay off the base overnight but I wasn't married. I could get a pass every afternoon but it had to be turned in before midnight. So, I'd get my pass in the afternoon and as I went thru the gate I would show it then I would turn around quietly and drop it in the box at the gate thus showing that I'd returned to the base. Sometime between midnight and morning the box was emptied and the passes returned to the orderly room. Offically I was on the base but since my barracks number wasn't listed anywhere they wouldn't know where to find me and for the next few months they never had reason to hunt me so it went along just fine

The only possible problem now was that if I was stopped in town I didn't have a pass to show. I took care not to be stoppd and questioned. I was free and clear until it was time to show up to fly again.

I also didn't have a pass to show and turn it when I returned to the base, so if I had to fly I stepped out to the highway early in the morning and waited. Many of the pilots I flew with lived down this highway and eventually one of them would stop and pick me up.

Officers are a higher breed, some animals are more equal than others, so we drove up the gate.

The guard saluted the officer who drove through the gate and dropped me off somewhere inside, the guards did not check anyone riding with a pilot. It was a wonderfull arrangement.

A local bootlegger/moonshiner was producing sugar cane whiskey and I had an order in with him, memory tells me that we were buying a quart a day but that may be high- maybe it just seemed like I was drinking a quart a day. We were also drinking at a local honey tonk a roadside bar with a front room and a back room with a crap table. The MP's patrolled in a jeep and did check the place once or twice anight but the bar top was quite wide and had a little shelf or seat built in behind and below it. If the jeep pulled up in front the soldiers walked around the bar and sat on this seat until they'd checked it and driven away. It seems probable that the bar owner would also hand out some free drinks to the MP's so that they didn't look very carefully. It was that sort of place §

Two soldier acquaintances had met local girls and then the four of them moved into an abandoned shack a quarter mile from the bar. Eventually the local sherrif picked up and jailed the girls for "no visible signs of support". The soldiers asked the bar toender about this and he made a quick phone call, then told them the girls were being released and would be waiting on the court house steps when they got downtown. Once a week a big Cadillac would pull up in front of the bar. the driver would go inside, pick up an envelope from the bar tender, get back in the Caddy and drive away. I gather things are still done this way in Florida.

In May the war in Europe ended. I didn't celebrate very much at the time the CO locked the gates and we couldn't get out. Oh, there would have been a way to do it but I didn't attempt it.

The base also solved their mysterious series of murders. The base had a batch of french students who were I suppose training as gunners. Five of them had been found on the beach stabbed to death.

Obviously this was some soldier on the base with a grudge against the French ... only it was a pretty little girl that worked at the PX. She'd been raped by one of the French students so decided to even up everything. She'd make a date with one of the french students to meet him on the beach but before he could get his pants off she'd stick a knife in him

Sometime that summer they closed down the B-26 target operation, they were now using a bullet with soft plastic nose. They would fire directly at an approaching plane and some sort of sensing device would register the number of hits they'd made. I was jobless again and it was time to move on