AROUND THE BEND OF THE EARTH

A BOOKWORM'S WAR, 1943-1945

Thomas George Wack

I never think of you as being very far away. I tell your mother you are just around the corner—or just part way around the bend of the earth.

— George J. Wack, 25

June 1945

Foreword

In no sense is this account intended to be an attempt at a history of a segment of World War Two or a chronicle of the operations of VPB-109, the patrol bombing squadron I belonged to. It is, rather, a memoir, written sixty years after the fact, of a bookish boy's initiation into adulthood during the final stages of the largest and bloodiest war in human history.

In the fall of 2003, when I had occasion to recollect my three years of service in the second world war, I had no intention of writing about them. Rather, what I was doing at the time was editing and emailing letters which my family and I had exchanged between the spring of 1944 and April 1946, when I was discharged. I had been sending copies of some of these letters to my children and to my brothers and sisters and their children. When they encouraged me to send out all the letters, I agreed and began in earnest to organize and edit them, and as I continued to email them, it began to dawn on us that we in my family had something unique—a history of my family during those years and a glimpse of World War Two as I and they had experienced it. I was the author of only half of the letters, the rest having been written by my parents and siblings, and we all recognized how the letters gave us a good insight into the hearts and minds of our parents, especially as they concerned themselves with my welfare in a war thousands of miles from them, as well as a chronicle of the maturing of my brothers and sisters. Moreover, the letters were valuable to me, in particular, as indications of my own human growth and moral development.

So these pages were written mainly for my family, for my brothers and sisters, who because of the letters we wrote back and forth during the war were never really separated from each other. I wrote them as well for my children and for theirs and their grandchildren, in the hope that by reading this memoir they will learn something of importance about a terrible war that shaped their lives even before they were born and about how the family of their birth coped with those times. And I wrote them also for my shipmates of long ago and for all those who, happening to read this account, find these incidents and remarks interesting in themselves and possibly also food for serious reflection about the nature of war and its frightful consequences.

Like many who grow up reading books, I tend to understand experience in terms of the written word, and it is through the act of writing that I learn what I think. So I

wrote these pages also for myself, in an attempt to understand the meaning of a world-wide calamity like the second world war through my small role in it, a role that was admittedly insignificant in relation to the whole, but momentous in terms of my own growth and being. That is my justification for the final chapter of this memoir, a chapter not of narration, but of comment and reflection. I wrote it in payment of the debt I have owed Cardinal John Henry Newman since the summer of 1943.

In July 1943, when my hitch in the United States Naval Reserve actually began, initiating the events narrated in this memoir, I was almost eighteen years old. My brother Jim was going on sixteen; the twins, Marianne and Joanne, nearly fourteen; John, eight; and Margie, seven. We lived in a house built in 1925 on the corner of St. Vincent and Eddy Streets in South Bend, Indiana, a short walk from the campus of the University of Notre Dame, where my father taught German. The Knute Rockne family lived diagonally across St. Vincent Street from us. The Jack McAllister family lived next door—Jack was the equipment manager for the Athletic Department at Notre Dame. Across Eddy Street from us there was the Joe Diericks family, Joe being the grounds manager at the Notre Dame stadium. We played with some of the Rockne and Diericks children and with the children of the other Notre Dame teachers and administrators who lived in our neighborhood. Notre Dame is the mother house of the Congregation of Holy Cross, of the Holy Cross priests who control the University and some of whom teach there. I was a senior at Central Catholic High School, where the teachers were Holy Cross brothers from Notre Dame. Jim was a sophomore there. The other children were being taught by the Holy Cross sisters at St. Joseph School, which belonged to our parish, St. Joseph's, which was staffed by Holy Cross priests from Notre Dame. Pat Hartzer, my girlfriend, later my wife, was a junior at St. Joseph Academy, also taught by the Holy Cross nuns. That fall, the twins would enroll at the Academy. We were a Notre Dame and a Holy Cross family.

We were also a part of a larger, extended South Bend family that included my mother's brother, Father Edward A. Keller, C.S.C., who taught economics at Notre Dame, and her sisters Amelia Kroger and Henrietta Geiger and their families. In addition, my mother had two brothers and their families in Sturgis, Michigan, fifty miles from South Bend, and my father had an older sister and older brother in Chicago, just ninety miles away. We made up and still are a close, extended family.

To write this memoir I did not have to rely solely on my own memory of events that occurred sixty years ago. I have made extensive use of the 316 letters written by me and the other members of my family, as well as some of the photographs I took while in the Navy. I also relied on various documents and items from those days, such as my flight logbooks and the squadron history, compiled by Ted Steele, and on a few memoirs from other members of my squadron, notably Dallas Vickers and Roy Balke. I have tried to acknowledge all these and other helps in the text and in a bibliography at the end.

1
Knights and Squires

And o' night there's fire-flies and the yellow moon,
And in the ghostly palm trees the sleepy tune
Of the quiet voice calling me, the long low croon
Of the steady Trade Winds blowing.

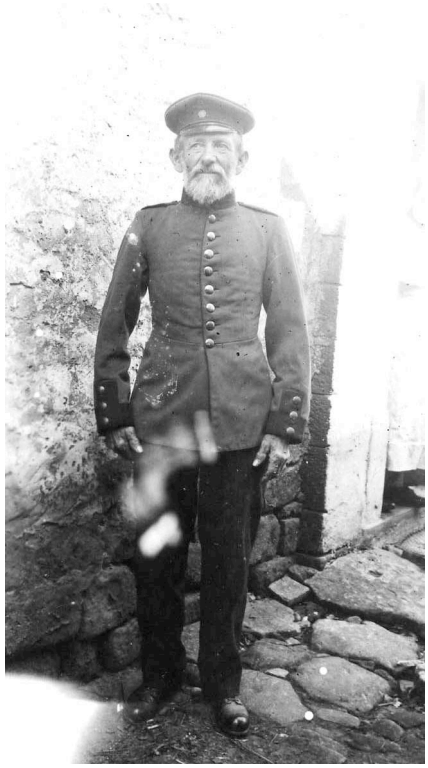
—— John Masefield, "The Trade Winds"

I was just fourteen in September 1939 when Hitler's Wehrmacht occupied Poland and began World War Two. We learned about it from the newsreel at the movies. To most Americans, however, it was Europe's war and we should have no part of it, even though we were already supplying arms and other war supplies to England, under several guises. Americans listened to the news on the radio and to what Edward R. Murrow and Eric Severeid had to say about the relentless German advances and the feeble resistance to them. In 1940, Congress passed the Selective Service Act, and we began hearing of friends and relatives being drafted into the Army. It was becoming our war, too.

But except as romantic adventure, war did not weigh heavily on my mind or on the minds of my classmates at Central Catholic High School in South Bend, even though some of the seniors were already enlisting in the armed services. We were much more interested in our own adolescent pursuits, doing our hobbies, playing sports, learning the popular songs, going to dances and rolling skating parties, seeing movies, and of course dating girls. So far, no one seemed to be seriously inconvenienced by the European war. We boys did think about the future, but only in a general way. In a few years, there would be jobs open at factories like Studebaker's, Bendix, and Ball-Band. A few of us expected to go to college, myself included—for me it would be Notre Dame, where my father was a professor of German.

So we continued to run our heedless ways. At Central Catholic, my cousin Bud Kroger and I discovered that the school library had all of Zane Grey's western novels, and we read them, every one, during "study periods," thrilling to Grey's John-Wayne-type heroes and his compelling, but chaste heroines. Even today I recall vividly his *Riders of the Purple Sage* and *The Rainbow Trail* (although it was Tom Mix, not John Wayne, who starred in the movie versions of these books). In *Collier's Magazine*, I pored over James B. Connolly's exciting stories of the beautiful Gloucester schooners and the cod fishing on the Grand Banks of Newfoundland. I read every

Connolly story that I could find and his novels, too, such as the fine *Out of Gloucester*. But the books that stirred me the most were Richard Halliburton's absorbing tales of his own colorful adventures—climbing the Matterhorn, swimming the Hellespont, stowing away on a cruise ship, swimming the locks of the Panama Canal. *The Royal Road to Romance* was a Christmas gift, and I went to the South Bend library for the others, like *The Glorious Adventure* and *New Worlds to Conquer*. Halliburton offered us adolescents an escape from the coming stodginess of adulthood. He himself died before he was forty, lost at sea in a romantic attempt to sail a Chinese junk from Hong Kong to San Francisco.



We were not a military family. My dad's father, Jean-Pierre Wack, had been sent by his siblings to America in 1873 from Lorraine, his homeland, so that he would not be conscripted into the Prussian Army. He considered himself a pacifist. In 1913, at the age of fifty-nine, on a visit to Schorbach, his *Heimat* in Lorraine, he donned a soldier's uniform as a joke and had his picture taken in it. By 1918, however, he was proud that three of his sons were in the U.S. Army.

One of those sons was my father, who in 1917 at the age of twenty-three had been drafted into the Army and made a corporal. While on maneuvers at Camp Sherman, Ohio, he fell ill with appendicitis, but his captain refused him permission to see a physician, and as a consequence, he developed peritonitis. Some months later he was given a medical discharge, but the captain's stupidity cost my father a lifetime of abdominal problems. The incident also made me leery of being drafted into the U.S. Army.

We were, on the other hand, a musical family. My mother played the piano, and most of us took music lessons, piano or violin, from the nuns at St. Joseph School. My brother Jim took violin lessons, but learned the piano on his own. I took piano lessons during grade school, but when I got to high school, I studied the clarinet and played it in the CCHS band. There I encountered the U.S. Army again, for our small high school, always strapped for funds, could not afford band uniforms, so we paraded ludicrously in cast-off woolen Army uniforms from World War I, hot and uncomfortable, complete with wrap-around leggings. For his part, Dad sang German folk songs for us and turn-of-the-century romantic favorites, like "Genevieve" and "I'll Take You Home Again, Kathleen," and he introduced us to opera through the Saturday afternoon broadcasts of the Metropolitan Opera Company. Wagner was his favorite. He bought an FM radio and a record player, and we children bought 78-rpm

records—Jim and I went together to buy all the Beethoven piano concertos, performed by the great Rudolph Serkin, and we wore out the records. We bought records of popular songs and jazz, too, but mostly we bought the sheet music. As we grew into our teens, our taste was swing, and we heard it first-hand when bands like Glenn Miller's performed in the movie theaters in town.

We were also a family of readers, including the two youngest, John and Margie, who had caught the reading fever from us older children and even wrote stories of their own. As a family, we were among the most faithful patrons of the South Bend library. My mother read detective novels, especially those by Ellery Queen and Agatha Christie; she was also fond of the Irish stories of Father Patrick Carroll, C.S.C. My father was a voracious reader, although his specialty was linguistics, of course, and German literature, along with philosophy, politics, and astronomy. My twin sisters read not only girls' books, but mature books from our father's bookshelves. It was no problem for Joanne to wash the dishes while reading from a book propped on top of the faucets on the kitchen sink. And since we still lived in an era when long-distance telephone calls were unusual, we all wrote letters—I benefited from this throughout my time in the war.

1918: George J. Wack with his parents

We all had hobbies. Jim and I, the would-be aviators, built one model airplane after another—from kits bought at Kresge's—constructing the planes meticulously, strut by strut, from balsa wood, aromatic glue, banana oil, and tissue paper, and paint—and the little planes flew, sometimes beautifully, even landing undamaged. Mother grew flowers and became skilled as a watercolor painter. Dad composed melodies for children's poems, picking out the tunes on the piano with one finger, but his main hobby was always astronomy. But for both of my parents, their vocations were their avocations, my mother as housekeeper and nurturer, and my dad as teacher and practitioner of the life of the mind. My main hobby, from the age of twelve, was photography, practiced at first with my mother's dollar box camera and a developing kit from the Central Camera Company of Chicago.

We didn't take vacations or go to the beach. There was no money, and we didn't have a car. However, I remember several train trips to Piqua, Ohio, to visit our father's aged parents and his brothers and sisters, but by 1933 all our grandparents had died. In the summer of 1934, Dad took Jim and me to Chicago, ninety miles away, for the Chicago World's Fair, a Century of Progress, an event that is still vivid to me. We stayed at the YMCA Hotel. Among the myriads of fascinating exhibits, the Skyride, the prehistoric animals, the technical marvels, the new automobiles, and the prophetic exhibit on air travel, I recall the picturesque European villages and, most compelling in my eyes, the world's tallest man and the world's smallest man.

Instead of vacations, we read books, worked jigsaw puzzles, made armies of toy soldiers out of lead, built a rickety tree house, rode our bikes, played ball in the vacant lots near our house, made marionettes and built a marionette theater to put on skits for our neighbors ands schoolmates, skits in which there was always a lot of hitting. We collected stamps and built our fleets of model airplanes. I made one crystal radio set after another, erecting an antenna that stretched the length of our lot. My best crystal radio pulled in stations from Texas—at night I'd listen to a Mexican singer (his name I think was Juan Arveçu), whose keynote song was "Tie a Little String Around Your Finger to Make You Remember Me."

I took photographs of everyone and everything—hundreds and hundreds of shots of Notre Dame scenes—and developed and printed them in our bathroom, having built a light-proof screen for the window (it was our only bathroom, and since we were a family of eight, I was permitted to use it as a darkroom only at rare, odd times). I knew a Holy Cross brother who was a serious photographic amateur, and he gave me equipment, including an old five-by-seven view camera with a shutter actuated by a rubber bulb, and told me where to buy supplies cheaply. Our uncle, Father Ed Keller, was an amateur photographer, and I learned from him, as well as from Professor Art Reyniers, the founder and director of the research Laboratories of Bacteriology of the University of Notre Dame (LOBUND), who used a lot of photography in his work on germ-free life.

We ice skated on St. Mary's Lake at Notre Dame, often gathering on the ice with the students who came to watch Father Ed, who in addition to being the University's photographer, was an accomplished figure skater and a friend of the Shipstad and Johnson families, who put on the Ice Follies. In the summer, we piled into our uncles' cars and went with our cousins to Lake of the Woods, near Bremen, Indiana, where Uncle Roma and Aunt Henrietta Geiger had a cottage. Some times as many as two dozen of us from four families would be packed into the four-room cottage for a hilarious weekend. Instead of one bathroom, we had to make do with a two-holer outhouse. One summer, the Daleiden sisters visited us from Chicago, and they gave us children a large paper sack full of prizes from boxes of Cracker Jack, hundreds of

them—metal airplanes, autos, ships—no plastic. It was one of the most memorable events of our childhood.

So if the war figured at all in my mental horizon, it was only vaguely, but if vaguely, also romantically. The first world war was still fresh to most Americans, but after twenty years, for us readers of adventure books, it had lost its stench. What enthralled me was the exploits of the knights of the Middle Ages, which I read about in Sidney Lanier's boy's version of King Arthur and his knights.

Then came that afternoon of 7 December 1941, when we heard on the radio about Japan's sneak attack—bombing our fleet at Pearl Harbor and invading the Philippines and Guam—and suddenly it was very likely that my future involved going to a real war. At once, every boy my age was eager to get into it. The prospect excited me, especially the prospect of war in the air or at sea—which to me were the glamorous aspects of the situation. But I was also caught up in America's anger at Japan's perfidy and Germany's nationalistic greed. I shared my countrymen's lust for retaliation and was eager to serve.

Pearl Harbor must have struck my parents quite differently. They knew that in only eighteen months, I would reach draft age. As it turned out, I still had five months to go when, on 19 February 1943, I enlisted in the U.S. Naval Reserve, to begin training on July 1st in the new V-12 Program at Notre Dame. This decision was agreeable to both my parents and me, for they were relieved that I would be safe in this country for an extended period of time rather than overseas in combat, while I was content that soon I would begin training as one of the Navy's officers. Moreover, it was likely that I would see action, probably in the Pacific. My choice would have been to become a Navy pilot, but since acceptance into the V-5 program was becoming increasingly difficult, V-12 was a practical and acceptable alternative.

By now, we Americans knew we were in a war. When we went downtown, there were flags in the stores, and we saw uniformed soldiers and sailors on leave. United Service Organization centers were being set up in cities that were near military bases; later, these centers were a godsend for me and other homesick soldiers and sailors—homesick for friendly civilian faces, for homemade sandwiches, and for girls to talk to and dance with. The rationing of food and gasoline began nationwide in 1942, with beef, sugar, coffee, and butter in short supply. My family, with five growing children at home, traded sugar stamps for beef stamps and worried about losing their individual ration books. Once my youngest sister and brother did lose a ration book on their way home from visiting our aunt—luckily they found it in the grass when they retraced their steps back to St. Louis Boulevard. My mother had to learn ingenuity, not just to plan the family's meals within the limits of the rationing, but also to be able to send me the cookies and other foods that I felt I needed to offset Navy chow. One of her less successful tactics, to ensure that no one in the family took more than his

share of the rationed sugar, was to put each person's ration into a separate mason jar, one for each of the seven family members. The scheme was quickly abandoned as being more trouble than it was worth.

With my brother Jim (two years younger than I), I had been following the war in the air, both over Europe and the Pacific, rather than the war on the ground, which was for us, less exciting. Both of us wanted to fly, and we saved pictures of the Army and Navy aces that were printed in the newspaper. Ironically, when I got into the conflict, it was as a crewman on a plane, a passenger, not as a pilot, while Jim, still in high school, took flying lessons and got his pilot's license. But by the time he was old enough to enlist in the Navy, the war was over.

My family had a large victory garden which supplied them with almost all the vegetables they needed, plus enough for relatives and friends. It took a lot of work, but my father kept at it, despite his long hours of work at Notre Dame, with help from the children, especially Jim and John. On 16 October 1945, when my squadron was in training at Oahu, my father wrote me about the garden: "We are having much rain again but now it seems to be a real help for our gardens. Let me enumerate what things I have coming up in the big field: potatoes, corn, peas, beans, tomatoes, cucumbers muskmelons, watermelons, pumpkins, carrots, cabbage, beets, broccoli, peppers. In the back yard we also have lettuce and radishes. I hope we will garner or have garnered a rich harvest 'when the frost is on the pumpkin.'"

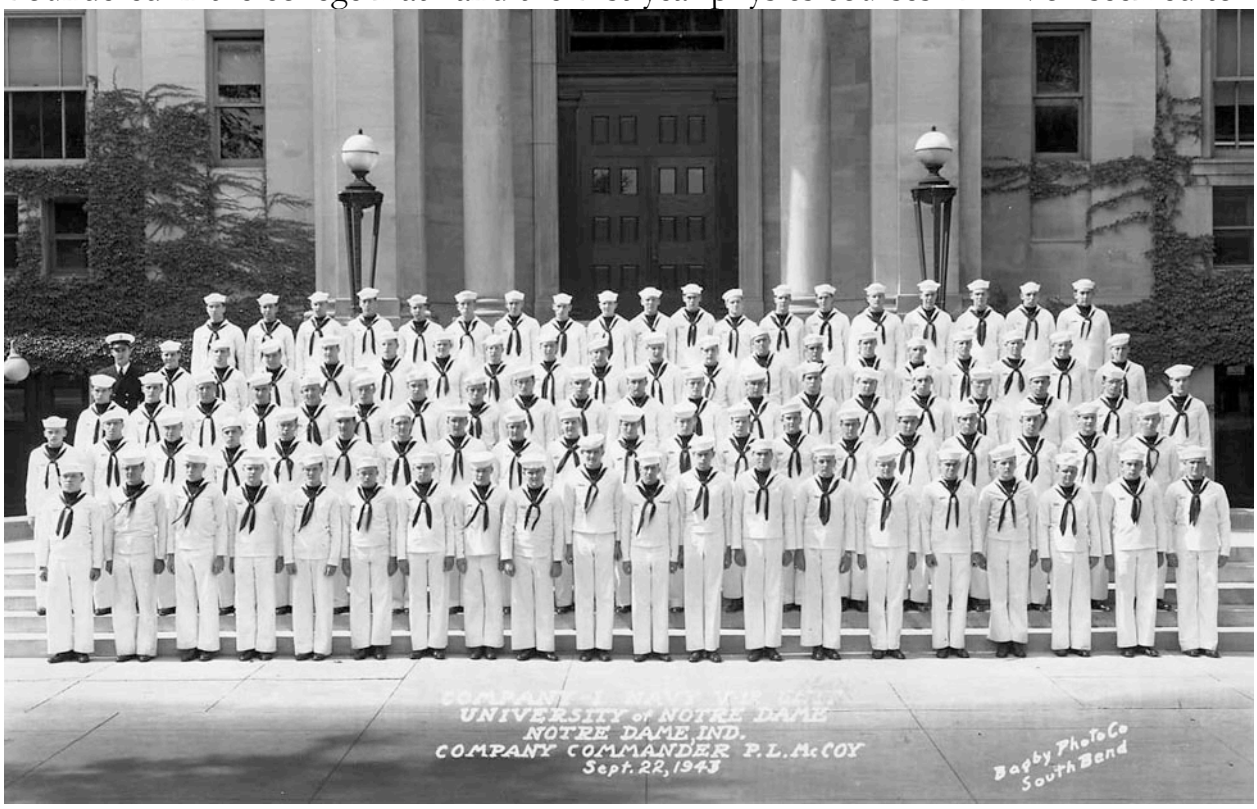
1945, Pat Hartzer, the Wack Victory Garden

On 1 July 1943, a week before my eighteenth birthday, I traded my fawn-colored corduroy zoot suit for Navy blues, entering active service in the Navy as an Apprentice Seaman at the University of Notre Dame. The tide of the war had taken several turns in the year and a half since Pearl Harbor. The nation had suffered severe damage to its naval capability from the initial attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor, but by July, 1943, the U.S. was finally on the offensive in the Pacific, the Battles of the Coral Sea in May of 1942 and of Midway the following month having put a check to Japan's string of victories and having eliminated her superiority in naval power. Yet despite the improvement, the Allies were seeing dark days, especially in North Africa and Russia, and German submarines were sinking Allied ships in the Atlantic close to

American shores. However, the United States was just getting its massive war machine into gear, while Germany and Italy were beginning to feel their losses of manpower and the limitations of their war resources.

But for us new V-12 trainees, it was not the war's progress that was our immediate concern. Essentially we were college students who were also being trained to be Naval officers. At Notre Dame, I was assigned to Company I and given a room in Alumni Hall, where I was surprised to find that my roommate was Bill Voll, my classmate from Central Catholic (it was alphabetical reasoning at work, Voll being the last of the V's and Wack the first of the W's). If all went well, in two years and eight months (at the rate of three semesters per year) he and I would graduate with a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering and be commissioned Navy ensigns. So we drilled and did daily calisthenics and underwent a lot of physical education, especially swimming. Before that, I had fancied myself a budding long-distance runner, like Paavo Nurmi, and had practiced by running the mile to and from St. Joseph Church where I often served the 7:00 o'clock daily Mass. Now I found myself undergoing physical exercise that was really grueling—not only a lot of running, but having to complete a murderous obstacle course as well. Usually I finished the obstacle course in good time, but often at the expense of throwing up my breakfast.

But mainly we studied. I studied especially hard and for long hours. I had left high school with decent grades, even in math and the sciences, but at Notre Dame I floundered in the college math and the first-year physics courses. Bill Voll seemed to



grasp the concepts more easily than I, but both of us went for special tutoring to Father Bolger, the physics department chairman. In math, we suffered from the disadvantage of having a poor teacher, a man with a flighty, hysterical manner who proved totally incapable of introducing us to the world of mathematics. Around the middle of the first semester, he disappeared. In his place was a very capable, young priest, who had to start us all over again—yet I, for one, never really caught up. These troublesome experiences with mathematics and physics should have told me right then that I was not cut out to be an engineer.

I did much better in my other courses, especially the humanities, which were highly interesting and therefore enjoyable. The English composition course was actually exciting as taught by Alvin Ryan, a New Englander who to me had heroic status because he had met and talked with Robert Frost. Matthew Fitzsimmons taught the course in American history, designed especially for us Navy trainees: he was one of Notre Dame's great teachers, and the course was excellent. Happily, the engineering drawing course, taught by Professor Harbaugh, did not depend on one's knowledge of mathematics. I liked it and worked hard at it—it was the reason why, later, I dreamt of becoming an architect. My European history course was taught by Gerhard Ladner, another outstanding teacher-scholar. He opened the door to the fascination of the Middle Ages for me. That I had the good fortune to be exposed to more than just a few genuine teachers during my undergraduate years at Notre Dame was one of the reasons why, some years later, I chose to be a college teacher myself.

Alvin Ryan was the teacher who made the strongest impression on me, as a combined college student and V-12 trainee, in that first semester at Notre Dame. One of the essays he assigned to us to read was an excerpt from John Henry Newman's *The Idea of a University*, which sparked an interest in me both in the nature of liberal education and in the pursuit of philosophy and theology. But one paragraph in the excerpt seemed to be speaking directly to me. I was a seaman preparing to embark on his romantic travels, even if these were to be travels from home to areas of combat, and Cardinal Newman was telling me that travel is not a reliable way to learn philosophy (he could have added that going to war is even less reliable):

Seafaring men, for example, range from one end of the earth to the other; but the multiplicity of external objects, which they have encountered, forms no symmetrical and consistent picture upon their imagination; they see the tapestry of human life, as it were on the wrong side, and it tells no story. They sleep, and they rise up, and they find themselves, now in Europe, now in Asia; they see visions of great cities and wild regions; they are in the marts of commerce, or amid the islands of the South; they gaze on Pompey's Pillar, or on the Andes; and nothing which meets them carries them forward or backward, to any idea beyond itself. Nothing has a drift or relation; nothing has a history or a promise. Every thing stands by itself, and comes and goes in its turn, like the shifting scenes of a show, which leave the spectator where he was. (John

Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1907, page 136)

I recall mulling over this warning, at the age of eighteen in my room in Alumni Hall, and resolving that I, for one, would learn from the experiences that I would undergo in the coming months and years. However, except for some of the "islands of the South," the war never took me to the exotic places like Tahiti, Burma, and Siam that I had dreamed of visiting.

Our days were so tightly regimented that by ten p.m., when "lights out" was announced, we were glad to be sent to our bunks. I found that I had no time for photography, my favorite hobby, and I got to see Pat Hartzer, my girlfriend, only on weekends, if I was lucky. Although my family home was a ten-minute walk from the campus, I got there only on rare weekends. I did see my father frequently in his campus office, and I kept bumping into my uncle, Father Ed Keller, C.S.C., who taught economics at Notre Dame and was the director of ND's Institute for Economic Research. So mainly I was a college student in 1943-44. I never encountered anything that approached actual combat training or that suggested to me that before long I might be face-to-face with enemies whom I was expected to kill. I was in uniform, but I was hardly "at war." On the other hand, I was earning wages, being paid an Apprentice Seaman's rate to go to college. It wasn't much, but at least I could buy a War Bond once a month and take out a membership in the Book of the Month Club.

But with the Navy routine and the constant studying, I had little time in which to indulge my love of reading. I did manage an hour or two now and then. My favorite books were light fiction, westerns and detective novels—but I remember also liking Wallace Stegner's *Big Rock Candy Mountain*, which came out in 1943—but now I was reading books about war as well, such as *Wings for Offense*, and especially books about the Pacific air war. Because of Al Ryan's influence, I started reading poetry, Robert Frost in particular. .

Before I enlisted in the Navy, I had gone to the movies at least once a week—more than that after I started dating. I had enjoyed such movies as *Wake Island, Random Harvest, Flying Tigers, To the Shores of Tripoli, Bataan*, and *Yankee Doodle Dandy*. In 1944, I saw the exciting *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo*, which sealed my fate. But V-12 meant having to postpone the pleasure of movies, even if it had been possible to see movies at Notre Dame, something I never heard about. Yet books and movies had taught me something useful to V-12—a familiarity with ship language, in which left was "port" and right, "starboard," which now I employed every day, along with telling the time on a twenty-four-hour clock, without the AM's and PM's.

I belonged to the Navy, so I learned to salute every officer I encountered. I chafed at it, even though I had been brought up to be polite and to tip my hat to

women and also to priests. At Notre Dame, the most immediate Naval unit I belonged to was under the charge of a regular-Navy chief petty officer named P. L. McCoy, who was also a V-12 student. He was probably no more than twenty-five, but to me he seemed much older. We considered him an old salt who was steeped in Navy experience, and he lectured us frequently, in the manner of a drill sergeant (but a patient one), on duty and behavior. He would end each of his exhortations to us, as we stood at ease listening to him, by saying darkly, "A word to the wise is sufficient!" One of the rules that he and our other superiors impressed upon us was that officers were gentlemen, and when gentlemen ate in officers' mess, they never disturbed the common tranquility by discussing religion or politics—although these were two of the subjects that were becoming of vital concern for me.

Most of all, I resented the picky Navy regulations that we were subject to, even if I had to obey them without hesitation. I'm sure that nine-tenths of my fellow seamen were also irritated at always having to do things "the Navy way" (which probably was the same as "the Army way"). Even the V-12 Ball, held in January, 1944, required all of us V-12 trainees and our dates to observe *two full pages* of typed rules. Besides forbidding flowers, jitterbugging, drinking, and smoking, these instructions stated flatly, "There is to be no form of affection for the opposite sex." Also given prominence in this set of commandments was a half-page paragraph detailing the proper way to introduce one's date to the commanding officers present at the ball ("Do not attempt to shake hands unless the Captain indicates that he wishes to do so"). But we enjoyed the ball in spite of all that foolishness.

One of the few diversions that Bill Voll and I enjoyed was our picnics at St. Mary's Lake on the campus, the food being provided by Bill's sisters (who sometimes brought their boyfriends) and my girlfriend, Pat. We'd have sandwiches and wine, and sometimes we'd sing bawdy parodies of popular songs. Once in a while, Bill and I would relieve the stress of studying with a glass of wine in our room. It was homemade wine, given to the Voll family by Professor Pirchio, a friend of both our families. The wine was strictly against regulations, both the Navy's and Notre Dame's. One evening, just before "light's out," when we were enjoying some of this wine, the door opened, and into our room came Father Bernard McAvoy, the prefect of our floor in Alumni Hall. Seeing the wine, he wheeled around without breaking stride or saying a word and left the room. Had he reported us for this infraction of the rules, we could have been doing pushups in boot camp at Great Lakes within a week. Father McAvoy always remained high on our list of great persons.

That was a brush with disaster for us, but not everyone was so lucky. Many flunked out because of bad grades or were kicked out for breaking the rules. Jackie Cooper, the movie actor, was in our V-12 class, and one day he left under mysterious circumstances. One ND classmate who left on his own and became famous after the war was Alexander Haig, who became Secretary of State under President Ronald

Reagan, but Haig had left N.D. in order to enroll at West Point, from which he graduated as a second lieutenant. In 1966, when I was on the faculty of Wheeling College in West Virginia, his Jesuit brother, Frank R. Haig, was the College's president.

At this time, the Pacific war was continuing to take the lives of Navy pilots. So in February, 1944, the Navy presented us with the opportunity of transferring to V-5, the Naval Aviation Cadet program. Like many of my classmates, I requested the transfer at the end of the second semester, February 29. I knew that if I stayed in V-12, I would have two more full years of study before being commissioned and sent to combat, whereas by enrolling in V-5, I could be piloting a Navy Corvair in the Pacific Theater within a year.

However, that would have been the ideal situation. The actuality was that, early in March 1944, along with a contingent of others from Notre Dame, I was put on the train for the Naval Air Station at Hutchinson, Kansas, as a "Tarmac," a kind of ground crewman whose job was to move planes around and tie them down, as well as to perform any kind of menial labor that our lieutenant could think up for us to do. What was behind all this, apparently, was a miscalculation on the Navy's part—there were still more men training to be Navy pilots than were needed for the war—hence actual flight training was turning out to be a long, long way off for us. I wrote home about it on 10 March:

Yesterday one of the Marines who are over us told us that the only reason we are here is that the Navy has no other place to put us. He said they're just looking for a chance to bust us and that we'd probably wind up like the previous Tarmacs—sent from station to station—no station wants them on its hands—and they finally wind up at Great Lakes. You see, they had a really good program fixed up for us here. We were to work one week and the other week we'd work on a routine of athletics, marching, and education. Very little liberty—the idea being to keep us in good mental and physical shape in preparation for flight schools. Well, the big guns didn't approve. They wanted us to be like the other Tarmacs—work every day and have liberty three nights out of four. The Marine told us how detrimental this would be to our chances of ever becoming officers in Naval Aviation. He said that they'd make lackeys of us—we'd have to do all the dirty work around here—anything they felt like making us do. The Marine was <u>very</u> angry about it. He said we were the best fellows he'd ever worked with and that we'd been given a rotten deal, especially since we're all college men.

We Tarmacs, actually pre-aviation cadets, were like parking-valet employees in sailors' uniforms. We wheeled the training airplanes around and tied them down to protect them from the constantly high winds. In so doing we came into contact with the cadet pilots, who were at the beginning of their flight training, and from them we got a pretty good idea of the current state of affairs in Naval Aviation.

But I liked Hutchinson itself, which was about ten miles from the base. I was especially impressed with the Hutchinson USO (United Service Organization), which was a great place to visit when we were given liberty. It was a roomy place downtown with cookies, coffee, popcorn to eat, a piano which I could play, places for writing letters, and very caring and helpful people, including some wonderful college-age girls who liked to dance and who talked with us. I corresponded long afterward with one of them, Margie Baird, a pretty, vivacious girl who was a student at the University there. She was a book-reader and enjoyed discussing philosophy and religion. On 7 March I wrote home about Hutchinson that "it's a very nice place—clean, and the people are friendly. There are a lot of Mennonite and Amish people around here."

The next day, I wrote that we had been told what we would be doing at the base: "We will work a week with the planes, then work a week going to lectures, marching two hours a day and taking phy. ed. It will be that way for about three months, I think. I don't know what comes then. But to think of being here three months! Just pray that they give us a leave when we're through here. I still haven't found out a lot of things, like laundry and shoe repair. I'll find out someday, though. You can be sure of one thing—I'm going to be a dry-land sailor for a long, long time."

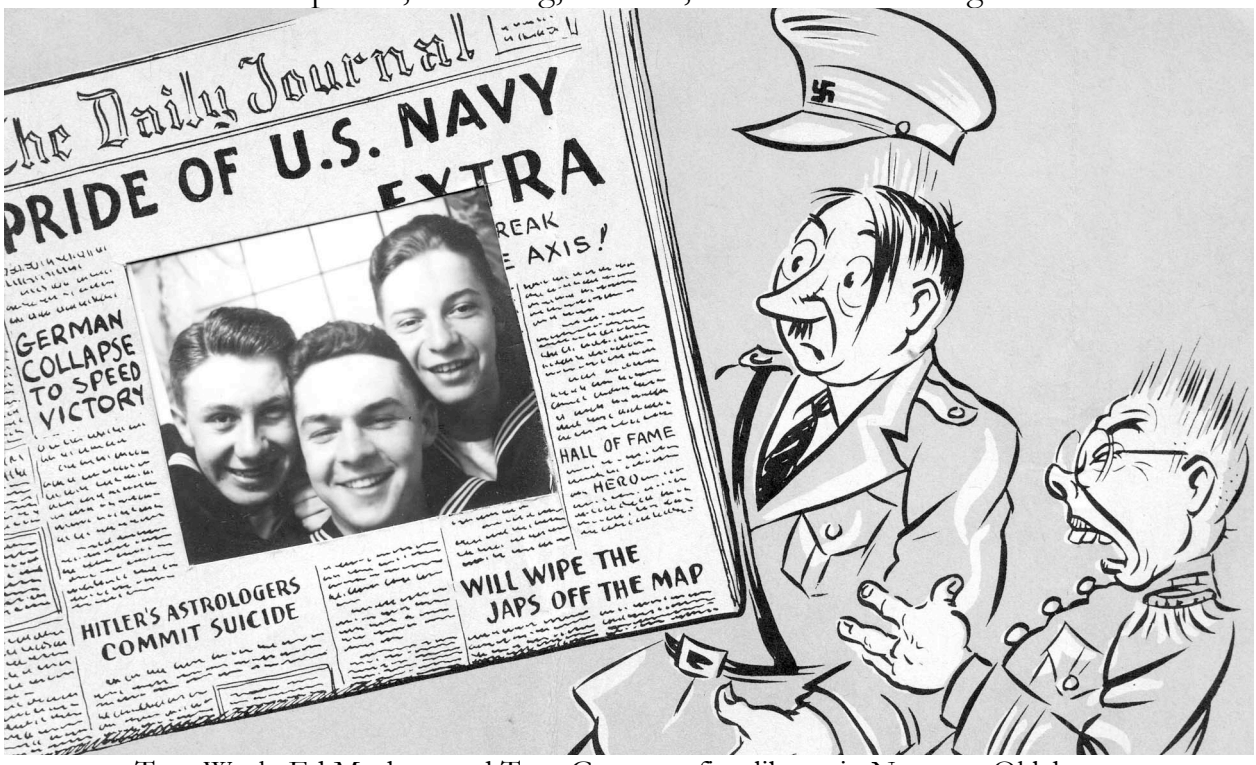
My mother must have thought I was in despair. "I was somewhat prepared for your news," she wrote after reading my complaint, "but never the less I was very upset about the whole set up. Surely they will do the right thing for you—if not I will personally see that they do. . . . Dad feels that everything will turn out all right in the long run. Don't be too discouraged for things have gone along nicely so far for you and St. Joseph isn't going to let us down now. We will all pray to him and you do the same and you will see that everything will be O.K. Try hard to keep your spirits up and always remember that they can't kill you. Do you remember that from your musical recital days?"

She had always told me that the worst that anyone would do to me was to kill me and that no one would ever do that! Actually, I was in good spirits. I wrote that I saw "a movie last night; it was 'Tarzan's Desert Mystery.' Along with it was chapter 6 of 'Captain America,' everyone's hero! Everyone cheered and shouted as the Captain battled the Scarab for the robot truck and the electronic ray gun. There's a dance to-

night. I think I'll go if I can get the stripes on my jumper clean. We marched for two hours this morning. It was tiresome, but not too bad, because the wind had died down. The food here is still very good, but there's much too much of it. For breakfast today we had pancakes and honey, ham, corn flakes, toast and jelly, coffee and milk. I still can't eat very much and when I leave the chow hall, I'm really full! . . . Just came back from dinner. Menu: 2 scoops mashed potatoes and gravy; 1 huge piece of pork (ugh!); 1 helping asparagus; 1 helping corn; 1 helping lettuce and French dressing; 1 helping applesause; 1 bowl vegetable soup; bread, butter, crackers, milk, and 1 extra large piece of lemon pie. Whew!"

But I was right that I would be on dry land for quite a while. "I don't know how I'll turn out," I wrote," but I'd a thousand times rather transfer to Great Lakes [the Navy boot camp near Chicago] than endure this galley slave Tarmac detail for a long time." However, apparently even Hutchinson was the wrong place for us, for after being two weeks at the Naval Air Station there, we were uprooted and reassigned to the Naval Air Station at Norman, Oklahoma, where, still as Tarmacs, we stayed for seven weeks.

From Norman, I wrote on 22 March that I had learned that "we're to go through a sort of boot camp here, marching, lectures, and more marching! . . . From what



Tom Wack, Ed Meehan, and Tom Green on first liberty in Norman, Oklahoma

they told us, we're to be here indefinitely." We did some drilling, had a lot of physical education, worked at odd jobs, and took every chance at liberty that we were offered. Although Tarmac duty was supposed to have a purpose—to serve perhaps as a kind

of aviation boot camp, without actual combat training—it was obvious that we were neither fish, flesh, nor fowl. Unofficially, we were officer candidates who were marking time until places opened up for us in flight prep school, but we knew that we were nobodies with no status at all. However, the Norman Naval Air Station was a much bigger, livelier place than its Hutchinson counterpart, and we had a better opportunity to observe the flight training of the large contingent of Aviation Cadets and to shoot the breeze with them.

I was homesick, but the letters from my family, filled with news about daily life at home and in South Bend, cheered me up immensely. At the end of March, I heard from my youngest sister, Margie, who was only eight, but knew all the gossip. "Had a show today at school," she wrote. "15¢ for it. But it was worth it. Mary Roamer was there and Mr and Mrs Roamer were there too. Had a nice time. Chucky Roamer had to sing Daisy Daisy. The name of the play was Hattie. Mrs. Riley was there and Philip Riley. Philip Riley got an orange from Sister Lourdes, my Sister. It was realy good, the show Philip got the orange for singing. Mother just gave me some choclate chips. She is going to make choclate chip cookies for our lunch. Their going to be very good. Evelyn is coming for supper. Aunt Meal went to Chicago so Evelyn is staying all night. Mother made some pies and other good things. Wish you wer with us to eat. I would enjoy It very much. First letter I've written in ink so excuse my writing. I'm very happy to send to you my first letter in ink Looks like we are going to have Christmas instead of spring. Its so cold Its snowing. Its snowing arval hard how about up there?" (Professor William Roemer, on the faculty at Notre Dame, and his wife, Carmel, were my parents' best friends; they too had a large family. The Rileys were another Notre Dame family.).

The Air Station at Norman was even windier than Hutchinson. "This is a funny place, believe me," I wrote on 10 April. "In two days we've had two hurricanes. Each time the whole station was shut down—all operations stopped. This morning things look green and refreshed after last nights rain, lightening, hail and terrific wind." A week later we started working on the flight line—"warming up planes and generally caring for them as a mother hen cares for her chicks, although, of course, we do not scratch up the ground to find bugs for the planes. Anyhow, there was a terrible storm, and I was in it. We were rushing all around trying to put covers on the cockpits and motors, and I got soaked."

We were also drilled in knot-tying, not for use on ships, but so that we could tie down planes securely against the fierce Oklahoma winds, and since we were still regarded as potential pilots, who carried side-arms, we had target practice with .38 pistols. "I had to stand sentry duty for four hours Wednesday night—" I wrote to my folks, "from 2200 to 0200. I carried a "38" revolver, and scared the pants off of some drunks. They thought I was going to blow their heads off." But Norman was a big base, and there were many types of activities, including a very large choral group made

up of Tarmacs, Waves, Cadets, officers, and seamen and led by a former member of Fred Waring's Glee Club. Several of us tried out for it and were accepted, and the group got to perform once for the entire station—our best number was "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" done in Fred Waring's arrangement. The base was also big enough to provide chaplains for the daily Masses that I and several friends attended. Every night there was a first-run movie. "We go to the movies at night, a lot," I wrote to my family, "but if it wasn't for the movies, I'd go nuts. They make me forget that I'm not home." I did a lot of reading, too, much of it in religion and philosophy. As at every military installation, rumors abounded. The ones that caught our attention had to do with being shipped out.

Jerry Wack, my cousin from Columbus, Ohio, was living in Norman with his wife. Jerry was in an Army program at the University of Oklahoma. Called ASTP (Army Specialized Training Program), it was the Army's equivalent of V-12. However, I had heard that ASTP had closed at the University. I wrote home on 3 April that Tom Green and I "were in Oklahoma City and Norman, over the weekend. Don't think much of either place. The USO's aren't bad, but they can't compare with Hutch. The people here aren't as friendly as Kansans, either. I received Jerry's address from Aunt Mary, but didn't get a chance to try it. Most of the soldiers have been shipped out anyhow. There are about fifty left at the University—all pre-meds. Gosh, I hope he's one of them. I've been looking forward to seeing him, and since this place hasn't much to offer, he and his wife could make up a little for being away from home. I'll be awfully sorry if I don't see him."

A week later we went to the city again and this time located Jerry's house, where we met Peggy, Jerry's wife, who told us that Jerry was in the Infantry taking basic training at Camp Howze in Texas." Jerry had become a victim of war mismanagement. As in V-12, ASTP was a way for qualified enlisted men in the Army to study engineering, mathematics, and languages at colleges and become officers. However, as Paul Fussell says in *The Boys' Brigade*, when casualties among the ground forces in Europe suddenly mounted, the Army removed many thousands of these officer-candidates from ASTP and thrust them into the decimated rifle companies, even though they were untrained for front-line duty and almost useless in actual battle (Fussell, 68, 97-98). I found the parallel with V-12 an uncomfortable one.

In early April I wrote, "The unofficial word is that we're to be here until July 1st. How in hell will I stand it? All day the wind blows and the dust flies. One can feel the dirt gritting in the mouth. It is often very hot—my face is getting dark, but it's a painful burning process. The nights, however, are very cold. Two woolen blankets aren't enough, so I freeze all night!" My dad wrote sympathetically, but sensibly to me ("Well, we can't have everything our own way. All through life unwelcome things pop up unexpectedly and it's up to us, the rational animals, to show that we can take it"). So I got used to Norman and even stayed optimistic about becoming a pilot.

On 4 May I wrote home that a "draft of 35 Tarmacs are being shipped out of here next Tuesday [9 May] to flight-prep. I haven't the slightest idea who's going, but I doubt if I will. What we want, is for the four of us [Tom Green, Ed Meehan, Walt Hill, and I] to go together, wherever we go. We filled out a preference sheet and all of us picked Penn. for our first choice. Maybe we need some praying, so get to work. The officer who is over us, Ens. Pruett, told us that he would do all he could to see that we stay together, but was afraid that he could do very little. So all we can do is pray and hope." Then, on the ninth, without much warning, a bunch of us, including Tom Green and I, but not the others, got the good news we had been hoping for. We were told that on 9 May 1944 we were being shipped to the Navy Flight Preparation School at Louisiana State Normal College, Nachitoches, Louisiana. Happy, I wrote to my family, "I'll really have to get to work there—learn to study again. However, I'm going to do what the cadets here have told me to—assume a "don't give a damn" attitude. That is, do my best, but don't act as if everything depended on those wings. They say a lot flunk out because they don't relax and raise hell while they're training—because flying is something not just everyone can do, and if one can't fly, then why kill oneself trying?"

We arrived at Nachitoches on May 10th. Right away I wrote home asking for my camera. "The train ride took almost a whole day and night. We rode in a troop car which had huge seats—made into three-deck bunks at night. We really had a picnic all the way—and stopped for a few hours at Ft. Worth and Dallas. As soon as we got into Ft. Worth (Texas is a "wet" state) the drinkers in the crowd made for the liquor establishments and got properly soused. Of course they brought back a whole store full of supplies with them and for the rest of the trip our two cars were full of drunken sailors! The scenery along the way was swell, too—a fine train trip. Now [10 August], I think I'm going to like Louisiana. Nachitoches is the oldest town in the Louisiana purchase and from what I hear—it is as full of romance as I can take! It is noted for its fishing, hunting, and boating! The campus is just fine and all the civilians are women—and pretty! So with all this beauty I'll need that camera fast!"

Cadet Tom Green

At Nachitoches (which we learned to pronounce correctly as "NACK-i-tosh"), we were issued splendid new uniforms—aviation cadet khakis. We were assigned rooms in the college's dorms, and handed piles of textbooks. "The cadets here quit right and left," I wrote. "This is going to be a hell of a course, but with plenty of help from above I can do it." We cadets were the only male students—all the civilian students were coeds (about 350 of them), which in our eyes made for an ideal learning situa-

tion. So back to class we went, but now we were studying navigation, political geography, flight theory, and Morse code, as well as more maritime history and Navy etiquette. Our physical education was increased and intensified. We exercised vigorously in the summer heat. We played soccer to toughen us, stifling in the southern heat as we knocked each other around on the grass of the college stadium in soggy sweatsuits to keep from being bitten by chiggers.

In the previous two months, as Apprentice Seaman and Tarmac at Hutchinson and Norman, I had been considered the lowliest of the low, despite having had eight months of V-12 training . Now I was about to embark on the real thing, aviation cadet training in V-5, where even the uniform I would be wearing would be suggestive of officer status. Nevertheless, at this point in my career the Navy sought fit to issue me a copy of *The Bluejacket's Manual*, 11th edition, 1145 pages (1943). Supposedly this manual contained all the information needed "to make an able seaman and a thorough man-of-war's man," such as tying knots and painting the deck of a ship. It even had a section on how to sail a small boat. Although I dutifully carried it with me for the rest of my hitch, the only practical use I found for it was to file letters between its pages.

Around 20 May, I received a V-Mail letter (i.e., a one-page letter written on a special form, which was then photographed, printed in snapshot size, and air-mailed to the recipient). It had been sent by my cousin, Don Geiger, who was in the Parachute Infantry. "I am some place in New Guinea," he wrote. "It isn't so bad here. But the food is awful. If we had our way we would hang the damn cooks at sunrise. There are a hell of a lot of Australians on this island. And they sure do hate the Japs. There is also a lot of natives here. Our camp isn't far from the jungles and they sure are dense. And hot as hell. You can't see very far. So it will be pretty tough going. But I am not worried a damn bit." He seemed to think I was in the "swamps of Louisiana," not in a college dormitory, enjoying cafeteria food, and it occurred to me that so far I was having a rather easy war.

In flight prep school, we were not allowed much spare time, but I managed to keep up my reading and letter writing. There was also not much time for dating, but I enjoyed a romantic friendship with Rose Nell Crump, a girl from a farm outside of Nachitoches who was an education student at the College. She was very pretty and, in my eyes, a movie-style Southern belle. And Tom Green and I became friends with a priest in Nachitoches and had dinner with him at the rectory. "Father Aycock says the 9:30 Mass here, and we had met him a couple of weeks earlier, and he invited us. It was a swell home-cooked meal—just perfect. Afterward we had a pleasant hour of conversation about various phases of education and religion. Fr. Aycock is young and a grand guy—studied under Msgr. Sheen at Catholic U." I told my dad that this priest had "loaned me a pamphlet by Mortimer Adler called 'God and the Professors' which is so good that I'm going to get one and send it to you."

Rose Nell Crump

Near the end of June, my father wrote me, saying "Your enthusiasm for the fine things in this world runs so high that you may find it hard to face moments of serious disappointment or perhaps even a defeat of your own ideals. . . . I should add at once however that there is something that may seem to you to have prompted the above observations. There is much talk of reducing the number of candidates for the naval air corps." And shortly after receiving that letter, I and the other cadets got a very special letter from the Navy. Dated 17 June, the letter had come from the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations and was directed to all aviation cadets and student aviation pilots to inform them that, at that time, the Navy needed fewer pilots than was previously estimated, that pilot training would be increased in length and scope, that the standards for qualifying as naval aviator had been raised, and that the number of those accepted into flight training would be reduced by about two-thirds. Among the alternatives listed to flight training was transfer to air gunnery school (the option most of us chose). What lay behind this was one of those good-bad situations: we were winning the war in the Pacific and therefore needed fewer pilots, but also we would-be pilots no longer had much chance of fulfilling our dream.

The outcome of the situation was that I decided to ask to be transferred to enlisted status and to enroll at an air gunnery school. To my parents, I wrote that the "reason I am leaving is not due to any lack of faith in myself."

"I know very well I could become a pilot, no matter how tough they make the course. I don't believe I could be at ease with my conscience or feel that I were being true to myself, should I stay in V-5 now that I'm not needed. Tom Green feels the same way. I don't think there are any other cadets who have been as eager to make good as Tom and I—yet we feel that we don't want to go on training for a war we'll never see. If you don't understand, please ask all the questions you want to—and if you think it's necessary, you could call me some evening. This is a very serious matter, and don't think I don't realize that. You can't know how much I hate to give up every chance I've ever had to become an officer, but I feel that it's necessary. This is why I'm dropping from the program—I most definitely am not "quitting"—and I haven't been kicked out!"

All this was happening, however, during a flareup of the chronic abdominal ills from which I had suffered since I was a child. Today my condition is called Irritable Bowel Syndrome, a good name for it, but the malady remains mysterious. Stress probably was a factor in 1944. In early July, the Navy physician at the College, having decided that "chronic appendicitis" lay at the root of my stomach problems, sent me to the Naval Hospital at New Orleans for an appendectomy. On 5 July, I wrote to my family that I was still at the hospital on Lake Ponchartrain, but that I had been given a promise that I could leave the next day. "Since my last letter, the head doctor examined me and said I show no symptoms of appendicitis." After questioning me at great length, this head doctor asked me to take a walk with him outside, during which we chatted about many things. He told me that having "chronic appendicitis" was as likely as a woman's being "somewhat pregnant," adding that the Navy doctor at Nachitoches was nothing but "an old woman."

Both amused and relieved, I took the train back up to Nachitoches to finish out the flight prep course and conclude my career as an aviation cadet—and to say farewell to my dream of becoming a Navy pilot.

Meanwhile, back in South Bend, my father had joined the war effort through being appointed a Block Warden. Whenever the authorities called an air raid drill, it was the Block Warden's job to make sure that no house in his area showed any lights. Dad wore a white metal helmet and an arm band and carried a whistle, a flashlight (with the lens covered so that only a small amount of light showed), and a small "pumper," to be used for pumping water to be sprayed on fires caused by incendiary bombs. My cousin Evelyn Knapp remembers watching Dad on the day he could not find his whistle, trying to whittle one out of wood. Probably he participated in no more than three or four air raid drills. No enemy bomber could have reached South

Bend, Indiana, but it was part of the psychology of the war effort to get even Midwesterners involved in some way in the defense of the homeland.

I got to see Dad's military equipment during the last week in July 1944, when I went home on leave. I was still an Aviation Cadet, so I was in my snappy cadet uniform. I boarded the train at Shreveport, and changed trains in St. Louis. On the way to Chicago, I opened the window at my seat to get some relief from the stifling heat inside the passenger car, and in blew the soot-laden smoke from the engine, changing my boyish, officer-like appearance to that of a down-on-his-luck hobo.

2
An Ordinary Seaman

No, when I go to sea, I go as a simple sailor, right before the mast, plumb down into the forecastle, aloft there to the royal mast-head. True, they rather order me about some, and make me jump from spar to spar, like a grasshopper in a May meadow.
—Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*

On 4 August 1944, having sent half of my gear home (mostly those eye-catching aviation cadet uniforms), I was on the train from Nachitoches to New Orleans, one of a consignment of ex-cadets enroute for the Naval Air Gunnery School at Yellow Water, Florida (it was attached to N.A.S. Jacksonville). At New Orleans, we found that we had an eight-hour layover for exploring, so we visited St. Louis Cathedral and strolled through the French Quarter, where we stopped in at the Court of the Three Sisters for absinthe frappés. As tourists we were inconspicuous, since every other person in New Orleans was a serviceman. We arrived at Yellow Water that night.

For the first time in over a year in the Navy, I had a fairly definite idea of what lay ahead of me. For the next six weeks I would be in training as an air gunner, after which I would be assigned to a squadron, land-based or carrier-based, and go into action in the Pacific. Of course, I was no longer a candidate for an officer's commission. Now I was a Seaman Second-Class. However, even at that I remained something of an anomaly, since, according to my *Bluejacket's Manual*, I was hardly an "Able-Bodied Seaman" or "Man-of-War's Man" qualified to perform all the duties required of such a person on a gun-carrying ship. I would have been lost on a ship. No, the most that could be said for me was that now I was just an Ordinary Seaman, the lowest on the bluejacket scale. No one would ever make the mistake of ordering me to take the helm of a ship, but I would learn how to be an efficient, accurate air gunner.

Now I wore a seaman's uniform. I usually wore whites when on liberty and dungarees at work. In San Diego, during the cooler months, I wore blues on liberty. Blues were the traditional seaman's uniform, with bell-bottom trousers and thirteen buttons on the large flap in front, blouse with big collar, and neckerchief. The less ornate whites were for warm weather. Dungarees were simply jeans.

My life at Air Gunnery School did not begin optimistically, however, as I wrote to my family on the 10th of August: "Guess where I am now! In the damn sick-bay with intestinal flu. Only I don't think it is intestinal flu, because two days ago I ate some greasy meat for dinner, and got sick right after that. Was sick all afternoon and night, and came here in the morning. Had a fever of 102° but I think it's gone by now. This is my second day here, and my headache is almost gone, but my stomach still feels bad."

I was in a quandary about what to do about my condition, which seemed to be getting worse. I was skipping meals because everything I ate seemed bad for me. "They have so much fried stuff in the Navy, and it always gives me cramps. It wouldn't be so bad if they'd fry the food crisp, but it just drips with grease. We never get milk here, but strong coffee, and that brings on cramps too. Even milk, if I drink it fast."

The following day, I felt better and expected to be released from sick-bay. "I talked with the head doctor, who felt that I was suffering from a food allergy and should considering buying my meals off base. I thought that was an insane solution. He said that another option was to send me to the hospital where I might be given a "survey," i.e., a medical discharge from the Navy. He said, however, that even if I did get the survey, I might be drafted into the Army once I got home." I wrote that same day that I did not know what to do. "I'd hate to have to leave the Navy, and wouldn't, if it meant going into the Army where the food is probably worse. But if this is serious, I think it would be better to be home, where I can get the right foods. The war is almost over, and they've even a surplus of aerial gunners, so I wouldn't feel conscience stricken at leaving. And it becomes apparent that my condition is becoming increasingly worse."

The doctor told me that the choice was up to me and that I could do more for myself than any doctor by avoiding the foods and the cooking that were causing me trouble. And that is the choice I took. A week later I could report that I had not been sick since having left sick-bay. However, I was losing weight—from 150 pounds at Nachitoches, I was now at 140 pounds. But once I was into the routine of gunnery school, my health did begin to improve. As often as we could, Tom Green and I ate our dinners downtown in Jacksonville, notably Berney's Restaurant, which I wrote about on 30 August: "It is the best in Jacksonville—food is perfect but it costs quite a bit. However, the food is so good that we go anyhow, but I'll have to economize. This guy Berney is famous, because he always wears a green suit. He darts around the restaurant all the time. We start a meal with a glass of sherry, then comes cheese and crackers, then the steak and accessories. If we aren't full by that time, we start on dessert. The food is really swell." We spent time at Jacksonville Beach, too, swimming and girl-watching. Tom Green, familiar with ocean swimming from his New Jersey boyhood, was amused by my surprise that the Atlantic was salty! As for

Yellow Water itself, I considered it a "hole." I wrote that it "is the most inefficient naval activity I have ever seen. Everything is screwed up, and that's no lie. After all we gave up to come here so we could see action, they don't even let us go to class. We are on work detail for two weeks."

Bob Taylor, Ed McLean, Tom Wack, Jim Lindus on liberty at Jacksonville Beach

But we learned plenty of air gunnery once the two weeks were over. On 23 August I listed our daily activities for my folks: "We get up at 0530, wait half an hour in line for breakfast, then go to our first class at 0650. Class until 1005, with code, recognition, and sighting. At 1005 we go to dinner and wait an hour in line. After dinner we go to swimming class at 1115. At 1215 we go to the range where we have target practice and learn about our guns, how to clean them and repair them. We are through for the day at 4:30 PM, and immediately go to supper, since we have to wait in line for an hour. I spend all this time in line very profitably, by reading. After supper, we usually go to the movie, then read and write letters until 10 o'clock, time for taps. So that's the day. Yesterday, instead of going to the range, we flew in a bomber trainer, which was quite the thing. Quite a nice trip—over Jax and the coast."

Gradually I got used to the ear-splitting hammering of the Browning M-2 50-caliber machine guns (we wore ear-plugs or earphones) and the jack-hammer vibration. I learned to hold the gun steady enough to hit the target, although the gun sight wanted to leap around like a jack rabbit. As it turned out, months later, once we got into actual combat, we used those same guns in pairs, but the gun turrets we fired from absorbed most of the recoil.

None of us ever had use for Morse code and not much use for plane and ship recognition, but what was important for us was learning the machine guns, 30-caliber as well as 50, along with an introduction to 20 mm's), how to clean and care for them, and the target practice. We had to be able to assemble and disassemble them blindfolded. A humorless Chief Petty Officer drilled us over and over in the routine for stripping and cleaning our weapons. A dirty gun, he lectured at us, would not only fail to kill the enemy, but most likely it would explode and kill *you*. Not knowing how to clear a jam in your gun gave the enemy time to kill *you*. Valuable lessons. We had constant target practice, too. Sometimes the targets we shot at were carried on the cars of a narrow-gauge railroad train, which was fine as a preparation for situations where we would be shooting from a moving plane at a stationary target, such as a ra-

dar tower or a slow-moving ship. For training in hitting moving targets, such as enemy planes, we played skeet, using shotguns to track clay pigeons spinning in the air and shoot them down. Of course, skeet-shooting presumed a stationary shooter—and for situations in which both shooter and target were moving, we needed to be in planes firing at other planes, but that would have to wait until future assignment.

The gunnery training was rigorous, but enjoyable. There is nothing like the thrill of cutting loose with a machine gun! And I continued to stay healthy. On 5 September I wrote to my family, "Despite the doctor's instructions [to eat what I am served at the chow hall, then come to see him at the first sign of cramps], I am carefully avoiding the foods that give me trouble, and so I've felt quite well lately. Once in a while, though, it comes on, though not often."

However, even though we were now in a training program that led to a definite outcome, we were still awash in rumors. On the 15th, I had written that we had "heard a disgusting, but seemingly well founded rumor" that three-fourths of those of us who were former aviation cadets would be made gunnery instructors after we finished gunnery school. That would mean having to stay at a base like Yellow Water for six months—or for as long as two years. Supposedly we were not considered good for anything now but gunnery. "What we really want," I wrote, "is to get the training over, then get into action. We certainly don't want to stay in a gunnery school (especially in this gunnery school . . . !)"

The point of the rumor and of our complaint was that, although we had been given many months of generalized naval training both in V-12 and in flight prep school, we had no training in any of the three skills needed by crewmen in Navy planes (mechanics, radio, and ordnance), so that when we had finished gunnery school, we would still be "unrated" seamen whose only useful training would be in air gunnery.

A further complication occurred. "This last week we've been studying for midterms," I wrote on 11 September. "The assignments are out for the planes we are to get. Tom and I asked for B-24's, but were given A.B.T.U. (aviation bombardier training unit). There is some compensation in this, since one has to be in quite good standing and have good grades in order to make A.B.T.U. But it will mean more school before operational—not here, but farther south, probably [at N.A.S. Banana River, Florida]. We are thinking of asking to be changed to B-24's, because we <u>did</u> want that, but I don't know what we'll do. We're happy, anyhow, that we were chosen for the somewhat exclusive school, since there were only twenty [chosen] out of three hundred."

This put an end, of course, to the previous rumor, since now, as it seemed, our V-12 and flight prep training was serving us well, and two days later we decided to accept the chance to become bombardiers. I wrote that "I still feel reluctant about going to more school, but am damn proud I got the assignment. The men who formerly

were the Navy's bombardiers, were officers, so we'll do an officer's job. In the Army, they are using officers for the same duty. Pray hard that T.G. and I will make it O.K., since it's pretty rough going in spots—lots of math. Part of our duty may be navigating, which I'll like. Another part will be taking over in case a gunner gets shot, so we'll still have to know our gunnery—better than most guys, because we'll have to know all the guns and turrets. But our big job will be operating the Norden bombsight, and blasting hell out of Tokyo."

Yet five days later, Tom Green and I had made a hundred-and-eighty-degree switch back to our first choice, B-24's. We were taking our final exams in code and recognition, and I told my folks that we still didn't "know where we're going, but I hope it's not A.B.T.U., as I want to see action more than ever, since the war news is so good. Boy, I'd surely like to be in on the push that frees Pepe and his people!" (Pepe, my family's link with the Philippines, was José Panganiban, a professor from Manila we had come to know when he was a graduate student at Notre Dame; he roomed with the McAllisters next door to us.) I do not recall precisely why I decided not to become a bombardier. Probably it was my desire to see action. As I now realize, had I gone on to become a bombardier, I would have been obsolete in a few months, since the Navy was no longer using the high-altitude bombers that required trained bombardiers who operated bomb sights, but were relying mostly on patrol bombers, in which the pilots were themselves the bombardiers, dropping bombs on ships at masthead-level heights.

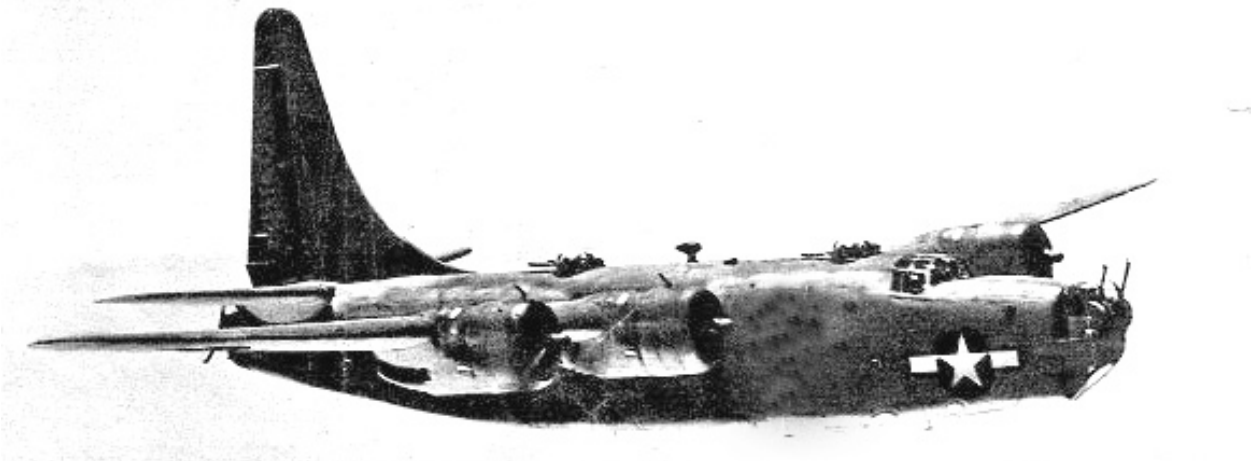
Then, on 21 September, two days before the end of the gunnery course, I wrote that I was coming home on leave. "Twenty-one of us were informed today that we have orders to report to San Diego fifteen days from Saturday [i.e., Sunday, 8 October]. We graduate Saturday morning [23 September], and will be given our orders Saturday afternoon. There is a train leaving [from] Jax at 9:00 P.M. for Chicago—which will arrive in Chi Monday morning [25 September] sometime. Will take the South Shore to home, and I'll send you another wire as soon as I get to Chi, telling you when I'll get in South Bend. . . . I guess you know as well as I what this leave means—I will take my operational training in active Pacific duty, instead of taking it here. So I'll probably be overseas by a month from now."

Being home for a week did wonders for my morale, and I left on the train for San Diego in renewed anticipation. Once I got to the Naval Air Station at Camp Kearney, near San Diego, I was put in Headquarters Squadron, which meant that once again I had to mark time for a while. "Finally here," I wrote, "and so far, I think this is a good deal. Food is good and we are treated excellently. As yet, we are not assigned to a crew. Dago is crowded and worse than Jax." A few weeks later I found that I had been promoted to Seaman First-Class, which raised my wages from $54 to $66 per month. "Am settled, to a certain extent, and am waiting for a squadron. We do work of sorts, not too hard, so far. The base is ideal, San Diego is not."

But I did not remain long in Limbo, because on 25 October the word came that I was assigned to VPB-109, a patrol bombing squadron flying temporarily in PB4Y-1's (B-24's in the Army). "Whee! Finally been assigned to a squadron, but Tom didn't get assigned. Bob Taylor is going with me in the Squadron."

I was put into Crew 13, under Lieutenant Floyd Hewitt, the plane commander, where I was to be an air gunner and mechanic. VPB-109 had been established in August 1943 as a heavy bombing squadron flying Liberators (about the time I was flunking my first physics exam at ND). One notable attack by the squadron occurred on 10 May 1944 (by that time I was a Cadet at Nachitoches), when a Liberator flown by the squadron's commander, Norman M. Miller, heavily damaged a 5,000-ton Japanese freighter and a 10,000-ton ship at Truk and strafed enemy soldiers and destroyed radar and other installations at Puluwat. The plane was hit four times by AA fire, and both Miller and his co-pilot were wounded, but they flew the damaged plane 800 miles back to Eniwietok, where they made a safe landing. For this, probably the most successful and destructive single-plane raid in the squadron's history, Commander Miller was awarded the Navy Cross. The executive officer of VB-109 was Lieutenant Commander George L. Hicks, who became the commanding officer of VPB-109. ("VPB-109," *Dictionary of American Naval Aviation Squadrons*, II, 522.)

VB-109 had "trained from 2 August to the end of December 1943 at NAS San Diego and NAS Kaneohe, Hawaii. Until mid-August 1944, it operated out of Apamama (Gilbert Islands), Kwajalein Atoll (Marshall Islands), Eniwetok, and Saipan, bombing enemy ships, airfields, and other installations. On 14 August 1944 VB-109 began its return to NAS San Diego via Kaneohe, and all personnel were given home leave." It was reformed as VPB-109 in October 1944 at Camp Kearney, "with 15



PB4Y-2 Privateer bombers and 18 crews." (*Dictionary*, 522) Pictured above is a rotogravure photo of a Privateer published in 1945.

My family asked me to explain the initials and acronyms I was using in my letters, so on 6 November I told them that NAS" stood for Naval Air Station. "Hedron

stands for "headquarters squadron" and F.A.W. stands for fleet air wing. The racket I'm in, VPB109, stands for "heavier than air" (V), "patrol" (P), "bombing squadron" (B) 109.--Or just "bombing squadron 109." This squadron has a wonderful record. Former C.O. was Commander Miller—Jim probably knows of him."

Right around that time, I was alarmed to learn that Franklin Delano Roosevelt had been re-elected to an unprecedented fourth term, with Harry Truman as his vice-president, defeating the Republican Thomas E. Dewey. Throughout his presidency, Roosevelt suffered, sometimes severely, from poliomyelitis, which he had contracted in his late thirties (polio was much feared in America in the 'thirties -- we at Notre Dame knew about it from seeing Fred Snite in the stadium in his monstrous "iron lung" at the ND football games). The next April, when my squadron was still in training in Oahu, Roosevelt died of a stroke, probably brought on by exhaustion from the effects of the war. To the dismay of many Americans, myself included, our new President was Harry Truman, an unknown who was said to be little more than a political hack. After the war, however, as a married man, a teacher, and a voter, I came to understand that Roosevelt had been a genuinely outstanding president, not just because of his conduct of the war, but for his social and economic programs, his support of human rights, and especially his fostering of international cooperation (such as the United Nations). And it did not take me long to realize that Truman was another of the great ones – even though I continue to believe that he was seriously mistaken in authorizing the atom-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, just as Roosevelt was sorely misguided in not authorizing action to save the Jews when he learned of the existence of the Holocaust early in the war..

From mid-October to the end of January, VPB-109 trained out of Camp Kearney, practicing takeoffs and landings, aerial maneuvers, bombing, strafing, and defense against attacks by fighter planes. In Crew 13, I was given the job of manning the starboard waist turret, which looked like a large teardrop. On November 6th I explained to my parents why I had not been writing recently. "For the past week I've been at another base near San Diego, going to gunnery school. Last week I was at North Island in S.D. harbor, and now I'm going to school at Border Field (a gunnery school on the U.S.-Mex. border), but am living at Camp Ream, an air base 14 miles from S.D. and about five miles from Mexico. Complicated, huh?" On the 12th, I reported that we had been issued more gear, such as flying suits (the ones with all the pockets). "I'll send home a lot of stuff as soon as I know whether I'll need it. According to the guys, I'll need only half of the gear I've been issued, and I want to take all the books I can. By the time our squadron goes out, the Eastern campaign ought to be far enough advanced for us to be stationed in the Philippines or China."

On 4 December: "The classes we attend are: 3A2 (target practice using a movie projector), recognition, pistol practice, skeet shooting, turret practice, lectures on various types of warfare and rescue work, and athletics. Usually we fly four hours a day.

We have two classes a day—one of which is athletics, and one flight. Not too tough, especially since half the time the flight is cancelled. I haven't flown for a week!"

My close friend Tom Green had been assigned to VPB-122 at another base. But in December he was back at Camp Kearney. His squadron had broken up and he was waiting to join another which was to form soon. The other member of our trio, Bob Taylor, from Evanston, Illinois, was actually a member of Crew 13.

We knew that the Squadron would not go into action directly from San Diego, but would continue outfitting and training on Oahu, Territory of Hawaii, beginning early in the year. In November I wrote to my father that when "I go overseas, I'm going to take a number of books with me. I intend to read and reread them, until I know them completely. This comes from your telling me that you'd rather have me know ten books well, than to read all of the classics. Here is a prospective list: Dante's *Divine Comedy*; Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*; Melville's *Moby Dick*; Tolstoy's *War and Peace*; and *The Canterbury Tales* by Chaucer. These are books I've always wanted to read, and are representative classics of age, country, and subject matter." To tell the truth, I did not read even one of those books, but I did read quite a few others. "Every night before I go to bed," I wrote Dad, "I read a little of *The Imitation* [*of Christ,* by Thomas a' Kempis]. That is the best one of them all, and no matter what I've read before that's deep and puzzling, *The Imitation* always puts me at ease again, like a good friend."

In December, a Jesuit by the name of Father Weitzman put on a two-day mission at the base which I attended, along with many others who were on their way to the East. A few days before Christmas, I received Christmas letters from my parents and siblings. My Dad wrote,

> When Christ was born God sent His angels to bring the glad tidings to a group of shepherds and to give them a simple little recipe for world peace. "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men of good will!" That is really all it takes. A recognition of God and good will toward our fellow men. A man of great "good will" has a basis for the finest kind of greatness a man can achieve. And if each of us strives to develop in his heart and actions a sincere spirit of good will toward all the people of the world we will surely have the peace that we all desire. May your Christmas be a happy one! And it can be, in spite of your being so far away from home and having a life to follow that is not to your liking if you accept your lot in a spirit of Christian resignation and remain true to your high ideals.

Despite it's being my first Christmas away from home, it was a happy one, since I was able to spend it in nearby Glendale, California, with the family of my uncle, Herb Keller.

In January, Bob Taylor was considering going back to V-5, having learned that the Navy needed pilots again. I decided to stay where I was, writing to my folks that maybe "I should do the same, but wouldn't feel right. If they still need us when I get back from overseas, I'll become a cadet again. After all, I got out not only because they didn't need us, but also because I want to participate actively in this war." However, to my relief, Bob decided to remain in VPB-109.

On the eighth, Bob and I made the requisite visit to Mexico, "in a little town just over the border, Tijuana, by name. One can get anything there—even nylons. We got there about noon, had a huge steak dinner, then set out on a stroll around the place. Tijuana is notorious for its many houses of ill fame, and the street vendors try to sell you everything imaginable, from chewing gum to their mothers! A minor in Mexico is anyone under eighteen, so we spent a little time in the bars, making up for lost time! Mexican beer is inferior, but hightly tasteful even at that! We came back to the border at 8:00 P.M. and got back to the base at 11:00 P.M." A souvenir of that visit was the charcoal sketch a Tijuana artist made of me—my family claimed that he'd made me into a Mexican *muchacho*.

Most of us crewmen were scheduled to leave by ship for Oahu on 30 January, with the Squadron's planes being flown there some ten days later. On 28 January, my father wrote me, saying, "We are finding it hard to get used to the idea of your leaving the U.S. for the Pacific. It will be a great adventure and you will learn much that you can turn to account later. But I would rather see you stay here where it's safe. On the other hand there is a war on and the nation is looking to you as one of the men to keep actively warding off the Japanese menace. Hard as it may be for all concerned it is a call that you cannot shirk. Your letters show that you have seen things in that light yourself." I wrote back that I had been received into the Third Order of St. Francis and had chosen "'Thomas More' for my patron and religious name. I am to be on probation for a year. Of course I feel very holy now!"

Writing to Pat about the same event, which at the time I considered a significant step in my life, I said, "I can wear a scapular medal in place of the cord and scapular since I'm in the service. Father gave me some spiritual reading to do . . . besides the daily office of twelve Our Fathers and Hail Marys. The Order is really quite simple. The goal is more perfect Christianity—to increase love and charity, and to strive to follow in Christ's footsteps, by following his teachings. Although it [is] commonly called The "Third Order," its real name is "The Order of Penance." The benefits are many. You see, the big thing is—one can acquire all the benefits obtained by joining a religious order, while still remaining a layman." One benefit that wisely I did not mention to her or to my family, but which probably held the greatest attraction of all for me at that time, was that when I died I could be buried clothed in the brown, cowled habit of the Franciscan Order. James Joyce's Stephen Daedalus would have understood!

However, we did not set sail for Oahu until 2 February. The night before, I wrote home, "I don't know exactly what to say—this is my last day in the U.S., and by the time you get this, I shall probably be on the high seas! Don't worry about me, just keep praying and writing, and I'll be OK. I'll go to Mass and Communion before we leave. You won't hear from me for several weeks, but write anyhow. We'll be in Pearl for about a month." We sailed on the USS *Fanshaw Bay*, a so-called "jeep carrier" or "baby flat-top"—also referred to, less kindly, as a "Kaiser Coffin." It was built in 1943 by Kaiser in Vancouver, Washington. The trip to the Hawaiians must have taken about a week, during which my health was fairly good, although I did have cramps the whole trip. They started the first night, when the cooks unwisely served fried liver and onions.

"You are on your way!" my father wrote me on 5 February—the letter arrived at Oahu about the time I did. "I presume you sailed the day after you wrote as you thought you would. We have all been talking about it. Of course we are proud of you but we are also conscious of the serious purpose of your trips. We are imploring God and the saints to watch over you. I hope you have a pleasant trip—with good weather and good health. It ought to be a great adventure. I'm sure you will miss no opportunity to get all that you can out of the trip and the new life you are going into. There aren't any books that can give you anything like the same thing."

On 11 February, after we had arrived at Ford Island, in Pearl Harbor, I wrote to my girlfriend, Pat, that "we are here! I am safe, well, happy, homesick, lonesome, and skeered—this place is idyllic, only there is a war going on! But, gosh, the times I'm going to have with these native girls—what beauties!" I wrote my family on the 12th that Bob Taylor and I had gone swimming in the surf. "The breakers were the biggest I've ever seen—took a real fight to keep 'em from drowning us! We inflated mattress covers and rode in on them. Sun here isn't the same as our sun in winter—oh, no! I am a reddish-brown now, and Bob, who is fair complected, has quite a burn. This place is quite agreeable." When he and I had arrived at the beautiful beach, we noticed with wry amusement that there was a fence dividing the beach into two parts. Obeying the sign posted there, we used the smaller part, the one for the enlisted men. The other part was the officers' beach, where the officers and nurses played and swam. At least there was no rule preventing us from gazing at the nurses in their swimsuits.

Crew 15 had joined the other crews at the station where we were to be for the next two months, NAS Kaneohe Bay, across the island from Honolulu, where I reported that "The food is good, air is wonderful, and the base is okay. The only gripe—too big! There is a restaurant on the base, so I'll be able to go there when they serve "my foods"! Had sauerkraut tonight, and as usual, I can feel it!" There was a big library on the base, plenty of opportunities for movies, and many other amenities, including a soda fountain. I assured my mother that my religious needs would be well provided for, writing that "there are *three* priests here, and so many Masses and other devotions *daily* that there's absolutely no reason why every one of us "Papists" here shouldn't become saints."

As crews continued to arrive [at Kaneohe Bay], the squadron was put into the training syllabus for combat patrols, bombing, gunnery and ground school. On 18 March, an RY-2 (the cargo version of the PB4Y-1) was assigned to the squadron's complement by HEDRON [Headquarters Squadron], FAW-2 [Fleet Air Wing 2]. (*Dictionary*, 523)

Once the entire Squadron was assembled, the skipper, Lt. Commander George Hicks, ordered a reorganization and fine-tuning, and in the shuffling I was transferred to Crew 15, where the pilot and Plane Commander was Lieutenant Hugh Wilkinson and the Plane Captain, Leo Leonberger. Bob Taylor remained in Crew 13. Beginning in March, Crew 15 flew almost every day. Most of the flights were gunnery practice, where we fired from our turrets at sleeves towed by pursuit planes, but some were searches for the crews of planes that had ditched in the ocean. We flew in No. 501, the plane assigned to Crew 15.

We were allowed frequent liberty, which we took, even though the base itself had a lot to offer. We found a "bottomless" pool in the hills south of the base and swam there, and once when I was enjoying the clear, cool water, my ring slipped off my finger and sank to who-knows-what depths. It was an unfortunate loss, because it was Pat's high school ring, which she had had altered to fit my ring finger—the ring was too loose, however. And we also spent some weekends in Honolulu, renting rooms there overnight. To get to Honolulu, we rode a Navy bus which climbed slowly and painfully up the long north side of Pali Pass, then hurtled down the southern side to the city. When we came back at night, the bus would be filled with drunken sailors, many of them sick. Once when I had returned to Kaneohe Bay after having too much to drink, I was stepping off the bus when the driver suddenly started up again, and I fell flat on my face. I almost knocked myself out. Thankfully, it was dark and late. I was sore for days.

We could not do our own laundry, since there was a water shortage on the base, so, as I wrote on 25 February, we sent our soiled clothes to the base laundry, which "just beats the hell out of one's clothes—I'm learning to sew on buttons! I sent ten perfectly good handkerchiefs, and was returned ten motley, vari-colored, ungodly rags! My other clothes are OK, though." When it was almost too late, the squadron acquired several washing machines. At the same time, late in March, we were being issued our overseas gear—helmets, knives, mess gear, etc., and I wrote my folks about what kind of food to send me. "I'd appreciate things like jar cheese or the like. I'm afraid that all we'll get to eat when we're out is Spam and coffee—that's the usual battle fare, so don't send canned meat, even if you can get it. Sardines, or chili, or soup, would be fine. I have my own cooking gear, and can always get bread and water and seasoning." A week later I received a letter from my father, saying "I had hoped that you would stay where you are now. I thought they would use you for patrol work right there. But from all you say you are going on farther west. Good luck, Tom, wherever you may have to go. We will be with you in spirit wherever you are. And we are praying day after day for your safe return. All our other little wishes are as

nothing in comparison with the great wish we have for you to be right here with us again. Love from all."

Between 10 and 23 April 1945, the crews of VPB-109 moved in stages to Puerto Princessa, Palawan, the Philippines, coming under the operational control of Fleet Air Wing-10. Not all the Squadron's planes left Oahu at the same time. Crew 15 left on 17 April, all twelve of us together, but not yet carrying bombs or ammunition. The hold of our plane was packed tight with the gear of twelve men, including the officers' liquor supply. We were lucky to have our own transportation to the Pacific islands, because that way we were not limited as to what we could bring with us.

Also in the hold was also a portable, wind-up phonograph, along with several albums of ten-inch 78-rpm records, which I had bought in Honolulu. The shop where I had bought the phonograph did not have much in the way of classical music, and I had bought all they had in stock, such records as "In a Persian Market," "Prelude to *Die Meistersinger*," some *Bartered Bride* music, and Lacuona's "Maguelaña," plus two albums I had never heard of, but bought anyhow and came to enjoy—Debussy's *The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian* and *Peleas et Melisande*. (I never did understand how it had happened that a record shop that offered so little in the way of classical music would have among that little two such esoteric Debussy compositions.) My fellow crew members were sure I was crazy when they saw the record player—although they had been suspicious enough before, when they had seen the pile of books I was taking to the Philippines! Bob Taylor's crew had the same notion about him.

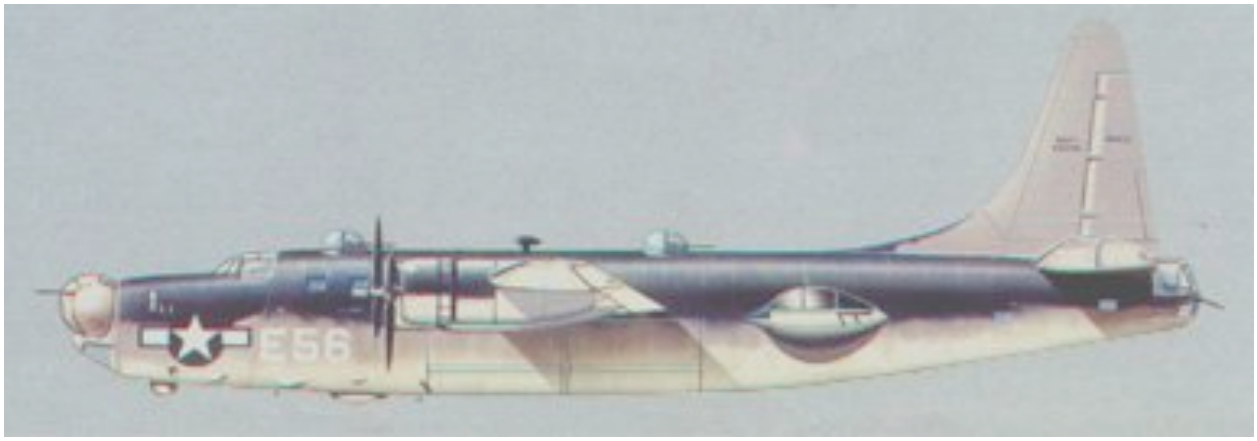
And so we set out to fight the Japanese.

3
The Ship

. . . for a whale-ship was my Yale College and my Harvard.
—— Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*

Patrol Bombing Squadron 109 was a bomber squadron of the United States Navy. This made us different from bomber squadrons in the Army Air Force. One way you could tell the difference was that we used "ship-language" for almost everything. For me, this mode of communication had begun in V-12 at Notre Dame, where I learned that stairs were not stairs, but *ladders*; that floors were *decks*; and that when you spoke to an officer, you said, "Aye, aye, sir," not "Yes, sir!" And that when an officer rescinded an order, he did not bark, "Cancel that order!" but "*Belay* that!"

Old habits die hard. When airplanes first became part of the Navy's arsenal of weapons—carrier planes, amphibious planes, and land-based bombers—whoever the admiral was who had been made responsible for the addition must have made sure that the planes and their crews became Navy in both matter and form.



In a large bomber like the Privateer, the cockpit was *forward*, and the *head* (the urinal, which was nothing more than a tube with a funnel attached) was *aft*. (Ironically, heads were so-named from their forward location on seagoing ships—at the ship's head or bow, where seawater could flush through the plumbing.) On the Privateer, there was a twin-machine gun turret in the *bow* and one at the *stern*, instead of nose and tail. There were two waist turrets, one to *port* and the other to *starboard*. My assignment was the *forward upper-deck turret*. The bomb bay was located *mid-ships*. If our bomber had contained a kitchen forward of the bomb bay, we would have called it the *galley*. Our pilot, Hugh Wilkinson, who commanded the plane, the other two officers, and us nine enlisted men, was the PPC, the Patrol Plane Commander;

and the Aviation Machinist's Mate who was in charge of the *crew*, was the Plane Captain, Bill Brady. We crewmen called each other "mate" or "shipmate" (sometimes), but all of us were *mates* in reality—machinist's mates, ordnance mates, or radio mates. Most of all, what we flew on—technically an airplane with wings and four huge engines—was a *ship*!

In ordinary usage, a *privateer* designates a kind of sea-going vessel that is one or two steps removed from piracy (hence the pirate-like figure on the Squadron's patch), but the ancestor of our Privateer was an Army Air Force plane, the B-24 Liberator. Like the B-17 Flying Fortress, the Liberator had earned its reputation in the bombing of Europe. It was a heavy, high-altitude, bombsight bomber. What the Navy needed in 1945, however, was a long-range patrol bomber that would destroy enemy shipping, necessarily at low altitude, and also defend itself from attack by enemy fighters. To serve this need, Consolidated-Vultee modified the Liberator both externally and internally and converted it into the Privateer. The Liberator's distinctive, double vertical stabilizers were modified into the Privateer's single vertical stabilizer, twenty-nine feet high. Described as a "heavily-armed flying platform," the Privateer was also longer than the Liberator, had more powered machine-gun turrets (six of them, each with twin 50-caliber machine guns), carried a heavier bomb load (four tons), and had a cruising range of over 3,000 miles. Some of the planes were also equipped with twin 20 mm cannons mounted below the bow turret. Parked on a baseball diamond, a Privateer would fit nicely, its 110-foot wingspan extending from first to third base, with about eight feet left over on either side. (By way of comparison, the wingtips of a B-29, the bomber used to destroy Japan's cities, would overhang first and third bases on a baseball field.)

One problem I had with the Privateer was that to get into the plane, you had to move under it in a crouch, crab-like, to enter it through the open bomb-bay doors. This was hard on the legs and back, even for a twenty-year-old in good shape. It seemed to be easier getting out. To get to our plane from the tent area, we rode in a "weapons carrier," which looked like an oversized jeep, but seemed to have no springs whatsoever. The drivers liked speed, despite the fact that the roads were in terrible shape, and we crewmen, sitting on the sides of the truck bed, were bounced around unmercifully. The air was blue with curses!

According to an Internet webpage devoted to aircraft, the first Privateer loss was a plane belonging to VPB-106 which was ditched in October 1944 in the Gulf of California. All the crew members were saved. The first combat loss of a Privateer was a VPB-121 plane, which went down on January 12, 1945. The last Privateer combat loss of the war was a plane from VPB-121, which was shot down on August 14, 1945 off the coast of Honshu. The total number of Privateers lost in action during the war was sixty-one. (*J. Baugher*)

The Privateer's complement was twelve men, three officers and nine crewmen. The pilot-PPC and the co-pilot (usually an ensign) were two of the officers; the navigator, the third. The crewmen were in three groups —three radiomen, three ordnancemen, and three mechanics. Of these nine men, one of the mechanics was the Plane Captain (his role was similar to that of the First Lieutenant on a ship), one of the radiomen manned the radio, and one of the ordnancemen armed the bombs; the six of us remaining manned the gun turrets—the ball turret at the bow of the ship, the two dome-shaped upper-deck turrets, the two teardrop-shaped turrets on either side of the waist, and the lozenge-shaped aft turret. One day after the hostilities ended, I flew a hop as plane captain. I wrote that "Brady wanted me to learn the procedure. It scares you, knowing you have the responsibility for the plane and the crew, but it's good for you, I guess. We made four takeoffs and landings, then flew down to Yonabaru [another Navy airbase on Okinawa]."

"In a demonstration of the Privateer's survivability and heavy fire-power, Lieutenant Fairbanks and Lieutenant Warren's aircraft were attacked on patrol by 12 enemy interceptors [on 17 May 1945]. Two of the Japanese fighters were shot down with only minor damage to Lieutenant Fairbank's aircraft and two wounded crewmen." (*Dictionary,* 524)

Crew 15 as of 15 May 1945. Back row from left: Hennes, Baskin, Vaughan, Wilkinson, Davis, Frink, Wilder. Front: Pollman, Wack, Mickle, Leonberger, Brady.

In my letters home, I described some of the members of Crew 15. "My pilot is Lt. H. M. Wilkinson of New Orleans. He is a graduate of Tulane U. and the Harvard Law School, and was a practising attorney before he entered the Navy." Until 15 May 1945, our copilot was Lieut. (jg) Eddie Vaughan of Houston, Texas. On the 15th (which was during the Squadron's first assignment to Okinawa), he was sent to Crew 17, being replaced by Ensign Archie Davis, from Jersey City, New Jersey. "He is twenty-three," I wrote, "while Mr. Wilkinson is twenty-seven. They are both excellent pilots, and I have every confidence in them. Mr. Wilkinson has given me a lot of valuable advice in regard to my reading and studying." Also on the 15th, Ensign Kenneth C. Jones was added to Crew 15 as the second copilot-navigator.

Crew 15 underwent several other important changes during the Squadron's second month of combat duty. Until 1 June, our Plane Captain had been Wilbert C. "Leo" Leonberger, AMM 2c, of Woodriver, Illinois, a capable, congenial man and an imaginative, amateur painter. At that time, the other eight crew members were the following:

William R. Brady, AMM 2c, of Orreck, Mo. (mechanic)
Thomas G. Wack, AMM 3c, of South Bend, Ind. (mechanic)
Eugene Wilder, AOM 3c, of Hattiesburg, Miss. (ordnanceman)
John A. Pollman, Jr., AOM 3c, of Homestead, Ok. (ordnanceman)
James M. Frink, AOM 3c, of Bladenburg, N. C. (ordnanceman)
Donald R. Baskin, ARM 2c, of Murphysboro, Ill. (radioman)
Henry H. Hennes, ARM 3c, of Los Angeles, Cal. (radioman)
Jay W. Mickle, ARM 3c, of Wichita, Kan. (radioman)

However, by 1 June, Leo Leonberger had been detached from the crew, much to the regret of the rest of us, and replaced by Bill Brady as Plane Captain, and on 10 June, Carlton W. Stallworth, AMM 2c, of College Park, Ga., was added to the crew. Also detached on 1 June was Henry Hennes, who was replaced on 10 June by Richard E. Ogden, ARM 3c, of Redondo Beach, Cal. The changes, which were ordered by the Squadron's leadership, were occasioned by a fistfight between two of the crew members and by the charge that Leo Leonberger, as Plane Captain, should have stopped the fight. For the rest of us, it meant the loss, in Leo, of a very competent crew leader and good friend. There may have been other such fights among Squadron personnel during our six months in the islands, but I never heard of any.

Leo Leonberger had painted many of the nude cuties on the Squadron's planes. This included the pin-up girl on our plane, "Punkie," supposedly a representation of the girlfriend of our pilot, Lieutenant Wilkinson, the result being, I think, not so much erotic as anatomically grotesque. "Punkie" was not Leo's fault, however, for he was trying to be faithful to Hugh Wilkinson's directions. Leo also painted the steel flak helmets of us Crew 15 members. He painted five stars on mine, making me a five-

star admiral, and also painted "my" nickname, having decided that my initials, "T.G.," stood for "Tough Gut." From then on, I was called "T.G." rather than "Tom," many of my friends assuming that the initials stood for "Tough Gut"!

For the rest of the tour, then, three and a half months, Crew 15 was made up of Wilkinson, Davis, Jones, Brady, Stallworth, Wack, Wilder, Pollman, Frink, Baskin, Mickle, and Ogden. On 10 June, I wrote that our "plane-captain is Bill Brady, A.M.M. 2/c, from Orrick, Missouri. He's a good-looking guy, dark hair, moustached, and is full of fun. He's a hard worker, and keeps us on the ball. The first radioman is Jay Mickle, A.R.M. 3/c, called Mick," from Wichita, Kan. "Mick is just about my age and is a grand fellow. He has been about everything you can imagine, from an ice-man to a semi-professional hockey player!" Bob Taylor was still in Crew 13, of course, but we got together as often as we could. I also had a close friend from Crew 15 in Gene "Doc" Wilder, another refugee from V-12; like Bob and me, he was an English major (at the University of Mississippi), but further along than we were. Doc Wilder and I were companions after the war, when we were at the Naval base at Farragut, Idaho, accumulating discharge points so we could go home and marry our girlfriends. Brady and Stallworth, by the way, were "regular Navy," and when the war was over they would have to serve out the remainder of their "hitches," the period of enlistment they had agreed to, while the rest of us were in the Navy Reserve and would be discharged at the war's end—that is, if we had accumulated the requisite number of discharge points.

Both Crew 13 and Crew 15 had their own planes (Crew 15's was named "Punkie"). The only crews that did not have their own planes were Crews 16, 17, and 18. Dallas Vickers, a radioman in Crew 17, wrote that "Crew No. 17 was originally Crew No. 1 when VPB-109 was formed. Our pilot and squadron commander, Lt. Cmdr. Brewer, had only recently returned from a combat tour. He had health and other problems and was eventually grounded. Our co-pilot, Lt. (jg) Serbin, became our pilot and we became Crew No. 17. Since there were less than 17 planes in the squadron, we didn't even have our own plane. We had to use the planes of other crews on days they didn't fly. This was my first and most valuable lesson in the big world. I learned how fast you can fall from the top to the bottom." (*Vickers*)

Once I did a hasty survey of the different states of origin of the squadron members, using the lists of crews in the official squadron history (trying to be careful to count each person just once), and came up with the information that about 31% of us

were from the Midwest, while the other areas (East, South, and West) accounted for about 23% each. This was a pretty good cross-section of the U.S. population at the time. But it surprised me, since I had thought that most of the members were from the South. Four members out of the twelve in Crew 15 were Southerners, and five were from the Midwest, a good mix, we thought. Our squadron numbered about three hundred men—216 enlisted, 74 officers, 4 civilians. This is not an exact count, because changes were being made throughout the Pacific tour, but it did amount to a ratio of one officer for every three enlisted men.

Despite the apparent roominess of the Privateer, there was not much space in it for a crew of twelve young men. The bomb bay was huge, of course, but except for a narrow catwalk, it was filled with the bombs on their racks and the spare gas tanks. It was also chilly and drafty. There was some room for stretching out in the unheated area aft of the bomb bay, where the "aft upper-deck" turret, the waist turrets, and the tail turret, plus six of the crew, were located. The area forward of the bomb bay and just behind the cockpit, where the navigator, the Plane Chief, and two crewmen were located, was filled with radio, radar, and various kinds of recognition electronic equipment, plus a station for the navigator, so if you wanted to get some sleep, you had to lie on the deck and worm your way between the metal legs which supported the electronic devices. Surprisingly, it was possible to sleep in such conditions. Besides, this area was heated.

Since I was the air gunner in the "forward upper-deck" turret (the "bubble" on top just ahead of the props), my place was in this forward area, as was that of Jim Frink, the air gunner for the bow turret. I was supposed to stay near my turret, but there were times when I visited the guys in the aft section or used the head located there by making the trip on the catwalk through the bomb bay. But the forward part of the plane wasn't a good place to sit comfortably and read books, nor was there sufficient light for reading. During the daylight portions of the long flights, where we might have to fly for five or six hours to and from our assigned patrol area, I often sat in my upper-deck turret to read books like Alan LeMay's *Winter Range* and Denison's *Klondike Mike*. There was plenty of light for reading inside the turret's plexiglass dome, with its deadly, twin 50-caliber machine guns on either side of my head. I was always seated facing the tail of the plane, since, except in combat, the guns were always oriented to the rear. I never went on a patrol without stuffing the many pockets of my flight suit with Armed Services Editions of westerns and mysteries. Usually I saved Aristotle and Boethius for those boring days between flights, but not always. After

the war, Lieutenant Wilkinson remarked that he had a vivid memory of me sitting on the flight deck "seriously reading something deep and philosophical."

VPB-109 was one of only three squadrons to have especially-equipped Privateers (designated PB4Y-2B's), which carried the SWOD (Special Weapons Ordnance Device) Mark 9 "Bat," an anti-shipping, radar-homing glide bomb underneath each wing. Twelve feet long, the Bat had a wingspan of ten feet and weighed 1,600 pounds. On 23 April 1945, Lieutenant Commander Hicks (the Squadron Commander) and Lieutenant Kennedy dropped the first Bat weapons employed on a combat mission against enemy shipping in Balikpapan harbor. Both devices were defective and did not strike any targets. Conventional combing missions by the rest of the squadron were carried out with great success against targets on Soebi-Ketjil, South Natoena, Djemadja, Mukah, Pandanseri Refinery and Cape Bila Harbor [Borneo]." (*Dictionary*, 524)

"The Bat guided missile was in essence a bomb with wings and control surfaces guided to its target by a mother ship. The Germans had successfully employed similar ordnance in the Mediterranean with great effect. The Bat offered the advantage of being a standoff weapon that allowed the bomber crew to remain out of effective AA range of a surface target while launching the winged-bomb at the vessel. The Bat could guide itself to its target by means of target echoes of pulsed microwave radiation emitted by the missile's built-in radar system. It could see its target under any conditions of visibility. The weapon presented such a small cross-section that it was nearly impossible for AA fire to destroy it before impact. Unfortunately, the Bat suffered from problems relating to the high humidity of the tropics and the poor characteristics of electronic devices of that period." (*Dictionary*, 523-24)

On 27 May 1945, "Lieutenant Leo E. Kennedy and his crew [Crew 10] obtained honors for the squadron with the sinking of a Japanese destroyer in the first successful Bat attack on the open sea, blowing the entire bow off the vessel. In the same attack, using conventional bombs, Kennedy sank a 2,000-ton freighter and four small freighters and damaged two smaller vessels. For this record-setting action Lieutenant Kennedy was awarded the Navy Cross." (*Dictionary*, 524) As for Crew 15, we never had much success with the Bat. The ones we dropped tended to go their own merry way, which was not in the direction of any enemy ships.

But we were not the only crew with dud Bats on its hands. On 28 April, Lt. Commander Hicks and Lt. Chay attacked shipping in Balikpapan harbor, Borneo. "Three Bats were released in an attempt to sink a large transport. Two of the Bats went to either side of the vessel, sinking two smaller freighters, while the third executed a sharp right turn to strike a large oil storage tank a quarter of a mile away in the Opandanseri Refinery." (*Dictionary,* 12) "On 29 May, Lieutenants Turner and Warren received reports of large shipping near Shanghai. They dropped two defective Bats with no results on a 6,000-ton and a 4,000-ton freighter located at the mouth of the Yangtze River." (*Dictionary*, 524) Like many good ideas, the Bat never lived up to its promise.

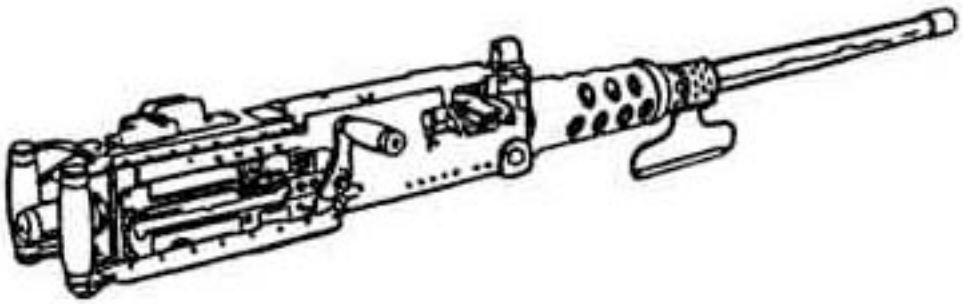
We searched for targets by flying over the ocean in long triangular patterns. Starting from our base on Palawan, Okinawa, or Iwo Jima, we would fly a search pattern of (for example) from 850 to a thousand miles northeast, turn due west for 50 miles, and then turn due south for the return to our base and the evening meal. Our long-range searching was done mainly to locate and destroy Japanese ships of any kind at the initiative of the plane commander—warships, freighters, any kind of craft that could transport personnel or supplies to Japan, but we were also assigned to make special flights, such as for determining the weather and to strike against radio and radar installations on the mainland or islands.

The searching was done both by the pilot and copilot from the cockpit and by the crewmen who were on lookout duty in their turrets. Since I had one of the upper-deck turrets, which commanded a wide range of vision, I did lookout duty a large part of the time. I often thought of the similarity of my situation to that of the sailor watching for whales from the mast-head of a whaling ship. One day, I did see an actual whale from my mast-head perch.

When we spotted a target on the sea, possibly a destroyer or a stack-aft tanker or even a fishing boat with sails that might be ferrying troops or carrying supplies, we would attack it by coming in low from behind, following the direction of the ship's path, in order to drop a bomb squarely on the craft—or, perhaps, aim and release a Bat at the target and pray that this time it would work. If the initial bombing run did not sink or incapacitate the ship, we would circle around, strafing it, then repeat the bombing run. The purpose of the strafing was to incapacitate any anti-aircraft weaponry that the vessel might have. If the ship was still afloat, we would attempt to finish it off by circling about and again coming in low from behind, but to one side of the craft, and strafing it continually with 50-caliber rounds from ten machine guns in five turrets (one each at the bow, the waist, and the stern, and two on the upper deck). Again the plane would circle and then come in from the other side with five turrets and ten machine guns bearing on the target. When the target was a small ship, a fishing boat, for example, such strafing was the preferred method of destroying it. During the first part of our tour, each search was carried out by two planes. When a tar-

get was sighted, one of the planes would do the bombing, while the other at the same time would protect it from anti-aircraft fire by strafing the target.

Operating the electric, upper-deck turret that I was assigned to was awkward at first, with its twin M2 Browning 50-caliber machine guns, but after repeated practice, back in Camp Kearney and Kaneohe Bay, my eyes, hands, and feet learned the kind of coordination possessed by the skilled driver of an automobile. The guns we had learned on in gunnery school at Yellow Water were mounted on stands, and when we fired them, we could feel the violent vibrations throughout our bodies, but the guns in the turret were bolted securely to the turret itself. During the first part of the tour, we used the standard gunsights we had learned on—our hands and eyes adjusting automatically to the speed of our plane and the relative speed and direction of the target. I would haul myself wormlike up into the turret and sit there, putting on my earphones. My head, inside the plexiglass bubble, was above the plane's fuselage, and I could see the plane's tail. With the pistol-like controls, I could rotate the turret so that I was facing forward and could see the bow of the plane. The guns were on either side of my head, their belts of 50-caliber ammunition hanging one on each side—armor-piercing rounds, and every fifth one a tracer to help in the aiming. Also on either side there were canvas bags to catch the hot, spent casings and the disassembled links of the belt. I cocked the guns by pulling back on the levers (this took some effort). Then all I had to do was aim and squeeze the triggers.



The danger to me was from the guns themselves. If a round were to become jammed in the chamber and explode there, I could be killed. Jams did occur, but I never heard of any of the rounds exploding that way in the guns of the Squadron's planes. You could get burned, also, by touching the hot shell casings, but I never heard of anyone getting burned either, that way. We were lucky.

The trick of good gunnery was to fire in short bursts—this resulted in more accurate shooting and tended to use ammunition economically. However, pumped up with adrenalin, one's tendency was to squeeze the triggers and fire until the ammunition was exhausted—in a mad, exhilarating barrage of firepower. Early in our combat tour, Hugh Wilkinson got us together and lectured us. "Watch Frink," he said. (Jim

Frink had the bow turret, the one that could always bear on the plane's target—it was also allotted more ammunition than the other turrets.) "Frink doesn't waste ammo," Wilkinson said. "He doesn't lose his concentration. Watch Frink, and shoot the way he does." So I watched Jim Frink (from my turret, I could see the tracers he fired), and I became a better gunner.

When the Squadron upgraded our turrets by adding automatic gunsights to them, activated by foot-pedals, we learned to coordinate our feet with our hands and eyes to control the aiming of the guns. These new gunsights had been designed for tracking enemy planes from the turrets of the Privateer. The problem was that most of our crews encountered few if any enemy planes. So we used the sights on ships and radar installations. Theoretically, once you dialed in the wing-span of the Japanese fighter that was attacking you and kept the wing tips centered in the sight (by means of your feet on the pedals), the gunsight was automatic and you could not miss the fighter once it came in range of your guns. Of course, you had to know the wingspans of all the Japanese planes. Actually, the new sights worked quite well on ships, which, however, were relatively stationary in the water. On the other hand, we could have done without them, just as we could have managed to bomb Japanese ships without the Bats.

"The primary mission of the squadron was long range search, patrol, and armed reconnaissance, but special patrols, strikes and assorted duties often engaged all the squadron's attention. In numbers of planes employed and hours flown, special duties often exceeded routine assignments. Of four months in the forward area, some sixty-one days were spent in operations against the enemy from the PHILIPPINES, IWO JIMA and OKINAWA. Despite the comparative shortness of the tour and the frequent change of higher command and locale, the squadron effort against the enemy was telling. In fifteen days of operation from PALAWAN, sixty-two ships were sunk and thirty-six damaged. In seventeen days of operation from OKINAWA, twenty-nine ships were sunk and thirty-five damaged. Although the squadron was the first to be equipped with a new tactical weapon, such a record was largely achieved by the efforts of individual patrol plane commanders in single or two-plane masthead-height attacks, undertaken on their own initiative.

"Aware of the deadly effectiveness of the minimum altitude attacks as exhibited on the squadron's first tour of combat duty, all pilots were trained in these unrivalled offensive tactics. At OKINAWA, two-plane combat tactics against heavily-armed enemy shipping and enemy fighter planes were emphasized. Operating with a bare minimum of facilities and under constant handicaps, the squadron ranged from SINGAPORE to SHANGHAI, and SHANTUNG to HOKKAIDO in its efforts to find and destroy the enemy. " (Steele, 3-4)

At the time I am writing this account, some sixty years after the event and far removed from the exhilaration we felt as innocent youths pumped full of adrenalin, I can imagine the sheer terror a Japanese seaman must have felt to see that big Privateer roaring toward his ship just above the waves! But we ourselves were feeling something like glee. Once our target was spotted and Hugh Wilkinson had the plane in position, we would come at the vessel at top speed in a long slant and release the bombs, then wheel in a huge circle and climb back to attacking position. Then it would be the gunners' turn. And as the plane made its passes, we would bring our twin Brownings to bear on the target ship enthusiastically, aiming at the water-line, trying to do it patiently and fire in short bursts as we had been taught, but with savage deliberation, intent on hitting the ship anywhere we could, to riddle it like a sieve with hundreds of 50-caliber rounds and sink it, to show no mercy toward it, to kill it. We had permission to be ruthless.

VPB-109 made a definite impact in the conflict in the western Pacific and played a role in bringing the Empire of Japan to its knees. And although the Privateers' war may not have attracted the kind of attention that resulted in a John Wayne movie, as some of the sea and land battles in the Pacific did, it did make the papers back home. On 25 July, my father wrote, "I suppose you are back in action. But where? . . . We are thinking here that you may have gone farther south [at the time we were in Iwo Jima, patrolling the Sea of Japan]. Privateers have been making raids in different parts of the Pacific. Today's paper mentions that a Privateer bombed and strafed Jap troops near Swatow, China, on Thursday and other Privateers strafed the Kuantan shipyards in Malaya. It would be easier to know where you are and what you are doing if the only Privateer out there were yours! Well, a lot of other fathers don't know just where their sons are and I'm no better than the rest. But the fact that we haven't heard from you for about ten days leads us to think that you are back in action. Wherever you are may God be with you! We have you in our hearts and thoughts all the time."

Not until they were in their seventies did my parents ever fly in an airplane—they went from South Bend to visit my sister in Florida. Apparently, my mother preferred to read during the flight and not even look out the window, but my father was fascinated with the cloud formations, just as I would have predicted. For during the many flights I made with Crew 15, I often thought of how thrilled it would have made him to fly in our plane and look out at the sky and the Pacific from my seat in the forward upper-deck turret. Often we flew into the rising sun and landed as the sun was dropping below the western horizon.

If I had to say which memory from the war was the one I treasure most, it would have to be the dawn flights over the Pacific, with the sun just beginning to leave the American continent as it emerged from a bank of clouds on the eastern horizon. On 28 February 1945, when we were based on Oahu, I wrote to my family about one of those early-morning trips, just after a shower: "I saw the most beautiful rainbow, this

morning. It was very clear—each color distinct. The natural scenery lent it a marvelous background. I wished for a color camera then! There were really two rainbows—concentric half circles, but the outer one was indistinct. It did, however, add to the charm of the whole scene. One could pick out each color, strong and fresh! I have seen rainbows, while flying, that were complete circles, but none ever approached the splendor of this one. It was wonderful!"

There was nothing to compare with flying over the Pacific, which was awe-inspiring even on an average day. Flying over the Atlantic is dull by comparison. Flying with Crew 15 was almost always pleasurable, once we were away from the combat zone. But one day back in San Diego, the experience seemed to have something of the ominous in it—although a few years later I might have used the classical term "sublime" to characterize it. "We took a 5½ hour hop over the ocean this morning," I wrote on 6 January 1945. "I read Dostoevsky for four hours straight. It was quite cloudy, and as we took off early, it looked as though we were flying over an oceanful of soapsuds with too much bluing in it. It was a bluish-grayish mass, with yawning fissures here and there. As it was early morning, one couldn't see the ocean through the openings—only a black void. It was almost terrible, horrible to watch. Because we were over the ocean, the cloud level was uniform, but here and there some of it bulged up like a tidal wave. It's bad enough when there's nothing but water underneath you and around you, but here there was only this whitish, fluffy mass. Thank God, we've a good navigator!"

But that was early in my Privateer experience. Years after the war, I read an Ignatian poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins, "That Nature Is a Heraclitean Fire and of the Comfort of the Resurrection," and I was reminded at once of those long flights over the Pacific, the intense, blue sky filled with masses of floating cumulus clouds that made moving shadows on the surface of the sea and seemed to race and tumble when the plane passed through them. It was a celestial scene of

> Cloud-puffball, torn tufts, tossed pillows flaunt forth,
> then chevy in an air-
> built thoroughfare: heaven roysterers, in gay-gangs they
> throng; they glitter in marches.
> Down roughcast, down dazzling whitewash. . . .

I was not the only one who felt it. In the July after the war's end, Hugh Wilkinson wrote that of the things that he still missed from the 109 days, the flying was the most precious. Sometimes, he added, "I think I would give anything in the world to be out there turning up a little before daylight for another flight across the South China Sea or another run into the Yellow Sea—or maybe just to take a plain old ordinary flight in V-501 with that very individual and unpredictable crew #15."

This was the great thing about the war, assuming that any war can have a redeeming feature—the flying. Except for the fact that I was not a pilot, I liked almost everything about flying—the heavily-laden, chancy takeoffs, the exciting landings, often coming in over the trigger-nervous U.S. Fleet in Okinawa's Buckner Bay, the steady, long-range sea cruising through the immense blue of the Pacific sky. Privateers were not built for passenger comfort, but we were young and limber and not yet in need of plush arrangements. Flying in a Privateer out of the islands of the Western Pacific had all the thrill of going to war without actually being at war. Except of course that we were!

4
Putting in the Time

"We hadn't ever been this rich before, in neither of our lives. The seegars was prime. We laid off all the afternoons in the woods, talking, and me reading the books, and having a general good time." — Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884).

One of the legendary rules of war is that combatants must engage in short periods of intense activity followed by long periods of boring inactivity. Although there are lurid and deadly exceptions to the rule, it applies in general to all branches of the service. It applied even to our long patrol flights, some of which lasted from dawn to dark, since most of the flight time was in the lengthy, unremarkable hours to and from the sector we were assigned to patrol. To illustrate the rule, using my crew as an example, over our twenty-eight weeks of missions, we flew a total of 383 hours, which is, on the average, only fourteen hours a week—we flew, that is, about every third day. The rest of the time, when we did not have to do maintenance work on the plane or policing-up in the tent area or were being briefed for missions, we were on our own. I am sure that the experience of 109's other crews was much the same.

Of course, for the first part of the Squadron's Pacific tour, we were stationed in the Hawaiian Islands, which was like being back in the States, only better. But once we had moved to the islands of the western Pacific, we had to provide our own diversions. On Iwo Jima there was nothing at all, but surprisingly the Seabees there (who were responsible for building the runway) had set up a rudimentary Ship's Service store at their camp, and you could buy a chocolate soda there if you were willing to hike two miles in the sulfurous heat to get it. Tinian, a large base, had the most recreational facilities, including a good library and a beer garden, even if the beer was warm. Guam, where we stayed for a prolonged rest, was a tropical Eden just by being Guam. But Okinawa was almost as desert-like as Iwo Jima, except that people lived there and it rained often.

Since patrol bombing squadrons were relatively small units of only 250 men or so, they were attached to administrative units called Fleet Air Wings. The Fleet Air Wing provided us with such needs as sleeping quarters, meals, latrines, medical facilities, chaplains, and provisions. At times, however, our quarters were not ready when we arrived at a new base, and the Squadron itself had to supply and erect tents and other facilities. We ate in a mess hall, at first really a large tent, which we called "the chow

hall" (later in the war we ate in a wood-frame building). Of course, the officers had their own mess and special cooks. This did not surprise me, since I never heard any of them complaining about the food the way we seamen constantly did. Bitching is natural to military personnel, especially enlisted men, and I suppose that we would have complained about any food served us that was not home-cooked by our mothers or wives, but at the same time, the meals we got were nothing to cheer about. I wrote home once saying that from "what I hear, the civilians are having it tough with rationing at present. The remark then comes up: 'The servicemen are getting all the good food!' Like hell, we are! I don't know who's getting the food, but I'm certain we're not!"

But I remember two entrees that were served often and that I actually came to like, "scrambled eggs" (made from powdered eggs), topped with tomato sauce, and ground beef in gravy over toast, always called "shit on a shingle." The problem the cooks were faced with was that everything came to them canned or packaged, nothing was fresh. On Iwo Jima we did have mutton once, brought fresh from Australia, and it was served with maggots included. I have never eaten mutton since.

However, I think that many of our crews managed to eat well the same way Crew 15 did. "We have two gasoline stoves in our tent," I wrote home on 18 May, "so we eat a lot of our meals right here. It's all "K" rations, of course, but some of it is quite good if cooked right. Back in the States we were issued two small pressure cookers, and I'm anxious to try them out. We have several jars of Hill's Bros. Coffee, and a percolator, so we have some delicious brew!" Jay Mickle, one of our radiomen, had brought one of the stoves with him from his home in Wichita, Kansas, where his mother worked in the Coleman factory. It burned high octane gasoline, the kind used in the Privateers. This served well for making coffee and hot chocolate (both available in powdered form in the K-ration boxes), but we needed solid food, and there were mountains of crates of all kinds of canned and packaged foods piled near the chow hall. All that we needed to do, once in a while, was to liberate a carton or two of something tasty. I recall that canned bacon was a particular favorite. One night we invited Lieutenant Wilkinson to eat with us, and we sat up until midnight, frying bacon on the Coleman stove and discussing profundities with our pilot. We always made enough for all nine of us in the tent. This way, we could skip entire meals at the chow hall and still eat better food. It did not take long for the authorities to wake up to what was happening, but the guards they posted at the stockpiles were inept mess cooks, newly arrived, and we continued to eat well, even if not as well as the officers.

Of course, for many of us, the Navy food was supplemented by the boxes of cookies and other delicacies sent to us by our families. I was especially fortunate in this regard, getting a steady supply of chocolate-chip and oatmeal cookies, and I know that it was because of me that my brothers and sisters at home had meager sugar ra-

tions at times. We crewmen shared our boxes with each other—a tinful of cookies disappeared quickly when they were distributed among nine men.

My practice was to put aside some of the delicacies from the boxes I received to eat when I was on plane watch. Each of us in the crew had to be on twenty-four-hour plane watch every nine days in rotation. The Privateers were parked on the perimeter of the runways, at some distance from the tent area, and our job was to guard the plane from a possible sneak attack by a Japanese soldier and also to help with servicing the plane when the crews came to add fuel or bombs and ammunition for an upcoming mission. On the day before our watch, we would relieve the man then on watch so that he could go in to the mess hall to eat. On one watch, I used the time to build myself a small locker for my gear out of scrap lumber. Another time when I was on watch, I brought a can of ripe olives with me. I was and still am fond of ripe olives, and my mother would often send me a can of them. Plane watch was often boring, although I usually welcomed the opportunity to be alone for long hours of uninterrupted reading and letter-writing and even just basking in the sun. That particular day, as I sat in the shade of the plane's wing, I was already tasting those ripe olives, and eventually I got to open the can and eat them. As usual, it was a hot day, and the olives in the can were warm, but I ate every one of them. Then I got sick. But the experience did not cure me of my passion for ripe olives.

VPB-109's first combat operation was out of the island of Palawan in the southern Philippines. As the Squadron was finishing its training at Kaneohe Bay, our Commander, Lieutenant-Commander Hicks, received orders to begin deploying to the Philippines. This occurred between 10 and 23 April, 1945. Westbrooke Field, the Squadron's destination, lay in the middle of the Philippine island of Palawan, near the town of Puerto Princessa. The trip of some five thousand miles, from Oahu to Palawan, would require six hops over nine days.

Our own Crew 15 left Kaneohe Bay on 17 April on the four-and-a-half-hour flight to Johnston Island, 717 miles west-southwest of Oahu. A low-lying sand and coral island only a thousand yards long, Johnston had a short, crushed-coral airstrip which ran the length of the island, west to east, the direction in which the planes had to land. Since the rumor was that the chow-hall garbage was dumped into the ocean at the west end of the island, it was considered a bad idea to use more runway than was available, since the ocean at the west end was full of hungry sharks waiting for their next meal. The big attraction at Johnston was the comical gooney birds—Laysen albatrosses—graceful in flight, but awkward on land. They shared the runway with the planes, flapping their wings madly

as they ran into the wind with their ungainly webbed feet, often tripping and collapsing onto the coral. But once airborne and soaring, they were beautiful. They would wheel about and land into the wind, flaps extended, but would sometimes stumble and somersault as they touched down, then waddle away indifferently.

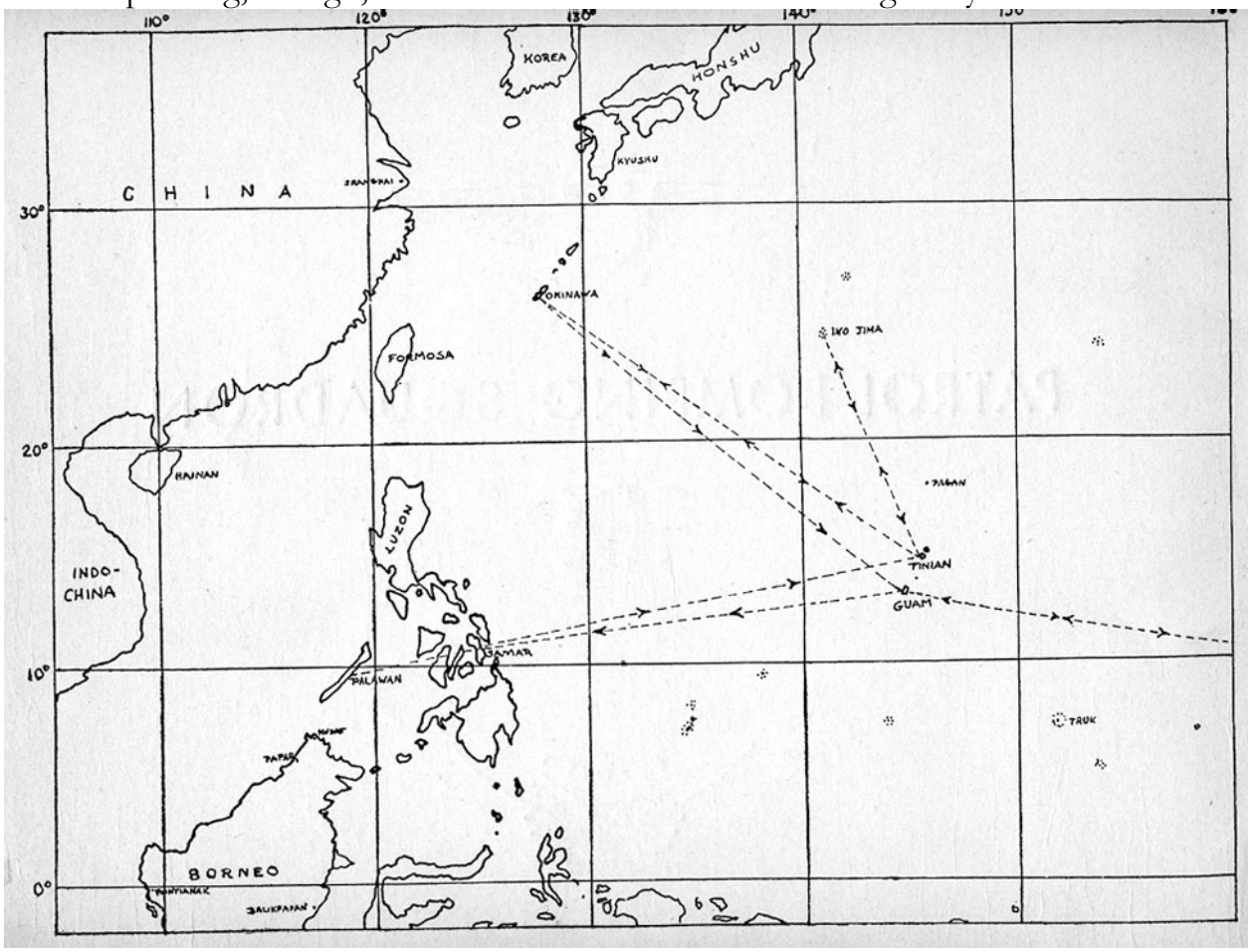
The next day we continued flying west-southwest, reaching Kwajelein Atoll, the largest coral atoll in the world, after a flight of almost nine hours. It had been a Wednesday morning when we took off from Johnston, but in less than four hours the day had become Thursday, when we crossed the International Date Line. (See the map on the next page, from Ted Steele's *Patrol Bombing Squadron 109*.) The long hop was an indication of the kind of patrols we would be making in the near future. The day after, we flew for two and a half hours to Eniwetok Atoll. Kwajelein and Eniwetok are part of the Marshall Islands, which the U.S. had liberated from Japan in 1944. Lying near Eniwetok, Bikini Atoll was used by the U.S. after the war for some deadly nuclear testing, prompting Bob Hope to comment that we waited until after the war to destroy the most beautiful spot of all.

On 21 April, we flew the six-and-a-half-hour leg to the island of Guam, which we would always treasure. On Guam, we were 3,300 miles west of Oahu, on a beautiful, tropical island, about thirty miles long, one of the Marianas. I had assumed that the Jesuits had named the Marianas after Mary, the mother of Jesus, but they had given the honor to Marianas of Austria, the widow of Phillip IV of Spain. Of all the island bases where 109 was located in the western Pacific, Guam was the one we liked best (it boasted a wonderful rest camp), where you could forget you were at war. It was where it seemed you had found the romantic Orient.

From Guam, we flew an eight-hour leg to Samar, one of the easternmost islands of the Philippines. We spent an extra day there—it seems there was a delay in getting the field at Palawan ready for the squadron. At Samar, we sat with our gear on the airstrip, while quarters were prepared for us. We were told that the Japanese were still in evidence on the island and had a habit of coming into the tent area at night to prey on the sleeping American sailors. That night we were awakened by the sound of gunshots. There had been a strong breeze, which caused the tent walls to belly in, and, apparently made nervous by the talk about the Japanese, one of our radiomen woke when the tent wall flapped against him and fired his .38 into the canvas. I think they took his gun away from him after that.

On 23 April, after a final hop of a little over three hours, we landed at Westbrooke Field, Palawan. Alan Carey, author of *The Reluctant Raiders*, a history of VB- and VPB-109, says that upon arriving there, the Commander found that no sleeping quarters had been prepared for the Squadron personnel, and the Squadron itself had to clear the area and pitch tents. The conditions were primitive. (Carey, 117) However, on the 25th, I wrote my family that "I'm vacationing in the Phillip-

pines—really vacationing! (Oh, yeah?) My body is tanned a beautiful red, while its loveliness is accentuated with pretty little mosquito bites, ten to the square inch! I'm not complaining, though, because on the whole we have things very nice. The food is



good, and though [the weather is] hot, we have lots of fresh water, and once in a while [the water is] cold. But what I wouldn't give for a coke!" Four days later I wrote that "we've moved into Quonsets, huts shaped like half cylinders. They're really swell, with wooden floors, masonite walls, and well-screened windows. The officers are still living in tents, so we enlisted men are really getting a good deal!"

On 25 and 30 April, we in Crew 15 flew our first two search patrols in enemy territory, in the China Sea (11½ hours) and French Indo-China (12½ hours). On 30 April, Westbrooke Field was attacked by enemy aircraft, which damaged three of 109's planes and injured a crewman. (*Dictionary*, 524) My account of the attack in a letter home was censored out—what went through was "all they accomplished was to wake me up!" On Sunday, 6 May, I wrote, "We had a very good dinner today, roast chicken, a great big helping of ice cream—the kind we make at home—and iced chocolate milk! Gosh, that sure was good! In the afternoon I wrote letters and played some of my records. I don't read much at all—too hot, most of the time. I went to Mass at six-thirty this evening."

We found that the native Filipino population around Puerto Princessa, where we were, did not speak English, but Tagalog. We were told that they were not Christians, either, yet there were several obviously Catholic churches in the area.

For my grade-school brother and sister, I wrote, "Did I tell you that we have a new crew member, a monkey? He's quite a guy, and a lot of fun. He steals and hides all our loose gear! We feed him almost anything. He likes candy, bananas, and coconut. He is about a foot tall and can move like greased lightning! We have some pictures taken of him, so you can see what he looks like when I get home. He rides around on our shoulders, holding onto our hair."

Frequently our entire crew would be out at the plane, perhaps all day, working on some project on the plane. One of the regular jobs we had to do was cleaning and adjusting our guns. We did only minor mechanical work on the engines, since crews of skilled mechanics handled the major jobs. The pilots were always trying to coax a knot or two more of speed from the planes, so we spent time out in the parking area sandpapering the fuselage of our plane to get the skin as smooth and frictionless as possible.

Someone gave the monkey the name "Putt-Putt," which is pidgin English for a term not used in polite company. We had bought him from a Filipino. When we were out working on the plane, the monkey would be there, too, usually creating trouble. One day when we were at the plane, some of us were doing some painting, using yellow paint, while the rest of us cleaned the plexiglass on our turrets, using a glass-cleaning fluid that dried in an opaque film and had to be wiped clean with a cloth. As Doc Wilder, who was working on his starboard waist turret, wiped the film off the plexiglass bubble, he could see that the inside of the turret was marked all over with yellow paint. Putt-Putt was in the seat of the turret, his hands and feet yellow and sticky. Somehow he had gotten into the paint. Doc Wilder had to be restrained from shooting the monkey on the spot. Lieutenant Wilkinson, a New Orleans lawyer, suggested that we hold court, try the monkey, declare him guilty, build a gallows, then hang him.

Eventually we had to get rid of Putt-Putt. He was far from being domesticated and often bit us. In the Quonset hut we slept in, our cots were lined up in rows from front to back, each cot with a mosquito net stretched over it, and Putt-Putt enjoyed leaping from net to net the entire length of the hut, usually ending his exercise by defecating on one of the nets. That was bad. Moreover, we could not take him with us on missions, and no one wanted to be responsible for him while we were on patrol. Finally, when we were about to leave Palawan, we sold him to a newly-arrived crew and hoped both that his new owners were more tolerant than we and that he would learn some restraint.

Sometimes when we were out at the plane doing maintenance or some other job, Hugh Wilkinson would make us a gift of a bottle of booze from the store that he had brought with him from Oahu in the plane's belly. He was very generous that way. If the gift happened to be gin, we mixed it with pineapple juice, of which there was always a supply in large cans. Obviously, there was no ice in that part of the whole world, so we had to consume it raw and warm. Once we tried wrapping the bottle in cloths and soaking them in gasoline, the theory being that the rapid evaporation of the gas in the Okinawan heat would lower the temperature of the gin. Probably it worked, but the difference of a few degrees was hardly noticeable, and we drank our gin and pineapple juice warm.

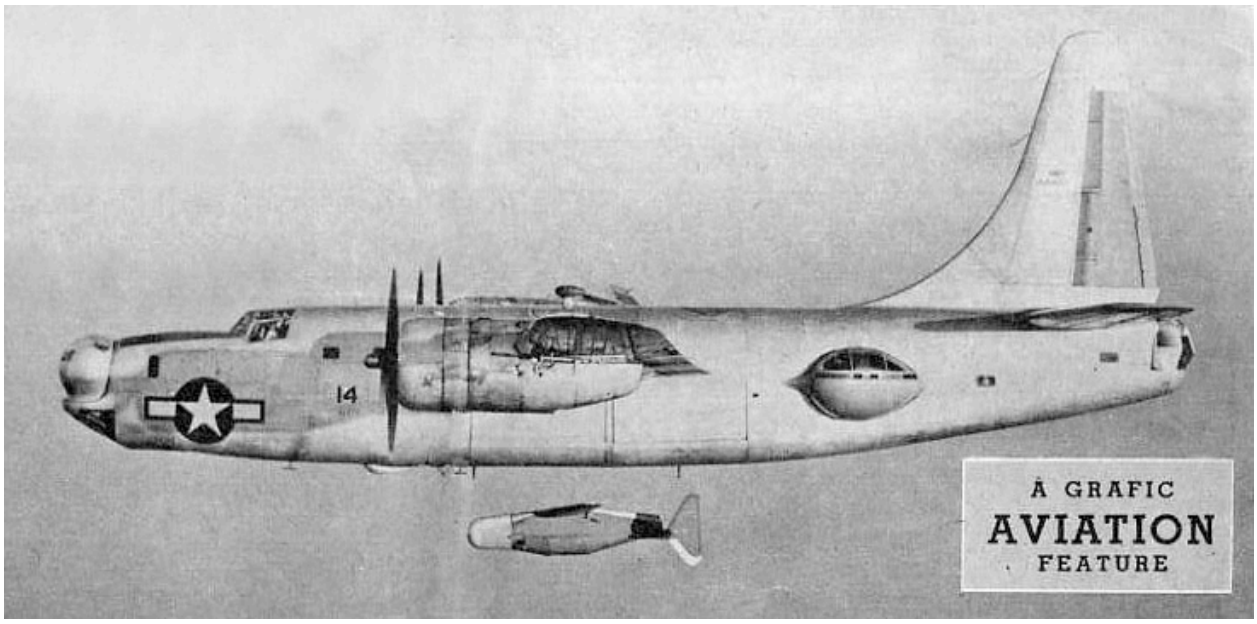
I assume that almost all the patrol plane commanders had brought a sufficient supply of liquor with them from Oahu. There would have been plenty of room in their planes for it, since they carried no bombs on that long trip to the Philippines. I suspect also that all the squadron's officers enjoyed a regular liquor ration in addition. Writing about the Infantry in the war in Europe, Paul Fussell claims that the liquor ration that officers were given in the States continued even in the combat zone. The few officers who did not drink sometimes gave their ration to their men. (Fussell, 114) But I know that our officers brought a supply of liquor along just for their men.

From Palawan, VPB-109 flew search patrols covering the "China-Burma-India Theater" of operations, bombing and strafing Japanese shipping and radar installations in the areas of French Indo-China and the Dutch East Indies— ironically, the very locales of my early romantic yearnings born out of reading adventure stories. But now, after fifteen days of operations out of Puerto Princessa, the Squadron was being moved. Although it had sunk or damaged nearly a hundred enemy ships, the Squadron was considered to have a greater destructive potential nearer Japan itself, where the Bat glider bombs could be used to greater effect. But the Palawan experience had helped mature the new Squadron and proved its mettle.

Since a base closer to the Japanese homeland was required, VPB-109 was moved to West Field, Tinian, under Fleet Air Wing 1. Three days later, on 10 May, the Squadron was relocated to Yontan Field, Okinawa Shima., and four days after that, "VPB-109 found out how close they were to the enemy homeland when they were greeted by the Japanese with a night bombing attack that damaged one squadron aircraft. A similar attack on 18 May destroyed one aircraft and damaged two others. The frequent enemy night forays precluded night patrols by the squadron, as the bombers could not be serviced or landed during alerts. It was also too dangerous to fly at night, because the fleet shot at anything with wings." (*Dictionary*, 524)

On 14 May, Lieutenant Wilkinson and Crew 15 attacked a FTB (5,500 tons) on the west coast of Japan, about 300 miles from Okinawa, with two Bats, both of which missed their target. We were somewhat depressed by this failure. "Attacks on ship-

ping on the 15th and 16th with three Bats was also unsuccessful. The sensitive equipment in the devices was too prone to corrosion and warping in the tropical environment. No test equipment for the Bats had been sent forward with the squadron to permit diagnostics before they were used in combat." (*Dictionary*, 524)



A BAT being dropped from a Privateer—photograph published in the rotogravure section of the *Chicago Sunday Tribune* in late 1945

In all, the Squadron would spend two months on Okinawa in two stages. Dallas Vickers wrote that on Okinawa he spent a lot time "sunning, exploring the family tombs where family member ashes were placed in earthen/pottery containers, and locals abandoned homes/farms most of which had fermenting mash to make their own alcohol." (Vickers) The Okinawan people were ancestor-worshippers and built large tombs, some of them elaborate, for the bones of their forebears. These tombs were their cultural and religious monuments, what they had in place of the cathedrals and palaces of Europe. The Japanese had turned many of the tombs into gun placements and bomb shelters, and later the tombs were often desecrated by us thoughtless Americans. Many of these tombs lay in the vicinity of the airfield. We called the natives "gooks" and made fun of them. The women would go by our tent. I wrote home that they were about four and a half feet in height and barefoot. The women would roam the camp area, looking for old clothes—it concerned us that they might steal our laundry as it hung out to dry. With the women in our camp area, it sometimes got embarrassing, because usually we crewmen were sitting around half-dressed or even naked, taking a shower. If we had understood then what the people of Okinawa had been forced to endure at the hands of the Japanese and later, in the battle, where they were caught between the American and Japanese forces, we would have given the pitifully poor women our clothes.

At 4,500 square miles, Okinawa is not a large island. Smaller even than Oahu, it is sixty miles long, but narrow and irregular in shape, of volcanic origin. Seen on a map, its looks like a diagonal squiggle separating the East China Sea from the Philippine Sea, some 300 miles southwest of Japan. We in 109 became familiar with only a small portion of it, Yontan Field and the area surrounding it, which is about twelve miles north of Naha, the capital city.

Okinawa made a bad impression right from the start. It was the monsoon season, and we had to wade through mud to get anywhere. It rained. The skies were gray and forbidding, but we flew in them. We slept in tents, one crew of nine men to a tent, on cots under futile mosquito nets. After dark, we had to use flashlights—there was no electricity or running water. At dusk, after slogging back from the chow hall through the mud, I would take off my damp boots and sit cross-legged on my cot with my knife to scrape my boots clean of the thick mud. Then I would hang the boots from a tent pole, where we hung almost everything else. The air was so thick and humid that in the morning the boots would still be damp, but they would also be covered with mildew.

Our crew did have a gasoline lantern, but most of the time we lived the way our ancestors lived before electricity was available—active during the daylight hours and sleeping during the dark. Our patrols usually began just at dawn, so we needed to get to sleep early. During the drier season, we would take our time coming back from the chow hall after supper, talking and laughing, fooling around, standing around outside the tent as dusk turned to dark. Then we would go inside, and in the dark I would feel my way to my cot and sit on the edge so as not to interfere with the mosquito net. I would undress down to my skivvies and slip carefully inside the mosquito net, making sure I had left no gaps. Then I would pull the blanket over me, say a prayer, and sleep.

On May 14th, I wrote to my folks, giving them "a few details of life here. We are living in tents again—the mosquitoes are bad, but I've rigged myself a completely bug-proof bed, with a fine-mesh mosquito net secured to a bamboo framework! Nights are very cold, but I've a snug, warm sleeping bag. That sounds like real sleep-

ing comfort. It would be, if 'tweren't for the damn air raids. We have a very convenient fox-hole, though. It is a little crowded, so I think we'll dig another. The food is as good as can be expected—just heated "K" rations. These rations are canned food—all kinds, mostly all dehydrated. Spam and similar canned-meat horrors are prevalent. Today being Sunday, we had real bread, instead of hard crackers and—whoops—a large spoonful of ice cream. (Boy, am I going to eat a lot of ice cream when I get home.) We have fresh water, but have to carry it a distance. Now, that sounds pretty good, doesn't it? I'm beginning to feel like a damn slacker again, with all this comfort. When I think of how tough the Marines and doggies have it, I can't complain at all."

Gene Wilder at entrance to Crew 15's tent

I did complain, however, and wrote that "If you even dare to mention Spam when I'm home—it's moider!" Most of our patrols were long enough to take place over one or two mealtimes, so we took rations with us in the plane, each man being given one K-Ration for a meal. The K-Ration was packed in a Crackerjack-sized box and included a can of potted meat such as Spam, a can of cheese, hard crackers, a packet of powdered mix which when combined with water produced something like Koolade, a bar of hard chocolate that would not melt easily in the tropical heat (and tasted pretty good), a tiny can-opener for the cans of meat and cheese, and a packet of three cigarettes which I would give to one of the smokers. (I had smoked cigars in California and the Hawaiians, but not out in the islands—my father wrote me that he had switched from cigars and had become a "cigarette fiend"—I wished I could send him my cigarettes.) There was always water available in a metal container and sometimes canned pineapple juice. This provided a satisfying meal, but only if you were hungry enough.

One aspect of my experience with VPB-109 that affected me memorably was associating daily with guys my age (and men not much older than I) from all over the country and from many different backgrounds. I don't know about the religious affiliations—I was the only Catholic in my crew, and I did not know very many other guys who were Catholics. I got into a number of more or less friendly arguments with a few of the Southerners in my crew who seemed to think I was odd because I was a Papist. There were no blacks in the Squadron, of course, and that itself had an effect on me—especially when finally I became aware that the officers had stewards who were black. Somehow, just knowing that made me feel guilty about it.

It was also a male universe we lived in, although women may have occupied our imaginations to the exclusion of almost everything else. But it was not a democratic universe, even if there was probably less tension between us, the crewmen, and the officers, the pilots we worked with as a team, than in the other branches of the military and even in other areas of the Navy, except perhaps in the two-man crews of Navy torpedo planes and dive-bombers. From what I experienced as one of the crew members, the relationship between chiefs and Indians was respectful and at most times congenial on both sides. Three officers to nine enlisted men is a high ratio. Because of V-12 and the like, many of us enlisted men were as highly educated as many of the officers.

Around the 20th of May, I received a letter which my father had written on 7 May about Germany's surrender. Characteristically, he associated that event with his fascination for the skies: "I wish the news that came today of Germany's surrender had also included the surrender of Japan. It was exciting to listen to the reports that came over the radio from time to time. I had got the news as given by the Associated Press at 7:30 this morning. An announcement was expected later in the day by President Truman proclaiming V-E Day. . . . Well, later it was announced over the radio that Churchill will make the official announcement of the end of the war in Germany tomorrow at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, London time and that Truman would make the announcement at the same time here, 8 a.m. C.W.T. (That would be about 9 p.m., I think, at the spot where I think you are). — If the sun rises where you are (or where we think you are—the Philippines, Luzon) at 6 a.m. during the early part of May that same sun will be standing in the western sky here with about two or three hours to go before sunset. As I have it figured, when we see the sun setting from about 5 to 7 p.m. you ought to see that same sun rising in your east from about 6 to 8 a.m. You are either 13 or 14 hours ahead of us depending on whether you don't or do have advanced time there. You are too damned far away to suit us!"

He chafed at not knowing exactly where I was and what the conditions of my life were, but he felt that astronomy kept us together. "Pat was over last evening," he wrote on the 17th. "We talked about your monkey and wondered where you might be,—whether you are in Luzon (I doubt this) or nearer the equator. In one letter you speak of what is likely to happen when you cross the equator for the first time. Does that mean you may do so any day or will you move farther south later? The Philippines seem to stretch for a thousand miles between the equator and 20 degrees north (like Central America). The sun at the present time passes over Luzon at noon (at zenith) but will soon be farther north. When it reaches the tropic of cancer (32½ degrees), about June 21 it will return south and be above the equator about Sept 21. I told you in a previous letter that you are about 13 hours ahead of us in time and that the sun that you see rising is the sun that we see setting here. You know I suppose that the days are longer up here during the summer than in the Philippines."

The gruesome details of the battle for Okinawa had been in the papers, and my father's fear was that my squadron would be sent there. He felt that he had to know the worst. So before I left the States, I arranged with him that if I wrote in a letter, "I haven't forgotten how to pray," it would mean that I was on Okinawa. On 14 May, when we had been on Okinawa for a week, I wrote, "Do you remember, quite a while ago, when you were speculating where we would go? You were hoping I wouldn't go to a certain place." Dad wrote back, "If you are where we think you are tell me that you haven't forgotten how to pray. If you say nothing about prayer we will keep guessing." And on 1 June, I replied with, "I haven't forgotten how to pray," which satisfied him. However, then we were relocated to Tinian, and on 7 July I had to tell him that "I am afraid that I have forgotten how to pray—it's been this way for over a month now." So a few weeks later, when we were on Iwo Jima, certainly a worse place than Okinawa, he wrote, "I suppose you are back in action. But where? You were merely afraid that you had forgotten how to pray. We are thinking here that you may have gone farther south." By the time I could answer that letter, 30 July, we were back on Okinawa, and I wrote, more cheerfully, "Don't worry, I have not forgotten how to pray!" Luckily, my letters all those weeks were censored by various officers, not the same one all the time, or else the same one would have been certain that I had been undergoing several severe crises of faith.

Usually my letters were not much cut up by the censors. But at the time I never knew. On 31 May, I wrote, "Do you ever receive a letter from me that is censor-free? I try to keep within the regulations, but there doesn't seem to be any definite word. Each censor seems to have his own regs." Once an officer got hold of me to say that he had read my letter and wanted to tell me that I had not included the money order that I had said was enclosed in the letter.

A dramatic, exciting event occurred the night of 24 May 1945, when we were on Okinawa the first time, but all I could write about it (on 27 May) was, "Our crew was on board a ship for a day and a night. It was really swell—good meals, a hot shower and shave, and a dry bed." Crew 15, and some other crews, had replaced a similar number of seamen from the ship who slept in our tent on our cots, an exchange designed to give all of us a change of scene. Lieutenant Ted Steele wrote about what happened that night:

> The night of 24 May was full of enemy activity directed against YONTAN Field, climaxed by the successful crash-landing of a SALLY with a load of saboteurs on the airstrip, the crash of two other SALLY's just short of their mark, and the shooting down of five others which were strafing at low level and similarly intending to crash-land. One squadron plane was destroyed by enemy bombing and another by the grenades of the saboteurs. One of the SALLY's shot down crashed just short of the tents of squadron enlisted personnel, and two men, [Roger W.] CLEMONS and [George R.] McKEEBY, were injured

> seeking deeper foxhole protection. A plane guard on the field, [John O.] OATES, was seriously wounded when caught in the gunfire of the saboteurs and the defending marines." (Steele, 18)

The Dictionary of American Naval Aviation Squadrons adds some details of the Kamikaze attack: "The Japanese considered the activities of the squadrons based at Yontan Field to be important enough to merit the expenditure of a specialized suicide attack force. The commandoes were flown in under cover of darkness aboard three Ki-21 Sally medium bombers. Two were shot down in flames, along with five of their fighter escorts. The remaining Sally landed wheels up on the airstrip. The attackers quickly dispersed throughout the area, throwing satchel charges and grenades into parked aircraft and engaging the Marine perimeter defense forces in firefights. (*Dictionary*, 524)

Because my crew and I were aboard that ship down in Buckner Bay that night, I missed all this action. The following morning, when we returned to the base, all there was to see was the wreckages and the carnage—the dead bodies of the Japanese pilots and soldiers, bloated and putrid in the heat—with Navy officers from our base going through their pockets, looking for who knows what. It was the first close-up view I had of our enemy as persons, and what struck me with a shock of recognition was that these uniformed soldiers were people like us, who, like us, were loyal to their ruler and had values, even if they were not ours, and who carried pictures of their wives and their children in their wallets.

One crew that had not been on the ship down in the bay that night of 24 May was Crew 17. Dallas Vickers observed a gruesome part of the incident and wrote about it: "One night one of the planes crashed into a group of trees very near our tents and exploded and burned. A group of us walked out to see if there were survivors. We had been told that intelligence needed prisoners to interrogate. By some miracle a single [Japanese] survivor came stumbling from the flames dragging a dead buddy. As he approached within a few feet of us, he appeared to be badly hurt, helpless and unarmed. Instead of taking him prisoner, someone raked him over with a Thompson machine gun, and then, kicked his teeth out and put them in his pocket. We never tried to identify the person but assumed he had lost some close relatives or friends at Pearl Harbor, the Bataan death march or someplace." I doubt, however, that the murder was committed by someone in our squadron, since there were still many companies of marines and soldiers in the area who had been in the fierce battles with the Japanese—the island was by no means yet secured.

On 27 May I wrote that we "were issued four bottles of beer the other day, and I still have mine. I'm saving it for the milenium! Also gave us some bars of tropical chocolate—which hit the spot. I almost wish I were a smoker, for one can get all the cigarettes he wants out here." Meanwhile, back in South Bend, Indiana, it was Bob

Hope Day. My father wrote me on 28 May that at "6 p.m. Bob Hope, Jerry Colonna, and other celebrities will entertain in the Notre Dame Stadium the people of South Bend who have filled their assigned quota of seventh war loan bonds. Apparently a lot of tickets were given out to people who had not filled their quota – or had bought no bonds at all. I got one at Notre Dame though I wasn't able to subscribe to the amount of bonds they expected of me (I'm really doing the best I can!), Jim got one for agreeing to usher at the affair, and the girls each got one from a sister at school. Mother is using my ticket and Margie has the one Jim got and the girls are using their own. I'm not much interested in this sort of things so I'm staying home with Johnny who you know has the mumps. . . . The paper says that Bing Crosby arrived also, as a guest of Bob Hope. It is thought that he will prevailed upon to sing."

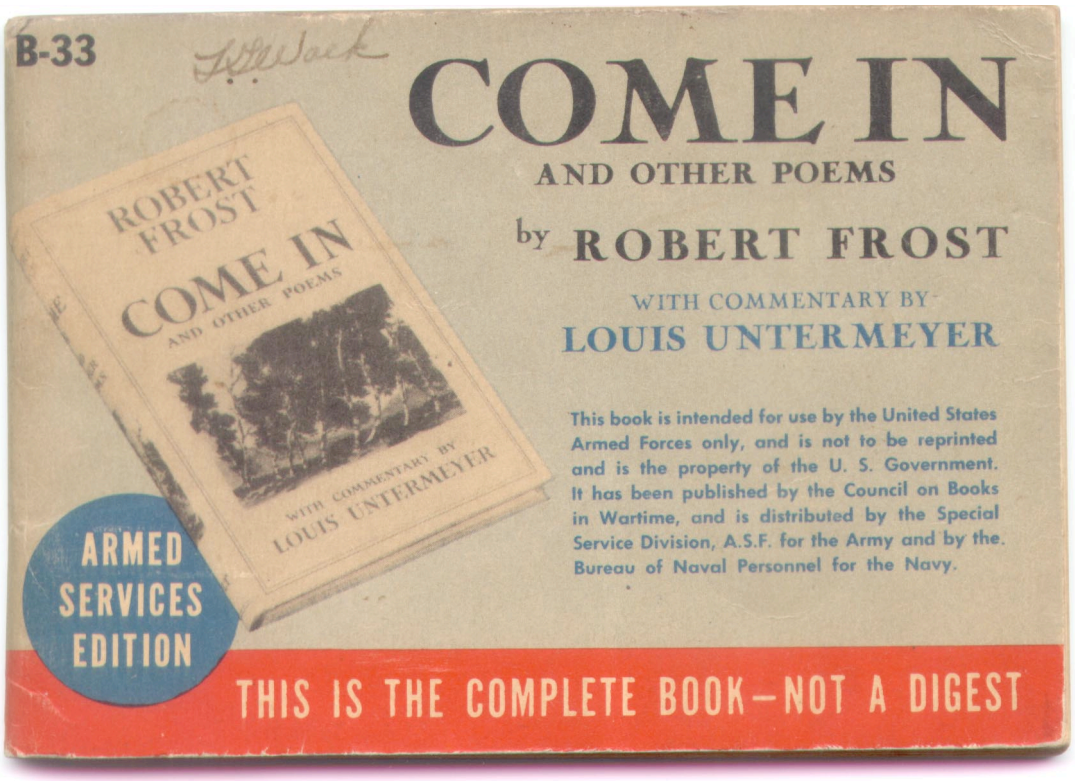
In the same letter, he poked fun at my complaining. "You say you have to neglect your reading too. You don't say! You don't seem to realize that you are experiencing right now the very things that books are made of. Concentrate on your job, enjoy the gang you are with, store your impressions for future telling, keep yourself straight before God and in accordance with your ideals, grit your teeth and face your tasks with courage, and don't forget how to laugh. Well you haven't forgotten how to laugh. You say you haven't lost your sense of humor. If you are on Okinawa you may have been in some of the heavy raids we are reading about. We are following the Pacific War in every detail. Of course any bad news worries us but it's war and our boy is in it and we are concerned about everything that happens in it."

I wrote home that "There are several chaplains at our base [this was Tinian, which was full of Navy and Army Air Force squadrons and thus had many amenities—it was where the B-29's were based]. I haven't the opportunity of going to daily Mass, but I hit Sundays quite regularly."

My parents worried that I was in the "danger zone," but by the time they wrote me about this, we were out of it and back at Tinian, after seventeen days of it on Okinawa. On June 1st I wrote them, "You are quite correct in saying that I am in the danger zone—that's evident, but it's really not so bad as you seem to think. Maybe I made it sound bad. I am in excellent health, am happy, and am griping constantly—that's a good sign. Right now, we're resting, so I'm getting a lot of sleeping, reading, and letter-writing done. Don't know how long this lull will last, but I'm for it!" Actually, although we made regular patrols from West Field, Tinian, not too many of them, they were "whitecap specials" and all "uneventful," and Tinian turned out to be six weeks of rehabilitation for the squadron and a vacation for us crewmen. I added, in my letter, "It's funny, when we're on a "job" and I'm alone for hours at a time [sitting in my turret with earphones on, looking down at the endless Pacific], I sing every song I know, recite every poem, and say every prayer. And some people say poetry is worthless! I haven't so much time to pray, but when I can, I try to do my best. I try to remember all the songs and poems you made up for us—my favorite is "Someone

Came Knocking." Remember it? I like those German songs, too, like "Du, du," and "Am Brunnen." I sing whole operas, almost, and compose Masses and Symphonies! It's wonderful, isn't it, the ability of the mind to improvise. This way I can occupy hours. And I enjoy it, too, though if anyone should hear me, I should be reported as mad!"

Early in June I passed the exam for Aviation Machinist's Mate third-class, which meant that my pay would increase. Luckily, I was never called on to demonstrate my meager knowledge of mechanics. I could have won the prize for reading, however. Tinian had a good-sized library of Armed Service Editions, and we could take as many books as we wanted.



The Armed Services Editions were unabridged copies of books put out by the Council on Books in Wartime, an organization of publishers that printed the Editions at a cost of only 5¢ a copy (so I was told). The books were paper-backs, of course, and most of them were 4 by 5½ inches (just right for the pockets of a flight suit). Lengthier books, like Donald Culross Peatie's *An Almanac for Moderns* and Walter Van Tilburg Clark's *The Ox-Bow Incident*, were printed in a 4½ by 6½ format, still pocket-sized, however. Each month, the Council put out a new series of the Editions, and many of the books were substantial literary works.

On 16 June my father wrote, "Your western novels are probably just the kind of reading you should have right now." He knew that I had brought a pile of books with

me from Oahu, including a few works of phoilosophy and history. But what I read on Tinian was books like Stewart Edward White's *The Blazed Trail*, Ernest Haycox's *Border Trumpet*, William McFee's *Casuals of the Sea*, Antoine de St. Exupéry's *Night Flight*, and *The Selected Writings of Abraham Lincoln*. When we were on a patrol, I could take three or four of these editions with me in the leg pockets of my flight suit. We might have had as much as eight or ten hours flying time to and from the sector where we were to patrol, and during those long stretches I read books, except when I was on watch.

One book that influenced me greatly then, as well as later, was *The Education of Henry Adams*; I had read a chapter of it when I was in V-12 at Notre Dame, but now I read the rest of it, in an Armed Services Edition. Others that I remember were a collection of Robert Frost's poems and a good biography of Lincoln, as well as the standard westerns and detective novels. On 7 July, my twentieth birthday, I wrote home that "I am really taking it easy, becoming a "wreck" from not enough exercise and too much reading. I am staying up too late too, but I can't sleep anyhow because of the mosquitoes. After supper we write letters or read (the last few nights we've been playing "Monopoly"), then about 10:30 go to the chow hall for a cup of coffee, and see the late movie from 11:00 to 1:00 A.M

All this changed dramatically when on 8 July the entire Squadron moved to Iwo Jima for operations (three crews and planes had been there the preceding week), "flying largely fleet barrier patrols for the Third Fleet, but also making special weather flights, performing Air-Sea Rescue functions and providing super-Dumbo cover for P-51 and B-29 strikes against the Empire, flying anti-submarine patrol around IWO JIMA and carrying out routine search and reconnaissance flights off the coast of HONSHU. The schedule of operations was intense, and only vigorous hours of flying made the the days at IWO bearable, for living conditions, rough ever in the forward area, were unbelievably poor. IWO's heat and dust, coupled with the lack of water for either drinking or bathing, were the primary irritants, and personnel looked to the ultimate return to OKINAWA with considerable anticipation." (Steele, 20)

The scarcity of water was a new and difficult experience for most of us. On 23 July I wrote, "I shaved today! That statement may seem a trifle strange to you, since shaving is by no means a new experience for me; however, lately shaving has been an uncommon occurrence due to the lack of water and facilities. The only water available for toilet purposes or laundry is ocean water and with that, shaving is no pleasure! Drinking water is a rarity. At meals we are allowed one cup of liquid—no more, and during the day we get kind of thirsty. There is another camp—a Sea Bee camp—about two miles from here, which has water all the time, even ice water. So we often journey there to fill our canteens. We wash and shave out of a helmet. Ever get some salt into a sore? Well, that's how my face feels when I've shaved!"

For Dallas Vickers, Iwo Jima was "mostly uneventful submarine search missions toward Japan in preparation for the invasion. We kept wondering when Iwo Jima would blow up. It constantly trembled and sulfur steam was everywhere coming through cracks in the earth. A volcanic island which was a short distance offshore was said to have appeared from the ocean almost overnight." (Vickers) The sulfur emissions were most noticeable in the latrines, which of course smelled bad enough to start with. It appeared that they were built over fissures, from which the rotten-egg gasses rose suffocatingly. The odor tended to blind one. None of us spent more time than was necessary in the latrines on Iwo Jima. One is reminded that Iwo Jima used to be called Sulphur Island.

The water shortage really bothered my mother, despite her not being sure where I was at the time. On 30 July she wrote, "It was so nice to hear from you today. But I could hardly stand it when I read that you have little water. I feel sure that things are pretty bad right now for you. I wish I could take your place for a while and have you here with all the comforts of home. I know how particular you were with your clothes and all the baths you took. Well, we still have the tub and lots of water and you can have all the baths you want *when you come home*." A day later, she wrote, "Are you getting more water? Dad and I think of you when we turn on the kitchen tap and can drink all the cool water we need. Be sure to let us know when you get more. It will make us feel better." She added, "Read more westerns, they will ease your mind." By then we were back on Okinawa and getting more drinking water. I wrote (on 30 July in the Western Pacific), "A few days ago came the landslide—eight letters and two packages. The packages were a disappointment—the one from you was evidently a birthday box, everything was perfect except for the cake, which was mildewed throughout. The other box was from Aunt Meal—a cake too, mildewed likewise."


Time out in the family victory garden in South Bend

Fresh water for bathing did not come until much later. Instead we used sea water and a special soap that was supposed to lather with sea water. The showers on the base were out in the open, and while we were scrubbing ourselves clean with the special soap and being rinsed with gritty sea water, the small Okinawan women on the road nearby would look curiously at us and perhaps make jokes to each other about out masculine attractiveness or lack of it.

The Naval bases on the islands in the Western Pacific out of which VPB-109 operated—Palawan, Okinawa, Tinian, Iwo Jima—were peopled almost exclusively by young men in their twenties, although there might have been some of us with a few gray hairs. We never saw children or women (with the exception of some Filipinos on Palawan and the Okinawan women (it was not until long after the war that I learned of the tragedy of the Okinawan people). Yet, aside from the predominance of young males, our war-world was made up of people pretty much like the people we were used to at home—representing a variety of faiths, occupations, educational backgrounds, and political interests—a cross-section of America itself. Or so I thought until one day at Yontan, Okinawa, when the war was nearly over.

On that day I was walking from the enlisted men's tent area to the chow hall. I happened to be by myself, with no one to talk to, and perhaps for that reason I was looking around more than usual. Near the chow hall, off the road to the left, were the officers' tents, and happening to glance in that direction, I noticed the many blankets strung on clothes lines hung between the trees. A seaman was beating one of the blankets with something, as though he was beating a carpet hung on a line. I was surprised to see that he was black. Other black seamen were doing the same thing to other blankets.

Puzzled as to who these men were and why they were engaged in such an activity, I went on into the chow hall, where I sat with some friends. They told me that the black seamen I had seen were "officers' stewards" (i.e., "steward's mates," officially), whose duty it was to wait on the officers. I was baffled—I had always assumed that in the combat zone, the officers made their own beds and aired their own blankets, the way we seamen did.

Later, it struck me that these were the first black persons I had seen in the combat area. In fact, they were the only blacks I had ever seen in Navy uniforms. There could have been others on Okinawa—perhaps some of the mess cooks were black—but if so, I had not been observant or sensitive enough to be aware of them. But I could not remember having seen any black sailors at any of the bases where I had been stationed. Certainly there was none in V-12 at Notre Dame or in the aviation cadet program that I underwent or at air gunnery school. And Patrol Bombing Squadron 109 was lily-white.

This was my first real experience with racial segregation. Again, it is quite possible that if I had been more alive to the possibility, I would have recognized the same kind of segregation in South Bend, Indiana, while I was growing up, or even more so in Nachitoches, Louisiana, in 1944, in the deep South, although there, being restricted as a cadet in flight prep school, I would have been more insulated from the knowledge of it. Seeing those black sailors engaged in that menial activity made a lasting impres-

sion on me. It was something I remembered vividly in later years when I began thinking more maturely about racial justice and injustice.

What I had experienced was far from unique. In June 1940, black personnel in the Navy amounted to a little over two percent, and all were enlisted men, and virtually all were steward's mates, "seagoing bellhops." By the time America entered the war, the percentage of black enlisted men had risen just barely, and they continued to be excluded from all ratings except steward's mate. Even after the country had been in combat for a year and a half, two-thirds of the black seamen were still in the steward's branch. By the war's end, the number of black enlisted men had increased dramatically, yet about 40% of them were still rated as stewards. Happily, this situation changed after the war, and new integration orders have overturned the kind of racial segregation that had become a way of life in the U.S. Navy

As the war in the Pacific wound down, living conditions began to improve at Yontan Field. On 6 August I wrote, "The food here is not too bad. We are hoping they'll decide to start giving us a little more to drink, and a little less hash. For one meal, we had a large slice of Spam, a big piece of cheese, cold beans, and water. At another meal, however—you won't believe this—we had fried chicken, lemonade, and apple pie. To be sure, they were in minute quantities, but they were real! When I get home, you'll be amazed at the amount of cold milk I'm going to drink! I surely miss it, and you'd better prepare now! We have beer and sometimes coke, but it is warm. I'm getting used to warm beer, but it surely is potent that way! I'd much rather have it ice-cold." We were issued beer in bottles and cans, sometimes three or four at a time. Several of us stashed our beers away under our cots, saving them for the next time went to a rest camp. The date of that letter, by the way, 6 August 1945, is the date on which the B-29 named "The Enola Gay" dropped the first atom bomb on Nagasaki—it is evident that we were not told about it at the time.

None of the stations where I was based during the war made any effort to inform us of the progress of the war, although in the States we did have access to newspapers. But out in the Pacific we had little notion of what was happening in either Europe or the Pacific and often were ignorant of developments happening in our own squadron. Very few of us had portable radios, which were heavy and bulky in those days (decades before pocket-sized transistor radios were available), but when we were on flights, our radiomen sometimes could tune in to short-wave broadcasts and pass on the news to the rest of us.

The best information I had came in letters from my family—my father even told me what our Privateer squadrons were doing. But even the war news in the States was censored by the military, and the folks back home had only limited knowledge about the American victories and horrors in the European and Pacific wars. We guessed that savage battles were going on, with considerable losses on both sides. On

7 July, I wrote, "Thanks, Dad, for your "coverage" of the news, both on the garden-front and the war-fronts! Honestly, I really don't know where we stand in regard to the Japs—don't see any papers or hear the radio at all! From time to time you'd better let me know how we're doing." Once the Germans had surrendered, we were also bothered by believing that, thousands of miles from America, we had been put on the back shelf. "What do the folks in the states think about this [Pacific] war?" I wrote, asking my father. "Are they beginning to take it for granted?"

Back home, the Wack garden was still providing the family with food, as well as food for thought. "When you have your own home later you must have a small garden," my father wrote on 5 August. "We must have at least that much contact with nature. The energy (or the "will") of things that grow is amazing—almost frightening. Those corn stalks clutch the earth so firmly with their thin roots and insist on growing right straight up. If the wind makes them bow and you think you ought to push them back into place you discover that they know how to do that themselves tho they may be left with a crook at the bottom of the stalk. Those pumpkins just can't be restrained. The way a vine branches out and draws its long tendrils around everything it meets makes you think of an octopus. When you pull out a weed that has a tendril wound around it you have a sudden fear that the pumpkin plant in rage will throw a vine around your neck and choke you to death. The really marvelous thing about garden plants is that they do their work and produce the fine fruit without making the least noise and without running from place to place. They make no noise like a motor, or bark like a dog, and they don't jabber like a human being but look at the product of their terrific energy—the big cucumbers, the many tomatoes, the watermelons, the yellow potatoes, the never ending beans."

But a few days later calamity had struck the garden, as my mother wrote on the 8th. "We had our first corn last night. It was delicious. We are getting cucumbers and beans. Dad dug a few potatoes too. We cut a cabbage head the other day. You can imagine how angry Dad was when he discovered that someone had taken two cabbages a few nights ago. There is a lot of stealing going on in South Bend. So many chickens have been stolen so I suppose the gardens will be next." Meanwhile, I was getting mail more regularly, and a long-awaited package of food finally arrived. "The contents were one can of sardines, a can of cookies, a jar of cheese spread, two cakes of soap, four Scholastics, and some cookies in wax paper. The package was somewhat delapidated and there was no date on it. Everything, except the cookies in wax paper (there were ants in them) was perfect. The cookies in the can were as fresh and delicious as though they were freshly baked!" (The "Scholastics" were copies of Notre Dame's student weekly news magazine.) Another delayed package arrived, and it, "too, was in very good condition, and was mailed last June. In it were two cans of sardines, a can of chili, some candy and gum, and a book of short stories. I've already read six or seven of the stories today. The one I liked best was Mann's *Disorder and*

Early Sorrow. The food will serve to supplement our highly undesirable chow. We had some of my soup today, and was it good!"

Letters from South Bend were taking only a few days now. On the 9th my mother wrote, "What do you think of the new bomb? It has certainly given all of us something to think about. Everyone stops on the street to say what they think of it. Then on the heels of that news came the announcement of Russia's entry in the war. Do write what your reactions were to the news—I mean the new bomb and Russia's latest move. This morning I heard on the radio that the war may be over in days or weeks—some say a month. The President will give a radio talk to-night."

That same day in Okinawa, I wrote that the mail "is all fouled up again, and none has come except a package from you, Mom. The contents were one can of sardines, a can of cookies, a jar of cheese spread, two cakes of soap, four Scholastics, and some cookies in wax paper. The package was somewhat delapidated and there was no date on it. Everything, except the cookies in wax paper (there were ants in them) was perfect. The cookies in the can were as fresh and delicious as though they were freshly baked!" I also confided that I had contracted "some kind of dysentary—I think from the chow gear. When we have eaten, we wash our gear in one barrel of hot soapy water, and two of hot rinse water. The water is not hot enough to completely sterilize the gear, and naturally, the water gets somewhat dirty after a while. And then, there are no cupboards to store the gear in (you must forgive me for the structure of these sentences!) and I think we may have gotten the germs there. Three or four of us have it, and see no relief."

In the same letter, I commented on the "new atomic bomb" and expressed our hope that the war would end soon, saying that "General opinion out here is most optimistic. As we have no radio, our knowledge must be second-hand, and we hear a lot of rumors. So, I for one, am hopeful, but a little skeptical. I'd hate to be disappointed." That was also the date when the second atomic bomb was dropped—on Nagasaki. Actually, without news from the radio or newspapers, we at our small air base had little better than a worm's-eye view of the war. Like my shipmates, I was ecstatic to learn that the U.S. had a bomb that would demoralize the Japanese and make them plead for surrender. How could the Japanese hold out after that? Now it was only a matter of time—no more than a few days or so.

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5
In Harm's Way

It is disgusting . . . that a towering cathedral, built by ages of care and effort, a sweet labor of centuries, should be shot down by laughing artillerymen, mere boys, because somebody with a machine gun is hiding in a belfry tower. When I see such a building, damaged perhaps beyond repair after one of these "operations," I know only disgust. The matter of sides in this war temporarily becomes irrelevant, especially if someone at my elbow says, like a conquering hero: "Well, we sure did a job on the old church, eh?"

— Donald R. Pearce, *The Journal of a War: Northwest Europe, 1944, 45*

The Abbey destroyed, a desolate heap of stone and dust and mortar. Brehmockel, Grumpeter and Wollersein would certainly have exulted over the sight. But I did not exult when I first saw the piles of ruins in the year 1945. I walked around, reflecting more calmly, plain to see, than they had expected. Had they anticipated tears? Indignation? . . . I would have given two hundred abbeys if I could have had Edith back. . . .

— Heinrich Böll, *Billiards at Half-past Nine*

World War Two—the most destructive war in history. Soaring works of the imagination demolished. Baroque Dresden and its people fire-bombed, centuries-old cathedrals and castles brought down all over Europe. Devastation everywhere—entire cities in ruins.

The most murderous war in history. Horrible crimes committed on both sides, a scandal to humanity. Over fifty million human lives snuffed out, more civilians than soldiers. Programmed genocide. Millions of wandering, orphaned, displaced sufferers. Cemetery after cemetery after cemetery.

But Heinrich Faehmel, the eighty-year-old architect in *Billiards at Half-past Nine*, Heinrich Böll's novel of post-war Germany, refuses to lament the wartime demolition of his masterwork, the great St. Anthony's Abbey in the Kissa Valley—for to him, the Abbey and all the other European monuments of art and architecture, no matter how ancient and noble, are nothing compared to the loss of one human life.

Even as a Tarmac, I had seen how easily one could be killed while flying a plane or flying in one. I wrote home from Norman, Oklahoma, that a student pilot and his instructor had been killed in the terrible crash of a training plane. A week later, there were two more crashes and two more dead pilots. "Things like that can't be avoided, though," I pontificated, "and when you consider how many soldiers are killed in ma-

neuvers, it doesn't seem so bad. There have been six deaths in the past two weeks, here." But all of us knew that fatal flying accidents happen only to the other guy.

When I became a member of a squadron, the danger that was emphasized to me and the other men was that of being shot down by the enemy, whether he was piloting a fighter plane or firing an AA gun from a ship down below. So we practiced evasion tactics. On 29 January, I wrote from San Diego, "We had a rough hop today, fighter evasion. Four Corsairs made [practice] attacks on us and we employed all sorts of maneuvers to get away from them—at the time tracking them with our turrets. The result—a hell of a sick stomach—one of those cases where you think you're going to die, and hope you will!"

China-Burma-India Theater shoulder patch

Hugh Wilkinson, our pilot, was especially good at evasion tactics and not at all hesitant about using them. I know that when we were in actual combat, later on, if any of us crewmen happened to catch what we thought was a glimpse of a Japanese aircraft in flight, all he needed to do is call on the intercom, "Mr. Wilkinson, I think I saw a Zeke at three o'clock," and in a split second Hugh Wilkinson would have us practically upside-down and flying sideways! Fighter planes have fixed guns that fire in the direction the plane is going, so in these evasion-tactics hops, our pilot's job was to use every maneuver that the plane would tolerate to keep the fighters' guns from coming to bear on us—abrupt climbing and diving, side-slipping, rolling, etc. (hence the nauseated stomachs).

We air gunners had movable guns in our turrets (my electric turret could cover almost 360° horizontally and more than 180° vertically—there were stops that prevented my guns from firing into the cockpit or into the tail of the plane). Our job in these evasion-tactics hops was to track the fighter planes, trying to keep them in our gunsights—so that, if they really were enemy planes, we would know how to shoot them down before they shot us down. It is interesting that the best training for this kind of shooting was "skeet shooting," in which a shotgun is used to shatter clay pigeons hurled into the air, although our situation was that we ourselves were in motion, as well as our targets. My crew, Crew 15, was happily spared the experience of being attacked by enemy planes, but several other crews in the squadron were attacked by Japanese planes and downed a number of them.

Once we got to the combat zone, we expected that we would encounter Japanese pursuit planes as well as anti-aircraft fire from enemy ships, but our first experience with danger was when we ourselves were attacked by bombers**,** our first indication that we were in as much danger of being killed or wounded on the ground as in the air. Besides evasion tactics, we had to learn the art of protecting ourselves from the bombs and the kamikazes. We had to dig fox holes and sometimes live in them, especially at Yontan Field, where air raids occurred almost every night. The Japanese bombers damaged the runways, interfered with our evening relaxation and sleep, and kept us from our work. All our flights had to take place during the daylight hours, since the planes could not take off or be serviced during air-raid alerts, and even though we had "friend or foe" recognition equipment, the threat remained that the Fifth Fleet down in Buckner Bay would mistake our planes for Japanese bombers and shoot us down, so we made sure to return to base before it got dark.

Several years ago, Dallas Vickers of Crew 17 wrote an account of a scary search mission undertaken by his crew on 2 May 1945. It is a good illustration of the kind of activity in which the Squadron was involved. Flying a Privateer out of Westbrooke Field, Palawan, their plane piloted by Lieutrnant (jg) George Serbin, they reached the coast of Borneo, where they sighted a large number of Japanese ships. Two Japanese aircraft appeared, a Dinah (a twin-engine Mitsubishi plane) and a Jake (a pontoon plane), which they shot down—the Squadron's first downed Japanese planes. Then they turned their attention to the ships, which were grouped in an inlet that was protected by a small island, elevated and heavily wooded. They made a pass-by to count and classify the ships in order to report on them to Puerto Princessa—however, because of the distance from Palawan, radio contact was not possible.

While taking another look at the situation, Lieut. Serbin proposed that they fly around behind the island, where they would be invisible to the ships, and come at the ships from that direction, dropping their entire bomb load on the ships in one pass. Talking it over, the Crew saw that this plan had at least two serious flaws. First, it was a suicide mission, since the fleet's guns would all be aimed in the direction of the island and would shoot down the relatively slow bomber when it appeared, probably before all the bombs were released. Second, the plane's mission was to search and report, not search and destroy. They had been unable to report the presence of these ships, and if they were shot down, no one would know what had happened to them. In spite of this, as the pilot polled the crew members, one by one, each one voted to go with it, although there may have one objection. Nevertheless, Lieut. Serbin, who had been a school teacher, realized that the plan was flawed and wisely decided not to pursue it.

"As we headed for home," Dallas wrote, "the fleet sighting report was relayed through a British radio station. The major problems after that were it was a long way home, very dark with no visibility over open water, and with a questionable supply of

fuel for what is remembered as about a 16 hour flight. Mr. Nemish, the navigator, was able to locate Palawan and the runway, but only after Jack Tenney and "Pop" Snedecker (26 years old), using the fuel sight gages, skillfully transferred fuel from engine to engine to keep all the engines running. Upon landing, there was hardly any fuel visible in the sight gages.

"Thinking about this day in the 55 years since, I'm amazed at our almost complete lack of a sense of danger and of how close we came to becoming a permanent part of the Pacific ocean thousands of miles from home. . . . Perhaps this is a major reason the military has relied so heavily on 18 to 22 year old boys." (Vickers)

My boyhood dream of some day visiting the exotic and mysterious countries of Asia, especially places like Singapore, French Indo-China, the Philippines, and Siam and islands like Tahiti and those in the Dutch East Indies (Java, Borneo, Celebes, Sumatra), a romantic dream born out of reading novels about the Far East, like the stories and novels of Joseph Conrad, was a dream brought up short by the reality of participating in the bombing of these places as enemy targets. Our intelligence officers briefed us on such places as these before we left to search them and the seas around them from the air, providing us not only with information about the location of harbors and radar installations, but also with tips about how to behave in case we were forced down in those areas. Of course, we carried identification as American airmen (see the picture on the next page), as well as arms, sheath knives, compasses, detailed topographical maps, and both Chinese and U.S. money. One of the compasses was the size of a pea, shaped to be hidden in the rectum in case the owner was captured by the enemy.

Our intelligence officers also issued us two booklets, a "Castaway's Baedecker to the South Seas" and a "C.B.I. Pointie Talkie." I do not remember thinking it advisable to carry either of them with me on any missions. The title of the former booklet is self-explanatory—it tells how to survive in a place like Borneo or New Guinea by locating food and water, fishing, making fires, locating one's position in the wilderness, and speaking to natives whom one encounters, i.e., if they know "pidgin English." The other booklet, designed for airmen forced down in the China-Burma-India theater of war, is a device for communicating with speakers of such languages as Burmese, Chinese, Thai, and French. If the language in question involved pictograms, the airman would look in the booklet for the meaning he wished to convey, such as, "I am thirsty. Please give me some tea," then point to the the pictogram that expressed that meaning. Having been shown the appropriate pictogram, the native speaker would then point to the pictogram which expressed his reply, such as the one standing for, "Sorry, we don't have any." There was also a French section, for French Indo-China, which contained English and French equivalents. My father, in World War One, was issued a similar booklet, designed to enable doughboys to commu-

nicate with French or German speakers—it was called *The Kolynos "Parley Voo* Chi-

na-Burma-India identification printed on silk and carried by airmen in the CBI theater of operations: Chinese flag and inscription identifying the bearer as an American airman *Booklet"*

and was distributed to Allied servicemen by the makers of Kolynos Dental Cream, "The Soldiers' Dentifrice."

Moreover, our intelligence officers lectured us on what the natives of each place were like. Some were said to be headhunters. I recall in particular being told that if we were forced to land in that part of Borneo where we had been ordered to patrol, we were not to shake hands with the men of the tribes we might encounter. They would consider that an insult. Instead, their practice, when encountering one another, was to cup the other guy's genitals in one's hand and give them a gentle squeeze. The intelligence officers said this was the friendly way the Borneo tribesmen greeted other men. Upon hearing this, I prayed fervently that we would never get shot down—or that if we did, I would have an opportunity to put on gloves before we abandoned our aircraft—or that if all else failed, I would be able to shoot myself before I encountered any of the tribesmen.

How reliable that bit of intelligence was, I have never learned. But even then, a green youth, I suspected that our leg was being pulled. Of course, the crewmen in our squadron who had been out there before solemnly backed up the experts. Yet intelligence officers are not known for playing practical jokes, and the intelligence officer for our own squadron, Lieutenant Ted Steele, had taught English at Columbia, so *naturally* I assumed that he was telling us the truth (I corresponded with him after the war). But as we know, intelligence can be flawed and even false, and actions are sometimes taken that should never have been taken because of lies and deception—because men say "that which is not," as Swift's Gulliver put in *Gulliver's Travels*.

According to VPB-109's official records, the Squadron flew a total of 4,778 combat hours, excluding training flights and test-hops. Seven or eight enemy planes were destroyed and eight damaged. Not counting landing barges, sampans, etc., the number of enemy ships attacked was 213; of these, 118 were sunk and 87 damaged. In addition, the Squadron made 46 bombing and strafing attacks on Japanese bases and other military objectives. The Squadron itself lost three planes on the ground in enemy bombing raids, and one plane was put out of commission when it returned to base riddled with anti-aircraft fire. (Steele, *Summary*)

During its approximately twenty-five weeks in the Western Pacific, VPB-109 suffered fourteen combat deaths. Out of a complement of about 300 men, this was a low number, compared with some other units and, especially, compared with many infantry companies in the Army and Marine Corps, but to us Squadron members, each loss was painful, even though we may not have known the persons well. Actually, I knew only one of the fourteen as a personal friend, Jim Krieger from Crew 6. These fourteen whose lives were taken from them by the war deserve to be named here:

Joe Kasperlik, AMM 1/c, USN, of Grand Rapids, Michigan, plane captain of Crew 11, killed 5 May 1945 by anti-aircraft fire over Parepare Bay, Borneo.

Leo E. Kennedy, 31, Lieutenant, USNR, of Ethlyn, Missouri, patrol plane commander of Crew 10 (had been PPC of Crew 14 in VB-109), killed 30 May 1945 by anti-aircraft fire over the mouth of the Yangtze River. Three days earlier, Kennedy and Crew 10 had obtained honors for the squadron with the sinking of a Japanese destroyer in the first successful Bat attack on the open sea, blowing the entire bow off the vessel. In the same attack, using conventional bombs, Kennedy sank a 2,000-ton freighter and four small freighters and damaged two smaller vessels. For this record-setting action Lieutenant Kennedy was awarded the Navy Cross." (*Dictionary*, 524)

The twelve members of Crew 6, "Bachelor's Delight," shot down on 6 August 1945 by anti-aircraft fire from a Japanese tanker east of Korea and crashed into the ocean two miles away with no survivors found, all presumed killed:

Henry Baier, Jr., Ensign, USNR, of Seward, Kansas, copilot-navigator;

Alexander J. Boyd, ARM 1/c, USNR, of Pueblo,Colorado, AG & radioman;

James R. T. Carswell, AFC 2/c, USN, of Baltimore, Maryland, AG & ordnanceman;

Lawrence R. Conroy, AOM 3/c, USNR, of Cleveland, Ohio, AG & ordnanceman.

Peter G. Ilaqua, ARM 2/c, USNR, of Syracuse, New York, AG & radioman;

Frank R. Kramer, AOM 1/c, USNR, of Bingen, Washington, AG & ordnanceman (had been in Crew 8 of VB-109);

John D. Keeling, 26, Lieutenant, USNR, of Scott City, Kansas, patrol plane commander (had been PPC of Crew 8 in VB-109);

William F. Kreier, ARM 1/c, USNR, of Philadelphia, Pennyslvania, AG & radioman (had been in Crew 8 of VB-109);

James E. Krieger, AMM 3/c, USNR, of Cincinnati, Ohio, AG & mechanic;

Keith W. Radcliffe, Ensign, USNR, of Kirkwood, Missouri, copilot-

navigator;

Melvin M. Rager, AMM 2/c, USNR, of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, AG & mechanic;

William L. Willocks, Jr., AMM 1/c, USNR, of Schenectady, New York, plane captain & air gunner;

To some extent, we had been prepared to expect such wartime deaths, but we were also told to expect something worse along with such deaths. When I was sent to Yellow Water, Florida, to begin training as an air gunner—and was transformed from an air cadet to a genuine enlisted seaman—my superiors and instructors never referred to the enemy we gunners would be facing in any terms other than "the Japs" or "the Nips," and their warnings about the barbarism and savage cruelty of the Japanese were manifold. From gunnery school onward, we heard stories that the Japanese always tortured their prisoners, then executed them, usually by beheading them. Too many of the rumors of Japanese bestial treatment of prisoners of war turned out to be true, but there was, as I suspected, much falsehood and exaggeration in the stories. Sad to say, they helped create an attitude that led to much retaliatory savagery on the part of Americans. The rationalization was that since the Japanese had no sense of fair play, we had the license to retaliate in kind.

An incident related by James Fahey is an illustration. In November 1943 in the South Pacific, Fahey's ship, the U.S. cruiser *Montpelier,* was engaged in a sea and air battle, during which the cruiser shot down five Japanese planes. Some of the Japanese pilots parachuted when their planes were hit, but, as Fahey tells it, a few of the ship's gunners opened fire on the parachuting aviators and cut their bodies to ribbons. The gunners were reprimanded—for wasting ammunition—but praised for the accuracy of their shooting. But Fahey adds that the Japanese were the first to shoot down helpless parachuters like that, and the gunners were just giving their own back to them. (Fahey, 68)

When Fahey's ship was searching for the crew of a B-24 that had been downed in the area of the southern Japanese islands, he wrote, 9 March 1944, that this was a dangerous place for a plane to crash. "Capture by the Japs would mean their deaths at a whim from their tormentors. Torture first and then a slow and agonizing end." (Fahey, 120)

We heard a few stories about gunners in Navy patrol-bombing squadrons shooting Japanese sailors in the water who had jumped from their sinking ships. There were even rumors of such incidents occurring in our own squadron. The only excuse for such behavior, if it happened, is that the pilots and gunners must have lost their heads. However, such rumors were not rife, and I cannot believe that more than a very few of the men I knew or was acquainted with could be guilty of such brutality, even under the pressure of battle. And I have no doubt that throughout the entire war, both in Europe and the Pacific, the very great majority of American servicemen acted with humanity and decency toward wounded or helpless enemy soldiers and toward enemy civilians. Nevertheless, war does not necessarily bring out the best in humans.

Naturally, hearing stories of Japanese atrocities, we hoped that if we were shot down or crashed for some other reason, we would die in the wreckage rather than have to submit to painful death at the cruel hands of the Japanese. Of course, it was not true that the Japanese executed all their prisoners of war. But of Japan's 132,134 Western prisoners of war, fully 27% died in captivity (35,756 persons), while only 4% of Germany's and Italy's did. (Brady, 319)

In the war crimes trials of 1946, the Japanese admitted they had even practiced cannibalism on their prisoners. A Major Matoda testified that the war had turned him into a madman, which is the only explanation he could give for having been a cannibal. (Brady, 317-18) I do not find it at all difficult to credit Matoda's claim of madness. Even my relatively benign experience of combat convinces me that war exists in a climate of insanity which poisons both the conquered and the conqueror. All are infected. All are victims.

One of Dallas Vickers' anecdotes illustrates this insanity. "Our first tour of Okinawa was soon after the airstrip was secured while the battle was still being fought," he wrote.

> The squadron we relieved was said to have lost six planes and crews. It was during the monsoon season and the mud was ankle deep even inside our tents. Almost every night the Japanese were flying suicide missions, attempting to crash land in the dark with planes loaded with personnel. The survivors scattered and attempted to destroy our planes by attaching explosive devices with suction cups.
>
> One night one of the planes crashed into a group of trees very near our tents and exploded and burned. A group of us walked out to see if there were survivors. We had been told that intelligence needed prisoners to interrogate. By some miracle a single [Japanese] survivor came stumbling from the flames dragging a dead buddy. As he approached within a few feet of us, he appeared to be badly hurt, helpless and unarmed. Instead of taking him prisoner, someone raked him over with a Thompson machine gun, and then, kicked his teeth out and put them in his pocket. We never tried to identify the person but assumed he had lost some close relatives or friends at Pearl Harbor, the Bataan death march or someplace. (Vickers)

John W. Taussig, Jr., was one of the Marines who had fought to secure the island of Okinawa. His outfit had hit the beach shortly after the first wave of the invasion and had set up in the area of Yontan Field (this happened on 29 April 1945, some ten days before VPB-109 arrived at Yontan). He wrote his reaction to the events in a graphic letter to his parents:

> The stink and smell of dead, bloated bodies in the air everywhere. Dried up blood and bones are strewn around, and wounded people straggling around. When I get

> home I want to forget about all this that I've seen. I don't want to remember it. Saipan and Tinian were not this bad. In a letter from a girl she said she had met a Marine who was on Iwo Jima. She said he was hard and bitter. My return answer went something like this. I asked her if she expected to see a courteous gentleman that talked about flowers. He undoubtedly saw his best buddies murdered in cold blood. Or perhaps came upon his brother that the Japs had gotten, tortured, castrated and stuffed his organs in his mouth. Inhuman, yes; but that is the way they fight, and that is the way I found two of my buddies. They weren't dead but dying, tied and staked to the ground, their guts cut open and their tongues cut out and their privates stuck in their mouths. . . . In Germany we are at least fighting people, but over here these yellow-belly bastards (and that's what they are) are just like animals. (Taussig, © 2003 KCTS Television)

Military men are apt to make excuses for each other, even for each other's fits of apparent madness. Not every Marine or sailor reacted that way to the Japanese, but then not every one of them had to undergo that kind of horror.

The greatest danger to us Squadron crewman from what seemed to be irrational Japanese malice was the kamikaze pilots, although their primary targets were the ships in Buckner Bay. But whether we were stationed on board one of those ships of the Seventh Fleet or up above at Yontan Field, probably most of us imagined the typical kamikaze pilot as a maddened fanatic whose eyes blazed hatred and who laughed maniacally as his plane exploded into the stern of a U.S. aircraft carrier. The source of this image was undoubtedly the propagandistic war movies we had seen and that still made up a large part of our recreation on Tinian and later on Okinawa. But some of it came from our not being able to comprehend the motivation of such suicide pilots, young men like ourselves, coming out of a Japanese military tradition that we considered utterly diabolical, but not necessarily deranged. The kamikazes, we figured, had to be insane, all of them, or had had their minds altered.

It was not until long after the war that I came to a better understanding of these pilots through letters some of them wrote to their families. Ensin Teruo Yamaguchi, who wrote the following in a final letter to his father, gives no indication of being anything but of sound mind:

> I was selected quite unexpectedly to be a special attack pilot and will be leaving for Okinawa today. Once the order was given for my one-way mission it became my sincere wish to achieve success in fulfilling this last duty. . . . The Japanese way of life is indeed beautiful, and I am proud of it, as I am of Japanese history and mythology which reflect the purity of our ancestors and their belief in the past—whether or not those beliefs are true. That way of life is the product of all the best things which our ancestors have handed down to us. . . . It is an honor to be able to give my life in defense of these beautiful and lofty things. (*Kamikaze Website*)

Rather than fanaticism, the letter reveals Teruo as one who acts out of devotion to his fatherland, but also, and even more so, out of religious conviction. He looks forward to a happy afterlife, and he anticipates meeting his dead mother and grandmother there. He says,

> Okinawa is as much a part of Japan as Goto Island. An inner voice keeps saying that I must smite the foe who violates our homeland. My grave will be the sea around Okinawa, and I will see my mother and grandmother again. I have neither regret nor fear about death. I only pray for the happiness of you and all my fellow-countrymen. During my final plunge, though you will not hear it, you may be sure that I will be saying "chichiue" [respected father] to you and thinking of all you have done for me. (*Kamikaze Website*)

Another kamikaze pilot had come from a more sophisticated academic background. On 11 May 1945, when VPB-109 had just moved to Okinawa, twenty-two-year-old Ryoji Uehara flew his plane into "an American mechanized unit" in Kadena Bay, Okinawa. The night before the attack, he wrote about how keenly he felt the honor of being chosen for the Army Special Attack Corps, "which is considered to be the most elite attack force in the service of our glorious fatherland. My thoughts about all these things derive from a logical standpoint which is more or less the fruit of my long career as a student and, perhaps, what some others might call a liberal. But I believe that the ultimate triumph of liberty is altogether obvious. As the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce has proclaimed, 'liberty is so quintessential to human nature that it is absolutely impossible to destroy it.' It is equally inevitable that an authoritarian and totalitarian nation, however much it may flourish temporarily, will eventually be defeated." It is evident that he included Japan in his reference to "authoritarian and totalitarian" nations.

> Both in this letter and in an earlier one, Ryoji, like Teruo, expressed a strong confidence in the existence of a world beyond. "My belief," he wrote, "is that death is a passage leading to reunion with my loved ones in heaven. I am not afraid to die. Death is nothing to be afraid of when you look at it as just a stage in the process of ascending to heaven." He knew that the next day he would have given up his life. "Tomorrow one believer in liberty and liberalism will leave this world behind. His withdrawing figure may have a lonely look about it, but I assure you that his heart is filled with contentment." (*Kamikaze Website*)

Even a slight acquaintance—so long as it is real—with Japan and the Japanese, with their culture and history, reveals a people of high ideals and moral values—a people who devote much attention to beauty and the life of the mind. Yet in cases like this, one is always bothered by the question of whether something in the Japanese character impelled that people to seek dominion over the Pacific, to attack America with overwhelming force and kill American servicemen, to commit atrocities on the

soldiers and civilians they captured in defiance of international standards of humane treatment. The question bothers one. Even my mother, the soul of kindness and tolerance, asked the question in a letter to me on **2** September 1945: "I suppose you heard the radio broadcast at the time of the signing of the surrender and the President's talk. It was all very impressive and a bit sad. The Japanese deserved their fate yet it is sad that they have never been taught to act as human beings. Or perhaps there is something that makes them behave towards the white race as they do." But we ask the same question of Nazi Germany, and not only with regard to the Holocaust. Of Russia, as well. The same question can be and is asked of America, concerning our own forays against smaller and weaker nations. Is there not only a racial, but a national tendency toward savagery? The problem seems ultimately to rest in the question of leadership, of the leaders' exploitation of their peoples' pain and anger and sense of honor, and of the people's abdicating their consciences to the leaders. Certainly, the leaders of Japan exploited the youth and high ideals of aviators like Teruo and Ryujie— who come across in their letters as sane, reflective young men, devoted to their families and their country, willing to die for what they believe in, even if the cause is a lost one. Their leaders wasted them, literally. The kamikazes were used as weapons only when the defeat of Japan was inevitable. It is true that the greater part of warfare involves the exploitation and rape of innocence.

We civilized nations agree to honor a curious dichotomy when we are at war with each other We acknowledge a distinction between military combatants and so-called "innocent" civilians, especially if the civilians are woman and children, and we promise that *insofar as it is possible or expedient* we will spare such civilians from the ravages of war. (It is a convention of warfare that harks back to the rules of combat of the Middle Ages, but seems out of place in the all-out carnage of modern warfare.) Sometimes the distinction includes, in theory, at least, the acknowledgement of the "innocence" of soldiers who have been conscripted vs. the non-innocence of those who are volunteers. There are, however, horrible instances in World War Two of the deliberate targeting of off-limits personnel (such as medical and chaplains) and of civilian populations—often with the purpose of demoralizing the enemy. Guilt lies on both sides. Outstanding among numerous scandalous incidents were the bombing of London by the Germans, the fire-bombing of Hamburg and Dresden by the RAF and the AAF, and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by America. In the Pacific War, the Japanese refused to honor the Geneva Convention and treated the red crosses worn by medics and ambulances as targets to shoot at.

Without doubt, instruments such as the Geneva Convention have accomplished some good in wartime in preventing some instances of utter savagery. But the danger lies in our assuming that, therefore, the savagery cannot occur because nations are humane, after all. Yet over and over again during wars the knowledge is forced on us

that there are no limits, as far as war is concerned, and that restrictions like the Geneva Convention are a fool's paradise.

While Squadron VPB-109 was stationed on both Okinawa and Palawan, there was always danger from Japanese bombs. Of course, Japan wanted to destroy our planes and munitions, as well as the air strip itself, and their accurate bombing made huge craters in the runway that kept the Seabees hard at work. The Japanese were also interested in killing us airmen. We dug fox-holes in the area of our tents and, as I recall, many were dug near the chow hall and administrative tents. Upon hearing the air raid siren, we would run for these fox-holes and dive into them, crouched down in them with our heads tucked down for the duration of the alarm. The theory was that, unless we were struck directly, the safest place we could be during such a raid was below the level of the ground. As I recall, the only personnel who were struck by bomb fragments were those who failed to make it to a fox-hole.

While on Okinawa we were warned about the anti-personnel bombs the Japanese were using—bombs timed to explode a few feet above the level of the ground and scatter shrapnel horizontally, ripping apart anything that is struck. You can be sure that, knowing this, there was no dilly-dallying when the sirens went off—we streaked for the nearest fox holes. The Germans had used such bombs in Europe, and we Americans used them, too. The modern version are cluster bombs (notorious in the Iraq war), which do much more damage—their use in civilian areas is regarded as a war crime. One of the advantages of employing such anti-personnel munitions—from the point of view of the side that possesses them—is that they kill both military personnel and civilians indiscriminately and thus strike terror among the enemy.

An incident that I still remember vividly occurred while we were eating supper in the chow hall. When the air raid siren went off, the chow hall emptied rapidly, except for the few who seemed to believe in luck (some of those received Purple Hearts for delaying too long). Actually, I do not remember even the getting up from my seat or the leaving from the big tent. But I do remember running hard down the road, seeing a depression in the earth off to my right, and leaping into it. The next thing I knew, I was being heaved out of the hole by men who were cursing at me. I had jumped into an occupied machine-gun pit onto the busy gunners, who were at the time, understandably, not in a neighborly mood

Nevertheless, by comparison with other possibilities, the war I experienced from 1943 to 1946 was not especially hard or dangerous. I had escaped the draft three months before I became eligible for it by volunteering to enlist in the Naval Reserve and begin training in the Navy's V-12 program. What if there had been no V-12? Surely, then, rather than wait to be drafted, I would have enlisted in the Navy at Great Lakes, Illinois, and gone through boot camp, then have been assigned to a ship—perhaps as a gunner on a cruiser, to undergo hazardous duty for three years in the Pa-

cific, the way James Fahey did, as he related his experience in *Pacific War Diary, 1942-45*.

There is no doubt in my mind that had I waited until my birthday to be drafted, I would have been on a troop ship to England by Christmas 1943 and on the beaches of Normandy six months later. There is a good chance that I would have been killed in France or Germany. As it turned out, by the time my VPB-109 squadron began operations in the Philippines, the war in Europe had only two more weeks to go, and America's full attention was turning to the Pacific War. In other words, although the choices I made during my first two years were all in favor of getting into combat as soon as possible, events conspired in such a way that I was never put fully into harm's way. Without being more deserving than anyone else, I was more fortunate than many other young men my age.

On the other hand, I was part of a crew that flew combat missions in a bomber, and that had its own hazards. Many of 109's individual missions had to be aborted because of engine failures and other malfunctions. These flights were chalked up as RTB's (returned to base). Back at the base, the supply of needed parts was not ideal or endless, as it might have been back in the States. Crew 15 had at least five RTB's while we were in the Western Pacific, caused by such problems as high oil temperature in an engine and carburetor trouble. On some of these RTB's, we were forced to turn around and return on three engines, hoping that those three would hold out. On one return, we had to jettison our bomb-bay gasoline tank and all our ammunition in order to lighten the load on the engines. I myself was responsible for one of the aborted flights by failing to cinch down a gas cap on the plane's wing, but the vapor trail from the gas cap was noticed immediately after takeoff, so we resumed the flight right after we had landed and tightened the cap. I was not proud of that oversight and grateful that I was never chewed out for it.

One day during the period when the squadron was operating out of Yontan Field, Okinawa, our plane returned from a patrol with an armed bomb still hanging in the rack in the bomb bay of our Privateer, something that must not have been uncommon in bombers in general. During the bombing run, the mechanism holding the bomb on the rack had failed to release this bomb, despite our pilot's attempts to trigger the release from the cockpit and the ordnanceman's manual attempts in the bomb bay itself. Naturally, we kept the bomb bay doors open on our return flight, as we could well imagine what an armed bomb might do to the plane and its fragile occupants if the bomb were to drop from the rack inside a closed bomb bay.

The bombs for a given mission as well as the belts of ammunition for the plane's six 50-caliber machine-gun turrets were brought out to the airstrip during the night or early in the morning before takeoff by the ordnance crews. There were no night missions, because of the often-nightly air raids by the Japanese. Up to six tons of un-

armed bombs were loaded into the racks in the plane's bomb bay. Later, during the flight, the crew's ordnancemen would arm these bombs—i.e., trigger them to explode, once they were released from the racks, at a certain altitude or upon impact. When the plane would near its target, the pilot would open the bomb-bay doors and, then, at the appropriate time, trigger the release of one or more of the bombs during the bombing run. But in this case, the bomb in question, although armed to explode, had gotten hung up in the rack. There was no danger of its exploding—so long as it stayed in the rack. The danger was that a jolt or bump might cause it to fall.

We knew that to land at Yontan Field, we had to pass over the U.S. fleet in the harbor below the airstrip. Even in the best of situations, we were cautious about flying over the fleet, because every ship there was constantly alert to the possibility of being attacked by Japanese kamikaze aircraft, and despite our signals that we were friendly and despite the fact that we were flying in a unique, easily–recognizable, four-engine American bomber, there was always the possibility that someone in one of the ships would mistake us for an enemy and shoot us down. Hence it was especially important for us that day, while we were coming in on our landing pattern, not to let that errant bomb drop on or anywhere near the fleet. (It was bad enough that we were flying over the ships with opened bomb bay doors.) Our pilot, Lieutenant Hugh Wilkinson, made the dangers quite clear to us.

Happily, our landing approach over the anchored ships of the Seventh Fleet was smooth and without incident, and no one tried to shoot us out of the sky. But now we were nearing the runway, and we had another problem—what might happen with the dangling bomb once the plane's wheels hit the deck. I am sure that Hugh Wilkinson tried to land as gently as possible. Nevertheless, the moment the plane touched down, with only the slightest of bumps, the errant bomb released itself from the rack and dropped through the open bomb bay onto the tarmac, bouncing and skipping madly after us like an angry, demented shark. (I did not witness this—I was in the forward part of the plane—but those in the aft section watched the event in mingled horror and glee from the tail and waist turrets). But the plane was moving down the runway much faster than the bomb, and by the time it had come to a stop, the bomb lay motionless on the tarmac, with all sorts of emergency vehicles and crews converging on it. The bomb was quickly disarmed and hauled away, and we parked and secured the plane.

All of us had remained calm and workmanlike during the event. Even afterward, strangely, no one in the crew seemed concerned that we could have been blown out of the sky or bombed on the runway by our own bomb. We had almost been hoisted by our own petard! Hugh Wilkinson and the ensigns may have had different notions about it, but they were a few years older than we and perhaps a bit wiser. By then they may have grown out of those feelings of immortality and invincibility that we

younger, enlisted crewmen still possessed. That time, at least, we had come unscathed through harm's way.

6

The Pacific

To any meditative Magian rover, this serene Pacific, once beheld, must ever after be the sea of his adoption. It rolls the midmost waves of the world, the Indian ocean and the Atlantic being but its arms. The same waves wash the moles of the new-built Californian towns, but yesterday planted by the recentest race of men, and lave the faded but still gorgeous skirts of Asiatic lands, older than Abraham; while all between float milky-ways of coral isles, and low-lying endless, unknown Archipelagoes, and impenetrable Japans. Thus this mysterious, divine Pacific zones the world's whole bulk about; makes all coasts one bay to it; seems the tide-beating heart of earth.

—Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*

Look at a map of the world between 74° west longitude, which runs through New York City, and the meridian that is its exact opposite on the other side of the globe, 104° *east* longitude, which runs through the city of Singapore at the tip of the Malay Peninsula. You cannot help being overwhelmed by the immense amount of blue Pacific Ocean that covers that vast expanse, despite the intruding land-mass of North America. If you like numbers, the Pacific encompasses 70 million square miles. And you cannot help being overwhelmed by the tremendous distances between the landmasses. It is 6,600 miles from San Diego to Shanghai. Crew 15 once bombed radar towers in the general vicinity of Singapore. Several of our squadron members were from New York City, and when their Privateers flew patrols along the farthest reaches of the Western Pacific, they found themselves (if only they realized it) exactly halfway around the world. Our mission as a patrol bombing squadron was seeking out Japanese shipping and military installations among some of the twenty thousand islands that sprinkle the Western and Southern Pacific.

To Herman Melville, the manifold shores of the Pacific are the shores of the races and nations of mankind. The Peaceful Ocean—the "quiet ocean" in the German language—is the beautiful symbol of unity among the nations and truly the heart of the earth. Warfare roiled and bloodied it, but eventually there came a day in 1945 when it regained its tranquil nature, and once more it became the way of peace.

It may have been the Pacific that had captured my imagination, but war was why we were there. Yet in the early days of August, when the Squadron had returned to Yontan Field on Okinawa, the war news we were hearing was all good, and the letters from home were less tense. On 3 August my mother wrote about the family garden: "I wish you could have seen Dad yesterday when he found a cucumber on his vines. To-day he found a good sized pumpkin. Our beans are good but the tomatoes aren't

ripe yet. I think we will have a lot of them. Do you get any fresh fruit or isn't there any in China?" She may really have thought I was in China, but possibly she was trying to get me to hint where I was at the time. "Peaches are getting plentiful," she continued. "I hope to can a great many but I don't care to can anything with the little sugar I've been given. We were allowed seven and a half pounds per person and last year we were given twenty-five pounds. I can't make any jelly or jam this year—I don't know what I'll put in their lunch boxes or what we will have after school. I am buying jam and jelly so we will have a little. Everyone raves about the lack of sugar."

I did my share of wild celebrating when, on 10 August 1945, it was announced that Japan had asked to surrender to the U.S. On that date, late at night, I happened to be on plane watch, ostensibly guarding the plane from any Japanese sneak attack (there were still plenty of Japanese in the hills near the airstrip), as well as waiting there to help the crew that was coming to gas the plane. Our Privateers were parked spread out on the perimeter of the field, away from the runways, in case the runways were bombed. I was armed, but only with my .38 pistol, as I waited for the gas truck to come to gas up the plane for the next day's flight. Feeling bored, all of a sudden I heard several loud concussions, then a tremendous cheering coming from the distant camp area, and the sky exploded with flares and tracers. The cheering increased to a roar. I had no idea what was going on. As I wrote home a couple of days later, "I didn't know whether to join in the cheering and run for a fox-hole!" It did not sound like an air raid, but the possibility did occur to me that the camp might have been overrun by the Japanese.

Quite soon I learned what all the hubbub was for, when a weapons carrier drove up filled with guys who, like myself, had been guarding planes. "The Japs surrendered!" they cried. "Hop in!"

Unbelieving, I hopped in, and off we bounced to the camp area, with rifles, machine guns, flare-guns, and small arms being shot into the air from all sides of the airstrip. I guess we all took it for granted that, if the Japanese had sued for peace, they certainly wouldn't be attacking our planes that night.

But when I got to the tent area, I found that Crew 15 was not taking part in that reckless display of firearms—but only because our pilot, Lieutenant Hugh Wilkinson, had come to Crew 15's tent laden with bottles of gin and bourbon. Eventually, the celebratory shooting ceased—sense having prevailed—but not before a number of injuries had occurred from falling projectiles and shrapnel. Of course, the entire base had taken part in the celebration, not just VPB-109, for there were several squadrons there, as well as Marines in nearby camps, and down below our base, not fifteen miles distant, was a large fleet of U.S. ships in Buckner Bay, which also made themselves heard with artillery being shot off and whistles and foghorns sounding.

James Fahey's cruiser, the *Montpelier,* was one of the ships down there in Buckner Bay. He wrote in his diary that they were still at Okinawa on 10 August. At 8:50 pm the ship's captain announced to the crew that Japan would agree to the American terms but wanted to keep the Emperor. When the captain finished speaking, everyone whistled and cheered and "went wild." The ships in the bay were firing their guns and blowing their foghorns. He wrote that they could hear the guns firing on the island, with flares of all colors, star shells, and searchlights lighting the sky. It was quite a celebration. "This was the happiest day of our lives," he wrote. (Fahey, 374) At the time, it was the happiest day of my life, too.

Crew 15's party lasted all night. All I can remember of it was sharing bottles of bourbon with Hugh Wilkinson and my fellow crewmen and happily, but with great concentration, arguing points of scholastic philosophy with everyone around me. However, the rest of that night is a blank. We awoke around noon the next day and blearily contemplated the devastation of the tent area. I had the worst headache anyone ever had and swore off liquor for the rest of my life. After someone forced us out of our beds to clean up the mess we'd made of our campsite, we learned that the Japanese had not actually surrendered, but had asked for terms and had been given them, and now we were left with hangovers while we sweated out the Japanese acceptance of the terms.

Of course, we were not the only aircrew that got royally drunk that night. I imagine that there was not much liquor left on the entire island of Okinawa after that night's partying. Dallas Vickers wrote that he and his crew were asleep in their tent when "a lot of gunfire erupted. We all went outside to see what was going on. Someone was yelling, 'They dropped an atom bomb on Japan. The war is over.'" Vickers added that "when we went back to bed, our crew chief, Jack Tenney, laid back on his pillow and felt a hard lump in it. He dug it out and it was a .45 caliber slug which had fallen through the tent and embedded in his pillow. If he had stayed in bed it would have been in his head." (Vickers)

Actually, it was the same surrender news—the atom bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima four days earlier—although we on Okinawa did not learn about it until later. On 9 August my mother had written from South Bend, "What do you think of the new bomb? It has certainly given all of us something to think about. Everyone stops on the street to say what they think of it. Then on the heels of that news came the announcement of Russia's entry in the war. Do write what your reactions were to the news—I mean the new bomb and Russia's latest move. This morning I heard on the radio that the war may be over in days or weeks—some say a month. The President will give a radio talk to-night."

On the following days we continued to fly patrols and operate on a wartime footing, but it was becoming evident that the end was only a matter of time. We heard reports that the Japanese had inserted a condition for surrender. It was our opinion that America should accept the condition and let us go home. On the 12th I wrote my folks that we "were a little nettled when we heard that a lot of people in the U.S. were in favor of continuing the war. This morning we fixed a radio in the tent with some batteries. The latest we heard was that the U.S. had accepted the surrender with the condition that our military government dictate to Hirohito. The announcer explained that this acceptance was in accord with the Potsdam conference. Now we must 'sweat out' this latest movement, hoping that Japan will accept. They simply have to!"

Having heard the news of imminent surrender, my father wrote me, "I hope this is the day! The paper reports that there was much rejoicing on Okinawa and the other Pacific islands where our troops are stationed. In China, England, and Russia there is a lot of celebrating going on. But not much noise is being made in this country. The people are waiting for official word. They are all hoping that the Japanese offer of surrender can be accepted but they are resigned, it seems, to leave the decision to the proper authorities." Remembering the celebration we had promised ourselves once I came home, he added, "Perhaps I ought to be looking around for some beer!"

The Sunday after the announcement I wrote that I had just been to Mass and chow. "The latest news is that we will probably know the outcome of this by Sunday night in the U.S., which would be sometime tomorrow morning for us. Here's hoping! At Mass, Father announced that a special solemn Mass will be offered if and when the good word comes. The announcer said that it's quite certain that the war will be over within 48 hours. He said that the current trend in the Jap news points toward peace, saying that a nation has not the right to commit suicide."

On the same day in South Bend my mother was writing a letter to me, saying, "It is about four o'clock Sunday afternoon and still no word from the Japs. I hope that the war will be over at least when this reaches you. Do you get our letters? We are all in a state of impatience—why don't they surrender? . . . Tom, when you come up the steps of home and I can see your smile again, then we will begin to live again."

On 15 August, the Squadron got orders to cease all attacks. On the 20th, I wrote my family that "I received Dad's letter today, which was written on the tenth—the day on which Japan offered to surrender [in the western Pacific, the day was August 9th]. As you may know, the number of points required for discharge is 44, and I have only 23, at the rate of ½ point per year of age (10) and ½ point per month of service (13). So, unless something is done, I have three years yet to go. I believe that they will change the system in a few months." As it turned out, I was discharged about six months later, on 1 April 1946, when I would have had (I think) 29 points—it is pos-

sible that at that time the War Department started giving extra credit for overseas service.

Censorship was being relaxed, but it was still there. On 22 August, when we were told that we could inform our families of our whereabouts, I wrote, "I am at liberty now to tell you where I am and where I've been.

"Since July 28, I have been at Okinawa, but this is the second time. We were at Palawan in the Philippines from April 23 to May 7, where we patrolled Borneo, Celebes, and French Indo-China. From May 10 to 29 we were here at Okinawa. Then we went to Tinian for a rest. Got a good one, too, with relatively little flying and a lot of eating! That was the era of the Western novels. On July 8 we went to Iwo Jima, returning the 16th to Tinian. On the 18th, back to Iwo, and on the 27th to Tinian again, coming finally to Okinawa on the 28th. So you see we've been around! We have seen our share of action, and have done some damage to Japanese shipping, but I'll tell you all about that when I come home. I am quite certain that I will be home by [*censored*]. However, the word as to what we'll do, hasn't been given yet, so we are all hoping that we will be home much sooner than [*censored*]. I wish the authorities would make up their minds—this waiting is killing me. We hear rumors constantly, and grasp at them like drowning men! We are supposed to know for sure in a few days."

Before we left for the States, I received my father's answer to that letter, which he wrote on 9 September. He said, "The account of the places where you have been was very interesting. How many hours will it take when you are home to tell us all about your experiences—not only the external ones but the experiences of your mind and heart too. I imagine you have reached considerable maturity and I feel certain that you and I will have many an interesting discussion later about this world in which we both happen to find ourselves—I as your father, you as my son, though this relationship is less important than the very fact of our existence and our individuality as human beings. From now on we should be able to talk to each other as man to man with due respect for each other's judgment and with a common interest in all the problems that life presents. Together perhaps we can find a satisfactory answer to some of the questions that harass the minds of men."

Now we were doing a lot of sitting around and exchanging rumors. On 24 August I replied to my folks about something they had read in the paper: "I'm sorry to say that one of my close friends went down in that Privateer you read about. Our Lady has certainly watched over me, for during all our combat flying, my crew wasn't fired upon or attacked once. As long as I'm still flying there is some danger, for *perfect* airplanes aren't being made yet, so keep up the good work of prayer!" That same day the Squadron began to move its planes moved to Awase Field, Yonabaru, some distance from Yontan, thus ending operations.

A few days later, Pat wrote that she had heard we were to get points for overseas service. She also made some disparaging comments on my beard—I had sent her a photo of myself taken with Hugh Wilkinson, and you could almost tell that I was growing a beard. A day later, my brother John (ten) wrote me, saying, "Pat has a picture of you with a beard. Mom says you better shave it off before you come home or she'll shave it off for you. And she doesn't know how to use a razsor. So shave it or else! Mom wants to know wether or not you have many duties or if you're on a vacation. Who's been telling you fairy tales about meat going off the rationing list? Mother was down at the store trying to figure out if she had enough points for meat. Who told you mother was going to have berries? Mom had to pass up strawberries and raspberries because no sugar so please come home with every pocket full of sugar. Mother did get up 23 quarts of peaches and you might get a pickel occasionally. If you come home she has 36 quarts of dill and bread and butter pickels up."

Our planes were at Yonabaru, but the Squadron was still at Yontan Field, and the mail was getting mixed up again. But our quality of living was improving steadily. On 1 September I wrote, "We had ice cream for supper yesterday, and last night one of the crews managed to get quite a bit from the chow hall and having about a quart left over, gave it to four of us who were still up at ten o'clock! Gee, it was good! And the biggest surprise—our crew now boasts electric lights in our tent! Now if we could keep out the mosquitos, we'd be set. Usually, everyone is in bed by nine, but last night the four of us that I mentioned—Doc, Brady, Ogden and myself—were up griping about the hundred thousand things there are to gripe about." A week later, I wrote that a water tower was being built at the chow hall—there would be running water there. We were getting ice cream twice a week and had even been served fried chicken once.

So when V-J Day finally came, the formal surrender of the Japanese on the *USS Missouri* in Tokyo Bay, it was anti-climactic for us on Okinawa, after that wild August 10th celebration. I think that to us on Okinawa peace came as an anticlimax. Later we learned that Admiral Nimitz had signed the surrender for the U.S. and General MacArthur, for the Allies. MacArthur was our hero, the man who had vowed to return to retake the Philippines from Japan, but later he sullied that fame by defying President Truman. After MacArthur had signed the surrender papers, the sky over Tokyo Bay was filled with the roaring of 1,500 Navy carrier planes and 500 B-29 Super Fortresses, a display of America's aerial strength. Today it is clear that the Japanese surrendered not because of the atom bombing, but because of the B-29's and their incessant pounding of Japan's cities. When 109 was on Tinian, we used to watch those huge planes taking off and returning. According to General Curtis LeMay, by the time the war ended, the B-29 pilots were safer in combat over Japan than those who were in B-29 training back in the States. (see Bradley, 290)

On 2 September, Pat wrote again about my beard: "This morning I went to ten o'clock Mass and then rode over to your house and took the picture along. Your mother said she was going to put it with those pictures of Margie that Father Ed took when she was real little. Remember? Jim looked at it with a magnifying glass and asked whether he should look at you or —. They couldn't believe you had a little beard. If they tell you they don't believe it you will probably come home with one just to prove it. They loaded me up with corn, cabbage, tomatoes, carrots, and cucumbers. I had a tomato and carrot when I got home and are they good!"

On the same day, my mother wrote that the "war is finally over and what a blessing! I suppose you heard the radio broadcast at the time of the signing of the surrender and the President's talk. . . . After the radio talk we said the rosary in thanksgiving for your safety and also for the peace. I always pray that the Blessed Mother will keep her hand on your shoulder to guide you and keep you safe from harm. . . . In your letter telling about the rumors—homegoing ones—your censor cut out the time when you might come home. We think you meant Christmas or New Years. Pat said maybe it was Thanksgiving but that is too good to be true."

Rumors were bouncing around all over the air station (actually over both Yontan and Yonabaru), and some of them proved credible. On 5 September, I wrote, "Three big news items—censorship is no more. I can wear civilian clothes on leave, and 109's first crew to go home is leaving tomorrow. Now if everything goes smoothly, I'll be in the states by October 1 and home by mid-October! I should be a civilian by the time I am twenty-one. Crew 15 is eighth or ninth on the list to go home."

Jim Wack with his Piper Club

However, now that it looked likely that I would be home soon, it also seemed that my eighteen-year-old brother, Jim, was in danger of being drafted. "Jim is in Indianapolis today for his pre-induction physical," Mother wrote on 7 September. "So you see the war isn't over yet for us. Of course it will be very different going into a peace-time army or navy but he will be away from home for two years. He is glad to go. He thinks the training will do him good. He doesn't seem to care for anything but flying." She added, two days later, that he had passed his physical and now wanted to get into the infantry. "Jim says that he will see more in that branch than if he were 'stuck on a ship.' He'd like to get in the marines. I

don't think he will try for radar since that means staying in four years. This way he will be in two years. He would join the paratroopers if I would let him. He would love jumping out of a plane. There were several boys of your class taking their examinations for the second or third time. "

"This place is getting permanent," I wrote back to my folks. "I noticed that down at Yonabaru they have few tents, but live in quonset huts. Even up here at Yontan, things are looking good. This place is being taken over by the Army, but six of our crews are still up here, flying test and weather hops. You may be interested to know that those typhoons that delayed the signing of the surrender papers in Japan were scouted by 109. In fact, my crew flew a weather hop in which we located the worst of the storms, and I was sick the whole trip. We flew right into the center of the typhoon, and recorded winds as high as 105 knots! It was like being inside a washing machine!"

Crew 17 had also been assigned to track the typhoon. Dallas Vickers wrote, "We had to go into the eye at very low altitude taking weather measurements. At times, it seems that we were right on top of the waves. Lightening was blowing equipment fuzes which had to be located and replaced. When we reached the calm of the eye, we felt little relief because we knew the only way to home base was to go back through that mess." (Vickers)

Around the middle of September, the Squadron was reassigned to its final base, the beautiful "Flight Personnel Rehabilitation Camp" on Guam. Everyone called it "the rest camp." I wrote home about it on 18 September: "The long delay in my writing you is due to the fact that I had expected to be in the states by now. Instead, 109 is now at the Flight Personnel Rest Camp on Guam, and will be until we are relieved by VPB 143 and put on a ship for transfer to the U.S. I don't know how long this will take, but I'm hoping that it won't be over a month and a half. This rest camp is quite a place. It's right on the ocean. The food is good, and there's everything to do, swim, read, all kinds of games. Our duties—nothing! It's all very wonderful, but I think that I could rehabilitate myself much faster at 1025 St. Vincent!"

I added that "I've been hitting the Westerns and mystery novels lately. When Dad wrote, suggesting that I lay off the heavy works, I decided to keep Aristotle for later. So I haven't even opened the ponderous volume. Nor have I finished Maritain's 'Introduction [to Philosophy].' The other day I started *The Education of Henry Adams*. It will take me quite a while to finish it, I'm afraid. It will be difficult, too, for me to readjust myself to a rigorous schedule of study after these Westerns, etc."

I also enclosed the copy of the letter of commendation from Rear Admiral Perry that each of us had been given. Perry was Commander of Fleet Air Wing One, under which our squadron operated. The letter listed the general achievements of all the squadrons under FAW One and contained this stirring and poetic paragraph:

"The Wing has traveled every mile of the long devious route to Tokyo. It moved into the South Pacific area in the early days of that campaign. Last year it moved forward in the Central and Western Pacific, taking active part in the assault and post-assault phases of the Marianas campaign, the capture of the Palaus, and the conquest of Iwo Jima. Finally it moved boldly into the Okinawa area for the most protracted, bitter struggle of all."

I wrote my last letter from overseas on the 20th, from the rest camp, where I had no duties but to write letters, listen to the wind in the palm trees, swim, read westerns and murder mysteries, drink beer, shoot the breeze, watch movies, and engage in self-analysis. The letter ends with an insight that I wish I could have had at the beginning of my naval career, instead of at the finish. Except for a few sentences, this is the entire letter:

"It's early yet, about nine in the morning. We've had breakfast—real eggs, soft-boiled! The food around here is a welcome change from the "C" rations at Yontan. Boy, do I hate dehydrated food!

"I think I'll go for a swim this morning. I wish that it could be warm yet when I get home, but there'll probably be snow on the ground. It would be swell to go swimming at Lake Michigan or Lake of the Woods.

"Dad, have you ever read Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*? I read *The Haunted Bookshop* by Christopher Morley recently, and he speaks highly of it in that book. Another one he praises is *The House of Cobwebs* by George Gissing, and another is Dickens' *Christmas Stories*. I've never read these books, and intend to when I come home. One of the things that is so disagreeable about overseas life, is the fact that there are no bookstores here. The libraries are stocked with the usual run-of-the-mill books—popular novels which the run-of-the-mill person seems to enjoy.

"Have you ever read *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* by ? I can't even find out who wrote it! Morley reccommends it as a good book to read in order to learn what the real meaning of suffering and misery is. Morley's novel revolves about the theft of Carlyle's Oliver Cromwell from a bookshop. Ever read that? Jim might be interested in a book on modern math I read recently—*The Education of T. C. Mits,* by Gray and Lieber. T. C. Mits are the initials for The Celebrated Man in the Street. The book is very good—even makes me want to learn more math. I think I'd like to start at the beginning with Euclid and work up through Descartes to Einstein. Then I want to learn physics thoroughly. I'm ashamed of myself for doing so poorly in it at N.D. Maritain says the natural order of knowledge is to study math first, physics next, and finally philosophy. Gray and Lieber, in their book, make the mistake of considering the philosophy of mathematics a complete philosophy in itself, whereas it provides the means to the study of metaphysics by giving us logic. Mathematics works up to metaphysics, not the reverse as they say.

"I am tired of drinking beer, so I think I'll stick to cokes until I come home. I'm no drinker, I've discovered. My stomach rejects liquor despite whatever liking I may have for it. I can't drink whisky at all; even the smell of it makes me shudder! Maybe when I'm a civilian again and my stomach is in better shape, I'll be able to drink a little. To me, drinking is one of the enjoyments of life (rather, one of the pleasures)—to increase the attraction of living. Moderation is the key to this attraction.

"You know, I have such strange ideas on ethics sometimes. I think that I have grown up too much alone. I am a very solitary person. I have tried to change, but it seems that I have an unalterable nature. I have never had more than two or three close friends, and don't want any more. Being such a recluse has very distinct disadvantages. My opinions are unusual and very often wrong, as I form them without discussing them with anyone else. . . . I have no criterion to go by. Guess I need some long discussions with you, Dad."

I do not remember the exact date when my crew left Guam to fly back to the States, but it had to have been only one or two days after that final letter home, perhaps 22 September. The flight to the States covered a number of days and involved three or four hops, including several days on Oahu (in a jewelry shop in Honolulu, I spent $35, a substantial part of my savings, to buy Pat an engagement ring). I am not sure of the exact dates of our flights, except that we flew one of the legs, probably the last one when we were only a few hours from San Francisco, our radioman, Hub Baskin, happened to tune in the Notre Dame game and called me over to listen to it. Finally we arrived at Oakland, California, landing at Naval Air Station Alameda. It was thrilling to see the Golden Gate Bridge as our plane crossed San Francisco Bay. After some days there, I took the train from Alameda to Chicago—I think the cost was about $60 for a sleeper, one way, which I had to pay myself.

My thirty-day leave plus four days travel time began on 11 October. In those thirty days, I managed to completely transform myself to a civilian again. However, since I still lacked the requisite number of discharge points, I was supposed to report on 14 November to the Naval Reserve Armory at Navy Pier, Chicago, for temporary duty and further assignment, but a few days before then, I fell sick with the flu and was put into the infirmary at Notre Dame (under Naval orders) for about a week. When I was released, I reported to Navy Pier, but every evening took the South Shore train to South Bend for a date with Pat, returning to Chicago on the last train, then sleeping in an all-night movie (Navy Pier was locked up at night until about seven in the morning), and getting further sleep in a bunk at the Pier.

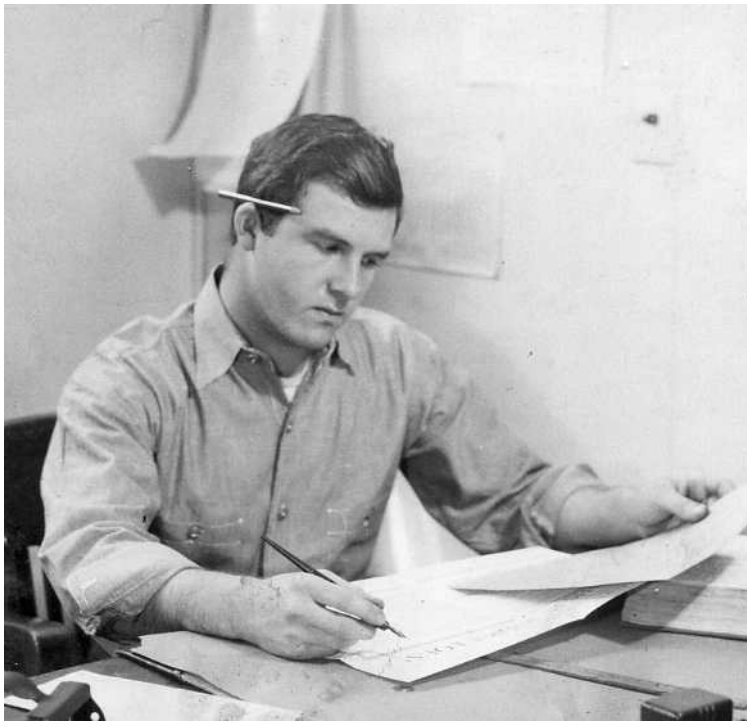
Finally, on 30 November I left Chicago by train to report on 14 December for duty at Whidbey Island, Washington. After about ten unpleasant days there—it was a hundred miles north of Seattle, cold and wet—I was sent to the Naval Training Station at Farragut, Idaho, up in the Idaho panhandle, between Washington and Montana, too far inland from the Pacific. As I learned later, Farragut had been the second-largest naval training station in the world (Great Lakes was the largest), and during the war the Navy personnel there made Farragut the largest city in Idaho. The Station, which was very large, was located at the southern tip of Lake Pend Oreille, the beauty of which did not impress me at the time. I did not want to be there, so Farragut at first dumbfounded and angered me. It seemed bleak and unattractive, and nothing was organized or made much sense. Was this how my naval career would wind down?

Eugene "Doc" Wilder at Farragut with air gunner insignia

I let it all out to my folks in a letter of 14 December: "I suppose Patty called you and told you how much I don't like this place. I am quite sure now that I will be here for a long time, because today we were checked into the base and on the slip was: "for duty." There are several jobs that they can give us—M.A.A. (master at arms—in charge of a barracks), Shore Patrol, or guard duty. I guess we'll be told Monday." As always, the place was overflowing with wild rumors, and foolishly I believed some of them. "This station is the strictest one I've ever been stationed at," I wrote. "It is so strict that it is laughable—there's no purpose in it. What reason can there be to be so oppressive toward men who have been overseas and are waiting for discharge. Imagine—if a man is caught smoking while walking the mile to the mess hall, he is subject to a court martial! And still sillier—if one is caught with his hat on the back of his head, all his hair is cut off and he is sent to "boot camp." Do they think

they'll make good civilians out of us by using such extreme methods?" These "penalties" turned out to be fabrications.

But within a few days I ran into Eugene Wilder, my mate and good friend from Crew 15, and I cheered up mightily. Then we found that Mike Scully, from VPB-109's Crew 17 (Dallas Vickers' crew), had also been assigned to Farragut. In civilian life, Mike had been a printer, and now he had been put in charge of the offset printing department of the base's Print Shop. Mike told us that he needed help. Formerly a boot camp, Farragut was still in active operation and needed a lot of printing done—the paperwork—letterheads, announcements, newsletters, etc.—which seem to be the lifeblood of all institutions.



Mike Scully editing copy in his print shop office at Farragut

Meanwhile, I had been assigned to the Seaman Guard and had to wear an armband with "SP" (Shore Patrol) on it. My job was to check ID's at the gate, keep order, and do whatever odd jobs I was told to do by the First Lieutenant. It was miserable duty. Mike Scully was working on getting Doc Wilder and me transferred to the Print Shop. On Christmas Eve, I wrote that I was feeling better mentally. "I've been paid, received three of your letters and Fr. Ed's card, and got a Christmas gift from the Welfare Dept of a certificate for one dollar in trade at ship's service. I got quite a bit with the dollar: five cigars, soap, toothpaste, three Hershey bars, a pair of black silk sox, two boxes of Kleenex. Quite a haul. eh!" And I had to have a bitter comment on the Season: "I saw a newsreel lately which has burned me up quite a bit. It showed the Americans smashing the Jap's scientific equipment. Have we the right to do that? There's so darn much inhumanity going on in the world, that it is sometimes hard to believe that we are humans. In the Mass there is a part which says: 'Let us enter into His divinity Who deigned to partake of our humanity.' To think that two thousand years ago God became a new-born baby in order to bring His divinity to our humanity! That will always remain—that divinity—come wars, atomic bombs, and even Farraguts!"

When I told Mike Scully that I was not entirely ignorant about the craft of printing (my knowledge was limited, however, to the ability to set type—no more) and also

that I was an amateur photographer and photographic processor, he convinced the First Lieutenant to let me handle the photographic end of the offset-printing department. Mike also managed to get Doc Wilder assigned to the Print Shop to operate the presses. So instead of remaining the First Lieutenant's unloved Seaman Guard stooge, I would be able to work at an avocation that I enjoyed and also associate with two convivial, good-natured companions. What great, good fortune that was for me—for the three of us!

We were to start at the Print Shop on 2 January, but then we had a further lucky break. We found that we were each eligible for a ten-day leave plus travel time, and the three of us were given the leaves at the same time, since we were to work together. We left Farragut on 10 January—Mike Scully and I traveled together on the train as far as South Bend, from where he continued to Massachusetts. We got back to Spokane on the 27th, so it was not until the next day that we began formally to work at the Print Shop.

For the remaining months of our hitches, until each of us got orders to take the train to our respective enlistment stations to be formally discharged, we stuck together, Mike Scully from Springfield, Massachusetts, Eugene Wilder from Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and Tom Wack from South Bend, Indiana. Each of us back home had steady girl friends to whom we were more or less engaged. We worked together at the printing jobs the First Lieutenant's office sent us to do, but the work was more like sharing in an absorbing and time-defeating hobby. There were other seamen like ourselves at the Print Shop, and they made good associates, too. Besides Mike and a few others, there were some genuine printers there, German prisoners of war, and some of them knew English and were friendly. The prisoner of war camp at Farragut was contiguous with the base, but separate from it, and supposedly housed about 700 Germans and Austrians, many of whom worked at the Naval Station. Mike, Doc, and I ate together, slept in the same barracks, and took liberty together. There were times when our work at the Print Shop seemed more like liberty than work, and we even skipped meals because of some project or other that held our interest.

My brother Jim had joined the Navy and was now in Cleveland, doing clerical work for the Navy's Bureau of Supplies and Documents. He was not happy. Early in January he had written me to lament his assignment. "Does the ruptured duck at the top of the page infuriate you or give you hope? It means absolutely nothing to me as I'm chained to this post for life. You sure as hell should be out in a few months tho, from what all the guys say; even before the points pan out. Incidentally I met Jack Sheehan taking the N.Y. train where he's shipping out again after having been to England once before. I would have given a lot to tell him I was in radar or CAC or something besides <u>filing</u>. He's quite a salt now, and only been in 5 or 6 mo. — Yesterday was my 90 days so I have 1 year + 3 mo. coming (I guess) in college. Time runs."

Time was running out for us as well. We were given a lot of liberty. Sometimes we went for a day or two to Spokane, Washington, about fifty-five miles on the bus, visiting its USO and restaurants and churches and seeing the sights. Often liberty took us on winter hikes through the unspoiled Couer d'Alene National Forest. Farragut was located in a grand area that was still relatively unspoiled by factories and housing developments. The food at the base was not bad, but we could also take a bus to a nearby small town—I think it was called Athol—which had a restaurant that featured a delicious, large steak and baked potato for a dollar—beer was extra! So my career as ordinary seaman was coming to a close on an idyllic note

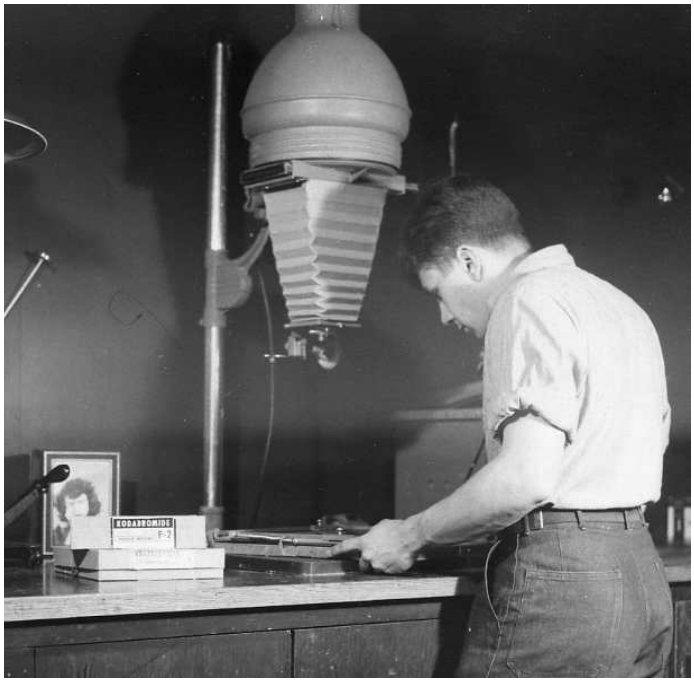
Doc Wilder was scheduled to be discharged on first of March, so he spent some time in Spokane buying civilian clothes. On 9 February, our boss, the First Lieutenant, reminded us that we were still his minions. He ordered Mike, Doc, and me to go to the skeet range and work there for him so that he and his fellow officers could do some shooting. "Of course, we could refuse," I wrote, "but he could make it hot for us. On those grounds, he could make us go to his home and cut his lawn! Of all things—to have to work for the officers' recreation! To me, that is certainly unfair and unnecessary administration, and cruel discipline that allows an officer to take such advantage of the men under his command. Believe me, if I'm ever in a position to make it hard on a former officer, it will be a pleasure for me to do it! The Navy is certainly a bad place to learn charity." The irony did not escape me that it had been skeet shooting that had taught me how to shoot enemy planes down, and now that I had returned from combat, I was being made to work on the skeet range for the pleasure of the guys I still had to salute every time I passed them.

Otherwise, things were going well. "I've been remarkably free of colds this winter," I wrote on 25 February, "and even my stomach ailments are few and short-lived. I eat pork every time we have it and suffer nothing from it. It is the unsuspected, simple foods that cause my stomach to revolt, such a fruit-juices, a hot-dog, a doughnut, and so on. Am still working a lot down at the shop, and have little time for reading. I am studying, a chapter at a time, a very technical book called "Photography, Its Science and Practice." I have read it once through, and am now "devouring" it, making notes as I go. I have started a really excellent book by a French aviator, St. d'Exupery. It is called "Wind, Sand and Stars," and in my estimation is a work of art. Jim ought to enjoy it."

Our threesome was being broken up, as I wrote on 5 March. "Doc is leaving for New Orleans tomorrow—lucky guy! All the fellows I know are getting points for the months they spent in the states with an FPO address, so I do stand a chance of being discharged the first of April. You folks will have to do some heavy praying that I do, but I don't know if I'm worth it! Doc is going to be married on Easter Sunday, and will spend his honeymoon in New Orleans. He has five weeks of college to go before he gets his degree. Doesn't compare with my three years! However, he's in

the same boat I'm in in respect to what he's going to do after college." Actually, I was thinking of going into college teaching, but I was still unsure that I wanted a career in the academic world. The only thing I knew for certain was that I wanted to get out of the Navy and be married in August. I complained that "This Navy life becomes more unbearable every day. I wonder how I have been able to stand it as long as I have. It really amazes me that so many men sign over for three or four years—can't understand it! I'm counting the minutes until I get to 1025 St. Vincent."

I wrote my last letter as a seaman on 24 March. I was still enjoying the darkroom work at the Print Shop. "We ate dinner right after Mass today, and are now down at the shop. The meal was good—T-bone steak and french-fries. It seems that we spend most of our time down here, even to the eating of a lot of our meals. Our friends who work in the chow hall manage to get us the necessary food in return for prints and stationery, and we make out all right. Last night, for example, we had a delicious dinner of steak and onions, complete to a cigar!



Tom Wack in the Print Shop darkroom

"Yes, I am thinking seriously of getting married in August, but at times, would drop the whole thing willingly. The whole business of marriage and responsibility terrifies me to a certain degree. I am convinced that I can make an excellent go of married life while at college, but my hesitancy at choosing a college major, and my present vague attitude toward life itself isn't the best frame of mind with which to be married. Perhaps it's only that I need to be reconverted, like the factories, to a sane, normal way of living again."

On that note, four days later, I took the train for Chicago to be discharged. For me, Farragut had been a kind of Limbo where I spent time pleasantly and usefully while, however, continuing to yearn for home and the freedom of civilian life. Limbo is perhaps not the right word, but Purgatory is—the way theologians sometimes describe Purgatory, as a place of waiting, a happy place, because heaven is just around the corner and you can get glimpses of it and hear the celebrating going on there, but a place of frustrated waiting, nevertheless.

I was discharged from the United States Naval Reserve at Great Lakes, Illinois, on 1 April 1946. On my last day as a U.S. sailor, I and all the other who were being discharged that day were brought into a large room, where we were seated, while a Navy officer explained to us the benefits and privileges of re-enlistment in the U.S. Navy. He touted the good pay, the reliable meals, the benefits, the thrill of seeing the world, the honor of being a member of the peacetime Navy of a nation that had defeated Germany and Japan. He told us how easy it would be to sign up. He asked which of us were interested. Not a hand went up.

James Fahey of the *Montpelier* had been subjected to the same kind of sales pitch the preceding September. He said he didn't think anyone signed on for another hitch and prophesied that the Navy may get a lot of recruits, but only from the young men who had spent most of their time in the States. (Fahey)

What did I do back in South Bend on April 2nd, the day following my discharge? Probably I took Pat to the movies. Maybe it was even to see one of John Wayne's characterizations of the Pacific War. The 1940's was the great decade of the movies. Wherever they were stationed, American servicemen wanted to be entertained by movies, and most bases and stations provided them, the movie theaters being set up in tents, airplane hangers, halls, and out in the open, and many bases were able to provide a movie every night, sometimes even the current films. However, when 109 was based on Iwo Jima and Okinawa, there were no movies, so they were a special treat when we were stationed at Tinian and at the rest camp on Guam.

The movie theater on Guam was outdoors, of course. We sat on bleachers in an open area near the beach. I have a memory, still vivid after nearly sixty years, of one of the last nights we were there on Guam (another glimpse of heaven), watching a movie. It was one of those balmy, clear September nights, and the movie we were watching seemed especially appropriate to the time and setting. As I recall, the film was one of the Bing Crosby – Dorothy Lamour – Bob Hope "Road" movies. I am not sure that it was *The Road to Singapore,* but if it was, it makes the story even better. I do know that as a movie it had a flimsy plot, yet was full of the exotic sights and sounds of the Orient, designed to transport the viewer to the tropics.

At some point in the movie, however, my interest lagged, and I started looking around. Turning around to look behind me, what did I see but a full, yellow moon hanging over the Pacific, its light creating a golden path right up to the white sands of the beach behind the bleachers where we sat. It was an entrancing vision. I got down from the bleachers and went to sit on the beach, Dorothy Lamour and her sarong forgotten. This was the Pacific Ocean, the object of my desire—what I had been reading about and dreaming of for years. There had been no war. There had been no threat. I had realized my dream, and here I was, on a tropical island in the Far East in the beautiful Pacific.

VII

The Lee Shore

June 2005

"Know ye now, Bulkington? Glimpses do ye seem to see of that mortally intolerable truth; that all deep, earnest thinking is but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of the sea; while the wildest winds of heaven and earth conspire to cast her on the treacherous, slavish shore?"

—Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*

Something that stuck with me through the months of combat in the Western Pacific was a short selection from Cardinal Newman's *Idea of a University*—it was part of Discourse VI, "Knowledge Viewed in Relation to Learning." It had caught my attention in Al Ryan's composition class at Notre Dame in the summer of 1943. In the passage, Newman says that seafaring men, even though they might visit every land in the world, can still end up having gained no enlargement of mind at all from their travels. Certainly, as a freshman in the Navy's V-12, I was a kind of seafarer myself and was preparing to embark for foreign lands, and that was reason enough for Newman's caution to be imprinted on my mind. But I doubt that I had any idea at that time how profoundly the war would be for me a passage to adulthood, something I began being aware of only after many years had passed. For when the war ended, my reactions to it had amounted to little more than a jumble of ideas, feelings, and impressions. It was not until my experience of living in the world had brought me into contact with some of the consequences of the war—serious encounters with reality—that I began to see what it was that I had learned from it.

Seafaring men learn to be wary of the perils of a lee shore, that part of the land toward which the wind is blowing. It looks safe, but it is deadly.

After the war, the encounters I had with life as a parent, a teacher, a citizen were both indirect and first-hand. They came through my reading, my college courses, and in the midst of life, living alongside and involved in further terrible wars, blatant injustices, political campaigns, the exposure of great crimes of fraud and deceit, weathering catastrophes of the spirit, honoring magnanimous sacrifices, rejoicing in morally courageous actions. Now, sixty years after World War Two, I hope I can explain better what I learned from my experience of the war itself. Much of what I am now and what I believe today about the world of political leadership, of riches and poverty, of nation-building and the brotherhood of humans, of power and weakness—and of the

relationship of all this to the kingdom of God—began to take form during that 1943-1946 period of my life.

All in all, the war as I experienced it for four months in the Western Pacific was not too scary. It was scarier for some of the other crews in the Squadron, for there was nothing trivial about the deaths of the fourteen VPB-109 men killed in action—even one such death is a severe loss—or about those who were wounded. Still, we in 109 were fortunate by comparison with other squadrons and certainly by comparison with a lot of other military outfits throughout the forty-four months of the War. Certainly the war we were engaged in was not as mortally dangerous as that fought by the twenty-year-old doughboys at the Battle of the Bulge or by the sailors on the "jeep carrier" USS *Gambier Bay* at the battle off Samar in the Philippines. No survivor of a field of slaughter can ever emerge unmarred, but the great majority of us in the armed services from 1941 through 1945 escaped such killing fields and survived the war without physical harm and with not too much mental damage.

Yet 109's war was not unremarkable. And once it had ended, it provided much on which to reflect. However, we are the very ones who, having reached the safety of the lee shore, might fail to see its treacherous, slavish character. We are the ones who might be seduced by the illusion that war works. We are the ones who might be deluded into thinking that warfare is in any way honorable or noble.

During my three years in the Navy, I did not give orders, I took them, and not always cheerfully. The only leadership I exerted was through whatever influence my words and behavior may have had on the people I associated with, most of whom were just as subject to being ordered about as I was. We enlisted men, really civilians in uniform, resented military authority and bitched about it constantly, especially as it involved jumping to obey the often petty demands of the chief petty officers immediately over us when we were on the base and not in on patrols in the air. Also we complained bitterly and in disgust about *the powers that be*, the faceless, unidentifiable authorities that issued nonsensical, contradictory directions from the safety of their offices back in the States, bringing misery and uncertainty into our fragile existence. We were suspicious of all those had had control over our lives, except, perhaps, Roosevelt and Churchill, whom we could hardly blame for being what they were. Generally, however, we were dubious about leadership. Always it was leadership or the lack of leadership that made the difference in whether we youths lived or died, whether we lived in hope or in misery. Ever since those days I have been much concerned about the importance of leadership.

When VPB-109 was about to depart from Oahu for the Western Pacific and we in Crew 15 were stowing our gear in the belly of our plane, I did not pack the dozen or so "great books" that I had intended to master once we reached the combat zone. I had enough sense to realize that classics like *War and Peace, The Decline and Fall*

of the Roman Empire, and Moby-Dick were reading that was too heavy for the upper-deck turret of a Navy bomber. Instead, I packed a smaller number of lighter, less-monumental books, which later I supplemented with paperbacks from the Council on Books in Wartime. Such books were suited for reading up in the turret or while lying on a cot and fending off mosquitoes. But at least one of these lighter books turned out to be a classic in its own right—Myles Connolly's short novel, *Mr. Blue,* which was in a box of gifts that my father and mother had sent to me for Christmas in 1944, when I was still at San Diego.

Now long out of print, *Mr. Blue* is a fictional memoir of the last two years in the life of a misfit in this world, a young man who is, however, at home in God's universe, who is a loyal Bostonian pledged to "Lady Poverty," a mystic who wants to start a Secret Service for God. I was one of many youths to be swayed by J. Blue, "a gent who's so happy he's almost crazy." Blue once inherited two million dollars and as much as threw it all away, causing the reader to suspect, as the book's narrator says, that making money "was a ridiculous and nonsensical business." I know of one reader of the book—a young man from a wealthy family—who was so impressed with Blue's practice of the Beatitudes that his friends had to keep him from giving away all his money and possessions. Blue had the qualities of a true leader.

He lived on the roof of a thirty-story skyscraper and from there flew kites that were vivid in color against the perfect blue of the skies. Although he had—as in Nick Carroway's judgment of Jay Gatsby—"an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in another person"—he was not another Gatsby. Rather, he was an alter-Christ, with the intense consciousness that Christ had of his Father's love, but also with His joyous embrace of life. Blue was a city-dweller, but had he been a seaman, he would have agreed with the narrator of Melville's *Moby-Dick* in proclaiming "that mortally intolerable truth"—"that all deep, earnest thinking is but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of her sea." The shore seems to be inviting and seems to offer shelter and comfort—but it is not a safe harbor, but a *lee shore*, treacherous and slavish, and the gale will force your fragile ship onto its hidden rocks.

On his skyscraper roof, Blue flew a flag on a broomstick with the word *Courage* painted on it in red letters. "Today" (he wrote sarcastically in a letter) "we have written across a million pages and placards and billboards our slogans: Self-considerateness, Thrift, Safety first. We have about as much hunger for loveliness as a turtle. And about as much capacity for intense and varied living as a cabbage." Seekers of the truth, Blue suggested, should take care that they are not deceived by the false illumination of Chinese lanterns.

I wonder how Blue would have reacted to being drafted had he been a youth in 1942 or 1943. Probably he would have signed up and gone through basic training

without a murmur, but then, when he was sent into battle, he would have discarded his rifle and, like St. Martin, walked up to the enemy lines unarmed, accompanied perhaps by a St. Martin's goose, to make the story more vivid, but also by a throng of pacifist disciples.

I must have read Blue's tale three or four times while the squadron was in the Western Pacific. One of the more famous books it had replaced in my luggage was Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*, also a story about leadership. *Moby-Dick* is America's foremost novel, one of the world's supreme works of the imagination, and a book that would have been suited exactly to the Pacific war—in fact, its thrilling, concluding episode takes place somewhere on the "Japanese fishing ground" between Japan and Iwo Jima, the very area where my squadron frequently patrolled. A hundred years before World War Two, a decade before he wrote the book, Melville himself had hunted whales in that very area as a seaman on the whaler *Acushnet*.

But I did not read *Moby-Dick* until I was a graduate student, five years after the war. Probably that was a better time for it, since by 1950 enough years had gone by for me to transform my generation's wartime chasing of evil-doers into Melville's magnificent tale. *Moby-Dick* is Pacific-deep, a many-stranded story, even though some might read it as straightforward adventure or as symbolic, gothic fiction, a madman's obsession with darkness, or even as comic history of the American whale fishery—after all, it is a book that, when it appeared in 1851, would have been read by the light of a whale-oil lamp. Everyone knows the plot. Ishmael, the narrator, signs articles for a three-year whaling voyage on the *Pequod*, which is owned and captained by pacifist Quakers, but only after the whaler sails from Nantucket does he learn that the "prime but private purpose" of Ahab, the ship's mysterious captain, is not to render whale oil, but to hunt and kill Moby Dick, the fabled albino sperm whale that had "reaped away" his leg. Ahab seduces the crew to his obsession and binds the men to himself with the vow, "God hunt us all if we do not hunt Moby Dick to his death!" It is a hunt that ends with the sinking of the *Pequod* and the death of every man on it but Ishmael.

But there is more to the story than that. For one thing, it is profoundly moral and religious, and its religious intent appears early, when the New Bedford pastor, Father Mapple, gives a dramatic and powerful sermon on the prophet Jonah—he who was swallowed by a whale—to the seafaring folk at the Whaleman's Chapel. "But *what* is the lesson that the book of Jonah teaches?" Father Mapple asks. "Shipmates, it is a two-stranded lesson; a lesson to us all as sinful men, and a lesson to me as a pilot of the living God." First, it is the lesson that Jonah sinned by wilfully disobeying the command of God, which he found a hard command. "And if we obey God, we must disobey ourselves; and it is in this disobeying ourselves, wherein the hardness of obeying God consists." But that "other and more awful lesson" is, as Father Mapple humbly acknowledges, what "Jonah teaches to *me*, as a pilot of the living God."

"And what was that, shipmates? To preach the Truth to the face of Falsehood! That was it!"

As the story of the *Pequod's* blasphemous hunt for the white whale unfolds, it becomes evident that the sermon applies to all on board the whaler. All, especially Ahab, are guilty of Jonah's sin of disobedience. Not only have the seamen themselves borne false witness—broken faith with the *Pequod*'s owners, with whom they had contracted to bring whale oil back to Nantucket— but, worse, they have pledged their allegiance to the god of vengeance and fire in following Ahab. As the ship's first mate, Starbuck, admits, "I disobey my God in obeying him."

The other lesson, although Father Mapple humbly refers it to himself as a leader of men, as a pilot of the living God, has to be identified with Ahab's utter failure of leadership, a deliberate failing and a great sin, since as captain of the ship, Ahab is "absolute dictator" over his world and responsible for the lives and moral welfare of all the crew. From captain of a whaling enterprise and leader of a shipful of men, he becomes a commodore over zealots, justifying his actions by appealing to predestination and claiming divine favor: "I am the Fates' lieutenant; I act under orders." Instead of preaching the Truth to the face of falsehood, Ahab succumbs to his insane delusion that all evil is "visibly personified" in the white whale and abandons his responsibility as a pilot. Ahab has looked too long into the face of fire and has lost his moral bearings.

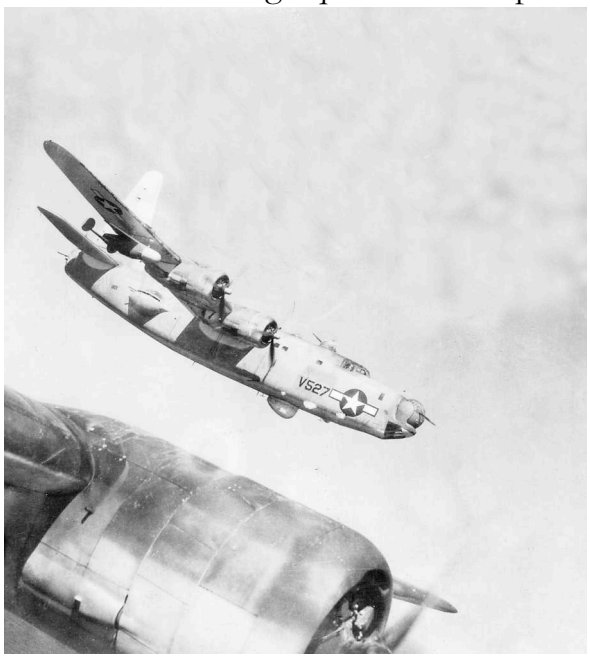
In the outcome, both of Father Mapple's homiletic strands are woven into one. A corrupt leader needs the connivance of his followers. As Melville's aghast narrator saw the situation, "the rushing *Pequod*, freighted with savages, and laden with fire, and burning a corpse, and plunging into that blackness of darkness, seemed the material counterpart of her monomaniac commander's soul." All on the *Pequod* perish except for Ishmael—and the whale. Ishmael had to escape to tell us the story, of course, but his escape is more than novelistic stratagem—it is also a rebirth, even though Ishmael, too, had given himself up to "the fiery hunt." But the instruments of his salvation are, first, the "Christian kindness" of the pagan harpooner, Queequeg, and, then, when Ishmael is all that is left of the ship and its crew, floating on the surface of "the great shroud of the sea," Queequeg's coffin with its pagan carvings becomes Ishmael's life buoy until he taken onboard another whaler, searching for its own orphans.

Only Ishmael survives. Ahab, for all his magnetism and seemingly heroic stature, has through his corrupted leadership brought the whole world of the *Pequod*—not to mention his own warped aim of warring with his concept of universal evil—to death and destruction and nothingness. Did Melville have anyone specific in mind when he created the character of Ahab? Possibly he knew or heard of some monomaniacal sea captain whose obsession with some insane ideology had led to the destruction of his

ship and his crew. It is not impossible that he modeled Ahab on some political ideologue of his day, someone like James K. Polk, the president who seduced the American people into supporting America's first war of aggression, the Mexican War of 1846-47. In those years, Melville was writing novels based on his sea adventures and publishing them with some help from his brother, Gansevoort Melville, whom President Polk had rewarded, for his help in Polk's campaign, with an appointment as Secretary of the American Legation in London.

What happened to the crew of the *Pequod* in Melville's novel and to the more than thirteen thousand young Americans in Mexico, not to mention the Mexicans themselves, is what happens in wars. With Hitler and Mussolini and Tojo, it happened in World War Two and created a legacy of shame that even we emerged from with dirty hands. We honor the courage and sacrifice and genuine charity that motivated America in that war, but we should never forget the horrors—the horrors that continually tell us that war is insane and inhuman to start with.

Patrol Bombing Squadron 109 spent four months in actual combat, carrying out its assigned mission of bombing Japanese ships and boats of all sizes, as well as land installations, such as radar towers. Obviously such a mission involved the killing of the Japanese sailors and other seaman on the ships we attacked. Our pilot would fly the plane along the axis of the target ship at a little above masthead height and trigger the bomb drop, then circle back so that the gunners could strafe the ship from both sides and finish it off. Our orders were to sink all the ships, large and small, since even sail-powered fishing vessels could ferry troops and supplies from the mainland to Japan. In reality, we had to suspect even small boats manned by one or two fishermen. We were told that the Japanese were using all manner of craft, including innocent-looking fisherman's sailboats, to carry provisions and personnel to the mother country. It seems likely, however, that many of these small craft were genuine fishing vessels, manned not by sailors, but by innocent, probably elderly fishermen eking out a narrow living. Who would know which was which?



Whoever was on board these targets, they were all but defenseless, and once we came at them out of the sky with a dozen, blazing 50-caliber machine guns, it is questionable if any of them could escape alive or without serious injury, especially those on board the small vessels and river boats that we encountered. At the time, it both-

ered me that probably we often killed civilians who were only fishing for their livelihood. It still bothers me. Who is innocent in such a conflict? We all lost our moral innocence early in that war.

I think today about the anonymous fishermen on the small sailing vessels we bombed and strafed, and I remember the stories from squadron members who had been out before and claimed to have deliberately strafed helpless victims of such bombings. I think of those dead Japanese suicide pilots and the families that loved them. I know that these few encounters with death that I experienced were only a miniscule part of the almost infinite killings of humans throughout Europe and the Pacific: Americans, British, Germans, French, Filipinos, Italians, Dutch, Canadians, Belgians, Polish, Australians, and more—people from almost every Western and Asiatic nation.

During the war in the Pacific, as our forces drove the Japanese back, island by island, to the Japanese Islands themselves, many populations of innocent, uninvolved islanders were caught in the middle—caught, regretfully but necessarily. Many were killed. It galls one to the bone (as Donald Pearce says about the cathedrals of Europe) that such deaths should be called "necessary." Today we hide behind the horror of such killings by saying they are merely "collateral damage."

Except on the sterile Iwo Jima, there were native populations on all the islands where VPB-109 was based, but I do not recall ever being told that we should be concerned about these people. Of course, we regarded the Filipinos as all but Americans, even if those we encountered on Palawan were not English speaking, and the natives of Tinian and Guam also had strong ties to the United States. Okinawa, on the other hand, was different. The ties between America and Okinawa were few—only Commodore Perry's visit to the island in 1853 and some migration in the twentieth century of Okinawans to Hawaii to work on the sugar cane farms. Something I was ignorant of until decades after the war was that there was a particular scandal involved in American's relationship with Okinawa. It occurred during and as a consequence of the battle for Okinawa.

The people of Okinawa were not Japanese, but for centuries they had lived under Japanese rule. To most Americans, they were even more alien than the Japanese. VPB-109 spent more than ten weeks on Okinawa, the first part of our stay occurring right in the middle period of the battle for the island. But it was wartime, and we never got to know much more about the Okinawans and their culture than what we picked up by seeing them in the vicinity of the airfield. In our ignorance, we minimized them by calling them "gooks." The Squadron's published history devotes several murky pages to photographs of "gook" tombs and caves, "gook" women, "gooks" bartering and doing laundry, Squadron personnel posing with skulls from the

tombs. The Japanese had their own denigrating term for the Okinawans—"little brown monkeys."

Marine John Taussig was part of the U.S. invading forces in April 1945. He did not see the Okinawan people under the best of circumstances, and he and his fellow Marines had no idea, I would surmise, of the strictures under which they were forced to live, first by the Japanese, and then by the horrendous battle between the Americans and the Japanese. "The people have no decency or morals," Taussig stated in his letter to his parents. "Their houses are filthy, as are their human bodies. There are abundant flies, mosquitoes, lice, fleas, ticks and other insects in their houses. They are made out of straw with mats strewn all over, and rice stored away. Malaria, cat fever, typhus, elephantiasis, dengue fever and rare diseases are imminent on 'the rock.' Rats the size of tom-cats, snakes that are poisonous, frogs, crickets, bugs, bores and all forms of live stock. The women have no decency and have children at the age of twelve or younger, and every nine months there-after 'til they are just worn out. The women do all the work and the men relax. Money seems nothing to them, but food everything." (Taussig)

The truth about the Okinawan people was, however, far different from what we or John Taussiug imagined. George Feifer, author of *The Battle of Okinawa, The Blood and the Bomb*, says that before the war, Asians praised Okinawa as "The Land of Constant Courtesy." The battle for control of the island was the most stupendous and the bloodiest in the entire Pacific War, but it was the Okinawans themselves who numbered the highest among the victims. "The instruments of that slaughter," Feifer says, "were Japanese cruelty to the people they claimed to be protecting and indiscriminate American munitions."

Before the American invasion of the island, Okinawa's population was half a million people. The "conventional" figure of 150,000 Okinawan deaths during the battle between the U.S. and Japan—almost a third of the island's entire population—has to be an estimate, "because virtually every structure of any significance was obliterated, including those housing population records." Far from being the primitive and even depraved people that many American military men considered them to be, "they lived in an exceptionally civilized and playful culture, developed during a long history of tranquil farming and trading, for centuries having been known as the 'Venetians of the East.'" (Feifer, "The Rape of Okinawa")

Feifer adds, in another article, that "if innocence can be quantified, they were even more innocent than Hiroshima's residents. Profoundly antimilitaristic, Okinawans were virtually the opposites of the Japanese and their long infatuation with the martial arts and their long history of racial intolerance. The Okinawans kept no arms whatever for hundreds of years before Japan swallowed them in 1879. ("The Okinawa Nightmare, *New York Review of Books*, vol. 49, 17 Jan 2002)

That was the situation up to the end of the war in August 1945. However, the scandal of Okinawa continued, for after the war the United States seized land from Okinawa in order to build military bases, much of this land enclosing villages and grave sites, forcing the people from their own homes and preventing them from celebrating their religious ceremonies involving their ancestral tombs.

It was not until after World War Two that I began to question seriously the justice and morality of war. I went into the Navy with the notion that military life, like war itself, was noble and selfless and brought out the best in men. It was my curiosity about the Okinawan people, as well as my first-hand knowledge of how black sailors were discriminated against in the Navy, that led me to question my military values.

I have learned since my wartime years that war is as outmoded and as evil as slavery. Slavery persisted for centuries, undergirded by religious and economic justifications, until these reasons were exposed as hollow and barbaric. Just as the abolitionists persisted until slavery was abolished, so the movement to abolish war must persist until war too is abolished. The science of warfare continues to develop with ever more lethal weapons of mass destruction. "Smart" bombs add precision to bombing today (though many innocents are still killed), but they should not lull us into thereby accepting war and its arsenal of death, including the chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons that place civilization itself at risk.

AS I see it, we are obligated to work for the movement to prevent war from happening. But instead of taking the lead in this movement, the U.S. currently is using its great military and economic power to assert preventive and first-strike policies that attack the very heart of the concept of multilateral treaties and of international laws aimed at ridding the world of the true axis of evil: hunger, poverty, disease, and illiteracy—the evil out of which wars grow. Building a world where the earth's resources are used for life instead of death is a goal truly worth working for.

Ethicists from many faiths and from various moral backgrounds consider war to be a crime. But they do not ask, "When is war justified?" Their question is, "Are there any instances at all when war is not murder?" They see war not only as a license to kill, but as a necessity to commit what would otherwise be murder.

It might seem that we have learned nothing at all from *Mein Kampf*, from the atrocities of the Third Reich and the Empire of Japan, from the Holocaust, from the bombing of London, from the firebombing of Dresden, from the Battle of the Bulge, from Hiroshima. Today, sixty years after the end of World War Two, a war which harvested fifty million deaths, many of them civilians, our country is again at war, our second war of aggression, a war started by a president who has never experienced military combat, a "preventive war," based on a pretext without merit. Once the pretext was proved empty, it was exchanged for a better one, but that made no difference, for it seemed that from the first the bulk of the American public did not require any more

justification for a war than a little presidential rhetoric and flag waving and the assumption that God wills us to wage wars and favors us over all other nations. It makes no difference, either, that to date over 1,600 Americans have been killed in this senseless war and that tens of thousands of the "enemy" nation, mostly civilians, have fallen victim to it—even though there are some who actually believe we have conquered this country, Iraq, and are still occupying it for the sole purpose of liberating these people. These casualties go unacknowledged, however, by a president who does not suffer doubt, or the truth, and who almost daily lays claim to compassion and to respecting the culture of life—a president who, like Ahab, has lived too long in the light of artificial fires and has ignored his responsibility to preach the truth to the face of falsehood.

It would be to despair, were it not for the great number of Americans who have kept their heads, often at the risk of being called unpatriotic. It would seem that we have learned some valuable lessons after all, as can be seen from the opposition to the war and to the president's rationalizations expressed by religious leaders, governments of nations, church leaders, thinking people everywhere—as well as by many, many Americans.

World War Two was such an overwhelming catastrophe, such a slough of despond in the long development of human nature, that after it had ended, it was inconceivable that things could go any way but up. Still, for the rest of the century, the world struggled at the mercy of a frightening arms race, technical achievement outpaced moral consideration, and America was caught up in one miserable and unnecessary war after another. Yet at the same time many marvelous things happened. Out of the 1930's and 1940's there emerged an amazing number of heroic figures, proving that there is light even in the worst of conditions.

I cannot end this reflection on World War Two without commenting on some of these persons, most of whom I became aware of only after the war—after the world had been given sufficient opportunity to reflect on the enormity of what the war had produced. These persons came mostly from the generation before mine. They were the men and women whose example helped shape my thinking and moral growth. They were, as I see them now, a few of the persons who awakened the moral consciousness of the twentieth century.. I think of them as *martyrs* in the original sense—*witnesses* to the faithfulness of God and to the love of neighbor—but some of them were also martyrs in the sense that their lives were taken from them because they were truly heroic and therefore a threat to evil men.

One could name many such persons. I am not thinking of heroic exploits in the air or on the battlefield (these have been honored), nor am I thinking even of the many truly heroic deeds of mercy and sacrifice done during the war by ordinary sol-

diers for other ordinary soldiers and for civilians. The martyrs I am celebrating are the men and women whose lives showed publicly that even in the midst of evil, noble deeds can be done and that the spirit can triumph.

After the war, as our eyes began to open to the raw horror of the Nazi concentration camps, we learned that in addition to the Nazi program of genocide against the European Jews, many thousands of non-Jews were imprisoned in the camps and many of them murdered there. A large number of them were priests—they had protected Jews, failed to give the Nazi salute, helped their parishioners avoid the draft, preached against the Nazi regime, and so on—priests who had realized in their lives that it was impossible to be faithful to Christ and loyal to Adolf Hitler at the same time. Once such priest, Père François Goldschmidt, a prisoner in Dachau for thirty-two months, published five books (*Elsässer und Lothringer in Dachau*, 1945-47) which recount the stories of Dachau prisoners from Alsace and Lorraine, clergy and laity, both those who died in the camp and those who survived it. (Some of those from Lorraine were my cousins from the large Wack relationship in France.)

The concentration camp at Auschwitz was even more infamous. It was not until 1971, when he was beatified by Pope John Paul II, that I first heard of the Franciscan priest Maximilian Mary Kolbe, who had been imprisoned at Auschwitz, Poland. Born Raymond Kolbe in 1894 in Poland, he was ordained a priest in 1918. In 1917, he had founded Militia Immaculate to combat religious apathy, establishing a Franciscan friary near Warsaw, which grew into a large center for evangelization. By 1939, when the Nazis invaded Poland, the friary was providing shelter to refugees, including Jews, and in May 1941, the Nazis arrested Kolbe and imprisoned him in Auschwitz.

That July, when one of the prisoners in Kolbe's bunker failed to appear for muster (the man was later found to have drowned in the latrine), the guards, assuming he had escaped, seized ten men from the bunker to be starved to death as examples to deter further escapes. Hearing one of these ten prisoners protesting that his family needed him, Kolbe stepped forward and offered to die in his place. The name of this fellow prisoner was Franciszek Gajowniczek. The guards were not particular—what they wanted was ten deaths. They accepted Kolbe, unaware they were playing into God's hands. After two weeks, six of the ten had died in the starvation bunker; the rest, Kolbe included, were murdered by being injected with carbolic acid.

In the spirit of Christ, Maximillian Kolbe had laid down his life for his friend. He was one of four million people put to death just at Auschwitz. In 1982, the Catholic Church declared him a saint—"the patron saint of our difficult century," as Pope John Paul II declared. What a privilege for the descendants of Franciszek Gajowniczek to thrive in the awareness that it was Maximillian Kolbe's martyrdom that gave them their lives! What beauty to be born from the filth of a Nazi death camp!

Another flower of Auschwitz was Edith Stein, also a native of Poland. As a Carmelite nun, Sister Benedicta of the Cross, she was murdered by the Nazis because her racial background was Jewish. Born in 1891 to Jewish parents, she grew up intellectually precocious, and as a teenager she considered herself an atheist, but she was a student and a scholar, and it was through her study of philosophy that that she turned to Christianity. An event which influenced her to become a Catholic was her discovery of the autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila, founder of the Carmelite Order. She sought to enter the Carmelites in Cologne, but was advised to wait, because of the opposition of her mother to Christianity—the religion of those who had oppressed the Jews.

By the time Hitler came to power, Edith Stein was well known in Germany in her academic field. She became a leader in the German Catholic women's movement, but despite having come to believe in and accept the Catholic faith, she also remained loyal to her Jewish background and sought to do what she could as a writer and speaker to counteract the anti-Semitism that festered in Germany.

Herself a philosopher and writer, she made it her career to write about women and women's vocations, while at the same time she felt drawn to the convent, in particular to the way of life of Teresa of Avila, the saint she most admired. In Cologne in 1933 she became a Carmelite nun, taking the name Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. In 1938, her convent, fearing that she would be taken by the Nazis as a Jew, sent her to neutral Holland, but in August 1942 the Nazis arrested her and other Catholic Jews and sent them to Auschwitz, where she was murdered in the gas chamber (executed with her was her sister, Rosa, a Third Order Carmelite).

My introduction to another martyr occurred in 1949, the year I graduated from Notre Dame. The reading list for senior English majors included the recently-published *The Seven Storey Mountain,* written by Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk in Kentucky. Having decided to give his life to God, Merton had entered the Trappist monastery of Our Lady of Gethsemani, in Kentucky, late in 1941, the year when Father Maximilian Kolbe had been murdered in Auchwitz. He had been twenty-six years old, but only three years a Catholic. With bachelor's and master's degrees from Columbia University, he had served a short stint as a college English teacher. As the nations were raging together in Europe and the Pacific, he began studying theology as a cloistered scholastic and novice. Yet at the same time he was not living in secluded ignorance of the growing horror of the inhumanity of the Nazi regime, and although he was entering into the vocation of a cloistered monk, he was encouraged by his superiors to write.

The Seven Storey Mountain was one of the most influential religious books of the century. Nearly twenty years after its publication in 1948, having written some thirty more books of devotion and reflection on social and political issues, he quoted,

with approval, Dietrich Bonhöffer's judgment of our time as a "time of confirmed liars who tell the truth in the interest of what they themselves are—liars. . . . a time of evil which is so evil that it can do good without prejudice to its own iniquity—it is no longer threatened by goodness."

Bonhöffer was writing in the context of the depravities of the Third Reich, of course, but Merton understood correctly that his frame of reference was more general than that. It was the West in the twentieth century, of which Auschwitz and Adolf Eichmann are the symbols—Auschwitz, the factory for eliminating what Hitler considered waste products, and Eichmann, hanged after the war as Hitler's manager for exterminating Jews—the personification of "the existential stink of moral death." "What judgment," Merton asked in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, "could add anything to the judgment already implied in the fact that a man who was by certain accepted standards quite honest, respectable, sane, and efficient could do the things he did without feeling that he was wrong? This judgment falls not on Eichmann alone, but on our whole society. What then is the significance of a special judgment pronounced on Eichmann by our society? This is the real question."

Hannah Arendt's 1963 book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* was based on the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem. Arendt's thesis was that people like Sichmann who carry out unspeakable crimes may not be crazy fanatics at all, but, rather, ordinary individuals who simply accept the premises of their condition and participate in any ongoing enterprise with the energy of good bureaucrats. They normalize the Unthinkable.

Merton's background was international. Born in France to an American mother and a New Zealand father and educated in France, England, and America, he grew to adulthood as an agnostic. But as a Catholic intellectual, he wanted to witness in his own person the bringing together of all believers, and a few years before his death, he wrote, "If I can unite in myself the thought and the devotion of Eastern and Western Christendom, the Greek and the Latin Fathers, the Russians with the Spanish mystics, I can prepare in myself the reunion of divided Christians." When he died, accidentally electrocuted from contacting the wiring to a fan, he was in Tibet, still working to further this motive of unification.

It was partially through reading Merton's books that I came to know of Dietrich Bonhöffer, the German Evangelical pastor and theologian who in 1945, at the age of 39, was executed by the Nazis. My first encounter with him was by means of a magazine article which included passages from some of the letters he wrote from the Nazi prison in Berlin. Having a Lutheran son-in-law was another incentive for me to get close to Bonhöffer, whose life and character is dramatic witness to the living faith of the German people that could not be eradicated by Naziism.

There were also German Catholic priests who preached against the Nazi regime and were sent to the camps and executed. One who spoke out early against Hitler but escaped being killed was the Jesuit, Rupert Mayer, another witness to Christ. Pope John Paul II beatified him in Germany in 1987, along with Edith Stein. I first heard of Mayer in 1984 when I was visiting Munich, where he is buried. He was born in Stuttgart in 1876 and ordained in 1899. The next year he joined the Society of Jesus and then spent most of the rest of his life in Bavaria. As a chaplain in the German army in World War One, he was wounded and lost a leg while shielding a soldier with his body—for that he was awarded the Iron Cross.

In the 1930's, Mayer's strong, anti-Nazi preaching in the Michaelskirche in Munich aroused the ire of the Naziis, who arrested him in 1939 and put him in solitary confinement for seven months in the concentration camp at Oranienburg, Sachsenhausen. He was then sixty-three. The Nazis saw that he was too popular in Catholic Bavaria for them to risk executing him, so, ironically, rather than make a dead martyr out of him, they silenced him by secluding him in the monastery at Ettal, in Upper Bavaria, near the Swiss border. At the war's end, he returned to Munich and resumed his pastoral duties, but died from a heart attack on 3 November 1945 while saying Mass.

There were American martyrs too. One of the fundamental, contemporary documents of Christian pacifism is *New Testament Basis of Peacemaking*, by Richard T. McSorley, S.J. (1914-2002). When VPB-109 was training on Oahu, McSorley, then a young Jesuit, was teaching in the Philippines. On December 13, 1941, the Japanese captured and imprisoned him, along with hundreds of other Jesuits and seminarians. During his three-year imprisonment, he was tortured and nearly starved to death. He lived under the constant threat of execution—he was three times brought before a firing squad at which several persons around him were shot. The Japanese soldiers would aim their rifles at him to kill him, but then would fire no bullets, but would laugh at his reaction. Finally, on 23 February 1945, he and the other prisoners were released by U.S. paratroopers.

He wrote in his book, "Our hope cannot be in weapons, in gods of metal. In that way lies death. God offers us the choice of life or death. Both faith and technology make it clear that we must choose life for others, too, as well as for ourselves. If we choose to kill, we will certainly write our own death sentence for this world and, unless we repent, for the next." (McSorley, 139-40)

Father McSorley's faith-based pacifism may have been influenced by that of another American. Back in the 1930's, when ragged and penniless "stiffs" were heating their mulligan stew over the cooking fires, Dorothy Day was writing articles for *The Catholic Worker* (a penny a copy) and opening Houses of Hospitality for the hungry and homeless. Her priorities were the welfare of the working classes and the dispos-

sessed and the culture of non-violence as preached in the Gospels. The Sermon on the Mount was hardly revolutionary, but it certainly was not status-quo Catholicism to go around condemning the American industrial system and saying that Jesus is to be found in the poor and suffering. Her idea was not new—a Church that is the Mystical Body of Christ, in which the people are bound together spiritually so that an injury to any one person is an injury to all the others and in which every individual person is responsible for the welfare of the whole body. What she was doing is what Jesus had asked—which involved being counter-cultural.

In the 1960's Popes John XXIII and Paul VI and the Second Vatican Council effectively endorsed Dorothy Day's conviction about relationships. Probably the most dramatic outcome of Vatican II was its re-emphasis on the Church as "the people of God"—on the idea that all believers are related in a mystical body—on the idea of searching outward for one's relationship with the rest of the world instead of exclusively searching inward for one's personal salvation. .

Two of the most central documents of Vatican II, both of them by Pope Paul VI, deal with this idea of the Church as the People of God. *Lumen Gentium* (Christ as "the light of the peoples"), 1964, sees the Church as the faithful in Christ, both lay and religious, who with the Church in heaven make up the Mystical Body of Christ. *Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, addresses "the whole of humanity," especially "those who are poor or in any way afflicted." It spells out the Beatitudes for our day, calling for a preferential option for the poor, for the condemnation of war, for the fostering of peace, for the promotion of a community of nations.

It would be difficult to find a man or a woman of the 20th century who exemplifies those teachings and aspirations of Vatican II better than Dorothy Day. Her life's work seems to have been a direct answer to the call of *Gaudium et Spes* for "Christians who take an active part in present-day socio-economic development and fight for justice and charity [and who] should be convinced that they can make a great contribution to the prosperity of mankind and to the peace of the world," whose lives, "both individual and social, will be permeated with the spirit of the beatitudes, notably with a spirit of poverty."

Dorothy Day lived a life of voluntary poverty. It is not too great a stretch of the imagination to see her as a "voluntary hobo," very much like the fictional Mr. Blue in Connolly's novel. She grew into maturity during World War I and the Great Depression. In her youth, she had gotten pregnant and had an abortion at the insistence of the man who had been her lover. She had suffered painfully from what she had done. Then in a common-law marriage she had given birth to a daughter, this time refusing abortion. She had had the daughter baptized in the Church, and in 1927, she herself had become a Catholic. She saw the Church as "the church of the immigrants, the church of the poor." She prayed for God to show her a way to use her talents for

others. In 1933, with Peter Maurin, she founded *The Catholic Worker* to promote Catholic social teaching and began establishing houses of hospitality. She was a life-long pacifist on the grounds of Gospel nonviolence.

Neither Dorothy Day nor Vatican II have outlived controversy. In the 1940's we students at Central Catholic High School in South Bend were told by some authoritative figures that Dorothy Day was a Communist and a scandal to the Church. Some Catholics still believe that, and they are horrified to learn that she may be declared a saint. There are also Catholics who think that the Devil sat in on the proceedings of Vatican II and that Pope Paul VI was the Antichrist. But Dorothy Day was one of the most genuine, holy, and influential Christians of the twentieth century, and Vatican II has given rare, new life to the Church and the people of God. I am grateful to have been alive in their day.

It is the people of God who are declaring Dorothy Day a saint, as Cardinal John O'Connor proclaimed in 1997. "When we think of the masses," he said, "we think of waves of the sea, of forests, of fields of wheat, all moved by the spirit which blows where it listeth. When we think of the people, we think of the child at school, the housewife at her dishpan, the mother working, the mother sick, the man traveling, the migrant worker, the craftsman, the factory worker, the soldier, the rich, the bourgeois, the poor in tenements, the destitute man in the street. To a great extent [Dorothy Day] has made her appeal to all of these."

General George C. Marshall worked in a different arena. Even on remote Okinawa in 1945, we enlisted seamen heard of General Marshall— the President's Chief of Staff, whatever that meant. Anyhow, we knew he was one of those responsible for our being there and fighting in the war. After the war, no longer a general, he became Harry Truman's Secretary of State, and then there were articles in the papers about "the Marshall Plan" to bring hope to a war-torn people and help restore Europe to economic vitality. Gradually, during the succeeding years, I came to understand George Marshall as one of the significant figures of the century, although one who was never fully enough appreciated.

The career of George Catlett Marshall is a paradigm for the genesis, culmination, and consequences of World War Two. He was a Pennsylvanian, born in 1880, who foresaw military life as his vocation, which he entered on in 1901 after graduating from Virginia Military Institute. He was on the general staff in World War One and spent two and a half years in France, becoming acquainted, as he said, with the French peasantry and witnessing the devastation of war in the lives of ordinary people. From 1919 to 1924, during the critical aftermath years of the war, he served as aide-de-camp to General Pershing, and for the following fifteen years served in various administrative and teaching Army posts, being appointed Army Chief of Staff in 1939 by President Roosevelt. With another worldwide conflict already in being, he was the one

largely responsible for preparing America by building and supplying an army of eight million soldiers. In 1944, he was promoted to General of the Army, the first to hold that rank.

When Marshall was Chief of Staff, many of his duties had fallen in the area of diplomacy, and he had taken part in the major Allied conferences associated with the war's management and with the peace that followed it—the Atlantic Charter, Casablanca, Quebec, Cairo-Teheran, Yalta, and Potsdam. Then, in 1945, at the age of sixty-five, he resigned from military service, but in the following year served as President Truman's representative on a mission to China, and in 1947 was called home to join Truman's Cabinet as Secretary of State. That spring, in a speech given at Harvard, he outlined a plan of economic aid for the war-ravaged countries of Europe. Called the European Recovery Program, it came to be known as the Marshall Plan. Although designed to foster economic recovery, the Plan was also a strategy to strengthen Western Europe against the encroachment of Soviet communism.

At the end of World War One, the "Big Four" had met in Paris, where the American President, Woodrow Wilson, through his "Fourteen Points," had been advocating that the victorious nations agree on an international, just peace with the Axis nations. However, Britain's Lloyd George and Frances Georges Clemenceau prevailed in making the Treaty of Versailles mainly a vengeful instrument for punishing Germany—by implication, making Germany solely responsible for having brought on the war. It is not going too far to say that this warped treaty provided the German people with a motive for accepting the Third Reich and the totalitarian dictatorship of Adolf Hitler.

When it is viewed against the background of the Treaty of Versailles and the damage to the world that that treaty led to, one can see how revolutionary and humane the Marshall Plan was. In contrast to the senseless vengeance pursued by the Allies after the first world war, America and her allies sought instead to rebuild both Germany and Japan. Certainly the Marshall Plan was one of the most hopeful events to emerge from World War Two.

The Marshall Plan was not just a "giveaway program" that merely donated American dollars, but one that also created investment opportunities for Europeans and markets overseas for American products. The countries that received the largest amounts were not just England and France, but also Germany and Italy, America's former enemies. But, more than all that, it was a revolutionary plan in that it required the recipient nations to get together and come up with a unified approach to their common economic problems. It was also revolutionary in that it helped turn defeated and devastated enemy nations into peaceful, cooperative neighbors. It was a genuine realization of the Christian concept of the Mystical Body.

An earlier and even more faithful expression of the idea that parallels the Christian doctrine of the Mystical Body was the concept of the community of nations fostered by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The political and moral heir of his distant cousin, Theodore Roosevelt, he served as Assistant Secretary of the Navy under Woodrow Wilson, and in 1919 he was championing Wilson's League of Nations as essential to world peace; the next year, he campaigned vigorously for the League as the Democratic candidate for the vice-presidency, saying that for the first time in history nations were being placed on the same basis as the relations between individuals.

In his first year as President, he declared that opposition to armed intervention was the policy of the United States, and he put the blame for the threat to world peace on the world's political leaders who had scuttled the League of Nations. His first major foreign policy speech, given on Woodrow Wilson's birthday, clearly defined opposition to armed intervention as United States policy, saying "The blame for the danger to world peace lies not in the world population but in the political leaders."

In 1943, during Roosevelt's third term as President, America joined the other three allied powers, Great Britain, China, and Russia, in signing the Moscow Declaration, in which they agreed on "the necessity of establishing . . . a general international organization, based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all peace loving states, and open to membership by all such states, large and small, for the maintenance of international peace and security." This, the birth of the United Nations, can be attributed to Roosevelt himself, although he died before the idea could be implemented. If there is anything hopeful to have come from the carnage of World War Two, it lies in this federation of nations. If it has not always been successful in fulfilling its commission, it is because national leaders have not worked actively enough to give it life.

In 1958, Pope Pius XII died—the pope of World War Two. I had seen him in person when he was still Cardinal Pacelli, when he visited Notre Dame. In what happened thereafter, we Catholics, watching television and reading the newspaper, witnessed the living, nurturing breath of the Holy Spirit. It was the judgment of the College of Cardinals that the Church needed an "interim pope," an aged figurehead who would reign for only a few years, after which a strong pope could be elected who was fit to lead the Church and the world in the tumultuous period following World War Two. To the cardinals' surprise and to the surprise of the entire world, the aged pope they elected was Angelo Roncalli, a seventy-seven-year-old Italian, and he was just as surprised as anyone else. As expected, he was not a long-lived pope, but he went to his death only after having vigorously renewed the Church and lifted up the hearts of the People of God. Many of the cardinals in that College lived long enough themselves to become aware that the seeming nonentity they had made an interim pope had not been their choice, but God's pope. Through the intervention of the Holy Spirit, Angelo Roncalli had become one of the most significant persons of the twenti-

eth century, significant not only in that he took the action that the time required, but in that he himself, in his neighborliness, good humor, and pastoral devotion, represented the very qualities needed by an ailing world.

By the time of World War Two, he was already nearly sixty and had been a priest for thirty-four years. He was drafted into the Italian Army in World War One as a chaplain and member of the medical corps, and in the next conflict, as Vatican representative to Turkey, he aided refugees from Nazi Germany. As Vatican nuncio to France, he dissuaded General Charles DeGaulle from forcing the Vatican to remove twenty-five bishops who had collaborated with the Petain regime.

As Pope John XXIII, he was able, as Paul Tillich has noted, "to criticize the church, his own church, and could declare publicly how the church had become irrelevant for many people in our own time. He has shown us how the spirit of prophetism which can criticize the religious group in which the prophet lives has not completely died out in the Roman Church. It is still there and surprisingly has been voiced from the top of the hierarchy from where one would least expect it. The other thing that he has done is to make it possible to reach out to those outside the churches, not only to the "separated brethren" outside the Roman Catholic Church, but to the secularists and even to those who are enemies of the church and Christianity. . . . He shares the prophetic self-criticism which is open to the truth which has been forgotten in the church and which is now represented against the church by the secular and the anti-religious movements of our time."

The aged John XXIII had been elected to the papacy as an interim pope, one who would keep things as they were until a genuinely capable leader emerged, yet in his five-year papacy turned the Church upside-down. The relatively-young John Paul II was elected Pope in 1978 to lead the Church into the brave new world of the twenty-first century, yet to the eyes of many Catholics he served as an interim pope for twenty-seven years, guarding the status quo. However, at the same time he was a prophet of the light shining in the darkness of the war century. He is my final martyr-witness, one from my own generation.

Like most Catholics, until he became Pope, I had never heard of Karol Wojtyla, who was born in 1920 in Wadowice, Poland, a town about twenty-five miles southwest of Krakow. Growing up there in the Catholic climate of south Poland, he could not have been aware that only fifteen miles from his birthplace the unimportant village of Oswiecima would become the most notorious of all locales in the twentieth century—known to the Nazis and the rest of the world as Auschwitz.

In 1946, the first year of peace following World War Two, Pat and I entered upon our vocation to the married life. In that same year in Poland, Karol Wojtyla entered upon his vocation to the priesthood, having answered the call that ultimately would make him the pastor and spiritual leader of God's people throughout the world. As a

youth he had been an athlete, an outdoorsman, a drama student, a student of philosophy, and a poet. As Pope, he became the world's spokesman for the sacredness of life, a sacredness that has priority over war, abortion, euthanasia, even legal execution. He saw this sacredness as Christ saw it, that all humans are brothers and sisters in Christ and that the cooperation of nations is not just good policy, but is the message of the Gospels. It is true that he did not wish to openly pursue some of the questions that many Catholics today see as crucial in their religious lives—such as convictions and doubts about the celibacy of priests, the role of women vis-à-vis the priesthood, homosexuality as non-deviant behavior, the scandal of the abuse of young boys by some priests, and the growing loss to the Church of priests, religious, and laypersons.

But his achievements as Pope and his impact on the world was enormous. Like all popes, he spoke out against the evils of the day, but as a pope whose mission was centered on the Sermon on the Mount, he made a special effort to expose the plight of the world's poor and argue for sharing the world's wealth to alleviate that plight. To him, capitalism and communism were both to blame for poverty. Free from the anti-Semitism of many Poles, he grew up among Jews and aimed at crafting a sympathetic acknowledgment of the familial bond between Jews and Catholics. He reached out to all people of faith, Christians and non-Christians, and created tremendous admiration and goodwill for the Church. It is not too extravagant a claim to say that if any one person initiated the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Cold War, it was Pope John Paul II, speaking first for the liberty of Poland, his homeland, and then for the rest of the Soviet hegemony. The most traveled pope in the Church's history, he will be remembered, without doubt, for his strenuous efforts to acknowledge all the peoples of the earth without exception as God's children and members of the body of Christ. It is this radical inclusiveness, continually expressed and acted on, that was his greatest achievement, and it grew out of his own personality and spirituality.

Finally, if I may follow through on Melville's analogy that began this chapter, John Paul II and the other *martyrs* are the ones who beat off from the lee shore that offered them deceptive security and comfort. These are the true leaders, the persistent witnesses, the questioners, the objectors, the men and women who kept the open independence of their seas and refused to go along with the crowd. They are the ones who preached the truth to the face of falsehood, who loved their homelands more than they loved the flags of their rulers, who loved their neighbors as they valued their own selves. They are the ones who lived by the hope that inspired Zacharias when God gave him back his voice:

In the tender compassion of our God,

the dawn from on high shall break upon us

to shine on those who dwell in darkness

and the shadow of death
and guide our feet in the way of peace.

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