

My Stretch in the Service, Volume 2

By Lionel B. Potter

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Gratefully yours,
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Lt. Air Corps
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FOREWARD

This Journal will start from the date of my induction into the Army, January 6th, 1942. However, only the highlights of my career as an Aviation Cadet will be brought out on the preceding pages. For more elaborate descriptions of the trials and tribulations, see the letters written to my mother during the period prior to my being commissioned as a flying 2nd Lieutenant in the Air Corps on July 20th, 1942.

This Journal is being brought up to date while aboard the U.S. Army Transport Republic, re-christened the P33 en route to our first overseas base in the Hawaiian Islands. As this record is begun, we are some 250 miles west of San Francisco.

The Author
Sept. 5th, 1942

April 20th-24th, 1943

Nothing much of any account this week. Healthy and Gottke went on a "Snafu" mission to Kavieng. They were to act as a decoy while the Navy Catalina's mined the harbor. They flew through stinking weather and were the only ones who got there.

April 25th, 1943 (Easter Sunday)

Today was a beautiful, sunny day and Healthy, Sue and I went into Port Moresby to church. We attended the 9:30 service at the Church of England. It was a very nice service considering that half the church had been previously blown away by Jap bombs. Highlights of the service were the flowers set in shell casings on the altar and the wooden benches that we had to sit on. The Bishop of New Guinea held part of the service and was a very fine man. We took Holy Communion and were quite impressed. After everyone else had taken Communion at the altar, a very black native in a loin cloth stepped up and took it with as much devotion as any of us. Quite an inspiring sight.

Was told tonight that I was leaving at 6am the next morning to go to Brisbane with Wiltse and Bowman. We were to pick up a new plane. Threw a few clothes into my bag and hit the sack.

April 26th, 1943

Took off this morning at 6am in a C60 (Lockheed Lodestar). Landed in Townsville at 11:00am. Just before taking off for Brisbane, I saw Major Taylor's twin brother on his way up to N.E. to see the "Chief".

Landed at Rockhampton about 3 o'clock and took on a couple American nurses. It seems that they were carrying a couple quarts of gin which spilled during the take-off, in fact, it ran down one of the girls' legs that was trying to conceal it. After much embarrassment on their part, and equally as much hilarity on ours, they were forced to pass the bottle. Whee, a big time was had by all, between Rockhampton and Brisbane.

Landed about 5:30pm and proceeded to Oxford House Hotel. Met Ewing, Adler, Kline, etc., who informed us of a big party at J.D.'s hotel that night. We found a couple gals, I had one Leila Maroney, a nice lil' blond Aussie, and we went to Ewing's for a few drinks of good Johnny Walker scotch. After a couple rounds, we went over to the Officer's dance at the Lennon's Hotel. Had a really nice time.

April 27th, 1943

Saw Capt. Marshall this morning and was informed that no planes were ready to take back and to take it easy for a few days. Sent the wife a cable this morning.

April 28th, 1943

Bummed around Brisbane, bought myself a "Zoot suit" (worsted sun tan pants and shirt). Had dinner with the gang at the Bellevue Hotel. Mike Adler got cockeyed and left me with the blond he had in tow. Went to dance at Lennon's. Rough night.

April 29th, 1943

Plane still not ready. Went down to see Adler and Ewing. Drove out to quartermaster for some cigarettes and clothes. Driver was a very nice Aussie girl by the name of Joan Hooper.

This afternoon, Pat, Andy and I drove out in the suburbs to buy Pat an Irish Terrier. Bought a cute one after quibbling with the one eyed owner. Pat, Andy and I saw "Orchestra Wives" at the local theatre tonight.

April 30th, 1943

Met Joan Hooper at the National House for dinner and had a big steak. We later went to the dance at Lennon's. Joan is a very nice girl and from a very wealthy Brisbane family. She had her own car, which was a swell break for me.

May 1st, 1943

Had lunch with the Chief and his brother at the Shingle Inn. He informed me that our crew was going down to Sydney on official leave and would pick me up in Brisbane on the following Tuesday or Wednesday.

Had dinner at Joan's and spent the evening talking to her mother and listening to the radio. They treated me just like a son and I really enjoyed their excellent hospitality.

May 2nd, 1943

Slept in late. Had dinner with Pat, Jeannie, Ann and Wiltse. Wiltse and I split a bottle of scotch and were forced to retire by ten o'clock.

May 3rd, 1943

Had lunch at the Conberra Hotel with Joan and Wiltse. Joan got Wiltse a date and we all went to the dance at Lennon's. Andy and I spent the night at the Hooper residence.

May 4th, 1943

Andy and I got up about 8am and Mrs. Hooper had a grand breakfast fixed for us. Bummed around town today. Had dinner at the Hoopers' and spent the evening there. Found out that my crew had arrived that afternoon at Amberly Field and we were to take-off tomorrow morning for Sydney. Got back to the Oxford House about 11am and found that Yople had come down with the, to replace me with Wiltse as co-pilot. Yople had enough foresight to bring my good clothes down for me, also some much needed money.

May 5th, 1943

Plane left Amberly at 11am and I slept under the flight deck all the way to Sydney. The plane had 32 "Sydney-eager" passengers. Arrived at Sydney around 3 o'clock and proceeded to sign in with Col. Kelly at #7 Wynyard Bldg. Had to check in at the Windsor Hotel temporarily. This place was a dump if I ever saw one. Went out to #5 St. Neat's Place in the Kings Cross section and saw Cliff Marburger and Tom Magness. They were really organized., the place had more whiskey, coke and beer in it than most saloons. We agreed to meet that night at the Australia Hotel Lobby. (The "Bull Pen" as it is known.) We found out that the Australia lobby was the meeting place for all the stag Aussie girls and the American officers. We stood around for a few moments and then talked to a couple of very lovely girls, which George Maher and I took out to Prince's that night. Prince's is one of the two swanky dine and dance night clubs in Sydney. The other one is Romano's, just around the corner. We picked up Marburger's reservations and had a fine time. Took my date home about 1am and the taxi driver left me out in north Sydney somewhere. It took me two hours to get back to the hotel from there.

It is quite cold here and a big change from the heat of New Guinea. We'll all be lucky if we don't catch pneumonia.

May 6th, 1943

Looked for a "flat" (apartment) but had no luck, we are anxious, Elzey, Maher, Flohr and the author to get out of this lousy hotel.

This afternoon, Ben Elzey and myself looked up Enid Tibbetts, Bill Gentry's girlfriend and delivered a message for him. Decided to go to Romano's that night and took Enid. She is a grand girl and quite the prettiest kid I have seen in many a moon, in fact, since I left my beautiful wife. Elzey took Phyllis, a friend of Enid's and we had a rip-snorting time. Elzey got corned (sp?) up and I practically had to pack him into the hotel.

May 7th, 1943

Took the train out to Bexley to see Betty Bolton. As luck would have it, she was working, so had tea with her charming mother and then came back into town at six.

Met Pauline Wessel at the Australia and we went on over to Rose's (night club) for dinner and dancing. Pauline is a nice lil' brunette that I met through mutual friends. She is good company and an excellent dancer. Didn't care much for Rose's, too much of an enlisted mans night spot.

May 8th, 1943

Called Pauline this morning and she gave me a couple addresses of flats that might be available. Went out and looked at a couple and finally decided on Mrs. Griffin's place at 11A Billyard – Elizabeth Bay. Geo. Maher and I decided to stay here and Elzey and Flohr moved into out squadron flat on St. Neat's. These places were about three blocks apart. Maher and I stayed with Mrs. Griffin in her upstairs flat. Two navigators from the 65th squadron were in the lower flat. José Holquin and Bill Long. Mrs. Griffin is really a character. She is about 58 years old and a widow with two sons in the Australian Army. "Grif", as all the boys caller, knows practically everyone of our officers that have been in Sydney on leave. She is very crazy about Americans and calls us her Bombers. The fighter pilots she calls her "Peashooters". She is a very lovable, sentimental, woman and treated us like her own sons. Her place was overlooking the local yacht basin and we slept out on the sun porch overlooking this pretty bay. Grif fixed us breakfast, lunch and

dinner when we were around. She kept gallons of fresh milk, bread, butter and eggs on hand for us – she knew what we really wanted. We came and went as we pleased and could bring any of our friends that we wished up to the flat. Whenever we got tight, she was usually right with us – drink for drink. She said that we could bring any girls in that we wanted but that she would like for us to have them out by dawn. We laughed about this but appreciated her feelings. Of course this rule didn't apply to me!

We had a little trouble checking out of the Windsor Hotel. It seems that the ex-barmaid, that was running the place, thought that we should pay a full day's rate and as it was only 10:30 in the morning, we didn't think so. We finally agreed to a price and she gave us 15 minutes to get out, bag and baggage. We made it, but what a laugh.

After dropping our bags and cases off at Grif's, I sped back to town to see Betty Bolton before she got off work at noon. I got down to the waterfront importers, where she works, at 11:30am and chewed the fat with her until noon.

She seemed quite thrilled to meet me but not as surprised as she was supposed to be. Her mother was going to keep my appearance at the office a secret but she just couldn't do it I guess, so Betty knew I was coming.

Betty was a very pretty girl, not terribly exciting, but very pleasant and likeable. I will leave the more detailed description of her to my letters to Sis and the good wife.

When she got off at noon, I walked down to the railroad station with her and bid her goodbye there. I intended taking her out to lunch but she had a date, so we agreed to meet later if my short visit allowed it, which it didn't, as it happened.

Bummed around town all afternoon, tried to find someone to go to the horse races with but had no luck.

Called Enid tonight and made last minute arrangements for our tennis game tomorrow morning. Later on George and I went down to see Cliff and Ben. Had some drinks with Craig Crawford, a band leader at the Prince's. He is a swell fellow and lived right across the street from #5 St. Neat's Place. We left there at about ten and joined the party going on downstairs in our flat. Fooled around down there until about 1:30am and then retired.

May 9th, 1943

Got up bright and early this morning and picked up Enid at 8:30am in a cab. She looked very lovely in a pair of white tennis shorts and sweater. (Who said Australia doesn't have "sweater girls"!)

We got out to this private court at about 9:30am and found no one there yet. We didn't have any tennis balls, so had to wait until someone showed up, which they did – about an hour later. Enid couldn't find me any tennis shoes so I had to play in my street shoes which wasn't too good for me or the court, but I did it. Had a pretty good game, the club members weren't as good as I suspected they would be – hence I walked off with the morning honors.

We left the court about noon and tried to find a cab, but no soap. We were too far out of town. We finally jumped onto a train and we made quite a picturesque sight. Enid was still in her shorts and rather revealing sweater and I was in my officer's trench coat with the two tennis racquets under my arm. The train was very crowded with Mother's Day traffic and I was more than a little embarrassed, or I should say, uncomfortable. We rode the train part way into Sydney and then hailed a cab back to Enid's place on Bellevue Hill.

Enid then changed clothes and we walked down to Bondi Beach, about a half mile distant. This beach is on the order of Long Beach, but upon a much smaller scale. We found a little beanery and had ourselves a

couple of huge steaks and a couple of dozen glasses of milk. Enid is really swell company. We had a lot of fun together.

I dashed back into town and stopped to pick up Sue, as we were going out to dinner together. (I forgot to mention that Sue Tate was down here on furlough too.) She was not there and so I left her a very curt note. I was very tired after four days of steady going, so I had a couple drinks and went to bed.

May 10th, 1943 (Monday)

Ben Elzey and I went into town about noon and looked up Barney McManus. He has taken our squadron under his wing and he and his wife are crazy about Americans. Barney calls himself an Australian-born American. He opens his beautiful Balgowlah (sp?) home to any of the 320th boys who are in Sydney on leave. Ben and I made arrangements with him for the party he insisted on throwing for us Wednesday night.

Ben and his girls and Enid and I went to Romano's tonight and had a good time. Enid has my style of dancing down pat, so I danced down both my shoes.

Sue was at Romano's for a while but left after seeing me with Enid.

May 11th, 1943 (Tuesday)

Arrived in town around noon and bought a few things, made last minute arrangements with Barney for the party tomorrow night.

Met Luther Armstrong and the Carlton Hotel and we tossed off a half dozen drinks. Grif was having a big chicken dinner for George and I tonight so I left Armstrong about 5:30 and tried to find a cab. I had no luck so decided to try the tram. I caught one but it was a wee bit crowded. In fact, I only got halfway on – one foot on the step and one hand on the handrail. If I hadn't of been in a very rozy haze, I wouldn't have enjoyed the ride as much as I did. I got off at King's Cross and had about a four block walk to our flat. I was feeling mighty fine. The air was crisp and cold and it was dark. The lights from the many shops lighting my happy steps. I stopped at a flower shop and bought Grif a dozen and a half of gladiolas as a thank you gesture on my part for the chicken dinner tonight and the swell way she was treating us. I swung the "glads" over my shoulder and went singing on down the street – for some reason I had the definite idea that this was Christmas Eve and that the flowers over my shoulder was a Christmas tree. I was having a great time, in fact, I made five dates with the lovely creatures I passed on the street, during my four block walk to the flat. This will give you an idea of how Americans rate over here. They were all nick kids, too, just "friendly".

After Grif had gotten over her excitement of the flowers, we started tossing a few whiskey and sodas around. We were about half shot when she served us each with a roast chicken, I would say about a 4 pounder, dressed. In addition, she had fresh green peas and baked potatoes. It was really delicious and we stuffed ourselves like hogs. The Christmas spirit for some reason still prevailed, everything seemed to fit.

Picked Sue up at about 8:30 and brought her back to the flat. I fattened her up on some of the chicken that was left over and we talked about her new radio career. She auditioned for a radio broadcast put on by the Special Service Division and took top honors hands down; she is thrilled to death but very tired from all her activities. I took her home about eleven as she was so worn out.

May 12th, 1943 (Wednesday)

Went over to see Sgt. Wright this morning, he was shacked up with a girl in an apartment nearby. We had a couple drinks with them and then Ben and I went on into town.

We hired a car for the 15 mile trip to Balgowlah suburb and arrived there about 9:30. Let's ee, there was Elzey, Maher, Rickels and myself that finally arrived. The rest of my crew didn't make it, which burned my up more than a little. It was a swell party with plenty of women and plenty to eat and drink. Barney was the

life of the party, with his wife Bonnie close behind him. They had a lovely, modern home, which overlooked Sydney harbor.

We had a swell time dancing and singing. Left about 3 ayem, the hired car picking us up at that time. It cost us six pounds, about \$20, for this car but that wasn't bad considering the cost of most cabs at night. The car was a bit crowded as we had 13 going back to town in it.

May 13th, 1943

About noon, when I finally got up, I went on down to the Air Service Command and tried subtly to get out of going home tomorrow ayem. Had no luck as there was still plenty of room on the plane for the 10 boys I was in charge of. So, I drifted off to give the list a chance to fill up. We didn't want to go back, if we could help it, as we were just getting organized and starting to enjoy our stay. Seven days is too short for a leave in Sydney, it takes you about 5 days to pick your friends and start going the places you want. Spent the afternoon saying good bye to the good friends I had made. Enid at Aginians Gift Shop, Joyce at the Mayfair Theatre, Gloria & Bonny McManus at Stanley Johnson's Music House and Barney McManus at David Jones Department store. The transport office closed at 6 o'clock, so I arrived there at 5:55 sharp, hoping that the passenger list would be completed by now. Worse luck, there was still room for us, so I was forced to enter our names, We were to meet the following morning at the Oriental Hotel at 4:45 ayem.

Before I left #7 Wynyard, I picked up half a case of hooch and grabbed a cab. Toured the town for about an hour, telling all the boys the bad news. After a tour of the love nests I came back to the flat and cleaned up.

Picked Sure up at seven and walked down to the Red Cross for dinner. Had a good steak and then we ambled down to St. Neat's place to inform Ben and Flohr that we were leaving in morning. A party was in session, so we stayed a few minutes and had a couple drinks.

Went on back to the flat and had a few more drinks with Grif and sat around and talked. Sue helped me pack. She volunteered to put my "per diem" clothes in storage for me and I took her up on it. These clothes might as well be in Sydney as up her rotting and feeding the New Guinea moths. My bag held mainly a half case of whiskey and a case of Coca Colas. Boy, was that bag heavy. I could barely lift it. Took Susan home about 1:30 and said a reluctant goodbye to her, as she was staying down in Sydney permanently.

Got back to the flat about 2 ayem and stopped in at the party that Joe and Bill were having downstairs. Joe and I made some scrambled egg sandwiches and shot the breeze until about 3:30. Went back upstairs and awakened George and lay down for a few minutes myself.

A staff car picked us up at 4:30 and we bid Grif a tearful goodbye. She wanted to give me her little black cocker puppy, which I had become very attached to. I told her no, the dog would be much happier and healthier in Sydney.

Buses were waiting at the Oriental Hotel for us and I was surprised to find that all my boys were there. True, not all of them were capable of navigating by themselves, but they were all there, nevertheless.

May 14th, 1943 (Since midnight, this has all been Friday's entry.)

Arrived out to the Airdrome (Mascot) at 5:30 and everyone flopped down on the floor, tale tops, decks, etc. – absolutely exhausted after "opening up" for seven straight days. Some of them hadn't even to bed for three days.

At 6:30, we took off in a cold C-47 (Douglas Transport) and took a last look at the city of red roofs. Almost every house and building has a red slate or tile roof. It was with heavy heart that we left hospitable Sydney in the background. Everyone had a marvelous time and I know I can say that no other city in the world

could have treated us so perfectly. It is a city beyond compare; I wouldn't mind if I were to have my own home there.

We had a rough, cold trip to Brisbane and all of us were sniffing and blowing our noses. Almost all of us to a man had caught cold down there.

We landed at Archer Field, Brisbane, at about 10:30 and I jumped shop there. I had started some Naval Intelligence work a week or so before and was supposed to check up on it when I came back through Brisbane. I hitched a ride into the Oxford House in town and was surprised to find Wiltse, Yople and Bowman still residing there. They were out so I called Joan Hooper up and we had lunch at Rowe's. After lunch, I went up to Bowman's room and proceeded to get some much needed sleep.

I met Joan at the National House at seven and we had a big dinner. I order a Porterhouse steak and got one that coved two ordinary dinner plates. I managed to eat it, however.

After dinner, we drove down to Lennon's and joined Wiltse, Betty Cnondon, Bowman and Joan Lund, Yople and Gwen. The band, American G.I. was exceptionally good and we had a big time.

Left Lennon's at midnight and went on to the Hooper residence. Joan and I robbed the ice box and then retired to our respective beds.

May 15th, 1943

Mrs. Hooper had a nice breakfast for me when I arose and I proceeded on into town after consuming some.

Met Lt. Page of Naval Intelligence and worked with him all morning. Had lunch at the exclusive Brisbane Club with General Page and a couple of his colleagues.

We finished up our work soon after lunch and I promised to take him on a mission when he comes up our way.

Arrived out at the Hooper residence at 6:30 and was treated to a wild duck dinner, which was really good. After dinner, Joan, her mother and sister-in-law, and yours truly played Bridge until time for bed. Mary and I had a good night and we took 5 shillings apiece off of the mama-daughter Hooper combination.

May 16th, 1943

Said goodbye to Joan when she left for works at seven and then proceeded to catch the transport home. Got on a new C-47 at one-thirty, after chasing it from Archer to Amberly Field.

Arrived in Townville at six and went in town to dinner and a lousy show.

May 17th, 1943

Left Garbutt Field at seven and arrived unhappily in Morresby at noon. Boy, is it hot here, it's a long call from nice cool Sydney. Arrived back in the squadron to get ribbed for being gone so long, almost three weeks to the day.

Found a lot of new faces in the squadron. Campbell, Andrews, Iverson and McWilliams' crews had already left to go home.

The only consolation upon returning was the 55 letters I had waiting for me. I sat down at 2 o'clock and read until about six.

I am a pretty sad apple tonight, it's really hard to come back to this super-heated mosquito haven after being in civilian life, more or less, for three hilarious weeks. My nerves are steady now and I feel better for all of it, with the exception of the cold I am playing host to.

May 18th-20th, 1943

Spent these days writing many tardy letters and cleaning up the tent.

I have two new tent mates. Possum Kuhn and Paul Gottke were moved out and Fred Herzog and Junior Hand replaced them.

May 21st, 1943

Went out with Capt. Whitlock to shoot some landings. Since the Major isn't coming back, I am the proud possessor of our prize crew. That is, as soon as I am checked out. Capt. Whitlock is now Squadron Commander.

My landings were not too sharp this ayem, in fact they were lousy. I found out that you can't lay off flying for a month and expect to be a "hot pilot" when you start flying again.

May 22nd, 1943

Cleaned up around the tent and answered some past due letters.

May 23rd, 1943

Flew with Charlie Whitlock again – still not too good.

May 24th-26th, 1943

Things very quiet. Answered some letters and worked around the tent.

Wednesday, the 26th, things really began to get "SNAFU", just when things were looking good too.

We got word that Lt. Col. A.H. Rogers had returned to the groupd after his sojourn in the Hawaiian Islands. We were all hoping that he would go home! Then to top it off, three of our Flight Surgeons were transferred. They were Capt. Welch, 320th surgeon, Capt. Walzer, 321st surgeon and Maj. King, Group surgeon. It seems that 5th Air Force got burned up about they're sending nine crews home. This was on account of flying fatigue. Maj. King has to report to Brisbane for re-classification, practically a court martial, Doc Welch is sent to Dobadura and Doc Walzer to some Ordinance outfit. This deal really smells! What are we to do now, it we get so tired we can't fly! They'll probably court martial us for having a nervous breakdown.

The whole upshot of the thing was that we were left short of crews.

May 27th, 1943

Was awakened at 5:30 this ayem to shoot some landings with Paul Gottke, now Operations Officer. Paul and I had a pretty fair day and I learned a lot from him.

Tonight Cy Brainard got his orders to go home and so we went up to the club and had a few rounds of drinks with him. He's a grand fellow and we hate to see him leave.

May 28th-30th, 1943

Flew with Gottke every morning and am back on the ball finally. In the afternoons, I usually took a siesta and went to the show or wrote letters at night. Church Sunday.

May 31st, 1943

Had a check ride with Capt. Whitlock this morning and am now one of the members of the great Society of Four Engine Bomber Pilots. Health Smith was advised that he was checked out as 1st, pilot also. Wayne R. Smith and I have been together on everything since we joined the Army. Same flying schools, married same day, transferred to 24's same day, left the states together, etc., etc. and now checked out on the same day. We were told that our promotions were in for 1st Lieut.'s also. It's about time, most of our classmates are Capt. now!

Went to the show tonight and saw Robt. Montgomery and Gene Tierney in "China Girl". Incidentally, it stunk!

June 1st, 1943

Nothing much doing today.

June 2nd-21st, 1943

This period was very unexciting and can best be covered by one big entry. Some of the highlights were the following:

Flew locally, for the 1st time by myself, on Wednesday the 3rd. Had most of my crew along with me. My crew is now pretty complete. I have removed T/Sgt. MacCalmont from the crew and put S/Sgt. Wright in his place. The only other change was in adding Sgt. Conrad as gunner and moving Ceé Quimby up to Asst. Engineer. My officers consist of Frank Ekas, Co-Pilot, Lankford, Bombardier and Turner, Navigator. I think this crew will shape up against the best of them.

Also, on the 2nd, we gave Pat Bowman his Bachelor Dinner. Eighteen of us went to the Moresby Officers' Club. Let's see if I can remember who they were. Don Singer, Rod Thompson, Andrew Wiltse, Wayne Yople, Bob Hixson, Don "Possum" Kuhn, Cliff Marburger, J.D. Ewing, "Boot" Coleman, Wayne Smith, Doc Welch, John Noonan, John Bily, Bill De Jarnatt, Capt. Art Smith, "Pop" Layhee, Pat Bowman and yours truly. Had a lot of fun, but not much liquor.

June 3rd, 1943

Had another pre-marital party, this time at the 320th O.C. Had lots of fun and lots to drink.

June 4th, 1943

Pat and Jean were to get married tonight, they did as a matter of fact. There were five medics and five pilots as a "guard of honor". The pilots were Hixson, Wiltse, Yople, Smith and your author. The wedding was a very nice Catholic service, held in the recreation hall in the nurses quarters. It had been decorated for the occasion. There were a lot of reporters there and flash bulbs were bursting everywhere. The pictures were supposed to be in Life magazine. After the ceremony, there was a big happy reception with about 5 gallons of 190 proof "G.I." alcohol in 16 gallons of punch. Wow! So everyone got pleasantly numb. I had to leave both the punch and the alcohol [pretty early as I was scheduled to fly at 7 ayem. Too bad, it was an excellent brawl – party.

Nothing much of any consequence occurred then until I flew a photo plane for some Air Force photographs. We photographed some mock warfare and this lasted all one day, very tiresome.

During this period I started playing drums for the new 5th Air Force dance band. It's not too sharp yet, but it has excellent backing. Cill Marburger is rehearsing the band.

On about the 10th, Healthy Smith got to take a ship down to Brisbane for a nose turret. Up to the 21st, he's still gone. This was a nice break for him and he deserves it.

Along about the 12th, our promotions came back for “re-dating”. It seems that some dope in OHQ had let them sit idle on his desk so long that he couldn’t possibly send them through for fear that the dates would show what a “goldbrick” he was. So he fires them back to the organization, from whence they came, for new dates. Phooey! This will hold our promotions up a least a month.

We have been operating about every three days, almost entirely on the Rabaul area. I can’t fly these missions as I haven’t been checked out for night flying. They are going to send Smith, Layhee and I down to Charlies Towers to get this rating. When? You’ve got me.

The recent raids on Rabaul have been at high altitude and very successful. At least they are letting us use these 24’s the way they are supposed to be used – as high altitude precision bombers.

I continue to fly locally about every other day. Am practicing with Lankford on bombing runs and with Ekas on instruments. The first five bombs that Lankford dropped were excellent, three direct hits on the boat in the harbor (wreck).

There’s a new rumor, fairly well founded that there are 37 crews on their way over here as reinforcements, not replacements. If this is true, which it seems to be, we at least won’t have to fly so much. Russ Smith came down to say goodbye on the 21st, he was leaving for the States with Pete Menge on the 22nd. Nice break, Jean will sure be glad to see him.

During the last week I have been using my spare time to draw up plans for the remodeling of the Officers Club. I will also have charge of the actual construction. It will be a dam nice when it is completed.

The mail situation has been lousy. I don’t know whether everyone has quit writing to me or if the mail is being held up somewhere. Anyway, I’m not getting any mail.

June 22nd, 1943

Started work on the Officers Club today, but couldn’t go very far because of shortage of materials.

June 23rd, 1943

Tried to get materials for the Club, but no soap. Everyone has decided to build himself a wood shack and of course the Club has to suffer.

Flew local transition this afternoon. Dropped 5 practice bombs on Moresby wreck. Lankford, Bombardier, was very good. Hit the boat from 6,000’ feet three times out of 5 tries, with one near miss. He’s going to be a helluva good bombardier for yours truly.

June 24th, 1943

Whitlock announced at our regular morning meeting that your author was no a 1st Liet. At last, I got it, after over 11 long months and I couldn’t wait to put on the silver bars I had been saving for the occasion. Wired the wife this morning. Couldn’t wait to tell her by letter. Flew with “Sqdn. C.O.” Charley Whitlock tonight and received my official night checkout. (Correction: this night checkout was actually on the 25th.)

June 25th, 1943

Checked out for night flying as per paragraph above.

The information drifted in today about the forthcoming “big push”. Instead of Lae or Salamaua, as we expected, it was to be no less that the bog Jap stronghold at Rabaul. The plan was to establish bases very soon in the Tabrian Islands, either Kiriwina or Wood lark. From there they could give any landing force fighter protection. They are most afraid of the Jap air strength in Rabaul. So, it was to be our job soon to

blast the fields everyday to try and destroy their fields and ofc. So our quiet little existence is rife around the squadron, from the cooks to the mechanics.

June 26th, 1943

Took my instrument check with Whitlock this afternoon. Really went through the “works”, including an instrument take off under the hood. Came out OK, so I am now an unlimited, 1st pilot. This means that I will begin flying missions with the rest of the boys. Was notified tonight that I was to go on a recco mission tomorrow. So, my missions begin sooner than I expected. Was a bit nervous about the new responsibility and consequently didn't sleep very well.

June 27th, 1943

Was awakened this morning at 2L20 and had breakfast at 2:45. Breakfast was lousy, but I wasn't very hungry, so I only had a cup of awfully strong coffee. We were briefed by Capt. Art Smith and Capt. Whitlock at 3:30. Our mission was to check the weather at dawn around both Salamaua and Lae. Then we were to proceed through the Vitraz Straits and cover the entire Bismark Sea for any Jap shipping. Returning by Madang and down the coast.

Bill Gentry was to go along on this, my first mission as a 1st Pilot, in an advisory capacity. This didn't hurt my feelings at all, inasmuch as I didn't know as much about weather as I would like too.

We took off in the dark at 4:35 and promptly discovered that our wing tip tank was pouring gas all over the wing and engine nacelle. This created a dangerous fire and explosion factor, so I did a 180 degree turn and landed again. Sgt. Wright, my Eng., tightened down the gas cap and we took off again. We found that the gas was still leaking badly, but we proceeded anyway, “sweating it out” until we could transfer the gas into our main tanks. No one was allowed to smoke for two hours.

We got over Lae at 6:30 and found it closed in by weather. Then we proceeded on our reco.

We saw nothing of any consequence except a lot of clouds and rain. Landed here at 2:45 for the end of a 10 hour mission. Was briefed by Capt. Smith as I got out of the plane. (I should say “interrogated”, not briefed!)

We were very tired and hungry, but glad to have our first mission behind us. Crawled into bed after dinner and a cold shower.

June 28th, 1943

Slept in this morning. Took in a show and wrote some letters tonight. Saw “Palm Beach Story”, very good too.

June 29th, 1943

Worked on the Club all morning and most of the afternoon.

Went out tonight for a couple hours to check the position of a new searchlight beacon that was to aid us when we took off into the southeast (mountains). Landed at 8:15 and promptly crawled into the “sack”.

June 30th, 1943

Things were really SNAFU this ayem. In the first place, Gen. MacArthur is up here for the big push. It seems that we have a full division of men sitting on a boat near Goodenough Island, within easy reach of the Jap planes at Rabaul. Well, the lousy weather has kept us from bombing Rabaul for the last six nights, so their planes should be in good shape. So, the boys on the boat are really sweating, but profusely. I can't say that I blame them either!

Last night about 40 heavy bombers from the 90th and the 43rd, were poised to take off, only awaiting word from the “weather ships”, Berkowitz and a B-17. Well, the B-17 misunderstood orders and landed at Bobodura before he had half completed his flight. Then Berk messed up the deal by flying his mission without his radio in commission. So the mission was cancelled due to lack of weather information. And is “Gen. Doug” mad? Yea, Veril!

To make matters really “SNAFU (Air Corps jingo for “screwed up”). Lt. Rodenburg, our Sqdn, went out on the recco this ayem that I had on the 27th. Well, it seems he couldn’t stay on the taxi strip and got stuck. Consequently, he was about an hour and a half late getting off. The hard part about this delay was that about 80 B-25’s were awaiting the weather info from Joe’s visit to Lae, supposedly at dawn.

When we last heard from Rodenburg, this was the finishing touch to an already bad day, he had sighted three small freighters and had bombed and strafed same. His message said that he was returning to Dobodura with a man wounded. (Dobodura is our big base on the north coast of New Guinea.) The worst part of this news was that the position of the freighters bomber showed them to be our own ships. Aiy, vat a business. “There must be an easier way to make a living!”

At noon today, I went on the “alert” along with Wiltse. The “alert” meant that I would take off within one hour after the recco ship, now Johnny Ewing, sighted a target.

After lunch, we got the straight dope, to the effect that Rodenburg had really bombed a couple Jap boats. The radio report on the position of the ships was messed up.

Taking it easy this pm, don’t know for sure whether we will go out tonight or not. Took in a show tonight and wrote a letter. Ate a snack at 10:30 and were briefed at 11:00 for our Rabaul raid. Our target was to be the hot spot, Lakunai Airdrome. We were trucked down to the line at 11:30 for a 12:30 take off.

July 1st, 1943

Took off at 12:45 and proceeded to Rabaul. Only incidents on the way to the target were the lousy weather and danger of ice and when one of our own planes almost shot us down while clearing their guns over the Solomon Sea.

We weren’t quite sure we were over Rabaul, due to weather obstructions, when they threw up a lot of A/A and searchlights at us. We probably wouldn’t have found the target if the Japs hadn’t of began shooting at us and given their position away. We were caught in the S/L about three times but managed by violent maneuvering to elude them. The S/L display was very impressive, about 40 big beams trying to nail us. It reminded me of about 5 big So. Calif. Supermarkets opening on the same night. The searchlights weren’t very good at spotting us, but they did make it very difficult to see our objective. After about 20 minutes of maneuvering to keep out of the lights and trying to see the target, the Nippo turned out the lights, which was a mistake on their part as we immediately saw our airdrome objective and turned onto our bomb run. We had to fly right over the roughest part of Rabaul and the lights went on again, but this time we were lined up on our target and the lights didn’t bother Lankford as he was using a couple of Polaroid filters on the bomb sight. We released our bombs, 500 Lb. aerial burst, at 0430 and turned sharply out of the range of the ack ack which was getting close enough to bounce us around. The bombs, all nine of them, dropped in a line of beautiful flashes across the end of the airdrome. The A/A guns were giving us a bad time now and I maneuvered violently into a protective cloud. The cloud was very rough and set me up in an 80 degree bank. While I was trying to straighten the ship out from this violent attitude, my oxygen mask came off and dropped to the floor where I couldn’t reach it. My senses became almost immediately dulled, as lack of oxygen at 23,000 feet us no joke. Consequently, I couldn’t see the instruments to straighten out our wildly gyrating plane. The ship was practically out of control and I was almost blacked out when I told Ekas, my co-pilot, to take over. He straightened the ship out while I found my oxygen mask, just before I passed out.

The rest of the trip was unexciting and we landed at Wards Drome at 0810. We were then congratulated and informed that we were the only ones from the 320th to reach the target. Weather had caused the others to turn back.

Capt. Smith interrogated us while we ate breakfast. After we had eaten, we crawled into bed – none of us had gotten any sleep for 36 hours.

Slept all day, only got up to eat lunch and then back to bed again. Logged 8 hours.

July 2nd, 1943

Took it easy today, resting up from our rough Rabaul run.

July 3rd-6th, 1943

Nothing much new, a couple of dry runs to Rabaul, but no take off thanks to more than usual foul weather. On the night of the 6th, we were informed that our crew was to take a ship to Melbourne for a new turret in the nose. This made us rather elated as we really needed a good rest. So we did some packing tonight.

July 7th, 1943

Took off this morning in ship 358, “Double Trouble”, at 0630. Had a skeleton crew with me: Frank Ekas, Bill Turner, George Wright and Alex Sedilko. We had quite a few passengers which brought our load up to 19 persons.

I landed at Archer Field about 0130 and had a little trouble landing on this short, open pasture. To make matters worse the control tower made me land the short way of the field. I like to have cut short the lives of three cows and a fence before I could bring the ship to a stop.

After landing, I went over to see the Engineering Officer about getting a nose turret kit to take down to Melbourne with me. (I should explain that Archer Field is in Brisbane, northern Australia.) While I was waiting for said Eng. Officer who should I tangle with but General Connell. He was sore about something and so he picked on me to vent his ire. He stood me in a typical upperclassmen’s “brace” and really chewed me out. There was no reason whatsoever for his doing this outside of maybe having a good case of indigestion. It sure burned me up though.

When I finally did locate the right man, he said that he thought we were going to leave the ship at Archer for modification. This didn’t set so well with me as I was all eager to see Melbourne. He told me to see Capt. Marshall in the morning so I checked in at the Oxford House. Called up the Hoopers and Joan insisted that I go to the local club dance with them, which I tired and reluctantly did. How these Aussies can change good American arrangements into “one-steps” is a mystery to me, but they dood it, much to my dancing discomfiture.

July 8th, 1943

Saw Captain Marshall this morning and after he called Gen Connell, they decided to send me to Melbourne as soon as possible. During their conversation, Jen. Connell laughingly referred to his giving me hell the afternoon previous. He thought it a good joke – nuts, I’d like to take him out on a mission with me a see if he laughs.

Today was spent bumming around as the ship had to be loaded. Went with Joan Hooper, Joan Haynes and Frank Ekas tonight to see Fantasia.

July 9th, 1943

Took off for Sydney after trying for two hours to get the #1 & #2 engines started, We finally took off at eleven and landed in Sydney, Mascot Field, at one thirty. Parked the plane and went into town to deliver some parcels for Gen. Ramey. Holed up in the best hotel in town, the "Australia" for the night, thanks to the influence of Lt. Jack "Buck" Shaw.

As the plane was being worked on, we were to spend one day in Sydney.

July 10th, 1943

Bummed around Sydney saying hello to old friends. Saw Barney McManus, Sue Tate, Grif. Had dinner with Sue and some friends, all Red Cross workers and war correspondents.

July 11th, 1943

We were to take off for Melbourne at nine but it was 1130 before we could get the old b---- thawed out enough to start. The weather was beginning to get very cold as went further south. Things are all screwed up down here, the further south you go, the colder it gets.

Had a nice trip to Melbourne and took some pictures of the snow clad mountains, a welcome sight after the heat of New Guinea.

We landed at the Commonwealth aircraft plant at 0130 and signed over the plane. Major Steele met us and was very accommodating. I was a bit concerned over the fact that there was not another B-24 for me to take back. Capt. Whitlock, 320th Commanding Officer, had instructed me to take 358 down to Melbourne and bring the other ship that was completed, back. Capt. Steele said we would straighten that out in the morning, and for now we had better get lodging for the night. He got us rooms at the CTA which were not too sharp, but then everything else was full up.

Capt. "Bud" Goddis and I wondered about town trying to find a place to eat and finally ended up at the Red Cross Club. We retired right after eating.

July 12th-19th, 1943

The next week was spent trying to get my orders straightened out and endeavoring to keep warm. (Egad, it was cold.) It seems that Gen. Connell had sent orders ahead for me to wait for completion of repairs on 358 and Whitlock had told me to return. Oh me, what a mess, I couldn't do either without disobeying an order. So, I began frantically sending wires to both camps.

In the meantime, "Buck" Shaw, and Oregonian and sports announcer before the war, had struck up quite an acquaintance. We managed to get a room together at the Scotts' Hotel and immediately began operation in the "402 Club", which we named room 402. This damn hotel was one of the best in town but still had no heating system. The weather was extremely cold, getting down to sometimes 15 degrees F at night. More than once the water froze over night.

Buck Shaw had a gal friend in town so I tagged along with him, enjoying the company of his girl's sister, Leslie McAvoy. We took in Melbourne's only night clubs, "The Embassy Club" and "Claridges".

Melbourne was a very pretty town, parks everywhere. The people were not quite as friendly there as in Sydney. The downtown buildings for the greater part are 30 years old or better, but they do have a few modern building. Melbourne is a very devout town, no Sunday movies, etc.

I had Eileen, Buck's gal, get me a lambs wool coat for Dinky during the week. It was a beautiful, fluffy white fur coat and I really hated to mail it, I wanted to give it to the good wife personally, but of course, this was impossible. So I finally mailed it on the 15th.

Struck up a friendship with the night cook at the hotel, one Jimmy. He took a liking to Buck and I and for a couple packs of American cigarettes, fixed us a couple of steaks whenever we came in at night after a show. Cigarettes are at a real premium here, especially American cigarettes. For a carton of smokes you can practically own the town.

The 1st Division of Marines were in town, this was the same bunch that took Guadalcanal, and we had many a good stage party with the Marine officers. They are a swell bunch of boys and think well of the Air Corps too!

In the meantime, Ekas and Bill Turner had grabbed a rattle for Sydney. Frank has a terrific crush on an Australian girl up there so I told him it was okay if he wanted to wait for me there. I guess he talked Bill Turner into going for no special reason.

George Wright and Alex Sedilko, my Aerial Engineer and Radio man respectively, were really having a good time. Every time I saw George, he was cockeyed and with at least two women. One night he got oiled up and brought to girl tram conductresses up to the Hotel at 0230 in the ayem and left them. He said he figured that Buck Shaw and I were lonesome and so he brought these girls up for us. After he left, we had to get out of bed and take them home. Oh, what a night that was!

July 20th, 1943

Finally a wire came through from the Commander General of the 5th Air Force, to return to our proper organization. My contradicting orders had practically caused an international situation. This wire came in Tuesday the 19th, so I immediately made arrangements for the crew and I to get up to Sydney that night by train, there being no vacancies on the air transports.

Left Melbourne at 0630 pm on their one and only modern train, "The Spirit of Progress". This train was quite similar to the "Lark" that runs from San Francisco to Los Angeles. This however was short lived and we had to transfer to a typical old fashioned Aussie rattle about 10pm.

July 21st, 1943

Arrived in Sydney this morning at 9:30am after getting a pretty sleep on the train, thanks to the "Micky Finn" George Wright slipped me under the guise of a "nightcap"

Found Healthy, Yople, Wiltse and Gottke in town on leave so I moved out to the house in Rose Bay that they had rented for the week.

July 22nd, 1943

Made arrangements for Bill Turner and George Wright to leave for Moresby via transport Friday morning. Frank and I couldn't get on due to priorities. This made Ekas mad, he had gotten himself engaged while in Sydney to a girl name Nell and he wasn't too anxious to leave her.

Went to the "Prince's" tonight with Healthy and two bottles of Johnny Walker Black Label scotch, for which we paid 3 pounds /10 shillings – about \$10.00 each. The milk man in Rose Bay is also the local bootlegger, he delivered the whiskey with the milk every ayem. Very convenient.

July 23rd, 1943

Got up late, had breakfast at the house and bummed around town. Took a taxi out to see Mrs. Griffin. Went out with Browning tonight to the opening of a new club in King's Cross – The Embassy Club. Came back to #11 Carlisle for a party afterward.

July 24th, 1943

Went to the airport with bag and baggage, having the intent to leave for Port Moresby. When I arrived, I was informed by Capt. Archie B. Browning that we had been cut off the passenger list by two Colonels. So Brownie decided that Markowitz, himself and I would take in the races that pm. We did and I managed to lose 2 pounds, but it was quite an interesting experience. They operate their betting by both the use of tote machines and a bookie ring. Went to bed fairly early at the Officer's Club, where I was now staying.

July 25th, 1943

Got up late and went visiting with Capt. Browning at some Australian friends of his. Climbed into bed at 10pm after saying goodbye to Sue for the 3rd time.

July 26th, 1943

Actually got off for Moresby today at 11 o'clock. But our trip was short lived. We were shanghaied off the transport at Brisbane by Capt. Marshall to ferry a B-24 back to 929. We took our bags off the ship and checked in at the Oxford House as usual.

Called Joan Hooper and mother when I got into town and we got together for a quiet evening at the Hooper residence. They insisted that I stay overnight in the spare bedroom, which I did.

July 27th, 1943

Was supposed to test hop the airplane today but it wasn't ready, so just spent a lazy day around town.

Tonight I had dinner with Frank and afterwards went up to the new Officer's Club for a few steins of beer before going off to bed.

July 28th, 1943

Test hopped "Cookie", a 321st nose turret ship, today at noon and so the plane still needed some final adjustments. Frank and I went back into town. Took in a show tonight.

July 29th, 1943

Today is my first or rather our first wedding anniversary. Just imagine, married one year already. Not much in the way of a celebration was in order as we were supposed to take off this morning. However, we still didn't have a Navigator or a radio operator for the flight. But what finally held up our departure was the weather. So, Frank and I spent the balance of the day carting 100 cases of "Coke" from Amberly Field to Archer, loading said cases into the airplane. Geez what a job, but the boys up north will appreciate the "Coke".

Went into town about five and after Frank had called his Nell on long distance phone for the third time in as many days, we went down to the National House for a big steak dinner. And so to bed. Thus ended a year of married life, I lay in bed and thought all the wonderful evens this day last year. Oh, war is hell, and that's no joke!

July 30th, 1943

Took off this morning at 0930 and headed for Townsville, some 4 hours away. We had finally dug up a radio operator who did know his Pratt from third base as it developed and without a Navigator headed north. After being out some 5 hours in the "soup" we began to wonder if we were lost. I turned the radio beam on and discovered that we were about 100 miles further inland than we should have been. We checked our compass after reaching the coast and discovered that it was off 15 degrees. Wow, it's a wonder we ever hit Townsville.

We checked into the Officer's Club for the night as our ship was to have a new compass installed. I didn't wish to transverse 700 miles of water with a compass out of order.

July 31st, 1943

Left Townsville at 0900 and arrived at Moresby by 1330. We did a good job of navigating on this hop.

Of course, we got razzed by all the fellows for being gone 3 weeks. I expected this but was pleased to find that Major Whitlock understood our delay and harbored no ill feelings.

Was glad to be back, strangely enough, and the balance of my crew was glad to see me too.

Had some 72 letters awaiting me which didn't make me too mad. Spent the evening in my "sack" trying to get all this mail read.

August 1st, 1943

Started working on the 8' addition to our shack. The tent is now a big mess of clothes, flying gear, etc. While I was gone the boys had built the framework for the tent but hadn't screened it in yet.

August 2nd, 1943

Took off at 11 this ayem for a strike on Lae. We had a nice formation of 18 ships with P-47 top cover and P-40's for close cover. We bombed the fuel dumps in formation and set them afire. However, our bombs weren't the ones that started the fire. All our bombs fell into the ocean, 36 of them. So, now "Porky" Thrush is singing "I dropped a bomb into the ocean"! In a three ship formation the wingmen drop their bombs on the lead ship and "Porky" was Whitlock's Bombardier.

August 3rd, 1943

Worked all day on the addition to our chalet, finished the foundation and floor.

August 4th, 1943

Stood alert today until noon. Finished up our addition to the shack and began screening this pm.

August 5th-6th, 1943

Stood alert again but the weather kept us from going to Salamaua. Finished up our shack and slept without mosquito nets for the first time in a year, a great feeling.

August 7th, 1943

Took off at 1 today for another big raid on Salamaua, Kela township this time. We had 8 1000 lb demolition bombs on board. The first element of the 320th wiped out the main buildings in the town and we cleaned out a big bridge and an A/A battery which had giving us hell on our bombing run. No interception.

August 8th, 1943

Cleaned up inside our shack and built a couple clothes racks, the place is really nice now.

August 9th, 1943

Took off again this ayem at 1045 for another gravy run to Salamaua, this time to bomb some Jap artillery forces. We must have hit them alright because the ground force commander sent us love and kisses. We must have at least moved the Jap troops about 5 miles up the valley, what with 150 tons of bombs. The total combat time of the last 3 missions was 12:30.

August 10th, 1943

Wrote letters all day, trying to catch up on all my back mail.

August 11th, 1943

Strike for today postponed, worked around the shack all day.

August 12th, 1943

Did some practice formation bombing this aye, with Lake as Bombardier, Lankford still in Sydney on leave.

August 13th, 1943

Stike mission in support of ground troops again this morning. We were to un-dig the Japs from a ridge that they had dug themselves into and from this position were giving our ground troops hell.

When we got to the target we found it closed in by clouds so bombed Salamaua isthmus again. Dropped 8 1000 lb. demo's in 3 ship formation. Destroyed six buildings and Marine (Jap) Headquarters. No "ack-ack" or interception, all the A/A positions have been bombed out of existence. Logged 4:30 – total now 88:00 CM time.

August 14th, 1943

Up at 4 again this morning for the usual "milk run" to Salamaua. Took off at 7:30 and bombed old Bobdubi ridge at 9:41. 8 1000 lb. demo bombs on Jap positions there, bombing very accurate. No opposition at all. Logged 4:00 – total 92:00 CM time (13th mission)

August 15th, 1943

Another mission to Salamaua today, but they wouldn't let me go, said I'd been flying too much. When I heard the reports on the mission I was just as glad I didn't go. It was a plenty "SNAFU" deal and most of the bombs were "salvoed"(?) in the ocean, thanks to the target and surrounding areas being closed in by clouds.

Spent the day reading and writing a few letters.

August 16th, 1943

No daylight mission today, probable strike tonight. Heard at noon that we were going out tonight and so took a nap in the afternoon.

Took in a show and attended briefing at 9:30pm. As expected, we were going up to mess things up for the Japs at Wewak. They have been getting pretty playful with their Wewak-based bombers over our advanced airfields, so we were going to try and put a stop to it. We were to carry both frag bobs and incendiaries. The purpose of course being to destroy their aircraft, of which there were approximately 135, 75 fighters and 60 bombers of the twin-engine "Betty" variety. We were after the fighters (Zero) mainly and were to knock them out so that our B-25 C-1's (Straffers, with 8 forward-firing 50 cal. Machine guns) could go in there this following morning, tomorrow ayem, and destroy all the planes on the ground with machine gun fire. Their chief worry about this kind of a job was pursuit interception. So we were to try and destroy the fighters tonight, before they went in.

Took off at 11:02 pm with 20 clusters of 6 frag bombs each. 120 bombs a totaled. The weather was good all the way up. (We'll continue, as midnight passes, on August 17th.)

August 17th, 1943

At 0140 we sighted what we thought was Wewak, it was just too quiet and peaceful – not a light or sign of life anywhere. I was pretty sure it was Wewak so I had Lake, my Bombardier for the night, open the bomb bay doors and we started on our run for the airdrome, partially hidden under a low cloud. Still no signs of life. Just as Lake and I saw our target, they decided that they wouldn't hide peacefully any more. About four searchlights began to flash in sparkling array. As we started our run for the dispersal area at the end of the field below us 7,000', the ack-ack got our range and began bouncing the plane around. Five more searchlights came on us and we were now brilliantly illuminated by nine big lights. The bombardier complained the lights blinded him so that he could no longer see the target. I told him to stay on course that

I could see the target and would let him know when to drop. Ack-ack was now getting awfully damn accurate and we could hear the shrapnel hitting against the fuselage of the plane, sounding like rain on a tin roof. A beautiful string of “pom-pom” tracers went past our nose in a red line just before I told Lake to drop. (“Pomp Pom” is a very fast firing cluster of 20mm shells, very similar to machine gun fire but with a much greater range.) We dropped our bombs in our target area and turned sharply to the sea, out of the ack-ack. The results of our bombs were unobserved as frag bombs don’t make a spectacular explosion and seldom start fires. This ayem, when the 25’s go in, we will see what kind of a job we did toward keeping the Zero’s on the ground. As we turned for home, we saw several more planes on their runs and saw the fires that their bombs had started. Everybody was arriving now, we were the first ones to arrive and bomb the target. Just as we made our final turn for Moresby, we saw one of our ships hit by ack-ack and it started to burn, a few moments later it blew up and fell into the ocean, scattering burning fragments all over the water. We all wondered who it was, all hoping that it was not one of our buddies. (It turned out to be one of the new crews in the 400th Squadron.) We lost a total of three planes on this raid tonight, two shot down and one lost on the return flight. Not too bad, three planes out of 48.

The trip back was uneventful and we landed at 0530. Logging a total of 7 hours – 14th mission.

After breakfast we heard the news we had been waiting for. The B-25 straffers had gone in at 0910 and had themselves a picnic. We had done such a thorough job of bombing the place, a few hours before, that they only had one Zero to fight off. We were tickled pink, only one fighter out of 75 was able to get off the ground. The 25’s destroyed 65-70 planes on one runway and another 20 at Wewak drome. This is what could be termed a very successful cooperative operation. This is a big loss to the Nips, one of their biggest.

Crawled into the sack at 0630 and slept most of the day.

August 18th, 1943

Was very industrious today. I painted all the furniture on our “sun porch”. Of all colors, I painted it cream. Spent all day at this, rather enjoying it too.

Goettke told me tonight that I had a recco in the morning and so I went to bed about 10:30.

August 19th, 1943

Was aroused by a sleep duty officer at one ayem and had a snack of “one each” cup of coffee. Capt. Art Smith, Intelligence Office, briefed us at 01:45. We were to go up past Kavieng to a point 200 miles above the equator. The purpose of this reconnaissance flight was to check on the movement of Japanese warships and merchant vessels. This flight took us about 850 miles into enemy territory.

We took off at 3 ayem and went merrily on our way. The boys were a little worried about the fact that I had requested skip-bombing fuses and had them in the bombs. I wanted these just in case we ran into a nice fact convoy like Bill Gentry did. If said mythical convoy materialized, I was going to get me a boat too, that is, providing this convoy had no top cover of Jap fighters.

We reached our northernmost point about 0915 without seeing anything but “weather”. This was the first time I had been in the northern hemisphere for eleven months and I had a feeling akin to nostalgia.

Our next leg took us east and then our last leg carried us over near the Jap stronghold at Kavieng. This was our most dangerous point of the reco, for if we got jumped by Zero’s out here all alone it would be our “Hon. Ass”! We whistled on past Kaveing with everyone perspiring profusely but we didn’t see a single plane or ship.

At 1230, we dropped our four 500 lb. bombs on a new Jap installation at Garove Island, near Rabaul, We wiped out about six tents and we will never know how many Nips.

After bombing, we proceeded on back to our base, landing at 3:45pm. We were really pooped, but happy to have completed our mission successfully and without mishap.

15th Mission – total cm 111:30

Went to bed at six, after eating and really slept like a log.

August 20th, 1943

Did some more painting and took it kind of easy.

August 21st, 1943

On one hour readiness today, does not look like anything will come of it however.

And nothing did come of it.

August 22nd, 1943

Umpired a ball game this ayem, my own playing is still hampered by a lame left, or rather, right wrist and hand.

Took in a show tonight, Rosalind Russell in “Flight for Freedom” – the story of Amelia Earhart.

August 23rd, 1943

Spent the morning writing letters and the afternoon flying instruments. Saw Barbara Stanwyck in “Lady of Burlesque” tonight, a stinker if there ever was one. Going on a daylight mission to Wewak tomorrow, which should be interesting.

August 24th, 1943

Awakened at 4 ayem, briefed at 5 o’clock and took off at 6:45. Wewak was the target, the “township” to be specific. We had 24 ships going from our group and the 43rd had 18 going along with us. We were to have 4 squadrons of P-38’s as top and close cover, which amounted to about 100 of these beautiful fighters.

We met the fighters an hour out of the target and we went in together. It might be interesting to comment on the fact that Wewak is one of the two “hot spots” that the Japs have built up in this area – the other of course being Rabaul.

We went into the target at 10:45 and our 48 1000 lb demo bombs dropped on the township at 10:47. That tonnage was just our squadron, there were six other squadrons with the same bomb load and target. That town really took a pasting. Imagine 336 1000 lb. bombs on a town area about the size of Azusa and in a compact layout at the end of a peninsula.

The ack-ack was intense but fortunately not very accurate. There was a black cloud of it just below and behind us.

The Zero’s, that we had been expecting, didn’t jump us until just before we dropped our bombs. I was busy as hell, flying the tight formation that is necessary for this type of “pattern: bombing and couldn’t see the Zero’s. However, I knew they were there, thanks to the sweet chatter of my own guns – and the smoke I could see issuing from the tail turret guns of the ships flying ahead of me. I knew that they sure as hell weren’t firing at a “tow target”. The Zekes were attacking me in particular as I was flying “ass-end Charlie” in the formation which looked like this:

T T T
T T T (Me)

Squadron Diamond.

So they took advantage of my last position on the outside of the formation. The first pair of Zero's had just begun their pass at us, from "one o'clock" and below, when the protecting P-38's tore-ass after them. There was a regular "rat race" toward and under my plane. Two Zekes would whip in at us and breakaway under the nose, amid a hail of lead from my nose gunners, Sgt. P.G. Smith and Dave Lankford, and right on their tails were two P-38's. The minute the 38's started chasing them, the Japs dove for the ground 16,000 feet below – the Nip fighter pilots are scared to death of the P-38's – and rightly so! Boy, it was beautiful to watch our fighters "peel off" after the Japs, who had all good intentions of shooting us down.

We landed about 1:30 without further incident. For some reason, we didn't get hit at all – we were attacked 5 times and they missed us every time. I guess our guns and the 38's made them a little nervous, thank God!

Logged an even 7 hours – 16th mission, 118:30 CM time total.

August 25th, 1943

Rested up a bit today – not much doing.

August 26th-28th, 1943

The planes and crews were getting a much needed rest. A lot of the ships needed work done on them. We were briefed Saturday night in the Chapel (a fine place for the mass-murder instructions) for the strike on Wewak in the morning.

August 29th, 1943

The dear wife's birthday, she's 24 years old today. It looks as though I were to celebrate it by bombing the Japs to their knees at Wewak.

We took off at 0715 and proceeded to the target, picking up about 3 squadrons of P-38's en route. There were supposed to be 4 squadrons of "Lightning" but only two of them got there. We made comment on the fact but the flight leaders went on anyway, which we were to regret.

We approached the target with all quiet with the world, in fact too quiet. But all hell broke loose as we turned onto our bomb run for Boram Airdrome. The A/A fire was intense and right on our altitude, which was 16,000 feet. If the A/A fire had been one hundred feet to the left, I would be strumming a beautiful golden harp right now. Then the non-existent (Intelligence said!!) Zero's jumped us – in bunches of nine, like grapes. The 38's for some reason wer flubbing around above and ahead of us when they should have been right along side us. Of a consequence, some of the bomber crews got shot up pretty bad before the 38's got wise and came down to protect us. There was a running gun fight for a good 30 minutes before we were clear of them. I was several Zekes blow up in the air or trail down in flames. The official count was 10 Zero's for the 90th and 14 for the P-38's. We didn't lose any fighters and one bomber, North of the 400th, crashed. However 7 of the bomber crew bailed out – the rest were wounded. There were two other bombers, all B-24's, that crash landed with controls shot partially away, hydraulic system blown-up, etc. These planes landed at the runways and no one was hurt. Several crew members in various of the 36 bombers were shot, only a couple have died. This was certainly no "gravy run".

Our bombs were very beautiful. Dave Lankford, my Bombardier, sighted for our whole squadron; they all dropped when they saw our bombs leave the bomb bay. We patter-bombed the fuel and AP dispersal area. Coverage was excellent.

Our squadron got one Zero and two probables. Browning got the Zeke that shot his throttle controls away.

So it was that I celebrated the wife's birthday.

17th Mission – Total 125:30

August 30th, 1943

Rested most of the day and saw a show tonight.

August 31st, 1943

Another day of rest. Were briefed at the Chapel for strike on Alexishaven tomorrow.

September 1st, 1943

Took off at 0715. rendezvoused with fighters at Maribnian and proceeded to target. Oursquadron objecting was the Jap squadron headquarters at Amron Mission, Alexishaven. (30 miles NW of Madang on the coast of New Guinea) It was a big show, 100 fighters, 75 Mitchells strafing and 50 heavy bombers. Several beautiful fires were started in Alexishaven before we dropped our bombs on the "JHQ". Our 1000 lb. bombs destroyed better than half the buildings. Ack-ack was negligible. Landed about one.

18th Mission – 131:00 CM time.

September 2nd, 1943

Rest today, out again tomorrow. Took a practice bombing mission today. Dave Lankford is really a "Hot Bombardier". He hit a rock 100x25' twice out of five bombs from 10,000 feet. His other bombs were 20', 80' and 100'. Plenty good.

September 3rd, 1943

Took off at 0800 to bomb the Jap GHQ on the "terrace" at Lae. Our 24-90th group AP were to do the job. We dood it too! Even to showing the Nips what our 1000 lb. bombs could do to their two "16-holers". Well the Japs are now losing their royal ass in this theatre, so they'll really have no use for the "out-house"! The ack-ack was very accurate. If one of the bursts had been 20' closer, I would be now plaing a lovely harp for "Saint Pete".

Landed at 12:30 after a successful mission.

19th Mission – 136.36 CM.

September 4th, 1943

Today marks one year of oversears duty. We pulled out of San Francisco bay just over a year ago today. A lot of water has passed under the bridge since then.

Our forces celebrate this day by invading the territory surrounding Lae. Amphibious forces landed NE of Lae about 10 miles at Bitoi. The landings were practically unopposed thanks to the complete control we have of the air this Salamaua-Lae area.

September 5th-6th, 1943

We had two days to fix up our ships and rest after our latest workout on Lae.

September 7th, 1943

Took off at 0715 for Lae "Terrace" again. We dropped at 10:15, all bombs in the target area, specific results unobserved due to 8/10 cloud coverage and smoke. Ack-ack was still light but awful damn accurate. I heard us get hit; there was a metallic "SPANG" as the shell fragments hit us. I quickly checked the instruments for

signs of engine failure and was very happy to note that they at least hadn't hit an engine. I then checked on the crew and tested my controls anxiously. Everything was okay. When we landed at noon I found that dear ol' Dinky had seven holes, in the right wing and tail. One hole, a direct hit by a 3" A/A gun, went clear through the wing, a hole big enough to throw a coffee pot through. I should be very happy that no one was hurt, but I'm just mad because those little slant-eyed bastards put a mess of holes in my ship.

Mission 20 – 4.8 CM – total 141.24

September 8th, 1943

Was awakened at 0415 this ayem by the not-so-nice but familiar sound of a B-24 exploding off the end of the runway. We were plenty worried about it because we had two recco's going out this morning. The fire had just died down when the bombs (500 lb. demo) got hot enough to go off. The blast was terrific. Three men got out of the burning plane, but six rescuers were killed when the bombs went off. A bob-load B-124 upon crashing at night is a spectacular but depressing sight. This is the 2nd one in two days. Yesterday morning at the same time a B-24 from the 43rd group crashed into an Aussie troop convoy (trucks) and killed 167 men. The 43rd crash was attributed to engine failure but the 319th plane of ours this morning was pilot error. The pilot allowed the plane to touch the ground for an instant after leaving the runway. Tough luck, these accidents seem to run in groups.

September 9th, 1943

Took off on the Bismarck Sea recco at 10:00. Trip was eventful except for weather until we got to Garove Islands in the Witu group off New Britain. We bombed a new Jap village, the same one that we bombed on racco August 19th. This time, we did a real good job. Lankford put our bombs right down the main street of the camp. There were about 45 shacks on each side of the street. The pictures, received later, confirmed our belief that Dave's perfect bombs destroyed at least 30 shacks.

Inspected a few more new Jap installations and came on back through Vitiaz Straits, on our way home. Just as we were passing Finchaven we sighted 12 Zero's. They started to make a run for us and then changed their minds. In the meantime, old Bud was tearing for the nearest cloud cover, about 10 miles away.

Broke through a hole in the clouds in order to cross the range (Owen Stanly mountains) at 18,500 feet. We were beginning to sweat out gas now, as #3 and #4 engines showed very little remaining gas. Just after we got over the range and started down, #1 engine quit cold – out of gas! I feather the engine and took the most direct course to Moresby, still an hour away. We were over either water or rugged country all the way to Moresby, so if another engine cut out, there was no hope of making a forced landing anywhere. We transferred some gas into #1 engine and got it started again. We then sweat profusely all the way into Port Moresby, hoping and praying that we wouldn't run out of gas before we could land.

I called the tower and had them clear the field for an emergency landing. Everything was going fine as I made my turn into the field – then the ship gave a lurch, #1 engine had quit again. As this engine was on the inside of my turn, I had to make a complete circle in order to keep the plane from being turned over on its back because of the over-balance of power on the right side. I really was worried on that turn, for I was down to minimum altitude for the landing when the engine quit. I was at 900 feet and was flying in a circle through a valley surrounded by 2000 foot hills. I barely cleared the sides of two hills before I could complete my turn back to the field. This all happened in pitch darkness. Finally “prayed” the plane into position to land and surprisingly enough made a fairly decent landing. As the wheels struck the ground and we began rolling nicely down the runway, I cut loose with a heartfelt wahoo!! We taxied off the runway and on our way to the bunker, all the time Frank and I were discussing what would have happened if another engine had quit on us, then you guessed it, #2 engine stopped cold while we were taxiing. Wow, if that had of happened 3 minutes earlier, I would not be fingering “Old Black Joe” on a harp! My luck still holds out, but good!!

Were met in the bunker by about six carloads of anxious well-wishers, who had heard our frantic radio messages to the control tower.

Were interrogate by Scotty, our Intelligence Officer, and then found supper and bed waiting for us. I lay awake for quite a spell thinking over my recently past crisis. It's hard enough to make a three engine landing in the daytime when you are prepared for it. But to make your first forced 3-engine landing at night, without being able to get set for it- oy, there must be an easier way to make a living!! I finally decided, before I fell into dreams of San Marino, that I was quite proud of Bud and the way he handled a dangerous situation.

#24 – Total 9.6 CM – Total to date (151.00) 149:12

September 10th, 1943

Took it easy all day. Spent my time looking for people who hadn't heard of my rugged experience of the night before. (Just like an ol' maid with an operation)

September 11th, 1943

Nothing doing again today.

September 12th, 1943

On the alert for a Wewak strike – N.G. account of weather.

September 13th, 1943

Took off for Wewak at 0630. Mission uneventful, few Zero's jumped us, but the P-38's took care of them. Bombing of Dagua drome very good; we destroyed 25-30 medium Jap bombers on the ground. They make a pretty fire when viewed from above.

25th Mission, 7.5 hours, total 156:42

September 14th, 1943

Day of rest.

September 15th, 1943

Took off for Wewak again today. Got halfway there and developed a bad gasoline leak so I reluctantly returned to the base. The only thing I'm afraid of in this B-24 is fire.

Dumped 6 bombs in the ocean and brought six back – too hard to land the ship with 12 500 lb. demolition bombs on board.

My engineer, George Wright, was very ill with bad teeth and I very sadly had to ground him after today's mission. He just barely passed the 200 hour mark with today's time. I'm going to miss ol' George a lot, he-s a very dependable Engineer.

Landed at 9:00 o'clock for the first incomplete mission in 25 starts, but it just couldn't be helped.

26th mission, 2.7 hours, total 159.24

Had the crew assembled down at the plane this afternoon and had some pictures taken. This is the first time the crew has been completely together for about 3 months.

September 16th, 1943

Big row between fighter command and bomber command today. It's due to the fact that the bombers, the 321st, squadron in particular, claimed 39 Zero's shot down. The P-38 pilots only claimed 9. The fighters said

that there weren't that many Zekes up there. But there was and they didn't see them. As a result of this conference this morning the 90th Group had credit for 39 enemy planes shot down and all the P-38 flight leaders were relieved of their command.

September 17th-18th, 1943

Two "Dry runs" on a strike for Cape Gloucester airdrome. Had to get up at 3:30 each morning and had the mission called off at nine because of bad weather.

September 19th, 1943

Finally got off for Gloucester today. Two groups went, with a total of 48 bombers plastering the airdrome area. Nothing exciting, the ack-ack was pretty fair, which a hole in my elevator will prove. Bombs were right down the alley. Landed at 3:20 for 6.5 hours. 27th mission, total 165.54.

September 20th-21st, 1943

Same old heat and the battle for rest in the daytime while endeavoring to save yourself from drowning in your own plentiful perspiration.

The squadron went on another strike to Gloucester but I lay low in hopes of a recco, which would give my more CM time. Yep, I'm still battling for the all-important combat time. Got to have it in order to get home for Christmas.

September 22nd, 1943

Today is my 26th birthday and what a helluva place to spend it and what a rough way.

Took off for Bismarck Sea recco at 0630. As we passed Finchaven, we saw our forces making a landing there, with naval guns shelling the Jap shore installations and our fighters covering overhead. A great feat we had for a page of history in the making. All went well with us until we got to the furthest point of our mission, some 500 miles into enemy territory. Then it happened – two engines went dead, my heart and blood ran cold. We couldn't hope to keep the plane in the air on only two engines, there we were 200 miles from any land. We lost 4500 feet before we luckily got one of the dead engines started. We immediately got rid of our bombs and limped for home, just barely holding out altitude. We sweat very generously all the way back to Moresby, for fear that the other engine would quit again. Our luck held out though and we landed safely and happily at 14:000.

28th mission, 8.2 hours, total 174.06

Went up to the club tonight and the boys gave me a toast on my birthday and presented me with a cherished quart of champagne. Proceeded to get a little tight and barely made the "sack" at midnight. Thus ends my birthday.

September 23rd, 1943

Administered to a hangover and rested up all day.

September 24th, 1943

Was made Vice Secretary Treasurer of the Officers Club at a meeting this ayem. Spent all day trying to fix up some very messy records.

September 25th, 1943

Exercising my new rating of Instructor- Pilot, I took Frank Ekas up to shoot landings. He didn't do too badly – I think my first B-24 landings were even worse. Saw a stinko movie tonight, "Aerial Gunner". In which the combat action was supposed to have taken place in this area. Of course, the director dreamed up what it was like, and did we howl! Funny – boy was it ever.

September 26th, 1943

Took off for Wewak at 0615. The usual thing, airdrome area and supply dumps. It was rather a quiet mission – the ack-ack was nil and the 64, “P-38” fighters that escorted us took good care of the Zero’s that were eager for a shot at us. Was unhappy that we didn’t receive our usual “hot reception” up there. Why? Because we took along with us a Lt. (small “G”) Hayes (USN) who lives on Winthrop Road – San Marino, no less. Only excitement was caused by Conrad having his waist gun run wild on him while he was test firing it – it like to have shot our tail off before he could stop it. Landed about 1330. Total 7.7 hours.

29th Mission – total 181.48

September 27th, 1943

Rested up today and saw William Saroyan’s “The Human Comedy” tonight, very good too. A bit nostalgic for this was theatre however.

September 28th, 1943

What I am about to describe will long live in my memory. On this day, I completed my 30th combat mission, the “roughest” mission to date – and I hope I never have another like it.

We took off for Wewak at 0730 to bomb the supply dump on the shore side of Wewak airdrome. I was flying #2 spot in the formation as usual, but had to relinquish it to Larry Smith when Wiltse made a very steep bank and caused me to “stall out” of formation. I couldn’t get back in #2 spot for the bomb run, so Larry Smith took my position and I moved into his #3 (“tail end Charley”) spot. This proved to be a bit of bad luck as the ack-ack was really lined up on #3. On the run we really got shot up, how bad I didn’t know until later. Our left aileron was almost shot off the wing, the tail surfaces were more “holey” than solid, the tail turret was hit and put out of action, an oil line in #2 engine was severed, well the whole ship was riddled with jagged holes. Fortunately, none of the hits were in a vital spot such as the engines or gasoline tanks. But this wasn’t the least of our troubles. After turning off our bomb run, which was very good – starting four huge fires, we were jumped by six Zero’s who were really “eager” to add a B-24 to their trophy room – MINE!! They made passes at us from “around the clock”, above and below – mostly below. They pressed their attacks to within 200 feet of our plane, something I haven’t seen them do since January 8th over Lae. One pass knocked the left waist gunner out of commission while Frank Conrad was holding it in his hands and firing it. He escaped with just a minor wound in the index finger. Another pass caused a .20mm to explode in the tail turret which was already injured. This shot put many wounds in Johnny Rickels’ calves and feet, and completely destroyed the guns. However, he steadfastly refused to come out of the turret – he stayed in there and tried to handle the heavy gun mechanism by hand, while his shoes were full of blood from his wounds. He cried like a baby because he couldn’t get make the disabled guns fire at the Zero’s which were now all over us. There were only seven, but they had picked on us and us alone. Then I saw my Nipponese friend start a pass at us from 11 o’clock and below. None of our guns could get on him at this position and I dare not leave the protection of the formation to give one of the guns a pot shot at him. I saw this silver Zero come right straight at me with wings smoking (their wings seem to smoke when they are firing at you). When I saw him start to fire, I pulled the plane up, that was all I could do to spoil his aim. This proved to save my life. A fraction of a second later the fuse box on my left blew up and I had the sensation of being slapped on the left hip. The bullet went through the fuse box, cut clean both my microphone and headset wires, cut my safety belt, which was fastened across my lap, neatly in twain. Then it proceeded through the fold in my sweater at my waist and on into the armor plate behind me. A near miss, two inches anyway but lower and your author would have been a regrettable casualty. Finally, the P-38’s, who were to stop this sort of thing, got the idea that we were getting our ass shot off and tore into them. The rest of the trip is anti-climax. We had to do a special wiring job to control the propellers, which were running away thanks to the bullet through the controlling fuse box. Made an emergency landing, expecting my controls to give way at any moment. I needn’t have worried though as I still had three strands left, out of thirty, on my control cables. Oh yeah! Doc said, when he met me at the end of the runway with an ambulance, that “Rick”

would be ok in a couple of weeks. But boy, was poor “Dinky” shot up, so bad that the crew chief shook his head and turned the ship over to Service Squadron for major patching up.

After interrogation, two war correspondents, Bill Boni of AP and another from INS whose name escapes me, shagged me down in the mess hall for a story of the fracas.

I forgot to mention that Cecil Quinley in the top turret got one of the attacking Zero's. His tail broke off and he burst into flames right off our wing tip. This makes a total of 4 enemy planes for my crew.

To say that I am glad to be alive tonight is a masterpiece of understatement. We are the luckiest crew alive!

Total: 30 mission, 188:54

September 29th, 1943

Rested up today after yesterday's nerve wracking ride. Racked my bags for our trip to Sydney.

September 30th, 1943

Left at noon for Sydney; spent the night in Townsville.

October 1st-10th, 1943 (Sydney leave)

Got into Sydney on the 1st and moved out to the “Sad Shack”, #2 Wentworth Rd., Pt. Piper. Eight of us rented this two story brick house for the week. They were Wayne Smith, Possum Kuhn, Don Martin, Bill Turner, Dave Lankford, Jack Pelander, “Moo” Moomaw and yours truly. “Amy” was the housekeeper and cook; we paid her for the food and she cooked us chicken and steak dinners on alternate nights. We had many a good party at the “sad shack”.

My co-pilot, Frank Ekas, got married Wednesday night, October 6th. I was one of the ushers, or groomsmen as the Aussies call them. It was a very nice Episcopal (High Church) wedding with a lengthy reception following.

Met a swell girl, Pat Cotton, who was in the same boat as I was – married just a few weeks before her husband and wife respectively left for the wars. Pat and I really had a swell time tearing around together – just like brother and sister.

October 11th-12th

Left for New Guinea on the 11th and got back to Moresby on the 12th. We landed to find that the Rabaul daylight raid was then in progress. Nuts, I wanted to go on this 1st Rabaul raid in the daylight. It was a big show, 96 B-24's; 104 B-25's and 7 squadrons of P-38's (112). The total damage was about 6 vessels damaged or sunk and about 125 planes wrecked by the 25's on the ground and in the air. We lost 4 B-24's, 2 fighters and 2 Mitchells.

October 13th, 1943

Took over my dew duties as flight leader today on another raid on Rabaul. Joe Rodenburg lead the other 3-ship element. We got just past Kiriwina and were stopped cold by weather. Thus returning to our base after dropping our bombs in the water. SNAFU!

31st mission 194:54

October 14th-16th, 1943

Awaiting the weather to clear so we can paste Rabaul again.

October 17th-18th, 1943

Waiting on the 17th, took off for Rabaul on the 18th. We got as far as Kiriwina again and had to turn back account of weather. Bombs dumped into the ocean again.

6 hours, 25 min. – Total 201:20

Yep, I got over the hump today. They say that the first 200 hours are the toughest. I really believe it.

October 19th, 1943

I'm really a sad man this ayem. That's besides having a beautiful hangover from Healthy's going away party last night, which lasted until all hours. Finally, the two of us got the drunks out of the shack and packed his clothes.

"Wayne R." left this morning and we bid each other goodbye and good luck. A lump as big as the Rush Memorial came up in my throat. Gosh, I was sad to see leave me behind, after two solid years of being together every singly day. Through literally sweat, blood and tears!

On top of this, my plane, "Dinky", was taken south for a new nose turret and I have no assurance of getting my baby back. So you see why my chin is dragging on terra firma today. Lost my pal and my ship.

October 20th-21st, 1943

Nothing doing Wednesday. Took off on a gravy mission Thursday and bombed the ears off the Japs trying to retake Finchaven. No excitement.

5:15 33rd mission, 206:35

October 22nd-23rd, 1943

Nothing doing at all Friday. Jr. Hand packed his things to leave for the States. Frank Ekas got back tonight and I was really glad to see him. We were briefed for the Rabaul raid at 9 o'clock. Yep, we're going to try 'er again!

Took off this morning at 8 o'clock for the hot spot of the South Pacific (the "Berlin" of this area). I was leading a flight of three planes in the first element.

Everything went well; the weather was questionable ut cleared just enough for us to get through. We picked up our fighter escort at Kiriwina and proceeded to Rabaul. We arrived there at 23,000 feet and all of us cold as hell but somehow perspiration was running off our brows. We were to hit the planes and supply dumps at Lakunai airdrome. However, Lakunai was closed in by clouds, so we went across the bay to Rapopo airdrome and dumped our 240 frag bombs there.

As soon as we started our run into Rabaul, the Zero's jumped us. They only got in about 6-8 passes before our protecting P-38's got on their tails. I'm sure that Hohner on left waist gun got one of the, as he started smoking and went into a dive. However, we can't claim destruction unless we see them actually crash or blow up in the air. So we shall take a "probable".

Landed at 4:30 for a nicely completed mission. I don't think anyone is missing.

34th mission 8:50 – Total 215:25

October 24th-28th, 1943

Did nothing of any consequence up until the briefing for Rabaul on the evening of the 28th. During the rest of the time we fooled around, painting the furniture and the shack. During this time, Junior Hand left for

home, as well as Fred Herzog and Merrill Taylor. This left the shack vacant for the rest of my boys to move in. Bill Turner was already in Healthy's "sack". Now Frankie Ekas and Dave Lankford were to move in.

October 29th, 1943

Was rudely awakened at 4:30 by the duty officer and had breakfast, as usual, of soggy G.I. pancakes. I think if the Japs would offer me a good breakfast before every mission, I would go over and fight for them! Of course I wouldn't, but it makes conversation on a dull night.

Had the usual 6 ayem briefing at Group Operation and then waited around for the weather report to come in from the recco ship. The weather report was fair and so we roared down the runway at 7:45.

Flight uneventful until we got within sight of Rabaul and all the gunners were checking and re-checking their guns. Then it happened! As we leveled off after climbing to our bombing altitude (21,000 feet) the number 4 prop governor froze solid. We couldn't change the rpm for love nor money. I conferred with Arnie Holmen, now my Engineer, and we had decided to go on into the target anyway. Then two of our generators conked out on us. This definitely made up our minds for us – we would turn back and not tempt fate any further by giving the Japs a chance at us with our ship not functioning properly. I signaled our two wingmen, Hodges and Mills, and appointed a new flight leader to take my place. Then we sadly turned our erring plane homeward.

We landed about 2 o'clock after battling a rugged storm over the field. I finally saw an opening and tore for the field, shipping the "big-assed gird" just over the tree tops.

35th mission 5:30, Total 220:55

October 30th-31st, 1943

Lounged around after the raid, which reports showed to be very successful. They had god weather over Rabaul, which is unusual, and they really plastered Vunakanau airdrome. There were plenty of Zero's airborne, but the 100 P-38's we had with us kept the, plenty uneager for fight. Everybody returned safely to the base, but 10 Jap fighters didn't/

Sunday was a lazy day. Prepared the monthly statement for the Officers Club and wrote a few letters. Thus ends another month of combat. I wonder if I'll be on my way home at this time next month? Could be!

November 1st-3rd, 1943

A couple strikes scheduled to Rabaul, but weather prevented us from going.

Whitlock told me Tuesday that he was sending the crew and I home this week. Seems too good to be true, but I'm hoping it's correct.

November 4th, 1943

Took off a Jap Task force – hunting mission this morning. It was reported that a task force of 30 warships was on its way down from Truk. Supposedly to oppose our new landings on Bougainville and the constant threat to Rabaul. So I took off at 0830 to look for this convoy up around the equator. I flew through stinko weather until I thought my teeth would jar loose in order to get up there to interrupt them. They weren't where they were supposed to be so I never caught sight of them, even though I searched diligently over enemy territory for six hours. However, another recco ship discovered them on his regular recco run. They consisted of 9 heavy cruisers, 5 light cruisers and five DD.

Returned to base at six pm very tired.

36th mission 10:05, Total 231:00

November 5th, 1943

Rested up today, nothing of any interest. Found out that our big Jap convoy had turned tail for Truk, minus 5 heavy cruisers, two light cruisers and two DD. It so happened that the very secretive navy was laying for this Jap task force east of Kaveing. They tipped their whereabouts too early by dive bombing a couple merchant ships up there. Thus letting this task force know that we had a couple “carriers” in the vicinity – so they went home – leaving the Iowa, New Jersey, North Carolina, etc., without a target.

November 6th, 1943

Took off for Lae to check the new Aussie radar station. Landed at Lae airdrome, the first B-24 to land at this advanced base, at nine ayem. I almost immediately took off again as there was a “red alert” on. Meaning that Jap bombers and strafers were on the way down. Landed again an hour later and picked up two Aussie observers. Flew our check mission and came into Lae at 3 o’clock, to be grounded due to lousy weather.

Drove around Lae the rest of the afternoon, looking over the damage we had done on previous raids. And there was plenty of evidence of what our 1,000 lb. bombs had done. Took a lot of pictures and inspected all the wrecked fighters and bombers.

37th Mission 6:15 – Total 237:15

November 7th, 1943

Was supposed to take off at nine this ayem to finish the mission and return home. But – when we “ran-up” the engines we found a bad oil leak in #2 engine. We fixed that in two hours, during which time we had five red alerts. We spent a few minutes in the old Jap dugouts and then worked on the plane for a few minutes. It was rather a nerve-wracking morning.

Took off at 12, completed a triangular flight over Jap territory and returned to Moresby at 5 o’clock.

38th mission 4:15, Total 241:30

November 8th, 1943

Nothing much doing.

November 9th-11th, 1943

Just laid around, not doing much of anything. My Captancy came through on the 11th, orders dated the 8th. Joe Rodenburg and I “bought” the club and the party was on us. Our orders to go home went in yesterday, the 10th.

November 12th-13th, 1943

Whitlock left for Sydney today and asked me to help Gottke while he was gone. Went to the meeting tonight at Group. Am leading a six ship flight tomorrow to Alexishafen.

Took off this ayem at 7am and proceeded to the target. Had to make two runs over the target, thanks to the bomb sight screwing up the first run. The bombs were perfect and started two large fires in the supply area. A/A was inaccurate but lots of it. No fighters bothered us.

39th mission 6:00 – Total 247:30

November 14th-16th, 1943

As I anticipated, this was my last mission for the 320th. I told “Whit” I would fly one more mission or more. However, my crew and I are very tired and so I made this my last mission in the interest of safety of all of us.

On the 16th, Col. Rogers asked me to take the position of VBC Liaison officer in Brisbane, while I was awaiting my orders to go home. I accepted reluctantly, for I was afraid that this might mess up my orders. I was assured that it wouldn't so I packed up for Brisbane.

November 17th, 1943

After bidding all the boys goodbye, I left by transport this ayem for Brisbane. My job was to manage all the bomber ferry crews and to see that the new bombardment type aircraft were flown to their newly assigned organizations. I was to be in charge of about eight complete crews and around 200 air planes.

Landed at Archerfield about 8:30pm after a very rugged transport ride, I really sweat these C-47 pilots out. (Wish that I didn't know so much about flying – I would be a much happier flying with these “jerks” if I didn't!)

November 18th, 1943

Went down to the office this ayem and began to get things set up with George Hunter in A-3, Air Status. George Hunter is a good boy and I have worked with him before when I was flying down here in July.

November 19th-30th, 1943

Nothing very eventful happened during this period. Worked very hard on my job and made a good deal out of it. I could have lain on my sack all day if I wanted to, but I was too eager for that.

Along toward the end of the month I really began to worry about my orders to go home. At last I got word from Whitlock that my orders weren't put in with the rest of my crew because I was on duty down here and not under the jurisdiction of the squadron. I was going north to find out about this on the 1st of December but business at this time required me to go down to Melbourne on a quick check-trip.

December 1st, 1943

Left for Melbourne today and got as far as Sydney. Weather held me up there so I went on out to the “Sad Shack” to spend the night. Johnny Klines' crew was down on leave at the time and we had a bit of a party on beer and \$10.50 per bottle scotch. (“Blackmarket” price!) Pat Patterson came out to the house with me and had dinner and we joined the happy throng. Pat works for the American Red Cross, although an Aussie, and is really good company.

December 3rd, 1943

Weather still holding me up, so spent another night in Sydney.

December 4th, 1943

Left this morning for Melbourne and landed there at 12:30. Melbourne was damp and cold. I holed up at my old stomping grounds, the “Scots Hotel”.

December 5th-6th, 1943

Spent these days out at the fields checking on our aircraft being assembled down here. Found everything way behind schedule due to the priority given to the erection of P-47's. The balance of my time I spent trying to locate some Christmas scotch for the boys in Brisbane.

Made arrangements to fly back to Brisbane on Tuesday. The weather in Melbourne was sure lousy.

December 7th, 1943

Left Melbourne in a heavy storm on a ANA (Australia National Airways) plane at nine. Played “Papa” to a 4 month old baby all the way to Sydney, as its mother – sitting in the next seat to me – was violently air

sick. Was I ever a damp, gooey mess when we landed in Sydney three hours later. Everyone on the plane, mostly civilians, got a big kick out of my fathering the baby.

Weather was again bad between Sydney and Brisbane so I was forced to spend the night at the “shack” again. Didn’t get much sleep this night – thanks to the fact that Joe Rodenburg’s crew had blown in on leave and a big party went on all night.

December 8th, 1943

Left Sydney this morning and got into Brisbane about 11:30. Went right to work and finished about 6. No word had come in about my orders so I mailed a couple more messages to the Island and Whitlock. Just heard that Gottke is now 320th, C.O.

Began tentatively planning on taking a trip north to find out whatinhell’ had happed to my orders to go home. Time is getting extremely short and I am getting more anxious by the minute.

December 9th-14th, 1943

Nothing new on my orders, my work here running along smoothly. Getting a good rest and eating well. Still staying at the Oxford house.

Dahlberg left on the 10th and I sent my footlocker and a big box of fur rugs, etc., home on the plane with home, I am now beginning to doubt if my orders will be through in time for me to take a plane home.

December 15th, 1943

My ship, “Dinky”, was ready today to go back into combat with a new nose turret, so Pappy decide to fly her north himself. I wanted to fly “my baby” just this once more and also to check personally on my orders, one way or the other.

Landed at Moresby about 5 o’clock and immediately rode up to the squadron area. Found things very SNAFU there. The squadron had just gotten orders to move to Dobadura by the 21st. The ntoo, Col. Rogers had been replaced by Col, Bullis as CO of the Group and Charley Whitlock is the new Deputy CO.

As to my orders – phooey – they hadn’t even been sent into GHQ for attention. I talked to Whitlock and Gottke and ironed out the fact that I was on “temporary duty” and not on “detached service”. It made a difference with regard to submitting my orders. We agreed to set up all the necessary papers immediately and I would rush them through myself. I spent tonight typing up my own orders.

December 16th, 1943

All morning I was on the go getting my papers approved. Col. Rogers gladly signed them and congratulated me on doing a good job over here and he hoped I would get home for Christmas.

By noon, I had the papers approved by Squadron, Group and completed to Fifth Bomber Commands’ specifications. Now I have to wait for the Fifth Air Force to cut my orders. Got myself relieved from duty in Brisbane by “VBC” and will go back down there until the new man arrives.

December 17th, 1943

Had a good trip in a transport back to Brisbane, arriving at noon. Went to work again and began getting things lined up for my homeward trip. It’s going to be close if I am going to make it for Christmas. If my orders don’t arrive by the 20th, I am out of luck for Christmas dinner with the folks in San Marino. I have really about given up hope though.