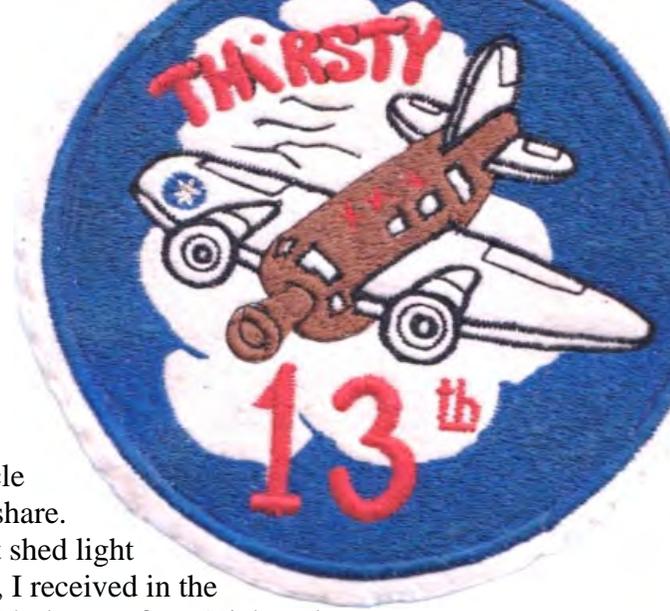


January 2023 Newsletter



Dear Thirsty 13th members, relatives, and friends,

When writing the September newsletter, I found an article about the 801st MAES nurses with good points I wanted to share. On December 11, a colleague emailed me helpful items that shed light on our Western Pacific Campaign award. On December 13, I received in the mail a USB drive from Gunderson’s daughter, Joann, with 74 photos of our Biak and Dulag camps which she kindly scanned for us. In December, I also received from the daughter, Karen, of 1945 radio operator Amelang a quote, a photo, and four scans which were helpful.

Our 1944-45 radio operator Art Driedger wrote stories about his Army experience that filled 101 single-spaced typed pages. His stories added 30 pages to the book *The Thirsty 13th* and have been added to past newsletters. Included herein are his entertaining stories I formatted years ago and have wanted to share about two trips to Tokyo and his return home.

With best wishes for the New Year 2023,

Seth P. Washburne, Squadron Historian
December 31, 2022

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This is the newsletter for the U.S. Army Air Corps 13th Troop Carrier Squadron, 1940-1946, nicknamed “The Thirsty 13th.” This is prepared by Seth P. Washburne, the son of John C. Washburne, navigator 11/42-7/43. Please direct any comments to him at (212) 289-1506, sethgw1@gmail.com, or 5200 Meadowcreek Drive, Apt. 2060, Dallas, TX 75248.

Page numbers referred to are in the book “The Thirsty 13th” unless otherwise stated.

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To enlarge the PDF to fill the width of your screen, press the CTRL key and “+” at the same time.

Please click the hand symbol to make it easier to scroll down.

1. Additional History

a. 1942-1944: Flight Nurses

In September, I found the photo of 801st Medical Air Evacuation Squadron (“MAES”) doctor Burton A. Hall in an article “Under their Wing: Impact of Flight Nurses in the Pacific.” by Amanda Reid-Cossentino. It has interesting points:

- A field hospital (e.g., on Guadalcanal) could perform ~80 operations/day, and more than 85% of those soldiers operated on in field hospitals survived.
- Stable patients requiring long recuperation were put on hospital ships.
- Air evacuation to station and general hospitals was for critically wounded patients who needed specialized treatment.
- 1,176,048 patients were air evacuated during WWII and only 46 died en route.
- The army only accepted volunteers to serve as flight nurses because the planes sometimes carried military supplies so could not be designated as medical planes.
- On a C-47, the nurse was in charge of the aft area as a 2nd Lt., outranking the crew chief.
- More than 59,000 American nurses served in the US Army Nurse Corps during WWII.
- Only about 500 nurses served as flight nurses in WWII, in 31 evacuation squadrons, about 16 per unit including replacements. 17 (3.4% of) flight nurses died in the line of duty.

b. 1944: Western Pacific Campaign Award

Many Thirsty 13th members received battle credit for the Western Pacific Campaign, of the Marshall, Caroline, and Mariana islands. On *The Thirsty 13th* book’s page 469, I wrote our members earned this likely for moving the 5th and 307th Bombardment Groups in April 1944 to the Admiralties, from where they bombed the Marianas. On December 11, 2022, Jim McCabe, Historian for the 307th Bombardment Group Association, emailed me the 370th Bombardment Squadron’s monthly report for August 1944. This showed that the 370th also bombed Yap and Palau in the Caroline Islands, so our award was for the battle for the Caroline Islands, too.

The 370th Bombardment Squadron’s August 1944 monthly report had the pages below which showed that for their next move, to Wakde, they moved 494 men and 21 loads of cargo on 69 of their own B-24 flights. There were only 15 C-47 flights, August 14-23, to carry 21 passengers, 5 jeeps, a water trailer, generator, kerosene, white gas, lumber, pipes and fittings, and 7 stoves.

13th TCS flight records for multi-day trips show flights from Los Negros to Wakde on August 18, 20, 21, 22, so we likely flew at least 4 of these 15 C-47 flights. We may have made same-day roundtrips not in the flight records flying more of these. This moved their air echelon. We may have moved the ground crew on our C-47s.

Supporting Document to Enclosure #1.

NUMBER OF B-24's USED TO TRANSPORT PERSONNEL & CARGO TO WAKDE

| DATE | No. Planes used for Personnel | Cargo | Total |
|------|-------------------------------|------------|-----------|
| 11th | 1 | 4 Pass. | 1 |
| 12th | 1 | 10 Pass. | 4 |
| 13th | 1 | 10 Pass. | 5 |
| 14th | 5 | 50 Pass. | 6 |
| 15th | 2 | 20 Pass. | 8 |
| 16th | 0 | 6 (5 Pass) | 6 |
| 17th | 5 | 50 Pass. | 6 |
| 18th | 7 | 70 Pass. | 7 |
| 19th | 7 | 70 Pass. | 7 |
| 20th | 7 | 70 Pass. | 7 |
| 21st | 4 | 41 Pass. | 4 |
| 22nd | 8 | 99 Pass. | 8 |
| | <u>48</u> | <u>494</u> | <u>69</u> |

NUMBER OF C-47's USED TO TRANSPORT PERSONNEL TO WAKDE

| DATE | C-47. | Passengers |
|------|-----------|------------|
| 11th | 0 | 0 |
| 12th | 0 | 0 |
| 13th | 0 | 0 |
| 14th | 2 | 1 |
| 15th | 2 | 1 |
| 16th | 1 | 0 (#520) |
| 17th | 2 | 2 |
| 18th | 1 | 0 (#520) |
| 19th | 2 | 2 |
| 20th | 2 | 4 |
| 21st | 1 | 1 |
| 22nd | 1 | 1 |
| 23rd | 1 | 9 |
| | <u>15</u> | <u>21</u> |

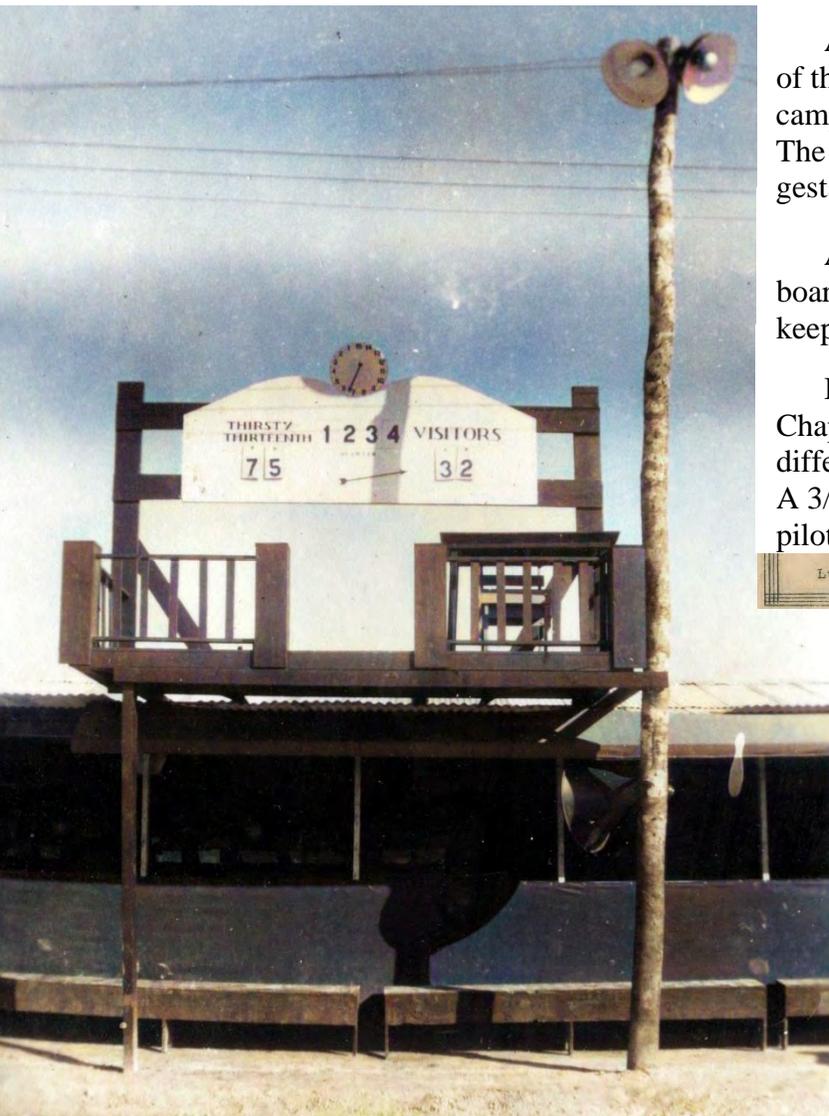
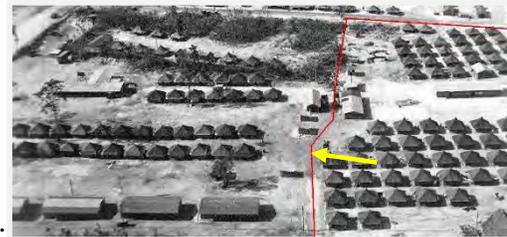
HEAVY ITEMS SENT BY C-47

| | |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| 5 Jeeps | 8 White Gas (367) |
| 1 Water Trailer | 3½ C-47's loads of lumber |
| 1 Generator (1500) | 2" and 4" pipe and fittings |
| 2 Kerosene (367) | 7 stoves, (300 lbs each). |



c. 1945: Photos from Norton A. Gunderson, Radar Mechanic, 1/30/45-9/17/45

On December 13, I received an email from the daughter, Joann, of Norton A. Gunderson, Radar Mechanic, 1/30/45-9/17/45, that she found “the second batch of Dad’s WWII documents.” She scanned them and mailed me a USB drive, plus a letter and two pages of notes. The scans were of 9 photo album pages (e.g., above right) with 59 photos, 25 loose photos, 4 church programs and scans of a 1996 3-page letter from Getter.

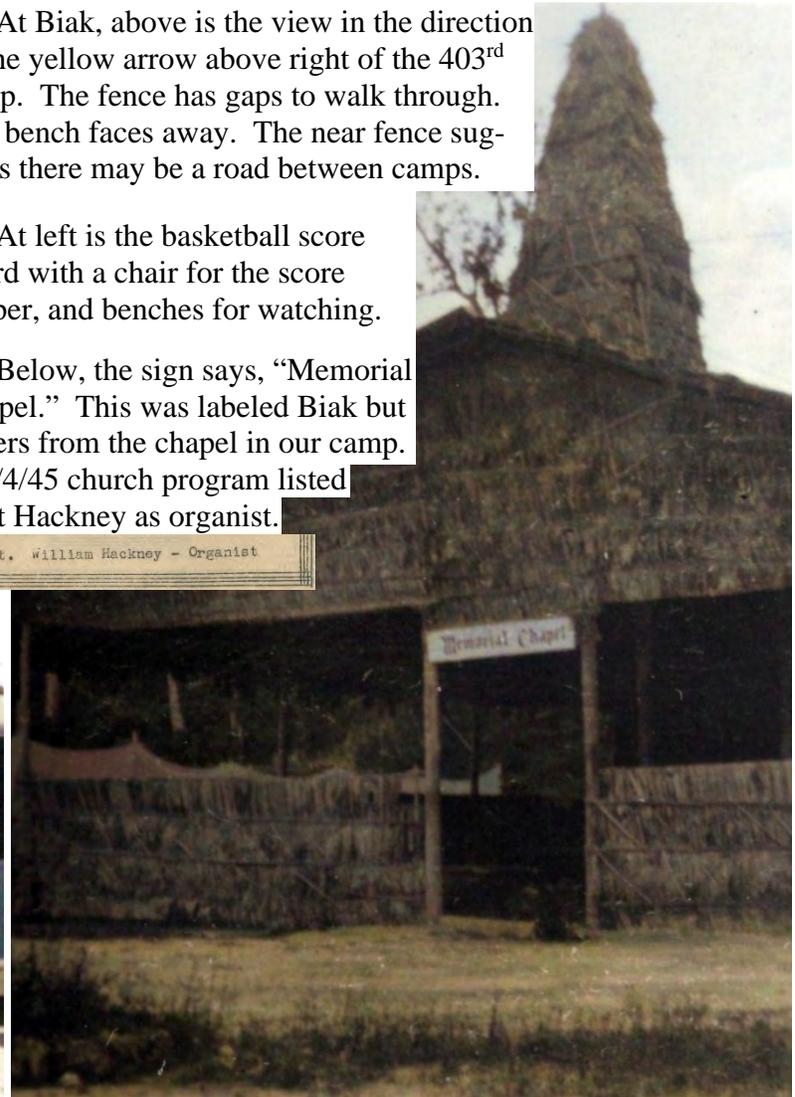


At Biak, above is the view in the direction of the yellow arrow above right of the 403rd camp. The fence has gaps to walk through. The bench faces away. The near fence suggests there may be a road between camps.

At left is the basketball score board with a chair for the score keeper, and benches for watching.

Below, the sign says, “Memorial Chapel.” This was labeled Biak but differs from the chapel in our camp. A 3/4/45 church program listed pilot Hackney as organist.

Lt. William Hackney - Organist

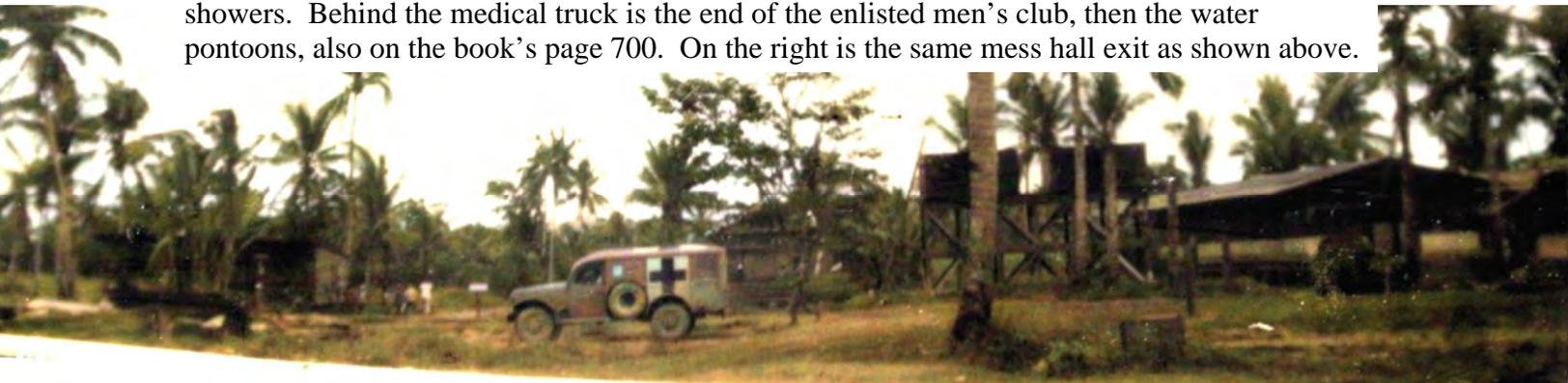




Dulag on Leyte, Philippines

Above, in September 1945, in our first camp at Dulag, is the mess hall. To the right of the stairs, on the side of the building, is an announcement board. After eating, men would clean their mess kits in the sink on the middle right. On the far right, outside the kitchen wing, is the water heater, also on the Thirsty 13th book's page 701.

The photo below shows for the first time the location of the PX, on the left, in the trees. The PX is shown on the book's page 706. Next to this, two men walk north on the path to the showers. Behind the medical truck is the end of the enlisted men's club, then the water pontoons, also on the book's page 700. On the right is the same mess hall exit as shown above.



Below is the enlisted men's tent area and the same PX. The near tree has electrical lines attached at the red arrow, being tree (h) in the February 2021 newsletter, page 5. The tents in the center are consistent with that newsletter's page 5 diagram.





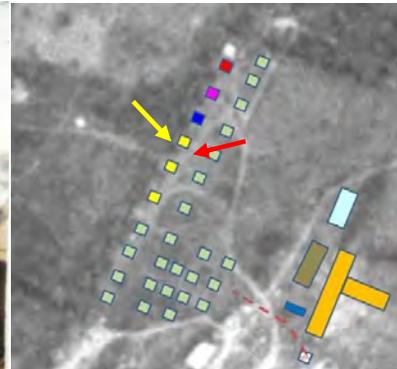
Above is Gunderson by the Quonset huts in this camp, their exact location not yet determined.

Gunderson had the photo below of a school. This is in the direction of the red arrow bottom left, with the same paths, east of our camp which is outlined in yellow. In the March 2022 letter, I included an image of a return address of Cabatoan Elementary School on a letter written to Irwin Cohen and I showed the image below right of where this is today. This photo shows what this school, close to our camp entrance, looked like in 1945. (I colorized all of these photos.)



5





Dulag Laundry

Gunderson had the photo at left taken in the direction of the yellow arrow above, showing the flat roof of the enlisted men's club in the back. The shadows indicate this is ~10 a.m.



Gunderson had the photo at left estimated of the same women but on a cloudy day. The leafy tree (also in the February 2021 newsletter) behind the near tent indicates this is in the direction of the red arrow above.

I estimate in the top photo these barefoot young women are returning clean clothes, and in the bottom are taking away clothes to clean, with one of our men carrying his for them.

Thank you to Gunderson and his daughter, Joann, for sharing these.

d. 1945: Items from Lewis Max Amelang, Radio Operator, 3/26/45-10/1/45

On 12/28/22, Amelang's daughter, Karen, emailed me a photo of her dad's sunglasses, and their case with the label, below, showing they were Type AN-6531. She also emailed me a note from her dad's diary which explained why our men in Dulag paid locals to do their laundry.

Amelang (Radio Operator 3/45-10/45, letter 9/7/45 at the 44th General Hospital, Leyte):

"At Biak, the [403rd Troop Carrier] Group did our laundry for us free, once a week. Only three squadrons [the 13th, 63rd, and 64th TCSs] and the headquarters squadron were there.

"Two squadrons [the 65th and 66th TCSs], the 801st medical evacuation (incl. nurses, doctors & 'medics' - non-coms), and 2nd Combat Cargo Resupply - a colored loading and unloading squadron attached to the Group, were at Morotai. Now, all 7 squadrons and the headquarters squadron are here on Leyte, so the laundry is 'insufficient' for our needs. Everyone in our squadron, and others, too, I guess, send our clothes and 'linen' out to the P.I. women. Cost: 2 pesos (or one dollar), a bundle." [The exchange rate was 2 pesos/USD, equal to \$16.56 in 2022.]



6



5.00
Recd. Feb. 16, 1948
- may

From Fiji Through The Phil

Amelang's daughter, Karen, emailed me scans of three newspapers her dad saved:

- Thirteenth Army Air Force Daily Beacon – at right (from July 24, 1945).
- Tropical Sun – below, by the 9th General Hospital's Information and Education section (from July 28, 1945).
- World Observer – below right, by the 13th ADG (?) 4th ASAC (?) Information and Education Section (from August 12, 1945).

The 13th TCS's parent organization, the 403rd Troop Carrier Group, published a paper, and there was also the Rimba Post shared in a prior letter.

Karen emailed me the image above of a page from book *From Fiji to the Philippines with the Thirteenth Air Force* with a note her dad wrote that he received this book, which many ordered, on February 16, 1948.



Volume 6 Number 56 Tuesday, July 24, 1945

FAST NAVAL FORCE ENTERS TOKYO BAY

Score of US 3rd Fleet's 6 Days of Attack Upped to 118 Ships, 112 Planes Destroyed

OPPOSITE FORMOSA
JAPS WIN BACK
45 MILES OF
CHINA COAST

CHUNGKING--(ANS)--The Chinese High Command reports a 45 mile breakthrough by Japanese along the coast opposite Formosa where the Japs, driving between Amoy and Swatow, gained 100 miles in 22 days. The drive is apparently aimed at strengthening enemy defenses against possible invasion.

Meantime, Chinese columns heightening pressure on the former American air base city of Kwailin have scored the main Jap communications line between Kwangsi and Hunan. They did this by recapturing Chichshou not far from Kwailin. Advanced Chinese units are eight miles from Kwailin.

GUAM--(ANS)--A fast task force of U.S. destroyers sailed into Tokyo's big bay yesterday. It knocked off a convoy of four Japanese ships to raise the score for six days of attack to 118 ships and 112 planes reported destroyed.

Another light naval force also yesterday sailed to the Bonin Islands between Iwo and Honshu and sent shells into the town of Omura on Chichi Island. Main heavy units of the giant U.S. and British fleet are still under cover of security blackout. However, the Associated Press reports there was no indication that typhoon storms which have grounded Okinawa based attacks on Japan have in any way affected operations of the fleet.

These new bombardments marked the return to action of the 3rd Fleet which has highlighted the last 14 days of air and sea attack against Japan. Including Army Air Force strikes, this 14 day period has now accounted for 791 enemy ships and 696 planes destroyed or damaged. Included in this total is the 32,000 ton battleship Nagato which was caught by carrier planes in Yokosuka Naval Yards last Wednesday. The Nagato's superstructure was mostly blown away, and it probably was put out of action.

Other warships accounted for at Yokosuka ranged from

| ATTACK BOX SCORE FOR LAST 2 WEEKS | |
|--|-----|
| JAP LOSSES in Destroyed or Damaged | |
| Ships | 791 |
| Planes | 596 |
| U.S. LOSSES | |
| Planes | 12 |
| Personnel | 22 |
| BRITISH LOSSES | |
| Planes | 2 |
| By Army News Service From Nimitz and MacArthur Communiques | |

DOOLITTLE INSPECTS AIR FACILITIES ON OKINAWA

8TH TO BEGIN HAMMERING JAPAN NEXT WEEK

GUAM--(ANS)--Lt. Gen. Jimmy Doolittle of the 8th AAF has just conducted an inspection of air facilities on Okinawa. Doolittle said his planes will begin pounding Japan within the next eight days. The 8th will use B-29s in



PUB. BY I&E SECTION 9th G.H. APO 920

VOL. I-NO. 80 BIAK, NEI SATURDAY 28 JULY 1945

NEWSNOTES

EUROPE: In England the Labor Party defeated the Conservative Party of PM Churchill by an overwhelming 2-1 vote, winning 389 seats to the latter's 194; there are a total of 640 seats in the British Parliament.

Clement Attlee was chosen as the new PM by the Labor Party, and King George summoned him to request the formation of a new cabinet immediately after Churchill handed in his resignation.

Vassili Kuznetsov, head of the Russian trade unions, declared that the USSR would shortly ratify the United Nations Charter but, he added, it was "a little too early" for Russia to discontinue large scale production of armaments.

US: The Senate continued its debate on the UN Charter for the fourth day. Sen. Claude Pepper of Florida warned that there are a number of members who will seek to cut the meaning and strength of the Charter. When legislation is offered to supply an American contingent to use as part of a World Police Force.

WHAT'S ON TODAY!

1. USO SHOW at 9th GH 1900 hrs "Hank Ladd's Variations"
2. Class at I&E - Morse Code
3. Forum Base H - Bldg. 5 - 1900

NOTICE: RED SOX vs 3rd AIR DEPOT (League leaders) tomorrow (SUNDAY) at 1400, 16cal fd.



VOLUME 1 NUMBER 75 DIAR ISLAND AUGUST 12, 1945

SPECIAL

A LATE BULLETIN FROM WASH. STATES THE U.S. HAS AGREED TO ACCEPT JAPAN'S OFFER, PROVIDED THE EMPEROR IS MADE SUBJECT TO THE ALLIED SUPREME COMMANDER'S. SEC. OF STATE BYRNES MADE THIS OFFER ON BEHALF OF ALL FOUR ALLIED POWERS: THE UNITED STATES, GREAT BRITAIN, SOVIET RUSSIA AND CHINA.



e. 1945: Arthur Driedger's Trips to Tokyo and Return Home

Our 1944-45 radio operator Arthur Driedger wrote great stories about his service. Here are his accounts of two trips to Tokyo, on September 24 and 26, 1945, and his return home.

Driedger (Radio Operator, 8/11/44-10/16/45): [Continuing the story on the book's page 723, on September 24, 1945, after flying over Japan's Imperial Palace, now flying west from Tokyo.]

"We located the RR tracks we were to follow for about 20 miles [as shown above] to Tachikawa Air Base, surveying the immense damage our planes had done.

Many C 47s landed there that day within a few minutes, and everyone had the same idea: get in a corner where other planes blocked your ability to reach the runway to take off, so that we would have to stay overnight. When we were convinced we would not be forced to leave, we made our plans. With all the bravado we could muster, we fell in step behind the lieutenants and approached the guarding MPs. Here we expected to hear a "Sorry sir, you cannot leave the base." Instead, the officers got the highball [a railroad signal for a train to proceed, also a hand wave], and they happily returned it while we sergeants smiled and went through with them.

We crossed the road to the railroad station and in the mass of Japanese of all ages, sizes, and dress, whom we would have had to kill and they us just 6 weeks earlier, we found we did not have to pay, and found the direction to Tokyo. It was mid-afternoon when we started.

It seemed there were three types of attitudes. Some Japanese seemed resentful, some smiled and said nothing, while others went out of their way to show and tell us directions. I asked one man what he did before the war. He had a Ford automobile franchise and hoped to get it back.

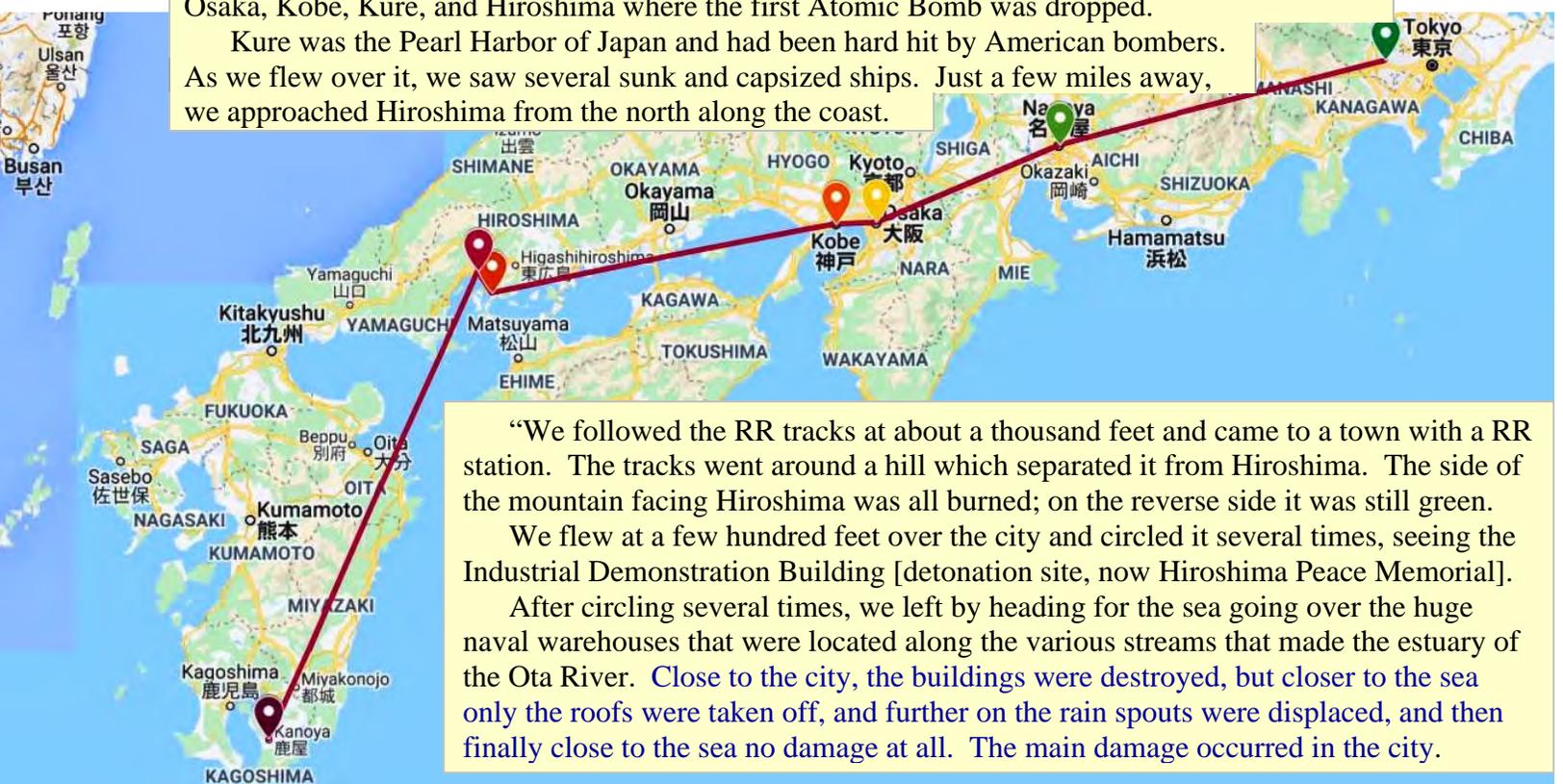
[In Tokyo] We found the moat and Emperor's Palace and passed the hotel of McArthur's headquarters. We stopped at the partially destroyed and famous Imperial Hotel.

We returned to the station at dusk feeling we had not seen nearly enough. We were told there was no train going to where we wanted, but another to a near place. Friendly natives told us when to get off. We would have to walk about a mile. This was no problem, but just at that time there was a heavy downpour. A jeep came along, and he gave us a ride to our plane.

The next morning, Sept. 25, we flew from Tachikawa to Kanoya on Kyushu Island, the southern-most island of Japan. All of us felt this was a rare opportunity to see much of Japan.

Instead of flying directly back to Okinawa, we flew south over Honshu [Japan's main island], and saw many islands and damaged cities, including [as mapped below, right to left] Nagoya, Osaka, Kobe, Kure, and Hiroshima where the first Atomic Bomb was dropped.

Kure was the Pearl Harbor of Japan and had been hard hit by American bombers. As we flew over it, we saw several sunk and capsized ships. Just a few miles away, we approached Hiroshima from the north along the coast.



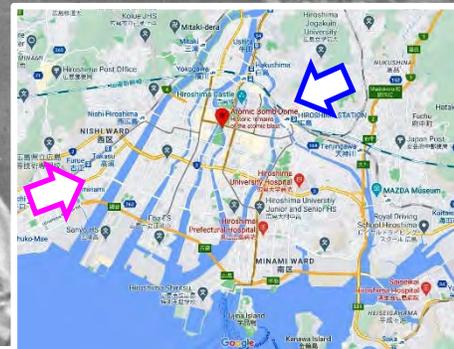
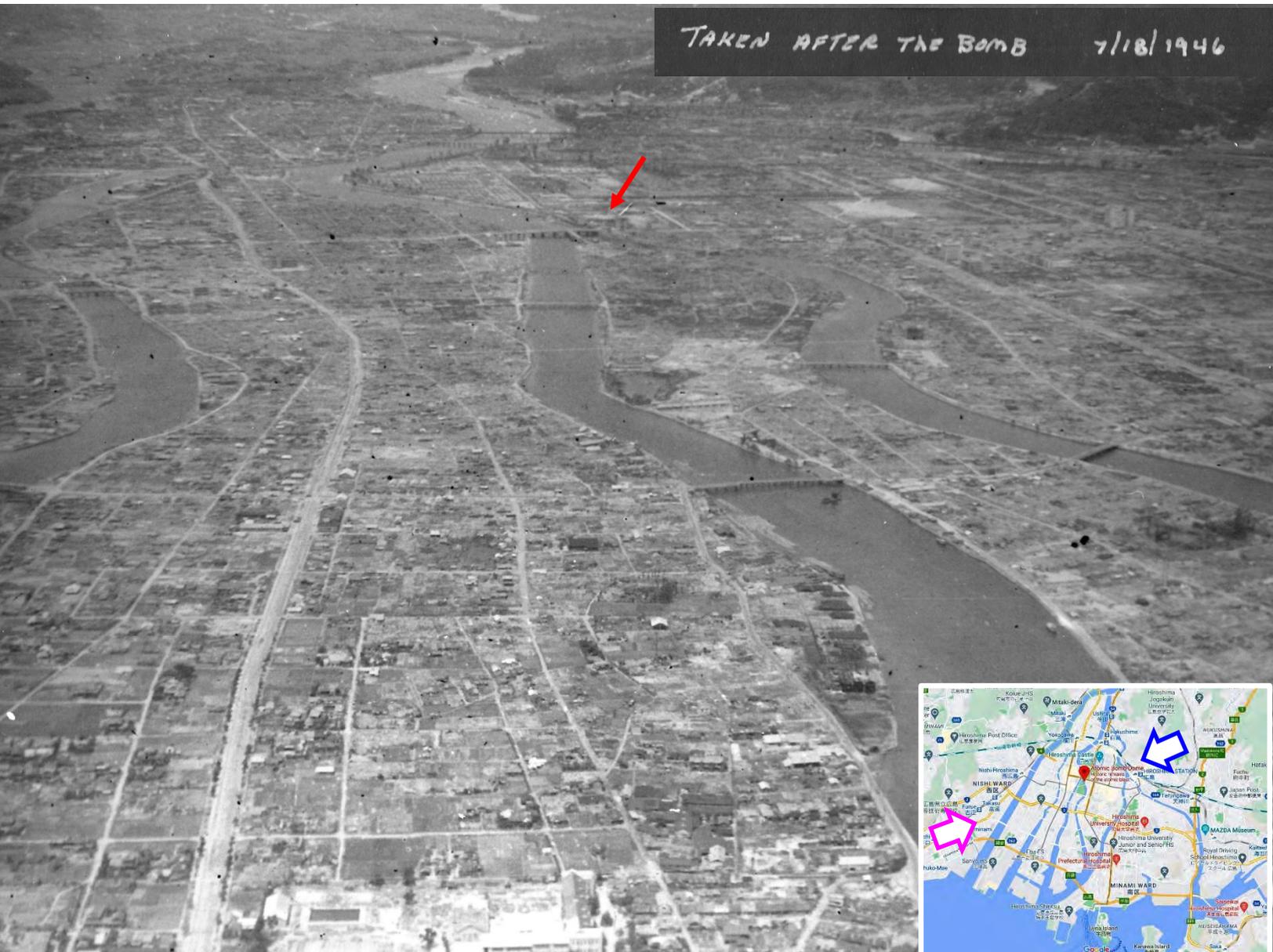
"We followed the RR tracks at about a thousand feet and came to a town with a RR station. The tracks went around a hill which separated it from Hiroshima. The side of the mountain facing Hiroshima was all burned; on the reverse side it was still green.

We flew at a few hundred feet over the city and circled it several times, seeing the Industrial Demonstration Building [detonation site, now Hiroshima Peace Memorial].

After circling several times, we left by heading for the sea going over the huge naval warehouses that were located along the various streams that made the estuary of the Ota River. Close to the city, the buildings were destroyed, but closer to the sea only the roofs were taken off, and further on the rain spouts were displaced, and then finally close to the sea no damage at all. The main damage occurred in the city.

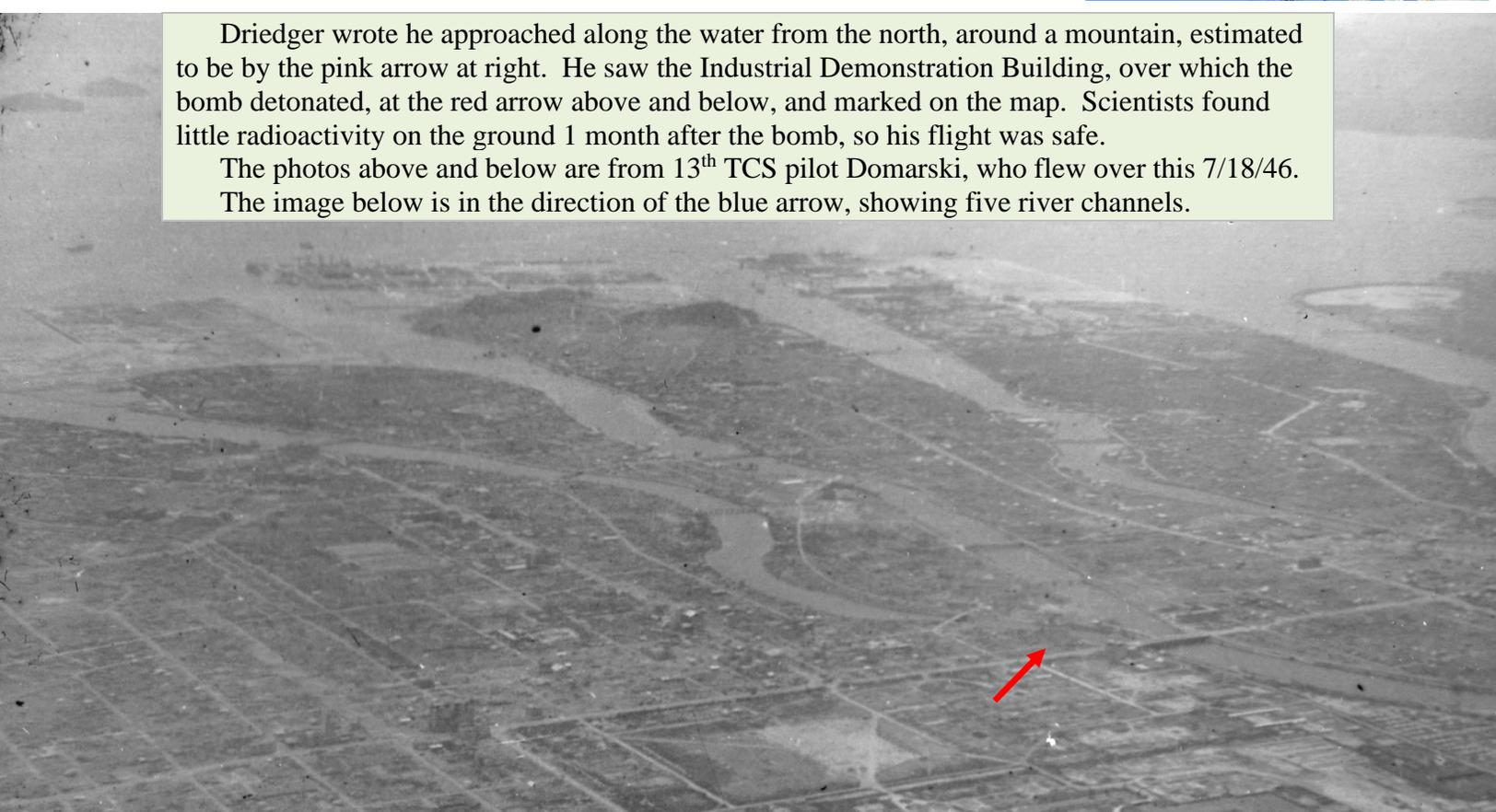
TAKEN AFTER THE BOMB

7/18/1946



Driedger wrote he approached along the water from the north, around a mountain, estimated to be by the pink arrow at right. He saw the Industrial Demonstration Building, over which the bomb detonated, at the red arrow above and below, and marked on the map. Scientists found little radioactivity on the ground 1 month after the bomb, so his flight was safe.

The photos above and below are from 13th TCS pilot Domarski, who flew over this 7/18/46. The image below is in the direction of the blue arrow, showing five river channels.



Driedger (Radio Operator, 8/11/44-10/16/45): We continued to Kanoya, got gas, and then in the early evening took off for Okinawa. On the way, we saw many volcanoes and flew low over Suwanose Shima, 2,615 feet high, and saw red hot coals and lava at the mouth of the volcano.

The last part of the flight was at night, and we encountered strong head winds. Iwo Jima called me and asked if they could help me as I attempted to contact Okinawa on my radio.

It was thought we had our day in the sun, so we were surprised when we had an encore the following day. On September 26, we flew from Naha Okinawa to Atsugi by Tokyo. We arrived late morning, so we had to leave the same day. However, we concocted up a plan whereby we would fly to another local airport near a railroad track, make a fast trip into Tokyo, and then take off that afternoon for Okinawa. All seemed as if nothing could go wrong.

We went to Chofu Airfield on a 25-minute trip. As the pilot turned the plane around in a confined area the pilot hit an army school building. What a revolting turn of events.

All of us got out on that wing, and with metal shearers trimmed the rough jagged metal. This enabled us to take off, and 25 minutes later we landed at Atsugi where we heard we could get another wing tip from a wrecked C-47. Fortunately, the left wingtip was not damaged on the wrecked plane. We stayed overnight there, and [crew chief] Sgt Payne and I slept in a Japanese barracks which we had to ourselves.

The local mechanics took off the tip we needed and loaned us a jeep to stand on the hood and have it serve as a ladder. All of us got busy to remove the dozens of Allen screws which held on the tip. It usually takes a half day to change a tip, but the four of us did it in a few hours. Since we had to leave there, we flew on to Tachikawa in 25 minutes, and then took another fast trip on the train to Tokyo. Once again it got dark on us early, so we had to return after a short time. We never had enough time to see Tokyo as we wanted.

On September 28, we flew from Tachikawa to Naha and took off at 15:00 and had a beautiful view of Mt Fuji. It was a night trip and took 6:20.

On September 29, we flew from Naha to Clark Field in 5:10. At Clark we took on more released POWs to Nielson Field [southeast Manila], a 25-minute flight. It was mid-afternoon, and we just pictured ourselves back at our base with good food and mail. All we had to do was unload the POWs and gas up for the final stretch. As we were gassing up the plane, a jeep rounded the back of the plane and hit our elevator. What a blow to our hopes.

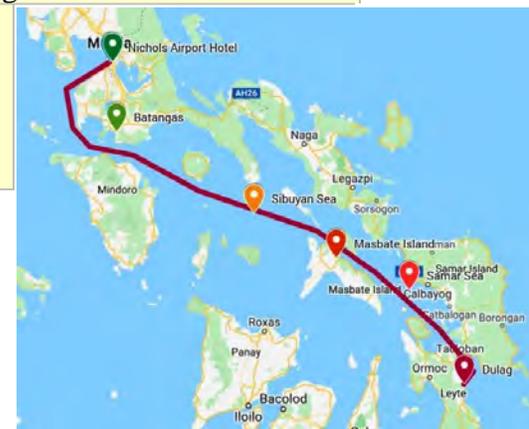
Lt. Hand [not 13th TCS] had a friend on the base whom he contacted and who was able to get us an undamaged elevator from a wrecked plane, while we took off the damaged piece. We put on the new one, tested it, and took off, finally, for the last couple of hours of our odyssey.

We were an odd sight, for we had three different colors on our plane since the replacement wingtip and elevator did not match our plane colors.

One of the worst storms I have encountered tried to keep us from our cots that late afternoon.

As soon as we took off, the ceiling dropped very low, and visibility was nil. The straits between the various islands were narrow with mountains on each side so we could not stray from our intended route [below right] without getting a mouthful of mountains. It got so bad we attempted to land at Batangas, but bad weather prevented us from finding it to land. Eventually after several bad storms and flying over the Sibuyan and Samar seas dodging mountains on several islands including Masbate, we pulled into Leyte Gulf and Dulag.

It was a fitting climax to our adventures gratis Uncle Sam. We returned to our tents. All my buddies were at the movies. When they returned, they could not believe I was back after 11 days of flying, sleeping, eating, and living on the plane. They showered me with mail. I showered them with Japanese money, Okinawa money, etc.



Transit Camp and Returning Home

The day came [10/16/45] when we packed our bags, lockers and all our accumulated gear and went to a transit camp near Tacloban, Leyte, probably 15 or 20 miles from our last base at Dulag. There were 17 of us from the Thirsty Thirteenth [mechanics Elfman, MacDonald, Payne, Tozzini, Waker and Zerovich, and radio operators Brady, Doukas, Driedger, Edwards, Fatula, Kovek, Reberry, Thear, Viscusi, Voorhees, and estimated H. Clark].

We were optimistic about getting home soon. I wrote Frank Summa that we might see a football game together before the end of the season and indicated to my parents that I might be home for Thanksgiving, but by Christmas for certain.

We were housed in big army tents, all 17 of us together [at the 137th Replacement Battalion].

As the days and then the weeks passed, our optimism changed to despair. Since this was the rainy season, drainage of our camp was quite a problem. One time, water flooded the entire tent area to a depth of several inches and our cots were in about 4 or 5 inches of water. In order to drain the area, Japanese prisoners of war were brought in to dig a huge drainage ditch. These were the first Japanese soldiers I had seen since Japan and the first for the ground crew members.

While in this camp, we had to pull K.P. Our group was put in as a unit. While working in the mess hall, one of my friends brought a young Jap prisoner of war and said "Art, you were up in Japan recently. This man says he and his parents live between Yokohama and Tokyo and he wants you to describe it." Before I could think, I blurted out "It is all in ruins and burned out." This was the truth, but I can imagine how he felt.

He felt differently and more forcibly a half hour later. One of the men returning from the tent said this young man, about 18 or so, had strayed from his work gang and came in the mess hall confused and wanted to know where to go. Apparently, he was located by his group and was now being interrogated. Our friend described the interrogation.

As the young man stood at attention in front of a table with American officers sitting behind it, a Japanese officer asked him questions. When he didn't respond quickly enough, the officer smacked him across the face as hard as he could, sending the soldier sprawling on the ground. At this, the young man would stand up, pick up his glasses and stand at attention until he was slapped as hard as possible across the face sending him sprawling again. This happened several times, and each time the American officers flinched at what they were observing.

All of us felt sorry for him since he had just been confused and was trying to find his way back to his work gang.

On another occasion I was on guard duty for 8 hours. My duty was to sit in a tent with a single light bulb hanging down the center the entire eight-hour shift and guard several hundred boxes of Babe Ruth chocolate bars. It was quite obvious that previous guards had taken some liberty in assuming that part of their compensation was to be paid in kind; several boxes had many bars missing. I didn't care to break that routine, so I ended up that night sick and tired of that candy. Before I could indulge, it was necessary to knock off the ants that wanted to share this bounty.

I also took advantage of my army knife to carve a 'ball in cage' from an eight-sided tent pole support [such a ball in a 4-sided post is at right]. I paced myself to finish one face of the cage each hour so at the end of the shift I had a completed ball in a cage. The pole was about 3 inches across, and the ball inside was about 1 inch in diameter and could go up and down in the cage I carved but could not be taken out. All the men were proud of it, and wanted me to bring it home, but I did not have enough room in my crowded bags.

As time went on, some men tried to make inquiry about ships returning to the States and if we could make room on a destroyer or an aircraft carrier or even a Liberty Ship.



We were told Liberty Ships were not reliable enough to take on American soldiers. They were only good to send Japanese prisoners home. So, we waited until we heard the great news just a few days after Thanksgiving. The night before, we made our final packs.

Everything had to be carried in one load. I had two barracks bags linked together over my shoulders, and in my hands I carried my airman's B-4 and A-2 bags all loaded with everything from souvenir money to Philippine bolo knives and mats. It was quite a load.

As luck would have it, the night before I came down with a heavy fever. I was determined not to miss that ship, so I filled myself up with coffee, which I never drink. About 3 A.M., I woke, soaking wet under my sheet, but the fever was broken. The outline of my body was marked with salt on my air mattress. As we sat in the hot sun the next day waiting for our names to be called, I think it returned, but I was strong enough to go up that long flight of steps to climb aboard. Of course, we found out it was a Liberty Ship anyway.

The names of the 970+ names were called. We were the last to be called. My friends knew I had belonged to a Boy Scout Troop 24, and as I struggled up those steps with my bags they kept calling out "Troop 24" and gave a cheer when I arrived on deck.

We were informed the Captain was not too pleased taking on soldiers. The officers of the ship and hardly any of the crew talked with us. We were also informed that we were short on good food and that our rations across the ocean would be the despised C rations which were all canned meals and crackers. We were also told the crossing would take about 30 days, and they were accurate on this; I think it was 31 days. In the late afternoon, we cast off from the pier and went across Leyte Gulf, passing islands that had been our landmarks on our flights into Leyte. A fleet of about 6 destroyers passed by us.

Milton Elfman [at right, at Biak] was a red-headed mechanic in our outfit. Toward the end of the war, we were assigned to the same plane, and flew together throughout the Philippines. I well remember our first flight together. It was not required, but it was accepted that the mechanic was very busy on the ground refilling the plane, walking the props, etc., and the radio operator, who had nothing to do on the ground, was expected to help him, out of courtesy and harmony. There was never any question about this, and there were never any complaints. The engineer would fill the tanks on one side of the plane and check the oil and drain the sumps and the radio operator would take the other side.



At the conclusion of our first long flight, we had a lot of unused, unwanted nourishing surplus food which was usually discarded by throwing it in the jungle. In the Philippines, the men would trade it to the natives for souvenirs, but the natives soon ran out of things to trade. Rather than ruin the price structure, the men would throw it away.

It was probably illegal, but Elfman and I saw it a different way. If we could get souvenirs, we took them. If we couldn't, we gave a man a broom to sweep the plane as an excuse, and then we'd load up his and his family's arms with all the surplus food. Sometimes, it was an effort for them to carry all of it. Of course, we had to do this when no other crews or the pilots were around, or else we would have been ostracized. We just kept it quiet to escape criticism.

Another device we used to get food to the natives was to take more than we could eat in the mess hall. Before we dumped our garbage in a GI can, we would let the teenage and smaller children grab off our trays the extra potatoes and bread we didn't eat but had taken for this purpose.

Once on board the ship, Elfman, on hearing the news about our food, said 'Boys, everywhere you go there is an angle, and I am going to find it on this ship.' Between our laughs at him, we told him there was no angle on this ship. He repeated his statement, we laughed, and he took off.

About an hour later, he returned and said 'Boys, I have found the angle.' Now we listened.

Elfman, by asking questions, located the cleanup man of the officers' mess. Elfman promised to clean up all the tables for him if he could have some of the leftover food. The deal was made. Now Elfman was willing to share the loot and good fortune with us.

Shortly after 6:00 PM, we gathered by a given port hole quietly, and then after all the officers had left, we passed in our canteen cups to Elfman, who filled them with peas, beans, fresh mashed potatoes, and other rare goodies. He did this faithfully for all of those of us in the 13th who wished to get in on it, and I did for the entire trip.

The first couple weeks aboard were in nice weather, but after passing Hawaii the weather turned cloudy and the sea rough.

The first Sunday religious service was on deck in good weather. An officer gave a sermon, and it seemed to me it was routine and of good sense. He urged us to forget all the unpleasant and possibly unfair experiences we had and get on with our lives.

We had bunks that had been built in the hold, and there we ate and played cards at long tables, especially after passing Hawaii. A long step led to the deck and the toilets.

The ship had for ballast thousands of steel helmets and several large cannons in the hold. We were in the aft part of the ship and when the waves forced the turning propellers out of the water, they vibrated the hold where we were located.

Finally, we approached the California coast. In the gray dawn of the morning, we approached the harbor slowly. The sea turned green, from a different depth level, and we saw several submarines entering.

Our ship, the John Barnett, docked at an army dock just a few hundred feet beyond the Oakland Bridge. As we did so, crowds on the pier waved and greeted us. A Lt. standing by me saw his wife and his son whom he had never seen before. A couple men yelled to the crowd asking if they had any food. It was quite a scene.

That year there were heavy snows over the mountains. Troop ships were pulling into the city and there was not enough room for all the troops. Some of the ships kept their men aboard and served as a hotel. Our ship was not equipped to carry men, so we were taken off. As we walked across the pier loaded with both hands full and stooping under the weight of my two barracks bags, a Red Cross lady pushed a doughnut into my mouth, the first I had since Australia.

We boarded an Army ferry that took us to Fort Knight [estimated Fort McDowell] on Angel Island in the harbor. Here we were assigned barracks, and then taken to the mess hall. Here, a great welcoming speech was given, emphasizing how through history victorious troops had always been welcomed home by the populace. Then we were given a huge meal, all we could eat of fresh food that we hadn't seen for months.

San Francisco and Home

We had pulled into San Francisco harbor before 7:00 a.m. and docked about 7:30. After walking across an army dock less than 100 feet, we boarded an army ferry which took us to Angel Island in the harbor where we housed in permanent barracks, given a welcome speech and then plenty of fresh food. At the conclusion of the speech, we were told the German POWs would do the K.P., and there was a rousing cheer on this announcement.

We stayed on the island just a day or two. The mess hall was open 24 hours of the day so we could eat roast beef, mashed potatoes, gravy, lettuce, eggs, milk, dessert any time we wished and could have all we wanted.

Waker, one of our mechanics, and I met German POWs on the street. They asked for cigarettes. Waker gave them some. I could only give them chewing gum. We asked about their homes, and they knew nothing of them, some were from East Prussia which was now under

Russian domination. They did not share the optimism about undamaged cities as we did, and most of us felt sorry for them.

Once there was a sudden announcement that a plane was going to Los Angeles and had room for 6 servicemen. In five minutes, they had to be ready and with this hurried departure I had to quickly say good-bye to my friend and crew chief Milton Elfman.

A day or two later we were transferred to huge new navy warehouses in Oakland almost under the Oakland to San Francisco bridge. We were given passes to stay out when we wished.

[On Christmas Day] It was announced over the P.A. that a few blocks away on a corner USO one could get a dinner at home. At this corner, a line of about 20 soldiers stood. Cars drove up every 30 seconds indicating they would take one, two, or more men home. A soldier in an anti-aircraft outfit and I were taken to a home in Berkley just down the street from their famous tower and stadium. The man was in the extract business and had been a marine when he was young. I think we disappointed him when we could not tell him blood and guts stories.

After a noon meal and another in the evening, he took us to the high-speed line, and we went back to Oakland. It was my impression that I would never forget the location of the house but, when I visited in 1964, all those nice homes had been taken over by fraternities.

In 1939, when I hitchhiked to the New York World's Fair, a teacher from Berkley and his family had picked me up at New Brunswick and I had a nice time with them. When I got home, Mom asked me if I had their address, and was not pleased when I said I would never meet them again. Here I was in Berkley where they lived and how I would have loved to see them again.

On the afternoon of December 27, we boarded a troop train under leaden skies and several hours later we were pushing heavy snows on the grades up the Sierra Nevada. Train crews were trying to keep the tracks open between the snow sheds. I recall passing a grade crossing in Reno, Nevada, that night and saw all the bright lights. The next morning, we were still in Nevada, but by late afternoon I spotted the Capitol of Utah in Salt Lake City.

From my shipping job, I knew we would probably go over the Denver and Rio Grande RR to Denver, which we did. By the next afternoon, we were going up steep grades in the Rockies, and as the train slowly, in deep snow, approached the Moffat Tunnel [below], we saw skiers. I figured we were in the middle of nowhere, and I wondered where we were and how I wished I would see this place again. An impossible dream that came true in 1963 when, as I was driving over a superhighway, a sign indicated that we were over the entrance of that same tunnel. I quickly turned around and saw the same platform where those skiers had been [at Winter Park].

Going through the tunnel was not pleasant. The smoke poured in the cars, and despite all the blankets we put over our heads, we had difficulty breathing.

Smoke on the train was a constant problem because most men smoked. Those of us who didn't lived 24 hours in a blue haze, which one could cut with a knife. I can recall standing with others, either in the restroom or in the vestibule between the cars, in the cold for an hour or more trying to get fresh air. We did this several times a day.

In Denver we watched the train crews change the brake shoes that had been worn down coming off the mountains. That night, a transit over the Great Plains, as well as the next day.



The excitement ran high. Would we be in Chicago for the New Year's midnight celebration? At 11:30 p.m., we pulled into a Chicago freight yard, about 30 feet below the level of the street. Now, the question was 'How long would we be there?' We all got off momentarily, staying within leaping distance of the train.

We expected the train to pull out any minute but as time went on and midnight approached, men started to go further and further from the train steps. At midnight, as the New Year's whistles and horns started to sound, men started to climb up the embankment to the bridge crossing the tracks. Some quickly made their way to bars and were treated to all kinds of drinks by the patrons. It seemed all arrived back on the train in time, for we did not pull out until after 4:00 a.m.

For myself, at midnight I was to go on guard duty in the open baggage car where a coal stove for preparing food was strapped to the floor. Next to this stove in the same car were piles of food including those valuable fresh eggs so eagerly sought after. When the officer of the guard came around, he said 'Sergeant, do you like eggs?' I answered in the affirmative. He said, 'Well, rustle us up a few.' It was not a direct order, but I interpreted it as such so we both enjoyed our own little New Year's repast. I was on duty for just one hour. Then I went to bed and woke up traveling east through Indiana.

That night, we saw the fires of the steel mills in Pennsylvania and the next day we detrained at Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania.

Here, we started our process of returning to civilian life. That night, I waited three hours for an open phone to call home. I remember attending a dance one night we were there, probably the 2nd of Jan. 1946.

We met soldiers who had served in Europe and for the most part they were glad they served in that theater of operations. One of them stole my cap with the Jap Red Cross pin on it when I got careless and left it on my bed.

All of us were glad to get home, but we had many mixed feelings.

Shaky Viscusi from South Philadelphia was the only one who knew what he was going to do. He had been apprenticed as a tailor at the age of 14 and worked after school to learn the trade. The rest of us had no jobs we wanted to return to or plans for other work. We also knew that our meals, clothing, lodging and medical care would no longer be on Uncle Sam.

About three or four on the afternoon of Jan. 4, we were given our bonus. I think it was a double or triple month's pay. We were driven to the train station in Harrisburg and warned of people there trying to get our bonus money. We boarded the train. Viscusi, Waker, and I were together to the last. At North Philadelphia Station, Viscusi went home on the subway, Waker's wife and parents were there to meet him. They lived about two miles from me, and they insisted on driving me home. With all my bags, this was a great help.

At about 7:15 P M on Friday January 4, 1946, we pulled up in front of 4802 Knorr Street [below left from Google in April 2012]. It was great and strange being home for good. Dad was in bed with a severe cold; I asked him if he had been up since I left almost three years earlier.

For the first time in three years, I was in charge of my time and life."



2. Conclusions and Thanks

Thanks to Jim McCabe for sharing 307th squadron reports, to Gunderson's daughter, Joann, for sharing photos, to Amelang's daughter, Karen, for sharing a story and items, and to Arthur Driedger for writing and sharing his wonderful stories.

With best wishes, Seth