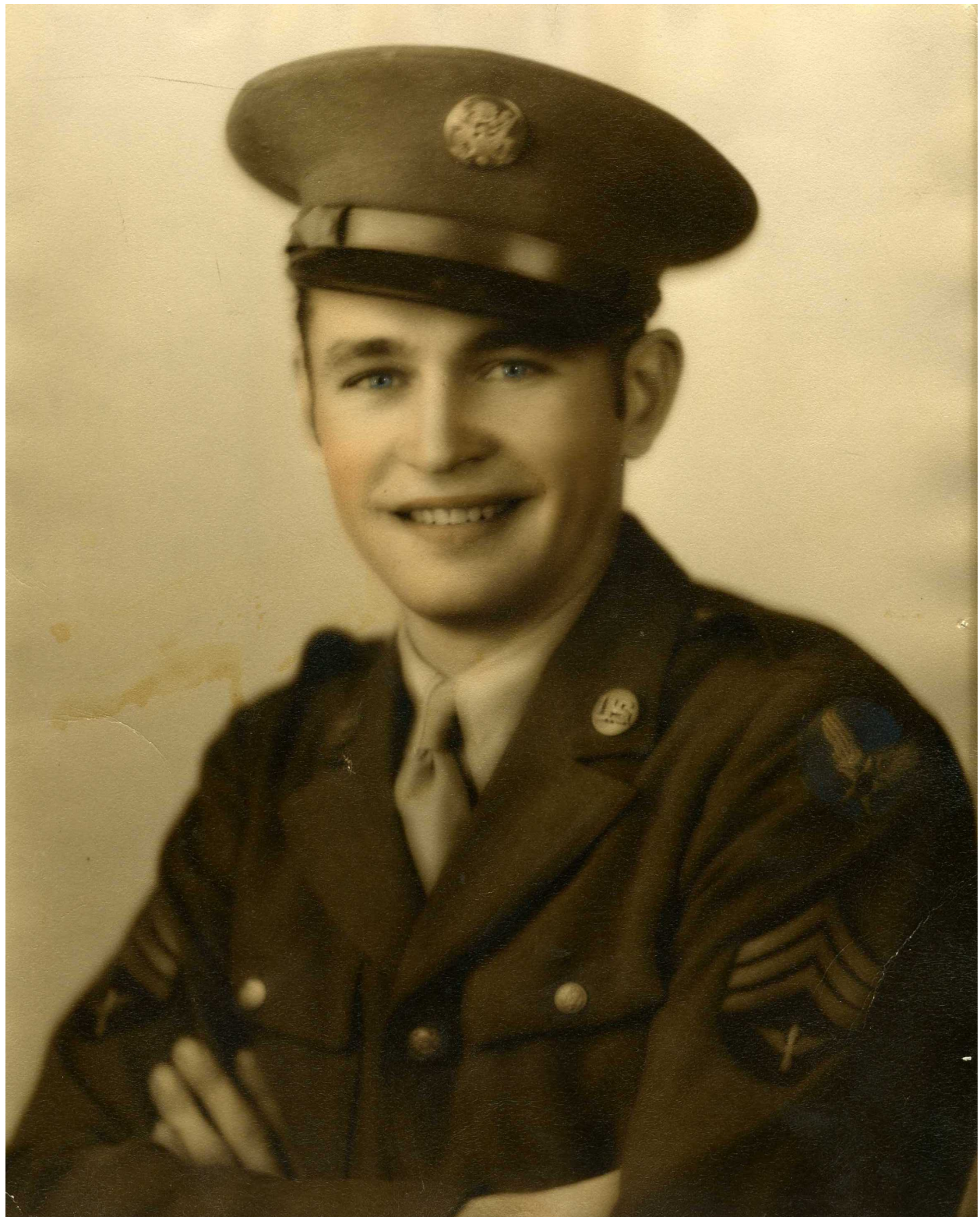


**ELMER H. HALFMANN'S
WORLD WAR II EXPERIENCES**



DAD'S WORLD WAR II EXPERIENCES

As Related To Mitchell H. Halfmann

Dad enlisted Feb.5, 1942 in the Army/Air Corp a short time after the attack on Pearl Harbor (Dec. 7, 1941). He was assigned to Goodfellow AFB for basic training.

Brief history of Goodfellow AFB: Goodfellow's history traces to the days before Pearl Harbor, but its name registered the valor and sacrifice of an earlier conflict. On 14 September 1918, 1Lt John J. Goodfellow, Jr., of San Angelo, Texas, boarded his Salmson 2A2 observation plane at Gondreville Airfield in France to conduct visual reconnaissance behind enemy lines. The mission was part of a larger undertaking just underway, a major American offensive intended to reduce the German salient near St. Mihiel. Unfortunately, adverse weather permitted observation only from reduced altitude, a condition which exposed the lumbering Salmson to enemy pursuit. Three days later, the offensive a success, the young pilot's remains were recovered from his ruined craft and interred at the US military cemetery near Nancy, France.

The peace that arrived two months later endured a mere two decades more. Constrained by neutrality legislation, but witness to the train of aggression across Europe, Africa and Asia, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt began a program of preparedness which included the construction of facilities dedicated to advanced air training. Several such bases were envisioned for Texas and one, specifically, for the Fort Worth-Midland-San Angelo triangle. Civic leaders from San Angelo immediately commended their community to the War Department. A generous offer of sewage and electrical service, a railroad spur, and a 50-year lease on 640 acres at one dollar per year easily decided the issue.



Construction of the new San Angelo Air Corps Basic Flying School began at once. Officially established on 17 August 1940, the base was ready for occupancy by 21 January 1941 and the first classes of students soon arrived. On 11 June 1941, in dedication to a young hero and in tribute to the community that shaped him, the base was officially renamed Goodfellow Field.

The next four years witnessed the graduation of more than 10,000 trained pilots and the decoration of scores of these for outstanding heroism in action against Germany, Italy, and Japan.



Taken in December 1941, this image looks northwest across Goodfellow. Visible are planes along the apron.

Dad, of course, was not a pilot but apparently the base was also a basic training base. After one week of reception station (interesting term) where they cut his hair off, gave him a thorough medical check up, threw all his clothes at him—none of which fit (they never do), got some of his shots (immunizations) more would come later when he went overseas, they taught him to salute, say yes/no sir and yes/no drill sergeant and all the other military decorum (my word not his, I think his term was more like bulls—t) they were supposed to know.

Basic training would last a delightful (again not his word) 9 weeks. He was in one of the first groups to go through and there was not a great deal of equipment available. They did not have a pair of boots that fit him (his foot was very wide and ugly, in fact maybe the ugliest feet in the world, which I now have—thank you very much) so he went through the first two weeks of training without boots. He had to wear his own cowboy boots. It's the only pair of cowboy boots that I know of that he ever owned. He told me after those two weeks he threw them away

and never wanted to ever wear another pair. From what he told me, the accommodations weren't the best, the cots were uncomfortable, the barracks cold and the food not the tastiest (probably not enough fried food). He complained about K.P. (stands for kitchen police). He said he didn't like cleaning up after a bunch of pigs. He indicated that the physical part of the training didn't bother him much, but I suspect that he didn't like the marching, running and double timing because he never liked to walk, unless it involved walking to a fishing hole or a deer blind. During basic training, they gave all the trainees a test to determine what specialized training they would receive. I guess (well I know) he had a mechanical aptitude and was chosen for airplane and engine mechanic course. They apparently did not have any jobs involving hunting or fishing or dancing, along with some whiskey drinking, I would think that he would have been a top candidate. Hell he could have taught the course!

After basic training, he went on leave and then off to specialized training. He didn't talk about this much. He did say that it lasted about 4 or 5 months. From things he said, he learned about hydraulics, aircraft engines, instruments, electrical wiring, (and some good times when he could get a pass to go off base). Well that last part I don't think he had to learn, I think it came to him naturally. I'm not sure where this training took place. I did some research and found there were schools all over the U.S., the closest ones being in Amarillo, TX and Wichita Falls, TX. So it would seem logical that one of these is where he would have gone to receive his training. He must have trained on the B-17 Flying Fortress, B-24 Liberator and C-47 Skytrain because he said he flew in all of these aircraft as a flight mechanic and gunner. I'll give more details about these aircraft latter. He also flew in the Curtis C-46 Commando but did not train on this one. The military did not have these planes until after he left training. All of his combat flights were flown in the C-46.

After airplane and engine mechanic training, he was off to Aerial Gunnery School, (30 and 50 caliber machine guns). The training lasted six weeks. Here again he never said and I never asked what base or city. Through my research I found gunnery schools in Las Vegas, Nevada (that would a rough place to be assigned); Kingman, Arizona; and Panama City, Florida to name a few.

I understand that the best gunners were bird hunters. In fact they sought people out that had been hunters. I guess it had to do with their learned skill of leading a moving target. I would think Dad would have been pretty good seeing as he was the best shotgun shot that I've ever seen, at least on game birds.

He said it was the hardest shooting he had ever done but, after a while, he did hit most of the targets. He said it was a tremendous waste of bullets, because they would shoot hundreds of rounds at a time. You have to remember that growing up they didn't have a lot of money and when he went hunting, his dad would give him a few shells and he had better come home with some food or else.

This training involved learning how to shoot out of an airplane that was in flight at another aircraft that was in flight, as well as at stationary targets. He told me the training started with familiarization of the weapons. He learned how to tear them down, clean them, repair them, replace parts if necessary and put them back together to the point were he thought he could do it in his sleep. Then they moved on to shooting at the gunnery range at stationary targets at ranges up to a mile (the 50 caliber would shoot accurately at ranges exceeding a mile). He said the

targets looked real small at a mile but when you got close, they were huge. They then moved on to shooting out of a moving vehicle. The machine gun was mounted on a swivel in the rear of a duce and a half (a truck weighing 2-1/2 tons) or sometimes a jeep. At first they fired at stationary targets and then at targets being pulled by another vehicle on a railroad track. They then moved into the aircraft and practiced shooting at a target being towed by another plane flying at different altitudes, speeds and angles. He said this gave him a lot of trouble until he got a little practice, but he said it gave everyone problems.

I'm not sure when or where (maybe in basic training) but somewhere along the line, he received rifle training (like he needed rifle training). The rifle they trained with was the Springfield '03/30-06 caliber. Later in the war, they introduced the M-1 Grand and the M-1 Carbine. He said he didn't have any problems with this and scored well. He did receive pistol training on the Browning 1911 .45 caliber semiautomatic pistol but had a difficult time qualifying (he did not have any experience or knowledge of pistols). But I won't talk any more about his experiences with pistols for now; that comes along later, in India. He said it was funny watching some of the guys that had never even seen a rifle except in the movies, much less held one before. Some were afraid and uneasy about handling weapons and at first couldn't hit the side of a barn.

As you will see later, all of this weapons training would become very beneficial.

In 1942, Dad was (temporarily) promoted twice. On August 6, 1942 he was promoted to corporal and on September 12, 1942 was promoted to sergeant. His paper work says both were at Goodfellow AFB. This is a little confusing, almost like he was stationed there for all of his training, but I know this isn't possible. He told me that he made sergeant 3 times while in the military but was busted back down to private every time. He did well while he was on duty, but as soon as he got a pass (permission to leave the base), he'd get busted. He told me that he just didn't think they should have the right to tell him when he needed to be back. You don't think Dad was a little independent, do you?

After all his training, he was assigned to the 649th T.S.S. Air Corps Ferrying Command. It was later redesignated as the Air Transport Command. He was first stationed in Miami, Florida and was assigned to a flight crew. He was billeted at a nice place named the Traymore Hotel. The Traymore Hotel had been conscripted to house military personnel. The crew had four men - a pilot, copilot, navigator and gunner/flight mechanic (Dad). Their job was to deliver B-17 bombers to bases overseas, by flying them to their destination (I never thought about how the planes were delivered). At that time North Africa was the only place in the European Theater where the Americans were fighting. (A side note: They asked him if he had any problem with fighting and killing Germans. I guess with a name like Halfmann, they felt they should at least ask. His reply was that if anyone was shooting at him, he was going to shoot back!)

He said the first flight to North Africa was a bit unnerving and he didn't sleep a wink the whole trip. A boy from West Texas had never seen so much water in his life.

He made several trips to North Africa to several different locations. He didn't know exactly how many trips, and he never knew where he was in North Africa. Only two of these trips were memorable.

On one flight, he thought maybe in September or October of '42, they encountered a bad storm (Dad thought it may have been a hurricane) out over the Atlantic, and the pilot decided to fly around the storm. By the time they got to Africa, they were low on fuel and had turned off two of the four engines to conserve fuel (the plane would fly on two engines) and had to land at an alternate base to refuel. They then continued on to their planned destination and the folks there were about to send out search aircraft when they arrived.

On the other memorable trip, as they were approaching the base he could see in the distance a wall of dirt/sand coming toward the airfield. Dad said it reminded him of some of the dust storms of the 1930's "dust bowl years" and later the 1950's drought years. They had just enough time to land and get into the closest building which happened to be the chow hall before this sand storm hit. He guessed it blew for an hour or more. He described the building as being a Quonset hut that had windows that were closed tight and two doors, one at each end of the building, only one of which he could see on his approach. When the storm hit, the building filled with a fine dust that covered everything including their food. After finishing a gritty meal and the storm had blown over, they got up to leave through the same door they had entered. One of the American soldiers stationed at the base stopped them and said, "You can't go through that door." Dad said, "Why the hell not? That's the one I used coming in here!" He said, "Follow me and I'll show you!" They went out the other door, walked around to the other side and the door they used earlier was completely covered with sand, to the point where it couldn't even be seen. When the sand storm hit, it blew all the sand away from that door and covered the one they had entered earlier. I guess it depended on which direction the wind blew from. The soldier said this was a fairly common occurrence. He also said the sand played havoc with all their equipment and that they spent a great deal of time cleaning equipment.

While he was stationed in Miami, he got to do a lot of fun stuff. He spent a lot of time going fishin' (imagine that) both fresh and salt water. He met a guy in a bar one night and the fellow invited him to go fishing on his boat and, of course, Dad accepted. The man told him to meet him at so and so pier the following morning. Dad said the boat was very big and they went out far enough that he couldn't see land. They baited up and started trolling, a method Dad wasn't familiar with (in fact Dad wasn't familiar with any of this kind of fishin'). He said they caught several different kinds of fish; he even caught a 4 foot shark. The highlight of the trip, however, was that Dad caught a sail fish (Marlin) that he guessed weighed about 400 lbs. He said it was exciting at first but, after fighting this thing for awhile, it turned into pure work. He was ready to go to the house after that was over. Dad never understood why they did all that fishing and the man didn't want to keep any of the fish to eat. Of course, growing up in the 1930's depression, Dad kept all the fish he caught for food. Apparently the man enjoyed Dad's company because they went a few more times.



B-17 Flying Fortress

A few facts about the B-17 Model 299:

Manufacturer: Boeing

Span: 103 feet 9 inches

Length: 74 feet 9 inches

Gross weight: 65,000 lbs.

Top speed: 287 mph

Cruising speed: 150 mph

Range (max): 3,750

Ceiling: 35,600

Power: Four 1,200-horsepower Wright R-1820-97 engines

Accommodation: 2 pilots, bombardier, radio-operator, 5 gunners

Armament: 11 to 13 -- 50 caliber machine guns, 9,600-pound bomb load

Number built (approximately): 12,800

After his stint in Miami, he went to Atlantic City, New Jersey with the same flight crew. He didn't talk about this much. He delivered B-24 Liberators to England. He said he didn't like England at all. He said it was too cold and wet, and they drank hot beer.



B-24 Liberator

A few facts about the B-24 Liberator:

Manufacturer's: Consolidated, Douglas, Ford and North American

Span: 110 ft. 8 in

Length: 68 ft 0 in

Loaded weight: 55,000 lbs.

Top speed: 290 mph

Cruising speed: 215 mph

Range (max): 3,700

Ceiling: 28,000

Power: Four Pratt & Whitney R-1830 turbocharged radial engines, 1,200 hp each

Accommodation: 7-10 crew members

Armament: 10 – 50 caliber M2 Browning machine guns, up to 8,000-pound bomb load

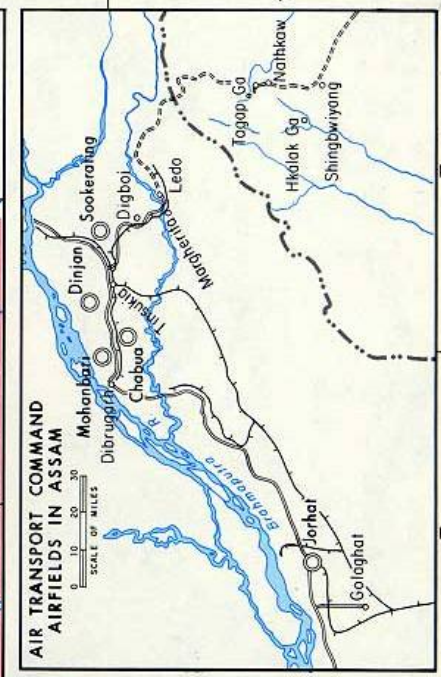
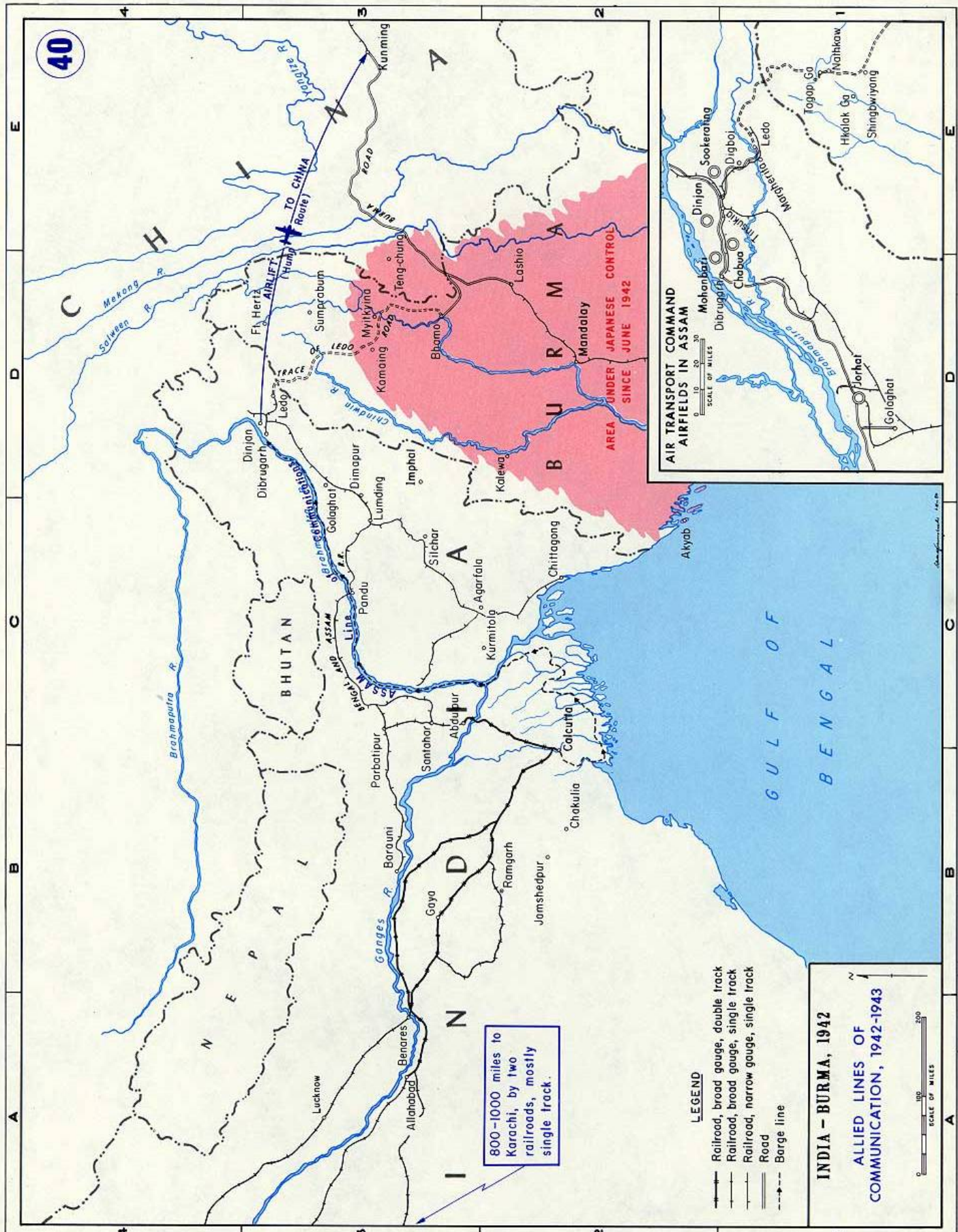
Number built (approximately): 18,482

Dad never said how many flights he made while delivering planes (I don't think he remembered how many), but he did say he was ready for another assignment by the time he finally did get orders. He and his fellow crew members, after delivering a plane, would catch a military transport (most of these planes were not made for human transportation) back to the States. Often times these flights, to quote Dad, "were pretty damn miserable". He was assigned to this duty for about a year. In June or July 1943, he received orders to report to San Francisco, California on 2 August 1943.

He did, however, get to go home on leave to see the family and eat some good groceries before his report date. When he was released to go on leave, he went to the train station. He found out the first available train wasn't scheduled for another twelve hours. This just didn't fit Dad's schedule so he took off walking and hitch-hiking. Sometime shortly thereafter, a man (I think Dad said his name was Bob) did pick him up and the man was headed for Dallas, Texas. Talk about good luck. Possibly it wasn't luck at all, because I know for sure from talking to Granny that she was doing some heavy duty praying. It must have paid off; having had three sons go off to war and not one of them was hardly even scratched. On the trip to Dallas, somewhere in Alabama, Bob complained about being tired and asked Dad if he would drive for awhile. Dad took the wheel and ended up driving the rest of the way. He even stopped for gas twice, Bob never woke up. After arriving in Dallas, Bob bought Dad a meal, wished him luck, and left Dad at the bus station. From Dallas, Dad caught a bus home.

After his leave and a bus and train ride to San Francisco, he boarded a navel transport ship. He would not see the United States again for five hundred ninety seven days. He hated the idea that he had to travel by sea. He, by gosh, had joined the Army Air Corp so he wouldn't have to ride in a boat! For God's sake, they wouldn't even let him fish on the way! He did not learn of his destination until after they put to sea (secrecy I guess) and then was told he was going to the "AP" (Asian Pacific) theater of war, specifically the "CBI" "China-Burma-India". They made port in Hawaii (Pearl Harbor), Australia and on to India. On sailing into Pearl Harbor, everyone on the ship went up on deck and viewed the destruction that the Japanese (he used the term "damn Japs") had inflicted. You know that Dad didn't show much emotion (I really believe he was a lot more emotional and soft-hearted then he let on) but when he saw the destruction, he got a little choked up and fully understood why they were fighting. From what he said, he wasn't the only one on that ship that felt that way. He told me they weren't allowed to leave the dock area at any of their stops so he didn't get to see much of Hawaii or Australia. He would, however, see plenty of India. The trip over took a total of forty-eight days. Upon arriving in Calcutta, India, they were given rooms for the night and were allowed to roam around the city. He was amazed at the huge numbers of people that lived in squalor and filth, and in such close proximity to each other. Later on, he would see some nicer areas of the city but, even in these areas, there were many, many people. Many of them looked like they were starving and this shocked him since there were livestock everywhere. He found out later that these people would not, for religious reasons, kill animals for food. He never understood this concept of starving when there was food running around everywhere.

Within the next day or two, he boarded a train for the Brahmaputra River Valley (a very large river according to Dad) in Assam, located in extreme northeast India (see map below). He enjoyed the first part of the trip, getting to see the sites of a new country. He saw a lot of wildlife, trees and rivers. The majority of the animals he could not identify. The trip took more than two days. I don't know to which base he was assigned. He did say that when he arrived, there were at least four Air Transport Command airfields in that area of India. This makes sense because the map shows four airfields: Dibrugarh, Mohanbari, Sookeraling and Dinjan. Eventually, there were 13 primary ATC bases in the Assam valley in India, and three in China. Places like Chabau, Tezpur, Misamari, Jorhat, and Chittagong.



- LEGEND**
- +—+— Railroad, broad gauge, double track
 - +—+— Railroad, broad gauge, single track
 - +—+— Railroad, narrow gauge, single track
 - +—+— Road
 - - - - - Barge line

INDIA - BURMA, 1942
ALLIED LINES OF COMMUNICATION, 1942-1943

0 100 200
 SCALE OF MILES

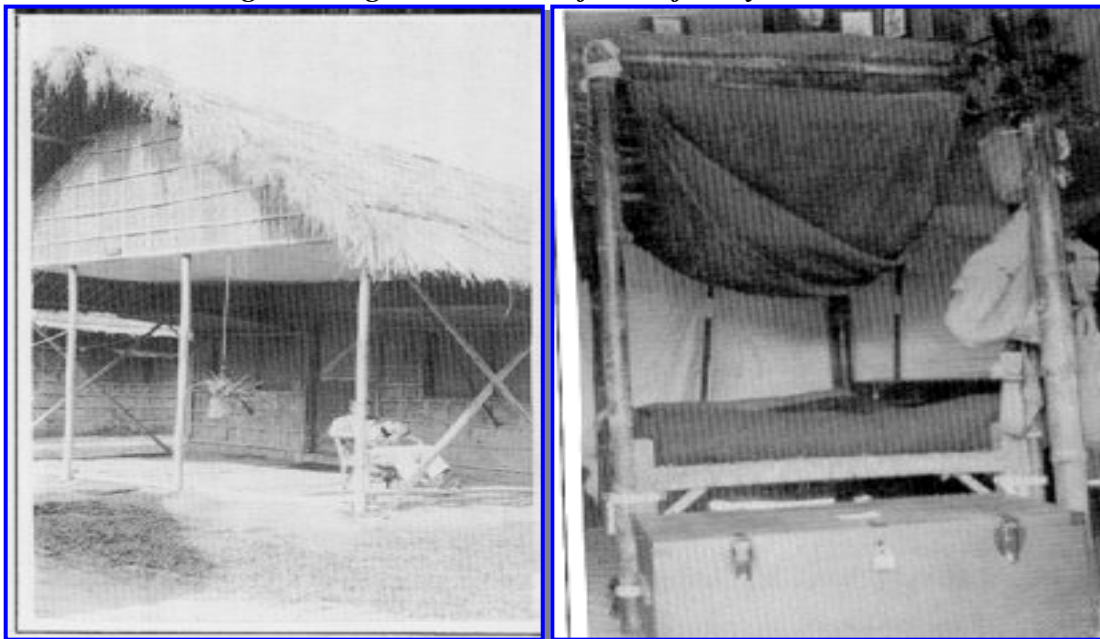
800-1000 miles to Karachi, by two railroads, mostly single track.

“In my research the primary purpose of the whole CBI campaign was to keep China actively in the war by supplying them with war supplies, thereby tying down approximately 1.2 million Japanese troops that otherwise could have been deployed against the Allies fighting in the Pacific. Obviously this was important because the strategy was for the Americans to win the war by sieving and holding strategic South Pacific islands, moving ever closer to Japan. China had been at war with Japan since 1937. By the summer of 1939, the Japanese had captured most of northeastern China and all major coastal seaports except for the British Colony Hong Cong, but shipment of supplies from Hong Cong was severely restricted. In effect the only supplies lines were coming through Burma and Indochina up the Burma Road to Kunming, China. In May 1942 Burma’s army was defeated, cutting off the last remaining overland supply route, thus the necessity for Dad to rescue their butt.“

Dad was assigned exquisite living accommodations with ten or so other airmen. See the pictures below.



*I found these pictures on the net; they were taken at one of the airbases.
Imagine living in either one of these for a year or more.*



Basha and a typical bunk with mosquito netting gathered at the top.

He was then assigned to a flight crew, consisting of a pilot, copilot, navigator, flight mechanic and gunner (Dad), and one other man (I'm not sure what his job was) who would later become one of the gunners. Dad also had to supervise the loading of supplies and materials to make sure the load was distributed and secured correctly. The whole crew did preflight inspections of the plane; I guess they all thought it was important to check the plane. He did say he was sure glad he didn't have to do the actual loading or unloading. Most of the loading was done by American ground crews but quite a bit was done by Indian natives, sometimes they even used elephants to assist in the loading. The Chinese did all of the unloading. Some of the things flown to China were gasoline, munitions, food, jeeps, and replacement parts for planes and machinery. They even hauled bulldozers and maintainers and troops.

He then went into training on the C-46 Commando. Ironically, he had never been in one of these planes and neither had the pilot or copilot, so I guess they had better have done some training. The C-47 was the predominate plane used early on. However, after Burma fell to the Japanese, it was necessary for the flights to go on a more northern route, over the HUMP. The C-47 was incapable of flying at the required altitudes while fully loaded. The C-46 could reach altitudes of 20,000 ft. + while fully loaded, a definite advantage when flying over the Himalayan Mountains; some of the mountains were 20,000 feet above sea level. Neither one of these planes came with any armament (meaning no guns); they would install two machine guns later.



Pictures Taken Over the HUMP



The Curtiss C-46, then the largest two engine transport in the world

Facts about the C-46 Commando

Primary Function: Transport

Contractor: Curtiss-Wright Company

Crew: 4 /+40 Passengers

Unit Cost: \$233,000

Power Plant: Two Pratt & Whitney R-2800-34 radial engines rated at 2,100 hp each

Dimensions

Length: 76 ft 4 in

Wingspan: 108 ft

Height: 21 ft 9 in

Weights

Empty: 29,300 lb

Maximum Takeoff: 51,000 lb

Performance

Speed: 245 mph

Ceiling: 27,600 feet

Range: 1,800 miles

Remember I mentioned earlier that I would talk about Dad's experiences with pistols. It seems that Dad was the only Texan in the whole squadron and somehow the rumor got started that Dad, being from Texas (I guess the belief was that everyone from Texas knew about pistols), was an expert with the pistol and even the quick draw. Dad couldn't imagine how this rumor got started, but I sincerely think he knew exactly how it started. Everything rocked along just fine until the commander decided that everyone needed additional pistol training. Even this didn't worry Dad because he was, after all, an "expert" and he wouldn't need any additional training. That is until the commander, acting as instructor, got frustrated with the ineptitude of the "students". At this point, the commander yelled, "Halfmann, front and center, and show these yahoos (or maybe it was S.O.B.'s) how to do it!" Dad's knees immediately got weak; he started to sweat even more than he already was and generally had a very bad feeling about the whole situation. He saw the end to his carefully crafted image. He, however, was determined not to give up without at least trying (pride can be such an ugly thing). He walked up to the firing line and eyed the targets about 20 yards away, and he remembered thinking two things. One was 'Crap! Why didn't I just keep my mouth shut,' and the other was, 'God help me!' After a matter of a very few seconds, the commander yelled, "Well, Halfmann, are you going to stand there all day!" And in that instant, a bird flew up and landed about half way to the targets. Dad drew and fired (he had practiced the quick draw and spinning the pistol on his finger; in private, of course) and the bird literally blew up in a cloud of feathers. Well, the whole group stood there in awe and amazement including Dad (he said his jaw dropped about two inches). He, however, recovered quickly---spinning the pistol on his finger, and then sliding the pistol back into his holster. As he turned to walk off, the crowd parted and allowed him to walk off into the sunset (not really "the sunset" but I thought it sounded good) as the commander shouted, "Now that's how it's done!" After this, no one crowded him at the bar or chow hall. All he had to do was lower his hand to his side and they gave him plenty of room.

According to Dad, the weather was horrendous. During the monsoon season, it rained everyday. That area would receive approximately 200 inches a year of rain. In the hottest time of year, temperatures ran anywhere from 90 to 130 degrees, with humidity never falling below 75%. On the hottest days, ground crews could not work on planes because the metal got so hot it could cause 3rd degree burns. Dad said the heat wasn't that big of a deal, but the humidity was a killer. Makes sense if you're a West Texas boy. Mildew was a constant problem; they would have to hang their clothes and bedding out to dry whenever the sun did come out. Insects, mice, rats, snakes were a problem but mosquitoes and flies were especially bad. There was also quite a bit of illness. Dad didn't mention what kind of illnesses but I imagine they weren't good. He did say he came down with a fever once that lasted a few days. What made the heat doubly bad for flight crews were the extremes in temperatures they had to endure. Flying from their base where it was very hot to well below 0 over the Himalayas and back down to land in China. The planes were not heated. He was issued a very heavy flight jacket (more like a heavy coat than a jacket) which helped some. I don't know if you remember the jacket, but he hunted in it on very cold days for years and years. I know for sure he still hunted in it during the 1980's. I remember that you could stand this coat in the corner and it would stay exactly in that position. I think he

was afraid to wash it for fear it would disintegrate. He had three pecans (I think the pecans were twenty or thirty years old at that time) in one of the pockets and he would jiggle the pecans with his fingers to keep his hands warm. He never would wear gloves even on the coldest of days. [I wondered what had happened to the coat, so I asked Mom if she knew what had happened to it. She surprisingly still had Dad's coat, and she graciously gave it to me. So if anyone would like to see it or try it on, let me know. By the way, the three pecans were gone.] He did wear gloves while flying due to the fact that he had to handle metal objects in extremely cold conditions, one of which was the 50 caliber machine gun. Sometime or another, he grew a mustache and bought a pair of sunshades. I never knew him to ever have facial hair or sunshades (oh, the foolishness of youth). He said the sunshades really were a necessity because the sun was so very bright while they were above the mountains.

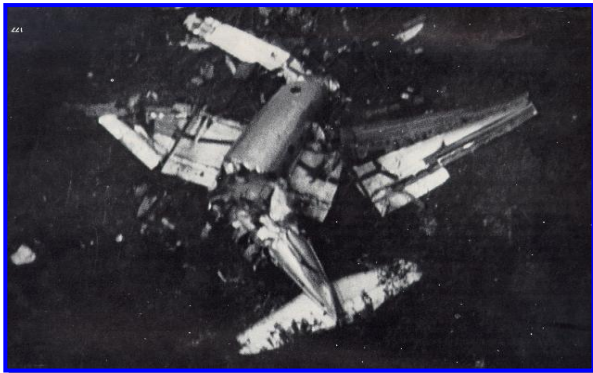
After training, which wasn't very lengthy, they made their first flight over the Himalayas "the Hump". Their destination in China for the majority of the time was Kunming, a distance of 500 + miles. They also delivered supplies to Yunnanyi. The first flight went pretty well, other than they were all scared. He said the mountains were beautiful as it was a clear day but the winds were horrible. The plane bounced around, dropped, rose and did everything but fly level, plus it was extremely cold. They also had to be on oxygen while flying the Hump. As it turned out, this first trip wasn't all that bad of a trip. Other flights were much worse when there were storms which were quite often and they would have to fly on instruments with no visibility at all. Later on, they would make night flights when they had to fly the whole way on instruments. Air sickness was fairly common until they got accustomed to the bouncing around. After the first couple of flights without incident, one of the other planes in his squadron was attacked by a Jap Zero (fighter plane). Dad with the approval and encouragement of the pilot, but without approval of the squadron commander, quickly modified the plane and installed two 50 caliber machine guns, one on each side of the plane. The pilot got into a bit of trouble with the commander for not requesting approval before installing the guns. The commander did, after chewing on the pilots butt for awhile, approve of the addition of the guns. The pilot told the crew that he didn't give a damn whether the commander agreed or not--it wasn't his butt hanging out in the wind. Most of the planes would, at some point, install guns on their planes.

An interesting thing about this pilot was that he trained the whole crew to fly the plane, just in case something was to happen. Dad said that the pilot liked to drink quite a bit and on occasion would show up for a flight without sleep, and a little inebriated and/or hung over. So Dad did learn to fly the plane but not how to take off or land the plane. He and the rest of the crew were allowed to sit in the copilot's seat during takeoffs and landings a few times while they were training, presumably to give them at least a feel for takeoffs and landings.

Dad never mentioned it but I wonder if he was able to get some good old American bourbon.

The only good thing about being over the HUMP was that Japanese fighter planes could not go that high. They didn't have to start worrying until after they started their descent into Kunming or down to their own base. They were attacked on occasion by Japanese fighters, especially when they did not have their own fighter protection which was most of the time. Dad thinks he may have hit two or three of these Zeros; he knows for sure he hit one because it started smoking and veered sharply away and down. He said he really didn't care if he hit any of them so long as they would go away and leave them alone, but I really think he did want to shoot them down. He said this was the most difficult shooting he ever had to do in his life because these guys were shooting back. He was always surprised that while the fight was going on he wasn't afraid but afterward..... He said that the fights seemed to last for a long time but, in most cases, only lasted a minute or so. He was amazed at how many bullets he could fire in such a short period of time; the floor would be covered with empty shells. They on occasion would receive damage, a few bullet holes, but never had any serious damage until sometime early in 1945, but I'll tell you this story later. The fighters were a problem, however, just as many planes and crews were lost to bad weather and mechanical failures.

History: More than 600 aircraft were lost and 2,186 men were killed or missing on the "rock pile" and a second nick name of "The Aluminum Trail" came into being. It was called the most dangerous flying in the world, and ATC losses on the HUMP were disproportionately higher than what the 8th Air Force encountered during the bombing raids on Berlin."



Along the "Aluminum Trail"

At Dad's home base, regular infantry troops and occasionally ground crews were assigned guard duty; the flight crews were exempt from this duty except when there was an immediate threat. On at least one occasion, Gurkha's were brought in to guard the base. Gurkhas were from Nepal (a country north of India). Dad said they were some of the fiercest looking people he had ever seen and, from what he was told by some infantry troops, the fiercest fighters as well. The infantry troops said the Gurkhas would always cut the heads off of any Japanese soldier - dead or alive - they came across. Their logic was that a "Jap" with no head can't shoot you in the back. Japanese soldiers were known for playing dead and, after passing

them, shooting you in the back. Each of the Gurkhas was armed with a Kukri. This is a very sharp knife and the Gurkhas were experts in using it. One day Dad came across one of the guys that spoke a little English and, after a short conversation, Dad asked if could see his knife. The man pulled out his knife, cut his finger, and handed the knife over to Dad. Dad was shocked; the man explained that a Gurkha never removed the Kukri from its scabbard that it did not draw blood. Dad never asked to see another one.



The Kukri

Dad said at one point the Japanese launched a major attack to cut off the Assam valley. I looked this up and this attack was in March, 1944. They were ordered to pick up Chinese troops from Kunming, China and fly them over the Hump (they only had a few oxygen bottles for the Chinese and they had to share) to help protect the bases in the Assam valley. The Air Transport Command ended up transporting 18,000 Chinese troops for this operation. I don't know for sure but I believe Dad said some of the Chinese troops didn't make it. Dad said the plane would reek with vomit and urine and someone had to clean it up, guess who got this wonderful duty. At their home base they propped up the rear of their anti aircraft guns (they wouldn't depress far enough) and were prepared to use them as anti personnel weapons. So much for the Geneva Convention! According to Dad, this was against the rules of war. The air crews were now, when they weren't flying, required to pull guard duty. Dad stood guard several times, always during the daylight hours.

One afternoon Dad and a bunch of the other guys were ordered to load up on a truck. They were armed with two tripod mounted 30 caliber machine guns, rifles, handheld machine guns, and Dad (believe it or not) was armed with a shotgun (12 gauge full choke) using 00 buck shot. They were now - joy of joys - going to stand night guard duty. They drove for what seemed to Dad forever and just before night fall, the truck stopped and they were ordered off the truck. They had been briefed to make as little noise as possible. They couldn't have any light, not even to light a cigarette. (I think not having a cigarette for several hours bothered Dad some.) After getting off the truck, Dad said the damn truck left. An American officer and a sergeant appeared out of the trees alongside the road and told them to follow them. They walked a considerable distance down a jungle trail, arriving at what Dad described as a long low rise about three feet tall.

They were stationed at intervals by the officer and told to settle in, not sleep and keep watch. They were also given a challenge password and a response password. If they heard something, they were supposed to yell out the challenge and, if the person was a friendly, he

would yell out the response. If no response - start shooting! Dad thought, "I'm not going to yell out anything." If he did, he figured they would know exactly where he was. After what seemed like hours, he heard some noise. Then it stopped. Then it started, and stopped again! The noise started once more, and then the shooting started (no one yelled anything). Dad emptied and reloaded his shotgun at least three times during the shooting. Finally, as if on command, they all stopped shooting. During the whole affair, he never saw anything except for their gun flashes. No more noise was heard that night.

The next morning when it was light enough, they viewed the killing field. They had shot two water buffalos and one black panther. Dad said the panther's tail was in four pieces and the buffalos had maybe a hundred holes each. Dad said thank God that was the only time he had to stand night guard duty.

Sometime during the Japanese offensive, a Japanese Zero flew in at a shallow angle with the anti-aircraft guns blazing away at it. The Zero bounced along the runway and nothing happened. After coming to a stop, the plane just sat there. Everyone came out to see what was going on, and after about a half hour or so, a squad of infantry went to investigate. When they got there, the pilot was holding both arms in the air, and he was grinning from ear to ear. It turned out to be a Kamikaze attack, but apparently this guy wasn't all that thrilled about committing suicide for the Emperor. They had welded an iron bar across his waist to secure him in the plane. They found a few hundred pounds of explosive in the plane.

At some point during the Japanese offensive, some American troops brought about twenty or so Japanese prisoners-of-war to the base. The Americans didn't have a prisoner-of-war camp so the commander called the British who said they would take them. Dad and a lot of the other Americans were curious what these Japs looked like - not having seen any up close before. Dad said he saw the British leave with all the prisoners marching out down a jungle trail. After maybe five to ten minutes, Dad and the others heard shooting coming from the direction the British and Japs had gone. After a while, one of the British soldiers returned and told them the Japs had tried to escape and they had to open fire on them and had killed them all. Dad and some others decided to go down the trail and take a look. Dad said that every one of those Japanese were right in the middle of the trail. Dad was convinced that they had not tried to escape, they were executed. War is ugly. The Japanese were repulsed and never really got close to any of the air bases; they did get within 30 miles of cutting off the railroad lines supplying the bases.

One short little story Dad told was about getting a 48 hour pass while in China. I think it was due to mechanical problems with the plane on the flight over, and they had to make repairs before they could return. When they released him to go on the pass, he exchanged a five dollar bill for yen. He said he had half a duffel bag full of yen. He and another man on the crew went to the town and decided to have a meal. Entering the best looking place they could find, they ordered - through much hand gesturing and broken English - a steak and a couple of beers. Dad said he wasn't sure what kind of steak it was but it sure wasn't beef! And the beers weren't really beer, some kind of local brew which was strong enough to give them a buzz. When they went to pay out, they told Dad how much. Dad had no clue how much that was; so he reached

into his duffel bag, grabbed a handful of money, and handed it to them. They shook their heads “no.” Dad handed them another handful, and they nodded their agreement.

While he was in India, he of course received mail from different people, but the one person’s mail he did talk about was Granny’s. I don’t know if you knew it or not, but the military would censor mail that servicemen mailed home, to prevent the enemy from obtaining any secret information. If the censor found anything questionable, he would cut it out of the letter (so that there was a slot missing out of the paper) and then send it on to its destination. Civilians that mailed letters overseas to servicemen would undergo the same scrutiny (I guess not to harm the morale of the men). Well, when he received mail from Granny there would be nothing left but “ands”, “buts”, “the’s” and “Love Mom”. He found out later that she would write a lot about black market stuff they were getting and how rough it was to get certain items. Some of the stuff being rationed was gasoline, meat, sugar and tires were very difficult to get.

On 1 May 1944 dad received his AAF Air Crew Member Badge, and on 13 November 1944 he received his Air Medal.

AIRCREW MEMBER AND AERIAL GUNNER

The Aircrew Member badge was originally the only badge available for Gunners, Flight Engineers, Radio Operators, Photographers and miscellaneous other air crewmen.

- *Aircrew Member (Established 4 September 1942- Now used for all non-officer flying positions) - Upon authorization by his Commanding Officer, a regularly assigned member of an aircrew, who had demonstrated his proficiency as such, can wear the badge during such time as he was assigned to such duties-*

Individuals authorized to wear the Aerial Gunner or Aircrew Member badges could continue to wear such badges, when no longer so assigned, if they met one of the following three requirements:

1. *150 hours flying duty as regularly assigned aerial gunners or aircrew members*
2. *Participation as regularly assigned aerial gunner or aircrew member in 10 combat missions during which time exposure to enemy fire was probable and expected.*
3. *Physically incapacitated through enemy action or while discharging duties as a member of an aircrew.*

Criteria: The Air Medal person who, while in or with the armed States, shall have by meritorious participating in aerial made to recognize heroism or for Award of the Air Medal to recognize those current crew member flying status which participate in aerial

LAUDED FOR 'HUMP' FLIGHTS

From the Air Transport Command in India comes news that two San Angelo men have received military honors. The Oak Leaf Cluster to his Distinguished Flying Cross has been awarded 1st Lt. Kenneth W. Smith of 302 Koberlin upon completion of 600 hours of operational flight over difficult India-China air routes. Pvt. Elmer H. Halfmann of Route 1 received the Air Medal for meritorious achievement on his 150 hours of flight over dangerous territory. The Hump route they traveled is the only aerial lifeline of vital military supplies for Allied forces fighting the Japanese in China.

is awarded to any serving in any capacity forces of the United distinguished himself achievement while flight. Awards may be single acts of merit or meritorious service. is primarily intended personnel who are on or non-crew member requires them to flight on a regular and

frequent basis in the performance of their primary duties. However, it may also be awarded to certain other individuals whose combat duties require regular and frequent flying in other than a passenger status or individuals who perform a particularly noteworthy act while performing the function of a crew member but who are not on flying status. These individuals must make a discernible contribution to the operational land combat mission or to the mission of the aircraft in flight. Examples of personnel whose combat duties require them to fly include those in the attack elements of units involved in air-land assaults against an armed enemy and those directly involved in airborne command and control of combat operations. Involvement in such activities, normally at the brigade/group level and below, serves only to establish eligibility for award of the Air Medal; the degree of heroism, meritorious achievement or exemplary service determines who should receive the award. Awards will not be made to individuals who use air transportation solely for the purpose of moving from point to point in a combat zone.

Sometime in late 1944 on a night flight to Kunming loaded with aviation fuel, they encountered a severe storm (even worse than the normal storms) over the Hump extending all the way into China. Some time during or just after they cleared the Hump, they lost their radio and apparently the navigator (their navigator had gotten shipped out and this one was relatively a rookie) was having a bad day (Dad said “the dumb SOB got us lost”). They entirely lost their way and missed Kunming. They couldn’t radio anyone obviously so they just kept flying on the heading they were on, hoping they would eventually figure out where they were before they ran out of fuel. Their fuel situation eventually came to the point where they could not make it back to their base or Kunming. They would have to either crash land or find another base, which was highly unlikely considering they didn’t know where they were. Finally, they cleared the cloud cover, looked down, and saw nothing but water. Dad said the pilot said, “I think we are in deep trouble!” Dad had been thinking that for awhile! The navigator, however, was able to shoot the stars and determined they were between the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea. They were approximately 1,600 miles from their base (the range of their plane was 1,800 miles when fully fueled) and about 1,100 miles from Kunming and several hundred miles into Japanese-controlled territory. The navigator gave the pilot a course to take to Kunming (for all the good it would do them because they didn’t have enough fuel). This is when Dad told the pilot, “We have a load of fuel in barrels in the cargo area. I’ll try to figure out a way of getting it into the tanks.” The solution Dad came up with was to reroute the fueling opening in the plane’s wing to the cargo area so they could utilize the barrels of fuel. He did this by crawling into the wing, disconnecting the refueling tube that connected the refueling hatch on the exterior top of the wing to the fuel tank and adding to it a tube he scavenged from somewhere on the plane, and bringing the now extended fueling tube into the cargo area. (The fuel lines were interconnected so that fuel could get to both engines by putting fuel into the one tank). On the plane they stored a hand pump (I have no idea why but it sure came in handy) made specifically for pumping from a 55 gallon barrel. This pump was a two handed affair, built similar to bicycle pedals. Dad jury rigged the connection of the tube to the pump and started pumping like hell. Dad pumped until he was worn out, then the other gunner, then the navigator, and even the co-pilot gave it a try. The hand pumping was working, however, not fast enough to keep up with the engines usage. While the others were pumping, Dad thought that by disconnecting a electrically actuated

hydraulic pump used for raising and lowering the landing gear (they would then have to lower the landing gear by hand but, at the time, that didn't worry them) and using it to pump the fuel, it might be able to keep up with the fuel usage. By the time he got the pump hooked up, they were down to less than a quarter of a tank, but it worked. They eventually got back to Kunming, refueled, made repairs and flew back to base. For his action, Dad on 27 December 1944 received the Distinguished Flying Cross. When the pilot told him he was going to put him in for the medal, Dad said, "I only did it to save my own butt." The pilot said, "and you saved the rest of us!" *During WW II 2,253,000 served in the Army Air Corp, of these approximately 43,000 airmen received this award.* I always knew he was special.

Criteria: The Distinguished Flying Cross is awarded to any person who, while serving in any capacity with the Armed Forces of the United States, distinguishes himself by heroism or extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight. The performance of the act of heroism must be evidenced by voluntary action above and beyond the call of duty. The extraordinary achievement must have resulted in an accomplishment so exceptional and outstanding as to clearly set the individual apart from his comrades or from other persons in similar circumstances. Awards will be made only to recognize single acts of heroism or extraordinary achievement and will not be made in recognition of sustained operational activities against an armed enemy.



RECEIVES FLYING CROSS—Pfc. Elmer H. Halfmann, Route 1, son of Mrs. A. E. Halfmann, is presented the Distinguished Flying Cross by his commanding officer, Col. W. S. Barksdale. An aerial engineer in the India-China Wing of the Air Transport Command, Pfc. Halfmann also has been awarded the Air Medal and a Presidential Unit Citation.

In early 1945 (possibly January) Dad made what he now considered a routine supply delivery flight to Kunming. After the plane was unloaded, night had fallen and they headed back over the Hump to their home base. After they had gotten over the mountains and on their

descent, they were attacked by a Japanese fighter which was unusual for a fighter to be out at night. This one was a little smarter than the others; he knew that they didn't have machine guns in the rear or front of the aircraft. He attacked from the rear. On his first pass, he knocked out one engine and, on the next pass; he shot up the tail and one wing. The pilot got on the on-board radio and told everyone to bail out; he couldn't hold it any longer.

Dad had never jumped out of a plane before but he figured it was time to try it. He jumped from the cargo door. He said the wind blast was terrific and, as soon as he cleared the plane, he was jerking on that rip cord. The chute opened but it was not a very pleasant experience. But thank God it did open. On the way down, he thought "Damn its cold". It then occurred to him to look for the plane in order to walk in that direction after he got down. That is if he lived. He didn't see the plane as he drifted down and never saw the plane again. In what seemed like two hours, he hit some trees and went right through them, getting scratched and beat up on the way down until his chute hung up in tops of the trees, and there he hung. When he got his wits back and his mind cleared, he thought, "Man, it sure is dark." He said he couldn't see two inches in front of his face. He decided he would undo his chute harness and drop to the ground and get out of the tree, but then it occurred to him, he could be inches from the ground or hundreds of feet from the ground if he were on the side of a mountain. He started dropping things from his pockets and listening for them to hit. He never once heard anything hit the ground, so he decided to just hang there until daylight. After hanging there for awhile, he lost all feeling in his legs and pretty much was miserable all over, especially in his back. When it finally did get light enough to see the ground, he wasn't more than a couple of feet off the ground, directly over a big patch of very soft sand.

After getting out of the tree and on the ground at last, he did a quick inventory. He had two chocolate bars, a knife, some money (for all the good it would do), a couple of packs of cigarettes, a cigarette lighter, a couple of boxes of small matches, and his pistol with one extra magazine of bullets. He had no map or compass but it didn't matter much because he had no clue where he was anyway. During the attack, the pilot had taken evasive action so they weren't even on course for their base when he had to bail out. The only thing he remembered from his survival training was to follow the rivers and/or creeks south and eat what the monkeys ate and, if the monkeys weren't eating, eat the monkey. He never saw a monkey the whole time he was in the jungle. There were no rivers where he was, but he did know which direction south was because of the sun so he headed south. He traveled south or what he thought was south, day after day. However, during the day in the jungle, it was easy to get off course and later in the day finding that he had been traveling in an entirely different direction. He would, at night fall, draw an arrow in the dirt pointing south, here again based on the sun. He never attempted to travel at night, probably a very good idea considering all the dangerous animals, and he never built a fire at night. In the beginning, he was afraid to use his pistol to kill something to eat for fear the Japanese or some unfriendly natives might hear him. As the days passed and he had tried to eat some of the vegetation (that tasted pretty bad), he decided to take the chance and shot some little animal. He didn't know what it was, but it wasn't bad and it didn't make him sick. About two weeks had passed (he wasn't for sure how long) when one day, he was just walking down a jungle trail, made a turn in the trail and almost ran head long into one of his crew members (I think Dad said he was the other gunner). It just about scared both of them to death. They were both very happy to see anyone but meeting up with an American friend and crew member was incredible. The sad part is that no other crewmembers made it back, nor were ever located.

One day as they were walking down a trail with Dad in the lead, they came upon a snake that was crossing the trail. Dad thought it a good idea to wait (at a short distance) for it to cross instead of stepping over. The vegetation was so thick on the side of the trail that they couldn't see his head or tail and didn't know how long it was. He knew enough to know it was a Boa Constrictor. He said it was bigger around than his thigh. The other crewmember (by the way, Dad never told me any of the crews' names) had a watch and it took a good twenty minutes for the snake to pass. Dad did think about shooting it for food, but the other guy was a little squeamish about eating snake meat. "I guess he wasn't hungry enough," Dad said, "It's just as well; shooting the snake might have just made it mad."

Awhile after this, they met up with two Indian men (Dad called them boys) and after much hand gesturing and broken English, the Indians convinced Dad and the other man to follow them. As it turned out, these men were out there looking for downed American flyers because they were paid \$500.00 for each American they brought back (a large sum of money for that day and age, especially in India). Dad said he now knew exactly what he was worth.

One day with one of the Indians in the lead, they encountered a large ape (monkey) of some kind that was not happy to meet men in his territory. Dad figured this was the dominate male of the group. He started to make menacing noises and acting very aggressive. The lead Indian, all of a sudden, started to beat his chest, started yelling, grunting and growling, turned and ran back the way they had come. I know you've heard the term "monkey see, monkey do". Well, the ape did exactly what the Indian man had done, including running back the way he had come. Then the Indians and, of course, Dad and the other crewman ran like hell in another direction for maybe 200 yards and then stopped and stayed as quiet as possible for a long while. Dad said apparently this ape was very angry at being fooled. They could hear it screaming and breaking branches and bushes for a long while. After they couldn't hear him any longer, they continued on their trek.

A few days later, they finally broke out of the jungle onto a large plain covered with tall grass. After reaching about half way in crossing this plain, one of the Indians suddenly stopped, laid down, and placed his ear to the ground. A second later, he jumped up, jabbering to the other Indian, and then they both took off running as fast as they could. After a moment, Dad followed suit (thinking what in the hell now). When they reached the trees at the edge of the jungle, the Indians climbed the nearest tree, with Dad and the crewman following suit, climbing trees as well. Dad could then see why they had ran, a herd of about a hundred stampeding elephants. If they had not ran when they did, Dad would possibly have been very flat.

A few days later, they came upon a road (the first sign of any kind of civilization Dad had seen in a long time) and they started walking down it. After about a mile, they were overtaken by - thank God - an American officer in a jeep.

It had been 54 days since he had bailed out. He had lost a considerable amount of weight, needed a hair cut, shave, shower (maybe not in that order) and, most of all, a decent meal and maybe a drink of whiskey.

Dad didn't tell me this but I know by his records that after this, he was flown back to the U.S. on 15 March 1945 and arrived in the US on 21 March 1945. After what I presume was convalescence, he was (can you believe it) sent back to India (as if he hadn't done enough). He

left on 8 July 1945 and arrived on 17 July 1945. The war would end on 2 September 1945. Doesn't seem worth the trip, does it?

The only other thing Dad told me about the war was that after it ended and they started to send the troops home, they sent a lot of the infantry first. The government had come up with a points system to determine who would go back to the States first. Dad talked to several of the infantry boys and they had less points than he did. Dad, however, was considered 'essential'. His duty now was to fly the infantry guys with the most points to Calcutta (the nearest port) to board the ship back to the States. Dad was extremely upset, angry, and mad as hell, but he would become even angrier later. When it was finally his turn to go home, he had to go by ship. He, being in Army/ Air Corp and after having flown hundreds of missions and innumerable hours over some of the most dangerous terrain in the world, had to go home by ship. I'm glad I wasn't there when he was told that! He left India on 30 October 1945 and arrived in the U.S. on 21 November 1945 and was discharged 28 November 1945.

A brief synopsis of awards, decorations, and badges Dad and his unit earned and accomplished are listed below.

Highest Grade Held --- Sergeant

Dad served a total of 3 years, 9 months, 24 days.

Continental Service: 1 year, 9 months, 20 days

Foreign Service: 2 years, 0 months, 4 days

Decorations and Awards

Presidential Unit Citation

World War II Victory Medal

American Theater Campaign Medal

AAF Air Crew Member Badge (Wings)

Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal with 3 Bronze Stars

Good Conduct Medal

Air Medal

Distinguished Flying Cross

By the time the war ended, the ATC had moved 740,000 tons of supplies and had flown 165,285 round trip missions over the HUMP.

First of all I apologize for my lack of writing skills. I hope this has been as informative and interesting to read as it was memorable and emotional for me to write. I tried to tell his story as accurately as I could, but my memory may not be as good as it once was, and it has been a while since I heard his stories. He never told me his stories in any order or more than one at a time. He would just tell one here and there, usually on a fishing or hunting trip. In all the stories

he told me, he never boasted and was pretty humble about his accomplishments. I have filled in some blank spots in his telling of his experiences in order for it to be chronologically correct and informative; however, the essence of the story is correct. It's kind of funny but while I was writing this, I thought of numerous hunting and fishing trips he and I had taken together. Odd, ain't it (well maybe not so odd)? Norma thinks I should write about the hunting and fishing trips. It also brought to mind many other memories of Dad and it occurred to me that he and Mom were always there for me, whether it meant advice, money, a butt wiping, butt whipping or a butt chewing. But most of all, he and Mom, by their example, taught me (and I think all of us) how to live a good life and how to be a good person.

As I was writing this and remembering him relating his experiences, I could almost hear his voice and, as weird as this may sound, I could feel him with me. What started out as work turned into a labor of love for me and a greater love and respect for my Dad. I hope and pray that with God's grace, I (we) will see him again.

I wrote this mostly because Connie and Elaine had asked me to more than two years ago. You can tell how eager I was to start. I truly hope that all his loved ones read this, not because I'm a great writer but in order for ya'll to come to know this man a little better. Connie and Elaine, I sincerely thank you for asking me to do this. It has come to mean so much to me.

I love all of ya'll and God bless ya'll – Mitch

