

**THE STORY OF MY PILOT  
TRAINING  
IN THE UNITED STATES**

**(PHOENIX, TUCSON AND DOUGLAS ARIZONA 1944-45)**

**AND**

**A LONG JOURNEY**

**FROM**

**KUNMING CHINA, LAHORE PAKISTAN, BOMBAY INDIA, MELBORNE  
AUSTRALIA, WELLINGTON NEW ZEALAND**

**TO**

**AMERICAN WEST COAST**



**STANDING IN FRONT OF CAF 12<sup>TH</sup> PHOTO RECONNAISSANCE  
SQUADRON IN NANKING AIRFIELD**

**BY JUDE BK PAO**

## MY FLYING CAREER, A LONG ROAD TO THE WINGS

I chose flying as my major career since I was in junior high school when Japanese warlord triggered off a total invasion over Mainland China on July 7, 1937. This aggressive war brought to China and my fellow countrymen the greatest catastrophe in human history. Tremendous properties had been lost, cities annihilated, culture interrupted, social order paralyzed and millions of innocent lives suffered dead, wounded or homeless. Never before perhaps would never again such immense



destruction have ever come to humankind. Patriotic and passionate, I



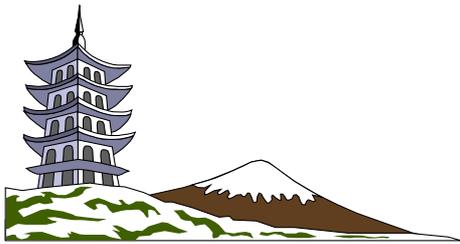
firmed up my decision after the brutal air bombardment against non-military target in Canton and the tragic Nanking massacre on December 13, 1937.

As long as I live I shall never forget the most horrible scene where a campus turned into a shambles by Japanese cold blood bombings. Two bombs of gigantic destructive power scored direct hit into our school on a broad autumn day. Many students and faculty members were relentlessly torn up to pieces. Human bodies, torsos, limbs and flesh covered most of the lawns along with falling cotton (plenty of cotton trees in the campus) while bloodstains painted deeply on the walls. What a terrible killing! Fortunately I only narrowly escaped death. Tears in the bloodshed eyes, survivors of the deadly explosions expressed hatred and unanimously voiced revenge. The merciless atrocity compelled me to swear: "One day when I grow up I must learn to fly and be a good pilot that some days in the future I can bring this same disaster to the aggressor's homeland, a tooth for a tooth and an eye for an eye."

In the spring of 1944 when I was still in college years, I was traveling to the wartime capital, Chungking in Szechuan province. During my three-day transit stop in Kwei-yang, capital of Kwei-chow province, I had a glimpse of the Air Force enrollment program calling for new pilot recruit. Lost no time I made a quick response. Thank God. My qualification met the entire stipulated requirement. After a thorough physical checkup, oral and written examinations, I was immediately enrolled. The Enrollment Agency issued me a certificate, along with traveling package, and asked me to report to the Central Aviation School in Kunming, Yunnan province. Consequently, I changed my destination from Chungking to Kunming.

Both provinces of Kweichow and Yunnan neighbor each other, but traveling from

Kweiyang to Kunming was not easy in those old days on war-torn underdeveloped China because transportation vehicle was scarce and highway condition inadequate. On a truck powered by charcoal engine I spent four days to reach Kunming. Besides, many hardships were encountered on the lousy and dangerous gravel roads. Most hazardous and hair thrilling sections were the so-called 24 S-turn mountain trails, in the neighborhood of the famous scenic Huanguoshu (Orange Waterfalls). Never again, I promised myself, should I travel on this road in the future.



Central Aviation School (Originally in Hangzhou, Chekiang province) was located at Wuchiapa, a military airport five miles from Kunming. When I reported in, there were more than 160 new recruits lined up for training. Actually the Aviation School (Flying School) conducted no flying activity due to shortage of airplane, part and fuel but only served as an academy institute to provide fundamental preflight training. In other word, how to transform a man into a piece of hard fighting machine, a good soldier. What impressed most at the first sight was the awesome statue at the main entrance. The propaganda Chinese characters on the front side read, "No coward should enter this gate" while on the backside "Our body, airplane and bombs should go together to the destruction of enemy warship."

Kunming was a very nice city, elevation 6,000 feet above sea level with wonderful climate and beautiful scenery, hills, lakes, stone forest and hot spring. However, I couldn't enjoy much due to busy training schedule. For four months we received very strict military drill. Platoon leaders were selected from the Military Academy. Physical training was exceptionally tough. Ground school was thorough. Foreign language specially required. The Chief Administrator of the school was a major general, Mu-chun Liu, and the Director of Education and Training, a colonel, Chia-shang Chen, who made Air Force Commander in Taiwan in early sixties.

After completion of domestic training I was among 120 cadets selected from the 160 to go abroad for flying training. Shortly after a commencement ceremony, the Transportation Agency put us on three American Dakotas (C-47) to fly over the hump around Himalayas to Dom Dom Ma (Ding Jiang Airport), a small landing strip in Assam, India. Bravo! We were exceedingly excited on foreign soil the first time.

Dom Dom Ma was a British transit camp set up in the jungle. Camp facility was

poor. No bedroom or shelter, every one slept in the dense bamboo forest. Mosquitoes were worst than the Japs. Food was lousy. We didn't get used to western foodstuff, black tea, butter and cheese, particularly the ration canned beef and hard biscuit. We had to procure curried chicken from local inhabitant for dinner (We used to have good kitchen in Kunming). We met some British soldiers, English or Scots. They suffered too but were well disciplined. I began to realize that when people were at war the lifestyle of an Imperial subject was no better off than a Colonial citizen was.

Two nights in Dom Dom Ma, we proceeded to Calcutta on a three-day jungle train ride. Across immense Bangladesh (Still India by that time) terrain, hills, village, farms and forests, we saw many skinny inhabitants. We made many monkey friends too in the



jungle. Whenever the train pulled for a stop, hordes of monkeys swooped down from the woodlands begging for food, banana, biscuits or canned beef, even money just as the local inhabitants did.

Calcutta was, indeed, a large city the biggest business center in India in early twentieth century. We lodged in the American Camp for the first five days. It was in the long hot summer that we particularly enjoyed the camp shower facility in addition to hot meal. We did have a chance to visit the city, sightseeing, shopping and movie entertainment. I took time to call on friends in Chinese consulate and enjoyed the gathering. Later on we spent another five days in a Chinese community compound before we continued our journey north.

Off Calcutta we were on the train again heading northwest to Ganges River, the cradle of Indian civilization. India was a very large country with dense population but little industry in the old days. Traveling for days over the immense terrain in the long hot summer, we were very suffering. The climatic condition was bad, terribly bad, and unbearable. Along the Ganges we had boat rides, train rides and camp stops off and on. I could hardly remember how many swaps and how many camps we had visited. At long last, nevertheless, we got coach ride to Lahore, Punjab province (Old day India now Pakistan)

After registration we were assigned to the Cadet Barracks in the tents (Except a few permanent buildings for office and classroom, every one slept in the tent). Off course, certain Quarter Master routine should be completed, such as: 1) Filling up a lot of paper forms, 2) Receiving uniforms, book and stationery. Most important of all, we

must have the flying equipment, shirts, helmet, goggles, goggles and boots.

The primary flying training school (a branch of Central Aviation School) was located in Lahore Airport under British Authority. Commandant of Chinese Detachment was Lt. Colonel Wei-ke Hu, a handsome Eurasian of German blood with very outstanding military bearing. He gave us cadets very good impression. In addition to a faculty for general affairs and academic staff, there were many flying instructors, Maj. Lew, Maj. Chu and Maj. Chao, all very excellent pilots, the last two responsible for Flight Line A & B.

Before a cadet could fly or approach an airplane, he must learn many lessons in classrooms in addition to physical check. The 120 cadets were divided into two flights, A and B, according to the names in alphabetical order. I was assigned to Flight B. Each flight took turn to Classroom or Flight Line in morning or afternoon sessions, switching every other day. There were also two hours in the evening for self-study. Every day was a long day.

With three fellow cadets I was assigned to Capt. Yao-wu Yang, a quiet instructor from Szechwan province. After a brief rundown on the Stearman, PT-17 trainer, he took me up for an orientation flight. For the first time I got a feel of airborne experience. My instructor, of course, took time to evaluate my airworthiness as well as my ability to fly. I flew with him again the next day. He taught me how to manipulate the throttle, stick and rudder for pitch and roll controls. He let me fly straight & level, gentle turns, climb and descent. After two flights he, then, disappeared and we got nowhere for a whole week. We learned later that he was on annual vacation to Karachi, a resort place around the Arabian Sea. What is a pity?

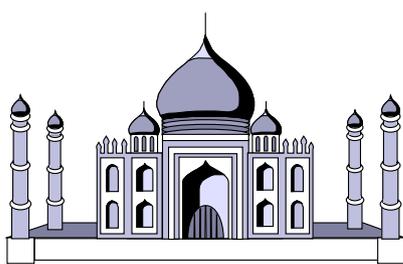
When the chief IP (Instructor pilot), Maj. Chu, found out the situation he immediately sent all four of us to another flying instructor, Capt. Hsiao-sung Hsiao, in order to catch up the schedule. Capt. Hsiao from Hunan province was a quick-tempered man but very strict to business. He had four students already allotted to him but he took four more with no complaint. Sorry he had to fly both morning and afternoon periods in such hot spell. I admired his hard working spirit and was very much grateful to his instruction.

Lahore was in the semi-desert region, so the climatic condition was very bad and dry, temperature above 40<sup>0</sup> Celsius. Scorching wherever you were, classrooms, barracks, dining hall, athletic field or Flight Line. Most terrible, we couldn't sleep

inside the tent at night due to hot spell. As usual we helped each other move the bunks outside in open air, sprayed cold water in the mosquito net then quickly jumped into sleep. If you failed to get into sleep in ten minutes, you had to spray water again. Lack of recreation facility, heavy training schedule plus hot-tempered instructors, life became most difficult and bore.

We were depressed and disappointed but under no circumstances should retreat. There was no room to retreat either. Our country was struggling in a resistant war. Our countrymen were badly humiliated, suffering hunger and death. Come what may we must be determined and firm. With courage and wisdom, I decided to work hard regardless whatever hardship. Capt. Hsiao flew with me for seven hours and taught me the entire basic aircraft-handling maneuver, including stall and spin recovery. As he felt satisfied he sent me to Major Chu for solo check. I reported to the Chief with no delay. Thank God, I made good flight and smooth landing. Every thing was up to the IP's standard. Major Chu congratulated me for my solo success as soon as the engine was cut off.

Solo means a great deal to a student flyer, a green horn pilot. To me it was like just crossing the threshold to go farther exploration of the sky for more challenge and complicated flying maneuver. I cherished the opportunity and worked hard in subsequent weeks preparing for coming check ride with American check pilot. Foreign students should pass the American IP check-ride before they could go to the United States for further training.



After three busy weeks in Lahore, we were allowed open-post on every Sunday. We could go down town for sightseeing, movie and Chinese cuisine. Lahore used to be capitals of certain dynasties in ancient and medieval times. With very rich historical background, there were many old castles, Hindu Temples, Islamic Mosques, Royal Crescent, Burial Tower, beautiful Gardens and Parks for visit. All tourist spots were marvelous. Oftentimes we rent bicycles to bombard the city streets and chase people on wagons. People in Lahore in the old days were old fashion, especially womenfolk who must put on veils. In a colony a human life was very cheap, cheaper than an animal. I still remember a warning sign to vehicle driver which read: "If a man was struck down and killed, 500 Rupees would be fined, a sacred cow, 2,000."



In early October, we had finished all terminal examination that covered academic curriculums, physical fitness, personal behavior and flying capability. The American check pilots showed up just on time to perform check ride with each cadet. Those who passed the terminal exams would take turn to fly with designated American IP. I took my turn and went through the check. Without difficulty I passed the test. All cadets who passed the test would be sent to the States while those who failed the check returned to Kunming.

Departed Lahore, we were once again on the train heading south on a long journey to Bombay. The train ride this time was much more pleasant than that four months ago because we felt good. When we were in good mood everything appeared rosy. We began to appreciate the magnificent countryside, beautiful scenery, wide-open villages and hills as well as the green prairie. We enjoyed watching sunrise and sunset, moon and stars in the blue sky. What a wonderful travel was.

Arrived at Bombay, the Transportation Agency lodged us in an American camp, Camp Carrion, 40 minutes train ride to the Main station in down town center. While we were waiting for embarkation for one week, we were free to go to Bombay several times for sightseeing, entertainment and Chinese food. Bombay, a masterpiece of the British Empire's architect in west India before the war, was a very large and busy harbor during the war. There were many beautiful architectures, grand market places, and business centers. The buildings along the coast were exceedingly beautiful.

We started boarding the troopship late October. The loading took a great deal of time because so many cargoes and passengers. The passenger list included American GIs (Government Issue means military personnel), New Zealand-Australian soldiers of Montgomery British 8<sup>th</sup> Army who returned from North Africa, some French personnel, Chinese student officers and cadets. The Chinese officers were combat-ready pilots who went to the States for refresher training. The troopship of General Brakenbridge Class with a capacity of 2,500 had many cabins in multi-layers. All Chinese personnel occupied five cabins.



During the war there were two sea routes from India to the United States. One sailed westward from India Ocean to Atlantic Ocean through the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa to American east coast, while another eastward from Indian Ocean via south Pacific to US west coast. Our convoy ran the eastward course. Started off from

Bombay in the Arabian Sea, the convoy, consisted of two troopships and two escort cruisers, headed south from Indian Ocean to the south Pacific, around Australia, New Zealand, twice across the equator and many port calls on a 44-day voyage to the west coast of the United States. Escort was mandatory during the war because Japanese submarines were reported extremely active.

No sooner than anchor aweigh, many passengers (first time at sea) experienced rough sea and fell pray to seasickness. I was in no exception. Dizzy, vomiting and weak, I lay flat for almost three days. When I came to and felt well, I felt very hungry. The Mess (Dining) Hall on board ship served two meals daily, brunch and supper, and the queue was extremely long. PX (Post Exchange) opened a couple hours daily with limited supply. You could hardly get anything at all. I tried to buy fruits from a black market sailor. He gave me three tiny lemons for a dollar. What a highway robbery!

Life was terribly bored. No room for exercise. You could hardly stretch your legs. What you could do was lying down and reading or playing cards. Many American shot craps (dice game) on the floor. The gangways were so narrow and crowded, you had a hard time to walk to toilet, dining hall or upper deck. What bothered us most, however, was the daily emergency exercise, abandoned ship drill. Whenever the alarm set off, every one should put on the life jacket and reported immediately to a designated station. No one enjoyed the drill at all. However, it was a routine. The American always says: "If you couldn't beat them, join them."

About two weeks or so (not to be exact because I lost count) leaving Bombay, the abandoned ship drill stopped. We gradually got used to rough sea cruise and began to enjoy Great Ocean life. At the same time the Kitchen Department of the troop ship asked the Chinese Detachment for ten KPs (Kitchen Police, American military system to assign service personnel or cadets to help working detail in the kitchen). Volunteer must be handy, snappy and fluent in English. I volunteered for the job along with nine other fellows.



We were assigned to the Vegetable Section to help Fatty Charlie to make mesh potato. Charlie, the second man in charge of the kitchen, specialized for mesh potato making. Our job was very simple, to unpack, wash, peel and clean potatoes then to turn them to Charlie. All the works were done in the machines. Actually the job didn't call for ten KPs; two would be good enough. I didn't know why they called for ten. Maybe Charlie wanted a big audience to listen to his good joke. Oftentimes we

helped other sections too, for instance, dish-wash or meat slicing. I preferred voluntary assistance to help slice meat, the pot roast. I always intentionally cut them thicker because I knew the guys up there so hungry.

We got along with Charlie just fine. We were happy to work there, not only plentiful of food but also a good environment to relax and shoot the bull. Besides, we had the privilege to go upper deck in the evening enjoying the cool breeze and watching beautiful sunset. Charlie was a funny and wonderful guy but a big waster. I watched him make mesh potato every day. The delicious potato should be mixed with butter, salt and powder milk. Each time he opened a five-gallon canned powder milk and took one or two pounds for mixture, and then he dumped the rest to the garbage. I asked him why he threw away the useful material. He would laugh and say: "Boy, never mind. That belongs to Roosevelt."



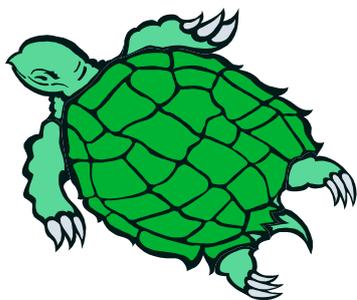
The first port call was made in Melbourne, southeast Australia. All the Australian soldiers took turn to disembark. The loading took a whole day. We didn't go on shore but browsed the city at leisure. A few days later we entered New Zealand water. Next port call was Wellington, the capital of New Zealand. Wellington was a marvelous harbor, excellent waterway and coastline. What made Wellington City so beautiful was the crescent hill slope surrounding the harbor. All houses scattered along the hillside were built with brilliant deep contrast colors. Flowers bloomed everywhere. What a magnificent landscape! You were not seeing anything black or white. Never before in my life I had seen such a lovely place.

The New Zealanders disembarked first then every one was allowed to go on shore including sailors. The ship was under refueling and major cleanup for three days. We, all Chinese, were invited by the Chinese community to go for lunch, sightseeing and dinner. We had coach ride along the city center as well as the countryside. It was exceptionally pleasant. Although New Zealand located very far away from the battlefields, the austerity economic policy of the British Empire, particularly the rationing system, was strictly enforced. Every one, regardless rich or poor, had equal share of foodstuff and daily necessity. The buying power was not money alone but a coupon must be attached. Overseas Chinese in New Zealand, we were told, manipulated majority of vegetable and fruit markets. They were highly respected and living a good life.

Leaving the scenic and peaceful Wellington Harbor, the convoy continued its voyage cruising north along the North Island of New Zealand. As the Australian and New Zealand soldiers disembarked, we felt the troopship much bigger, more room space for individual movement. We enjoyed more as time went by. For certain period of time the convoy anchored at the Port of New Caledonia, a territorial island of France. It didn't take long only for unloading of French personnel and equipment.

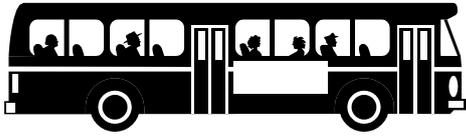
The convoy of two troopships accompanied by two destroyers (replaced the cruisers) once again cruised around the famous Coral Sea, a fierce naval battle site in the preceding year. Gradually sailing into hostile zone, the captain called for alert and resumed Abandoned Ship exercise. Zigzagging along the south Pacific Island chain for some time, the convoy finally arrived at its destination, Guadalcanal in Solomon Islands. Guadalcanal used to be Japanese strongholds during its full fledged aggressive expansion, the southern most in the south Pacific. However, the Americans crashed them out. Extreme heavy casualties were reported on both sides. American Forces made Guadalcanal a strong counter offensive base for flip-flop operation all the way to the Philippines. By the time we arrived there, American GIs still busily cleared up the Japanese remnants in the hideout. The troopship picked up more passengers, the sick, the wounded and those who had finished their tour of duty.

As soon as the loading was completed, the convoy was on the way because the area was still considered hazardous. A few days later we didn't see the destroyer escorts because we were away from trouble water. Crossing the equator once more we were back to Northern Hemisphere sailing smoothly for a bright course. All persons on board felt relax and the submarine nightmare was gone. We began to genuinely enjoy a smooth and pleasant seaborne journey like on a luxurious liner. We really enjoyed the pleasant sunbathe on upper deck to watch the clouds drifting by, the sea gulls hovering above and the giant turtles floating on the seabed. For the Americans, it was a home coming voyage, for us, exploring the American continent, a promising land.



Forty-four (44) days since we departed Bombay the troopship entered the channel of San Diego. How wonderful, the scenery along the coast was magnificent. Everything appeared to us just as signs of welcome. We were glad to watch the people on the shore; the grand architectures and the beautiful trees lined up on the shoreline. Especially pleased, the first time for me, to see the porpoises jumping up and down on the waterfront. What's a pleasant experience?

As soon as we disembarked, the Cadet Center receptionists greeted us. They showed us to the transportation vehicle, many coaches lined up waiting. After a briefed welcome and introduction message, we were asked to board the military transport on way to Santa Anna Field (Army Base). It was so simple and snappy. Santa Anna used to be an overseas transit camp for American GIs, a very busy terminal during the war. Aviation Cadet Training Center was also located there. The campsite was nearby nowadays Disneyland but it had been ordered to close down in early 1945.



As we arrived at the Center and had a hot meal, a lot of formalities took place. First thing first, the registration papers should be filled up. My class was designated 13<sup>th</sup> Chinese Detachment, US Army Air Corps (US Air Force before independence) Class 45F, my ID number 1081. As soon as we got to barracks we were asked go to the Clinic for physical check and blood test, the test mainly for the dog-tag (engraved with name and blood type, all the American service personnel issued one). Then we went to QM (Quarter Master Depot) to pick up uniforms and personal equipment. From the day we arrived at Santa Anna, we were authorized to receive a monthly allowance (pocket money) of fifty dollars.

The next important thing was English comprehension test. For better use of teaching aids and school facilities, ninety cadets would be divided into six small groups according to test result. I was in Group A. The mission of the Center was pre-flight training. Many instructors were civilians given a military enlisted man rank. In addition to strengthening English language, military drill and physical training (PT) were specially emphasized. The curricula covered a wild range of subjects, aerodynamics, airframe, power plant, navigation aids, aircraft and surface vassal recognition, voice and Morse code communications.

We arrived in the United States in a great time as American prejudice against Chinese was just over after Madame Chiang Kai-shek addressed the US Congress. She also delivered an eloquent and enlightened speech to the American public in Hollywood Bowl. In addition to her praise to the United States Government and her admiration to American brave fighting men in China-Burma Theaters, she let all Americans know that Chinese people had ignited a resistant war against Japanese aggressor long before Pearl Harbor being bitterly attacked on 7 December 1941. Chines scorching earth policy had bogged down hundreds of thousands of Japanese troops in China. As comrades in arms, we were given due respect and walking tall.



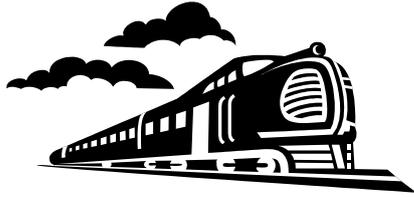
Two weeks we arrived at Santa Anna, it came the great holidays, Christmas and New Year. Because of a very tight schedule, we were allowed to go to Los Angeles only one time. Nevertheless, a very wealthy Chinese woman, Mrs. Chow, invited us to go to her Christmas party. She owned a beautiful mansion with large garden in Beverly Hills, Hollywood. She was awfully thoughtful to Chinese cadets who were far away from home. As usual she entertained every class from China to the United States. We went to her party in two coaches. She prepared plenty of food, drinks and snacks. Many Chinese College girl students in Los Angeles were also invited. It was a very enchanting evening. We were much at home. With friends we could dance in the ballroom and talk to one and other in the lounge or garden.



From Christmas to New Year it was quite a long holiday. Not many Americans stayed on base. They were on holiday. Besides, the Camp was already scheduled to close down after New Year. Newly arrived in the States, we couldn't go anywhere. We were not allowed to cross the main gate. However, a certain family, Mrs. Chang and her sister as well as her two daughters whom we met in the Christmas party visited us. They came to join us almost every day in the evening. Chang's husband was a family physician so her car didn't need coupons for refueling (During the war gasoline was rationed). It was very nice to have company and some ones to talk when we went dining and movie. I still remember two good movies, "Anchor Aweigh by Jean Kelly and Frank Sinatra" and a cartoon character "Donald Duck in Three Caballeros."

During our short stay in Santa Anna, a certain tailor came to take our measurement for uniforms. We already had many uniforms from Kunming, Lahore and Santa Anna. Curiously I asked the tailor: "We all have uniforms. Why should you do that?" He said: "I was asked by the Chinese Authority in Washington to make everyone a top coat and a black gabardine dress uniform. The uniform would be exactly the same as Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek wore. Cadets in all previous class received the same." Tailor-made dress was much more expensive. I wore the uniform no more than three times; the last time was in my wedding.

When the New Year was over, we were told to pack and go to Santa Anna Railroad Station. We bid farewell to Los Angeles before we could hardly know the big city. It was terribly sad. After one full day crossing the Wild West desert, the train took us to



San Antonio, Texas. We ended up at San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center (SAACC, nowadays Lackland AFB), next to Kelly Field. SAACC was a very large Pre-flight Training Camp of the Western Training Command of the Army Air Corps, much better facilitated than Santa Anna. We were told that in the previous three years, tens of thousands of pilots and combat crew were trained here before they went to war.

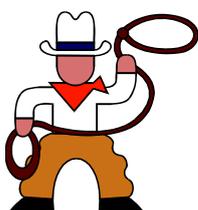
In addition to our class, Chinese trainees in the Center included student officers, navigators, bombardiers, gunners and other specialties. During our stay in San Antonio, we received a series of very thorough academic courses. Physical training (PT) was also tough. The instructor sergeant led us to make two cross-country runs every week with all kinds of obstacles. The military drill was particularly strict and formal. Every Saturday we had to participate in ground military review and parade together with our American counterparts. Like American GIs we were detailed to CQ (Charge of Quarters) and KP duties.

It was regretted that only a few days in San Antonio, a miserable incident had happen to us. A fellow cadet, T. M. Hou on KP duty, failed to acknowledge a Chinese student officer's call (Raising hand signal) for service in the Mess Hall. The officer accused Hou intentional negligence and bitterly blamed him wrong doing. Hou admitted neglect but not intentional so he rebuked the accusation instead of apologized. An argument thus arose. The Chinese Officer in Charge in San Antonio condemned Hou insubordinate and ordered to discontinue his training immediately. It was unfair, of course, but should not have made things that worse.

Due to the instigation of a few troublemakers in our class, all cadets were stirred up emotionally and urged to show solidarity to support Hou by fast. All were told to attend ground school and drill as usual but off limit to the Mess Hall. Consequently, many cadets suffered hungry. What a lousy idea! I was not that stupid. A few classmates and I didn't favor the move but we hated to offend the majority openly so we kept quiet. Besides, we had friends in the Navigator Group who helped smuggle fruits and sandwiches to fill our stomach anyway.

The hunger strike caused the Base Authority concerned. Nevertheless, they could not bring the cadets back to the Mess Hall. Washington, therefore, was alarmed. General P. T. Mao, Chinese senior representative in the States, flew to San Antonio with no delay. No sooner than his aircraft touchdown he asked for an urgent gathering

of all Chinese in the Auditorium. Without interview or investigation he pulled a long face like Lord Kuan and addressed the gathering: "You bums, you devils, you rascals, you bandits and you monsters! Shame on you. What a disgraceful thing you've done." Then he turned to his son, Cadet C. Y. Mao in our class, "Are you responsible for initiating the fast, or who else did that?" Young Mao was trembling without uttering a word. To conclude his short lecture he turned to us furiously and announced a terse order: "The 13<sup>th</sup> Detachment cadets would not have open post until receive the pilot wings." It was a very severe punishment. We would not be able to go out until we graduate. What a shame!



We spent almost eight weeks in San Antonio but never set foot in town. We didn't know anything of the city in big Texas. It was too bad. Nonetheless, we knew the camp facilities so well. Lonely and bored, we dug out every thing of interest on base that we could lay our hands to. The Library, Movie theater, Audio and film cabinet, Machine shop, Game room, Bar, Gymnasium, Swimming pool and Athletic grounds.

"Off we go into the wild blue yonder," the Army Air Corps (United States Air Force is a branch of US Army before independence in 1947) theme song: "Climbing high into the sun." We were ready and qualified to hit the blue as we had completed the pre-flight training in Texas. Departed San Antonio, we were once again on the train way back to Arizona. The Primary Flying School was located in Thunderbird Field, Glendale, Arizona on the fringe of Phoenix just across the railroad tracks.



Contracted to military for primary flying training, Thunderbird was a very famous civilian flying school in the commercial airport. One-mile square in size with grass mat, the airdrome had no runway or other navigational facility. Air Corps personnel managed and scheduled the program but all flight activity was conducted by experienced civilian instructors on the PT-13 BI-planes. Administrative area was very narrow only a triangle nearby the main entrance. When we arrived at the school, there was no formality only a welcome word from the commandant giving in the retreat ceremony (Lowering flag ceremony usually held before sunset and supper).

After a short introduction of the simple base facility the following morning we were asked to pick up our flying gears, shirts, jacket, helmet, goggle, hand grooves and



boots, then we were on business.

My instructor was Mr. Swingler, a very fine gentleman, patient and considerate. He was an outstanding instructor pilot (IP). I flew with him daily either morning or afternoon according to the scheduled shift. He gradually showed me what the PT-13 could do including unusual maneuvers such as: inverted spin, one point landing, two point landing, tail first landing and ground loop recovery. I had flown the same type of airplane PT-17 in Lahore for almost 40 hours so I had no difficulty to follow his teaching. When I demonstrated my ability and skill, he was confident to let me solo in the seventh lesson. I learned a great deal from him that laid the foundation of my flight in subsequent years.

I could hardly remember the name of the commandant but I vividly recalled his executive officer, Kenneth C. Brown, because the name of Brown was always read loud and clear in the daily order on retreat ceremony. The name of the Chinese officer in charge was Lt. Colonel W. H. Wang. Again, I always remembered this name, which we had used to forge gate-passes. As General Mao's "No Open Post" orders in effect, we would not be able to leave the base as other class fellow cadets did on weekend. We envied them who were free to go down, drinking and dancing in USO (A social organization to help and to entertain servicemen in wartime). Thunderbird was a very tiny place compared with San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center. Except a pool and a game room, recreation facility was scarce. Disappointed and hapless we suffered badly. Some got homesick or neurotic. Some dozed off in the classroom or on Link trainer.

Despite the inverse situation, nevertheless, we must cheer up and have fun. I had ten close friends of Cantonese origin in my class and we always tried to make fun together. We worked on board Troopship Brakenbridge as KPs before. Some of these fellows were men of genius. Chu, for example, was able to beat the pinball machine. The rule stipulated "A nickel for a game. If a player accumulates 10,000 points, play another game free. The more accumulation, more free plays." Chu punched a metal wire into the machine accumulator, the accumulation jumped up to maximum. We took

turns to play all day long free. This was the way we killed time.

Another guy, Wu, could cheat the Coke machine. He spent one nickel for a bottle of Coke and got one free. The Coke machine was a multi-layer lock-in round cabinet. Usual practice "Insert a nickel into the coin slot, turn the crank handle 90 degrees to pick up the bottle." But Wu played it other way. "He turned the crank shaft half way, snatched the lower layer bottle first then all the way to pick up the upper layer bottle." No harm done, it just made for fun.

The first weekend we arrived at Thunderbird a certain family, Mr. Teng, visited us. Overseas Chinese, Teng settled down in Phoenix for many years and ran a very large grocery store in down town Washington Street. He had been notified of our arrival but we could not go to see him. Consequently he took all his family in two sedans to Glendale to see us on Saturday also on Sunday. We felt happy of their visit but quite embarrassed. The awkward situation compelled us to do something else, even illegal, that we might be able to return their visit in their Phoenix home



While we were greeting our friends on the main gate, I had carefully watched the security process of the guard on duty. It appeared to me that he paid very little attention to the Identification Pass. Besides, the pass posted no personal picture either. I was thinking if we would borrow passes from other fellows we could make exit and entrance free. As I brought up my idea to my friends, they suggested otherwise. Why did we make our own passes?



Harry Lai was another genius, a handy thief too. As we arranged intentionally a conversation with Colonel Wang's secretary on the lawn, he sneaked in her office and stole ten blank passes. Marvelous! What we could do to make the pass work was a little typing skill and a forged signature. We tried hard to type names on the pass without success. No one had learned typing before. Clumsy enough, six of the ten blank passes had been ruined. Cadet Chao finally made up four usable. He used one finger to punch a funny name on each pass and forged Colonel Wang's signature. Thank God, we were able to take turns to go down town on every weekend.

Training activities in Thunderbird were very heavy, wave and wave of cadets filling in and overlapping. Therefore, military code of conduct was strictly enforced. Cadets in senior class had the privilege over the juniors. The juniors always obeyed and served the senior ones just like West Point Military Academy. Our senior class, 45E,

made up of American cadets. We had to help them crank up the engine on start (PT-13 trainer was not installed with starting motor) and wing-walk on taxiing. By the time we upgraded to senior, our junior class (45-G) all the American VFW (Veterans of Foreign War, Service personnel who had completed tour of combat duty), navigators, bombardiers and some from the army. As juniors they had to crank up our engines and walk on our wing tip too.

One month in Thunderbird, most of the cadets in our class got solo except a few dropped out. Unfortunately, three accidents occurred in three consecutive days that caused five PT-13s damaged. All credited to our class. Two bumped to each other on taxiing, two collided in mid-air and one ran over the barrier fence after landing. The Commandant ordered to ground (suspend) all our flight. According to the Board of Accident Investigation report: "Primary cause, pilot error; Contributory cause, lack of pilot concentration due to carelessness of mental fatigue." Fortunately, no body hurt.

The Commandant felt strongly that extended confinement on base caused student mental stress, which was harmful to flying safety. He flashed to Washington DC an urgent report of the accidents and suggested recommendations in parts: "These cadets are human beings not animal. Normal relaxation on weekend is helpful. Sorry! This school is unable to provide a better training package for students of bad mood or mental unbalance. Let them have open post or send them home."

Wonderful! The Commandant's cable helped bring General Mao to Phoenix. He flew to Arizona in a hurry on a certain Thursday afternoon. After meeting the school faculty he called for all Chinese personnel gathering. Followed his instructive speech he reluctantly announced his revised restriction: "Men! You would be allowed to go open post on every other weekend. From tomorrow on, you would have three holidays. Be happy. Work hard from next Monday." Consequently the Commandant cancelled the Suspended Flight order and let us resume flying the following Monday.

General Mao's announcement really helped release our tension. We were happy and no longer felt like a criminal. Almost ten weeks in Thunderbird we had, successfully, completed all the scheduled flights. We knew how to handle the airplane including some tricky acrobatic maneuvers. Nevertheless, only sixty-six (66) cadets were happily qualified to go on next echelon flying training, the rest were subject to wash out. Packed and bade good-bye, we missed Thunderbird very much because we had a lot to remember. The flying school was closed down after the war and the whole area turned to Metro Phoenix City project. I returned to visit in 1962, 64 and 78 but

nothing I could recognize. In commemoration of the tiny flying school, graduates of Thunderbird still held gathering every year.

During the war the Army Air Corps trained tens of thousands of pilots in a consecutive four years. Pilots were trained in three stages, Primary, Basic and Advanced Flying. The Basic Training site we were assigned to was Marana Field in desert Arizona, near Tucson, only one and half-hours driving distance from Thunderbird. Marana was a very large and busy military air base, very noisy too. You could hardly imagine how the scenery would be seen when four hundred trainers buzzed the field at the same period of time.

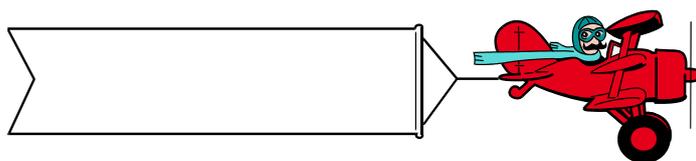
As always we had to go through certain routine in a new environment. First, we had to locate our barracks, mess hall, administrative office and classrooms. All the Quonset huts looked the same. There were more than five thousands officers and men working on base, we must, therefore, learn quickly how to find our way around. The weather in Marana was good all year round for flying activity but unbearable to human beings, hot and dry. There was no air conditioner installed but water coolers in every barrack and classroom. Physical training conducted by a specialized Army sergeant instructor was extremely tough. It seemed to me that he wanted to build every one a muscle man.

The Base Authority divided cadets in our detachment to two Flights. I was in Flight B. We were told that military flying instructor usually tougher than civilians. Very fortunately I was assigned to an outstanding instructor, 1st Lieutenant Joe Funk. He was an excellent fighter pilot of European Theater. A quiet man he was, but whatever he said was on the point. From Class 45-F on Air Corps basic trainer changed to North American made Calf AT-6 instead of BT-13, which were phased out later. Owing to this revolutionized change, Joe said: "T-6 is a very handy trainer better than B-13. T-6 has more power and maneuverability. Nevertheless, excessive engine thrust aggravates torque that might cause the nose to turn left on takeoff run. The narrow gauge landing gear is apt to enter ground loop after landing. You should pay more attention, however, to monitor the instantaneous tendency and apply adequate rudder pressure, every thing will be all right. I bet you enjoy the flight."

In addition to the main base in Marana (with asphalt mat and a runway), there were three alternate tar surface mats landing fields scattered around the area (I forget the names because all in Spanish tongue). The dispatcher officer assigned to each student not only the aircraft but also zone of alternate field as well. During rush hours

(first period when all planes departed out to alternate and last period all returned home) Marana Field was busy like a beehive. Hundred of trainers took off or landing at the same time. To avoid bumping into each other student pilots were warned to keep eyes open and stay absolutely on course parallel to the giant "T" sign. Any deviation on final approach or landing roll would be considered serious violation, which caused punishment or washed out.

Most of the instructors were combat experienced pilots. They must be good otherwise they wouldn't be able to survive many fierce air battles. They knew what a combat pilot should be and how to train good pilots for the mission. "As cream of the milk," they said: "A good pilot must be sharp, bold, aggressive and quick responsive. A dump pilot only makes the enemy easy. A responsible good combat pilot should be able to secure his own neck and to save the lives of his crew members." They especially emphasized air alertness as paramount requirement. Thus they said: "To win an air battle a good pilot must see the enemy first before being seen." Still neck student pilots would be subject to wash out.



I flew seven hours with Joe who taught me all the basic T-6 handling skill. On the alternate landing field

along the hillside of Mexican border, he let me fly solo. It was a big time when student pilots flew solo. It was also a time for instructors to compete honor. Students took turns to shoot landing on the mat at the same time. Instructors usually rounded up on the Mobile Control Vehicle watching or giving instruction, if necessary. A good landing should please the responsible instructor. On the contrary a bad one would make him disgraceful. I was glad to shoot a series of good landings and made Joe proud.

After solo, student pilots would be on their own for quite a while except team ride by instructor or Standard Board to check progressing. I used to fly three periods everyday, taking off from home base, landing at an alternate, taxiing to the gas tank (A truck) and refueling the bird on my own. During refueling I took time to eat my breakfast leftover, fruit or candy. In the old day I didn't get used to heavy and grease breakfast in the Dining Room so usually I took a couple of apples or pears in my pocket to fly.

During solo flight I tried to sharpen my mental and physical skill so I flew lazy "8", loop and roll, Chandelle, Immelmann, split "S" and clove leaf. All these maneuvers

required high degree of coordination. Some fellow took chance to fly tricky acrobatics or to buzz around on solo flight. A classmate of mine had his hairs burned by engine exhaust when he executed an Immelmann without closing the cockpit. He fainted instantly but recovered in lower altitude. Another fellow, Cecil Chen, buzzed his girl friend's home in Glendale, near Phoenix. It happened that an old lady was in the house. The woman was sick. She could not stand the high pitch propeller noise. His girlfriend waved him to go away but he misunderstood as a sign of welcome. He buzzed three times. As soon as he came back to Marana to land, MP (Military Police) immediately caught him for court marshal charge.

So much for flying, now let's turn to our holiday. We got our first open post to Tucson two weeks we were in Marana. We were excited, of course, in the cowboy town watching movie, bombarding the bar, seeing Indian costume and listening to the country music. Tucson in the mid forties was a small Wild West desert town. However, we met many service personnel on weekend because there were so many military camps in the neighborhood. It was always very crowded on holiday. Anyway we enjoyed the outing.



How about the other weekend? Well, the Base Recreation Office fully aware of our problem and made excellent arrangement. On each weekend when we were not authorized to go open post, we were arranged to go in-group to picnic. The kitchen prepared plenty of good food, drinks, fruits and ice cream. The Recreation Office arranged transportation. Many college girl students and female employees on base were invited. We had picnics in the parks, on the lakeside, on the border of Mexico and the Sabino Canyon. What a wonderful idea. We salute the people in Recreation Office for their deep compassion. A job well done.

During our stay in Marana Field we were just on time to join the Americans to celebrate V-E Day, a great day to remember. The Empire of Hitler's 3rd Reich collapsed followed that of Italy, Germany unconditional surrendered on 8 May. "Two down and one to go" A shining slogan everybody enjoyed chanting loud and clear. Marana Field opened to public for three days with many bombers and pursuit aircraft on display and fly-by. On the ramp there were B-17 Flying Fortress, B-24 Liberator, B-25 Mitchell, B-26 Marauder, A-20 Havoc, A-26 Invader, P-38 Lightning, P-39 Cobra, P-40 War Hawk, P-47 Thunderbolt and P-51 Mustang. Some Navy versions were also on display such as: F4F Wildcat, F6F Hellcat, F4U Corsair and TBF Avenger. However, two major combat aircraft, P-61 Black Widow (All weather night fighter interceptor) and

B-29 Super Fortress (Heavy bomber capable to carry atom bomb), missed the show list. Before Japan was knocked down the last two types of weapon system still considered highly classified.

Many civilians came to visit and witness the air show. Everyone was free to approach the airplane and climb up to the cockpit. Some of our Chinese friends from Phoenix and Tucson joined us too. They were extremely delighted. Never before they had seen so many airplanes in close range. I still remember a girl from Phoenix hurt her leg when she came out from a P-51 cockpit. I asked how she felt. She almost cried but not for being hurt. She said: "I don't care about my leg but my nylon stockings has been scratched." In 1945 nylon stockings was a rare luxury not only expensive but also difficult to buy.



Ground school in Basic Training covered more curriculums than Primary. Students should know all kinds of instruments on the airplane, communication and navigation equipment, voice procedures and map reading. Surface vassal and aircraft recognition was particularly emphasized. On airborne maneuvers, students began to fly instrument under hood (back seat with IP), night transition (with IP and solo), formation flight (team ride and solo) and cross-country flight (solo). Cross-country flying was most welcome by us because we could get farther away from Marana. Nevertheless, one should find the way home. One of our classmates got lost in the wild desert and made a forced landing at Cochise on the dry lakebed as he ran out of fuel. However, he was rescued the following day of course.

As the end of the Basic Training drew near, every student came to a two-way crossroad for selection of Advanced Training, single-engine Pursuit (Fighter) or twin-engine Bomber. Students had the preference though, the responsible instructor, on the other hand, also possessed important opinion. My choice was twin-engine aircraft and Joe fully supported my selection. He sent a written recommendation to the Board saying, "Cadet Pao is fully capable to fly multi-engine vehicle with his high caliber and leadership." Again, not everybody got his way, only fifty or so cadets were happy to continue on Advanced Flying Training, one-third being dropped out.



On the day we received the graduation certificate, the Chinese community in Tucson held a farewell party to us with good food and drinks wishing us continued success. Although the community was very

small, however, many friends showed up. We appreciated what they did and really felt warm. We had a chance to say goodbye to them, to our fellow cadets who would be going to Luke Field for single-engine Fighter training and also to those poor guys who failed to hang on.

We departed Marana the last part of June on a three-hour ride to Douglas Field (Army Base). Only twenty plus cadets rode on the coach. I felt lonely because almost all my fun-seeking pals had been washed out and switched to Bombardier-Navigator School. To provide twin-engine aircraft advanced flying training, Douglas Field was a very small military base located in south Arizona, only eight miles across Mexican border. We had no difficulty to find our way around because we were old hands then. Again, from Class 45F on advanced training aircraft skipped to North American built Mitchell B-25 instead of AT-11 flown by our previous class.

There were more than two hundred cadets in Douglas but most of them Americans, only twenty something Chinese. I was assigned to a Chinese instructor, a new graduate still a greenhorn. I didn't get along with him well at the very beginning because he



severely criticized my taxiing, taxiing before takeoff and taxiing after landing. My first flight was very frustrated on the B-25G. The brake system on the nose heavy G model (Equipped with one cannon and five machine guns) was extremely sensitive. Moreover, I failed to adjust the rudder pedals to an adequate length before taxiing. Obviously I was unable to exert my toe pressure on the pedals with ease. Whenever I applied brake to turn, to keep straight, to slow down or to stop, the nose gear strut bounced up-and-down. It scared me. He got upset and furious. His harsh criticism hurt my feeling badly. Tension mounted, I hated to fly with him anymore. I flew only to fulfill my student obligation, no comfort, and no joy.

In six flights, he wrote me three red slips for poor performance. Then he asked another Chinese instructor (slightly senior than him) to fly check ride with me. I understood it was a matter of formality, the guy issued me another red ticket. I didn't blame him. That was Chinese philosophy. Then I was left in the cold pending for evaluation by the Board of Education and Training. About twenty or so cadets (some Americans some Chinese) with me on the waiting list. No more flying schedule, I didn't have to go to Flight Lines anymore. Feeling lonesome, blue and stomach disorder, I

was hospitalized for twenty-four hours. After that I took time to join friends to go down town to learn roller skate and bowling. Douglas Field Authority paid no attention to General Mao's No-Open Post restriction so we were free to go out on every Saturday and Sunday even on regular days as other cadet did.

The Board of Education and Training consisted of highly qualified instructors to check student progress periodically and to evaluate students being recommended to washout. If a student failed to qualify the check, a washout was imminent. Eight days



after I was grounded, I received a note asking me to report to the Board the following morning. Captain Gilbert, a handsome officer with well-trimmed mustache, received me. He was an experienced bomber pilot of European Theater and also a renowned instructor of the Board. He told me he was assigned to evaluate my case and, as a routine practice, asked me a series of questionnaires about B-25. I responded to the best of my ability and knowledge according to the B-25 Flight Manual with no reservation. Satisfied then, he said he would fly with me in the afternoon. I understood this would be a great moment for me. If I should hang on to continue my flying career, I must, by all means, demonstrate to him my potentiality and B-25 handling capability.

We met again in the Dispatcher's Office in the afternoon. With flying gear he said: "Young fellow! Don't be nervous, just relax. On the airplane, you will be in full control. When you fly, I keep my hands off the control column, my feet on the floor. Don't take me as your check pilot but your co-pilot. I will help you mike up the landing gear and flaps whenever you show me the signal." He laughed and continued, "I won't lay my hands on unless you doze off. Good luck Boy!" He assured me with only a few words but it was most encouraging.

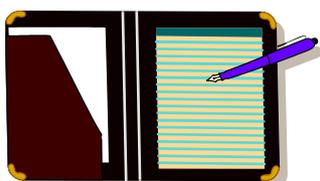
I performed the aircraft outside inspection on the ramp then cockpit check in the cabin strictly followed the checklist. After engines started I called the Control Tower for taxiing instruction and taxied gently to runway 36. With Tower permission I took the B-25H to the runway and accelerated full throttle to get airborne. I gave him thumb up signals and he retracted the landing gear and raised the flaps accordingly. At the same time I trimmed the power setting for initial climb. Over the 5,000-ft threshold altitude, I reset the throttle and pitch for optimum climbing configuration. The Captain kept his word and I felt free to fly.

Leveling off at 9,000 feet I performed the entire B-25 manual listing maneuvers. I called out one by one before each execution. Captain Gilbert appeared pleasant and positive without saying a word. Before I went into single engine procedure, I asked him which engine should I shut down. He chose the right one. I pulled back the right engine throttle and turned off the ignition switch then feathered the propeller. I flew straight and level and then made a gentle left turn without losing altitude. With his approval I restarted the right hand side engine and started descent.

During the descent, he asked me to shoot three landings; two touch-and-go followed by a full stop. I contacted the Tower for landing instruction then maneuvered to enter the traffic pattern. My first landing was excellent, two and a half point down the runway. The second landing was even better. When a gust blew my left wing low I kicked the right rudder to bring the wings level just before touchdown. He raised a thumb showing compliment to my timely and adequate correction. After another good landing I taxied back to the ramp. When the engines shut down (as all the noise gone), he asked me how could I get so many red slips. I said I didn't know but just had them. He said he would bring the evaluation up to the Board and promised to be my IP for the rest of the term.

In order to help me catch up my lost schedule, he flew with me three times in two days, instrument under hood and landmark identification. Thenceforth, I was fully qualified as a B-25 pilot to fly team-ride with other students on either side of the cockpit. As a matter of fact I was, indeed, very much grateful to him for his just and fair compensatory arrangement. To my fellow students I was exceedingly proud because I came a long way to wade off the storm.

A week later on a Thursday afternoon Capt. Gilbert asked me whether or not I would be willing to fly cross-country on weekend. I agreed without hesitation. He handed me a map and pointed to Winslow in north Arizona as the destination. At the same time he marked down a few cities as points of reference, such as: Tucson, Gila



Bend, Yuma, San Diego, Los Angeles, Las Vegas and Phoenix, then asked me to work out a flight plan for navigation. I did what I learned from navigation course to work up a plan. I submitted it to him for approval the following morning. He finalized it into two with minor

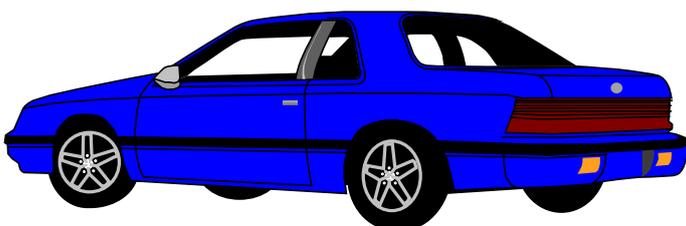
adjustment, one for outbound another for inbound. He said we were going to take off at eight o'clock on Saturday morning asking me to show up in the Base Operation Office at seven.

All my classmates went open post after breakfast in Saturday morning but I went to Base Operation to meet Capt. Gilbert at the appointed time. He showed me how to fill up the departure clearance form and take weather briefing. Then we proceeded to the ramp. He asked me to do every thing what a first pilot should while he was standing by to answer any question if I would ask. I performed external inspection, cockpit checks, engines start, taxiing, takeoff and climb accordingly. When I leveled off at 10,000 feet, he took over the control and asked me to recalculate the flight plan based on current wind direction and velocity from the weather briefing.

Utilized my E6B computer (actually it was a plotter) and deploying the map, I carefully calculated the heading and time to fly on each leg based on wind drift. Adding up altogether I figured out the ETA (Estimated Time of Arrival) to Winslow. It took me about fifteen minutes. I told him I was ready. He handed back the control to me and rechecked my calculation. With pleasure he approved my work well done. Over each checkpoint, Tucson, Gila Bend, Yuma, Los Angeles and Las Vegas, he told me how to identify landmark and terrain feature. He also asked me to make position reports to Regional Control. It was very interesting and educative. After we flew over Las Vegas and returned to Flagstaff, we started descent to Winslow ending up the outbound portion of navigation flight.

Winslow Field during the war was a small and quiet airport on weekend. Capt. Gilbert called the Tower for landing instruction and I landed the B-25 after permission was granted. Exceedingly excited, I had made a strange field landing the first time in the States. We parked in front of the Operation Office. As we checked in, we also asked the terminal to refuel the aircraft on the ramp. Waiting for Capt. Gilbert's friend to show up, we took time to fill up the flight plan for the inbound trip in the evening.

Capt. Gilbert's relative, a naval offer's wife (I forgot her name) met us at the terminal. Exchanged greetings she was happy to take us to her car. For approximately



fifteen minutes we were in her residence down town Winslow. She served us with coffee and snack. After settling down she asked me to stay in the reading

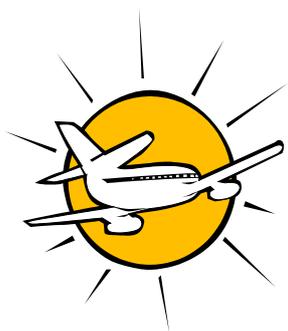
room to read or to rest for the afternoon while she and the Captain went out to visit other friends. I began to understand why Capt. Gilbert arranged the weekend flight. Before they went out I was asked to work out the details of the inbound flight plan for

the evening because we would return by way of San Diego instead of Los Angeles.

As soon as we finished supper, the generous hostess sent us to the airport. As Capt. Gilbert went to pick up the clearance I performed the aircraft external check. Saying goodbye to the kind lady, we boarded the airplane and took off at 1940, still in broad daylight over the desert summer sky. We flew to Phoenix first then to San Diego, until the sky changed from dim to completely dark. We could no longer visually identify the landmark. However, the cities or villages were shown in clusters of illuminated electric lights.

From San Diego to Tucson, Capt. Gilbert taught me how to read the beacon flash signal on each checkpoint. Beacon in different location emitted different identification Morse code. He said knowing how to read beacon signals was very important because we knew where we were all the time. He also said that airway beacons were erected all over the United States, ten beacons in a complete cycle. Radio and flash both transmitted Morse code signals. If you could read the signal you would not have any problem to stay on the airway and fly to the destination. I was extremely delighted to learn this lesson, which was very helpful to me for subsequent training flight. We returned to land at Douglas airport around midnight.

Thenceforth, I was the first student in my class fully qualified on B-25 cross country and night flights after the weekend long journey. My schedule was well ahead of that of my fellow cadets. I was much relaxed but not complacent. Flying was a performing art thus I had to work hard in pursuit of perfection and experience. At leisure I took time on weekend to improve my roller skate as my hobby.



During the course of training two classmates in our detachment, L. S. Yu and T. T. Wu, got lost on team ride due to bad weather. They ran into deep clouds and failed to find the way home. When the aircraft ran out of fuel they made a forced landing in the wilderness of Mexican bush slope. Searching and rescuing effort last for three days but no sign of their whereabouts. While the case almost closed, they made separate returns without harm on the number 4th and 5th day respectively. Bravo! They were lucky to keep on flying after physical checkup.

So many things happened in August. Asian Pacific warfare was no longer in the back furnace. The campaign took on a new look. After Germany collapsed, Uncle Sam

cast away the Europe first policy and concentrated all efforts to deal mercilessly with militant Japan. Followed the fierce battles over Saipan and Iwo Jima, two atom bombs of meg-ton explosive power had been dropped over Hiroshima and Nagasaki respectively. Hundreds of thousands of innocent Japanese perished. Trigger-happy Japan was no longer happy. It tasted the lethal weapon in its homeland the first time since Pearl Harbor. What's big news? Days of Japanese aggressor were numbered. People all over the United States exulted. Those in Douglas Field were exceedingly joyful.

Overwhelmed by great victory, working personnel on base, maintenance crew in particular, tended to relax and slow down (Many female mechanics took over the male counterpart's job because most of the able mechanics had been assigned to Pacific war zone). Aircraft in commission rate dropped noticeably. While we tried to expedite our flying schedule, we ran into certain difficulty. There was always something wrong during the aircraft initial check, engine, radio or instruments. Oftentimes we had to look for three or four B-25s to get one in flyable condition.

Completed my last airborne lesson, formation flight, I made up all my eighty (80) hours required by Advanced Flying Training by the end of August. On the first week of September, I was constantly asked to fly team-ride with my fellow cadets on cross country or night transition because I was considered an old hand having more experience than any one in my class. Therefore, I flew more time than I should. On the eve of the graduation ceremony, I was assigned to help a classmate, T. P. Ma, to make up his flying time. He needed three hours and 25 minutes night flight to qualify his schedule. Otherwise he wouldn't be able to receive the wings.

We got a B-25J and took off at eight in the evening heading to Tucson to join the airway. Shortly after crossed Tucson we found the right-hand side engine sluggish. He flew back to Douglas and made a clumsy hot landing on touchdown (Leveling off too high). He wanted to quit apparently he got panic and scare. I was determined, however, to persuade him to continue on. I said: "We have come a long way. No reason to give up in the last ditch." And I promised to fly for him. We approached the dispatcher for another airplane. After climbing up to 8,000 feet, I found the oil pressure gauge fluctuated and abort. It was over mid night then but he still needed one hour and ten minutes. Quickly we got another B-25J from the dispatcher. At long last I had flown up to his quota at half past three in the morning. Submitted the form to the office, we headed direct to the Mess Hall for breakfast instead of going back to the barracks.



We had no time to sleep but changed uniforms for the ceremony.

About two hundred student pilots attended the commencement ceremony in Douglas, there were only twenty from our Detachment. The solemn ceremony was held in the Base Auditorium on September 8, 1945, a great day one week after General Douglas MacArthur accepted Japanese unconditional surrender on Battleship Missouri off the coast of Tokyo Bay. When we congratulated one and other we proudly claimed that Imperial Japan was very much afraid of Class 45F and chose surrender before we were commissioned. In the ceremony every one received a pair of American Pilot Wings and a Certificate. American graduates were commissioned instantly for 2nd Lieutenant. We, at the same time, were commissioned by Chinese Authority Sub-Lieutenant with a monthly salary of 130 US dollars. American Military Services do not carry Sub-Lieutenant rank, one grade lower than a 2nd Lieutenant.

At the same time our fellow cadets in Luke Field, Single-Engine Fighters Training, were also graduated. Summed up altogether, thirty-three (33) of the original one hundred and sixty (160) from the Central Aviation School in Kunming came to final. What a happy day was! Most encouraging, more than twenty months of constant stress, hardship, anxiety, anguish, ordeal and perplexity, our hard work, labor, sweat and toil had finally been paid off. Bravo! We reaped what we sowed. With blessing from the Almighty God, I was extremely proud being able to ascend to the top of my own pyramid.



Holding a graduate certificate and a pair of wings, we were qualified as rated pilots but it was by no means that we could perform combat mission. To be combat ready we must go through OJT (On the Job Training) to fly a specific type of aircraft, to learn the weapon system and, most important, to know the art of teamwork as well as the leadership. Our single engine fellow classmates in Luke Field returned to China as soon as they graduated. They would take OJT at home when they reported for duty. Those graduated from Douglas would be sent to Austin, Texas for Cargo Aircraft (C-46) training. Lucky enough, I was selected among three other classmates (K. K. Chow, Peter Huang and Y. S. Chiu) to go to fly Lockheed P-38 Lightning for Photo Reconnaissance in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

So much time I have been sitting, thinking and composing patiently in front of the dull and dumb computer, I am now going to conclude the first part of my memoir here. It takes a great deal of strenuous effort and considerable memory to slowly recall what



had happened more than half century ago. It is a very tough job indeed for a man of my age. Although some individual personal names might not be exactly correct, neither places, however, the sequence of events still vividly recurred in my mind. In spite of certain difficulty, I tried hard to put them straight to the best of my ability. I have no intention whatsoever to make his western journey public. This journey will be served as a documentary script in commemoration of the early Chinese Air Force pilots who traveled from war-torn China to the United States to receive flying training in the Second World War.