



"ONLY ONE OF OUR PLANES WAS LOST..."

ONLY.....???

By James E. Wall



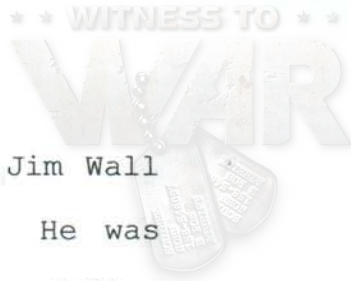
"ONLY.....?"

BY MY BROTHER-IN LAW

Almost every report that has ever been written about an aircraft combat mission goes something like this; "We destroyed 3 (or 30) enemy planes and only one of our planes was lost." The one pilot who was lost tended to become a mite grouchy, if he was lucky enough to survive. Where in the hell did they get that "only" crap? He didn't want to become a member of the Caterpillar Club, especially bailing out of a P-51 at 400 feet over that portion of China occupied by the Japanese in 1944. The "only" thing a man in that predicament wanted at that time was to come out alive. Some did.

This is the story of Jim Wall, a native son of Grapevine, Texas, who dreamed of becoming a fighter pilot, and then became one. His adventures took him to war in India, Burma and then China. There, ricochets from "friendly fire", brought him down. Just when he thought that loyal Chinese were taking him to freedom, disaster in the form of Japanese soldiers surrounded him. This began a period of torture, starvation and human degradation as a prisoner of war that would have killed lesser men.

This is also the story of a man who was not a hero in the



conventional sense of the great air aces. Nevertheless Jim Wall has been a hero to those whose lives he has touched. He was admired by his fellow fighter pilots, and especially by his fellow prisoners of war. He has been honored by his university, served in the highest ranks of corporate America, has friends around the world (including Japan), and continues to serve his country as a Trustee in the United States Bankruptcy Court in Charlotte, North Carolina. Incidentally, he damn near cards his age at golf.

He was and is a man of great intelligence, determination and humor; a True-Grit Texan, who endured his piece of history with pride, not self-pity. The one time he loses it is when some stupid media person reports that "we only lost one plane."

"Whadaya mean ONLY.....? That was ME!!!!

Jim has been a brother, friend, leader, teacher, confidant, well ... you name it. He has always been needed, and has always been present when needed. He has always deserved reward but never sought it. Those who read his words will be rewarded.

W.M.H.

Sarasota, Florida



PART ONE. PREPARATION

CHAPTER 1

It all started at an early age in my father's drugstore reading the old "pulp" magazine stories about World War I flying. "Flying Aces" and "Air Trails", and movies like "Wings" were exciting to a boy from Grapevine, Texas. They left impressions never forgotten.

Later, I would run out to see the very rare airplanes that flew over. Being close to Dallas and Fort Worth, the number increased during the 1930's. I built model planes of balsa wood and rice paper powered by rubber bands. These always ended up with the last flight "going down in flames." The dream of flying was implanted early and the fascination was never lost.

Teenage years during the Depression were grim. For years our only automobile was a 1923 Oldsmobile "touring car". It sat up on blocks in the garage as my father could not afford to run it. Airplanes were out of the question.

Despite the depressed times, I was lucky enough to attend college at Texas A&M University. The "A" in A&M stood for "Agricultural", and students and grads are forever branded



"Aggies". My major was Chemical Engineering. I was just sixteen when I started! A&M was a military school, and I was in Reserve Officer's Training Corps for the entire four years of college.

During my senior year, a recruiter from Randolph Field, San Antonio, Texas, came to A&M offering flight training to qualified candidates. The physical exam was particularly strenuous and demanding. Unfortunately for me, among other disqualifying conditions was Hay Fever. I simply disqualified myself, as I had always sneezed my way through each Fall.

Upon graduation from Texas A&M, the members of my class were granted Reserve Officer's Commissions as Second Lieutenants in the United States Army. Not yet being 21 years of age, I could not receive my commission as a 2nd Lieutenant until I achieved that age.

CHAPTER 2

In April of 1940, I was offered a job from Procter & Gamble Co. to work as an engineer in its Dallas plant, to begin upon graduation. It was best to get on with a responsible life, so any thought of a flying career was ended...I thought. Procter & Gamble made only Crisco shortening and salad oils in the Dallas plant at that time, but was obviously planning something new. These new plans became evident when construction of a new soap plant began in late 1940, using the very latest technology for continuous soap-making, and spray dried soap powders such as Oxydol and Ivory



powder.

While I was at P&G in July of 1941, I finally received my reserve officer's commission as a second lieutenant in the Chemical Warfare Service. Some of my classmates had been called to active duty, or in a few cases had applied to get in the Army right out of school as there was a severe shortage of jobs. I felt very fortunate to be able to go to work for a fine company like P&G for the handsome salary of \$30 per week. Second Lieutenant.'s pay was \$125.00 per month!

It was clearer every day that the war in Europe was more likely to involve us, and our military training made us aware that we probably could not stay out of it for long. Sure enough, on November 1, 1941 I received my orders for active duty. I was assigned to the Office of the Chief of Chemical Warfare, Department of the Army, in Washington, D.C. First, I was to report to Barksdale Field, Shreveport, Louisiana, for a physical exam and processing on Sunday, December 7, 1941, and proceed to Washington after that process was completed. P&G wanted me to complete a project that I was working on, so they requested a 30-day delay of my reporting date. New orders were issued for January 5, 1942.

CHAPTER 3

Of course, December 7, 1941 was "Pearl Harbor Day", and on December 8, 1941 I received a telegram saying "How soon can you report?". Proctor & Gamble was able to keep me for one week only,



and I departed for military service on December 14, 1941.

My assignment was in the Transportation and Issue Section of the Office of the Chief of Chemical Warfare Service. It was our job to control the flow of Chemical Warfare material from factory to warehouse to issue to the troops. We were supposed to keep track of all the Unit and Division priorities and locations so that as goods became available they could be delivered to those troops heading for combat.

However, Washington was in chaos. Many of the senior officers had not done "real work" for so long they were having difficulty getting up to speed. Information was scarce - misinformation was everywhere. Decision making was difficult, as locations and priorities changed every day. We found ourselves working 14 hours a day, 7 days a week. "There was a war on, you know".

CHAPTER 4

In late summer of 1941, I discovered that the Medical Corps had a new thing called "allergy shots" which I proceeded to take. THEY WORKED! It was unbelievable how much it improved my sneezing and stopped-up nose.

I also discovered that I could transfer to the Army Air Corps for flight training which would take priority over every other rating except "Radar Officer". Even better, I could go through flight school as a student officer, without surrendering my commission.



September of 1942, I got all the necessary papers to request a transfer, and presented them to the Major who was my superior.

He said; "What's this?" I replied; "A request for transfer to flight training." He threw them in the waste basket.

I picked them out and respectfully demanded; "Please forward this request, recommending disapproval."

Since he knew they would not be disapproved if I passed the physical, he said; "OK, but wait until I can get a replacement for you".

This was a reasonable request as I did not want to put a whole lot of work on my buddies who were staying. After what seemed an interminable wait, the request went forward in November. I went to an Army clinic for the physical. The eye test was the most complete I had ever had. It revealed that I had 20/13 vision which means I could see at 20 feet what a normal eye has to go up to 13 feet to see. This extra vision capability was very important to me as I wanted to be a fighter pilot. Having just seen pictures of the new North American Mustang fighter designated P-51, I knew that was for me. Fighter pilots had written about the value of extraordinary sight, and I was delighted to know I had it.

The doctor who examined me asked a lot of questions which I answered truthfully until he stopped, looked me in the eye, and asked; "Have you ever had hay fever?" Of course I lied and said "No." I swear he could see the ravages of the stuff in my nose. In a somewhat dry tone he said; "All right, if you say so."



CHAPTER 5

In January of 1943, I received orders to report to the pre-flight training school in San Antonio, Texas. This also meant that I would go through training in the Central Training Command, concentrated in Texas and Oklahoma. That was OK with this Texan. I left Washington for good just before Christmas of 1942. I headed for Grapevine to have Christmas with my family.

To say that my father was upset was an understatement. He thought I had lost my mind! The fact that I was the only male of my generation (with 9 girls) in the Wall family didn't make it sit any better with him. I had given up a safe job in the War Department for Lord-knows-what.

My father was born in 1879, and a motor car was a late in life invention with him. He never rode on an airplane, and absolutely refused to have anything to do with the idea. He would say, "When those things fall it is so final." I tried many times when we were living in Corpus Christi to persuade him to fly down to see us, but he would only spend ten hours on an overnight bus. That was "safe". He never flew.

I reported to San Antonio Air Corps Base [known to all as "SAAC Field", up a steep hill from Kelly Field,] in San Antonio, Texas, for pre-flight training. We student officers lived separately from the Aviation Cadets, but went through exactly the same strenuous physical and class room training with them from dawn



to dark. It was here that I met Paul Swetland, a fellow student officer. We became great friends. Paul would figure in my life a great deal thereafter as we shared many experiences.

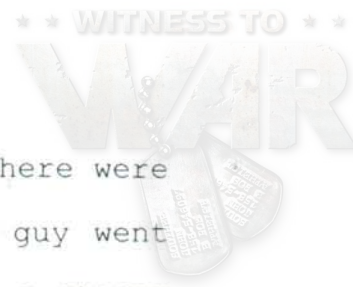
CHAPTER 6

We were in good physical shape when we left SAAC for Primary Flying School. I was sent to Vernon, Texas, where five of us were assigned to one instructor. He was a middle-aged country boy who had been a "barnstormer", and he loved to fly. His greatest ambition was to fly a Basic Trainer - the Vultee BT-13 or "Vibrator" as it was unfondly known.

We would be flying Fairchild PT-19's, a low wing, open cockpit plane where the instructor communicated with us through a "speaking [Gosport] tube" which was literally just that. It was a simple plane and very forgiving of student "screw-ups". The instructor took us each up for a "familiarization ride" which involved some mild acrobatics. He wanted to see how we reacted to being upside down and disoriented.

One of the five students was a fellow Aggie named Bill Swain. When he came down from his first flight he was green looking and the side of the airplane was sprayed with his last meal. Bill "washed out" very soon thereafter, as he could never overcome his airsickness.

Another of our group never soloed, and was "washed". The instructor put it to him this way; "I can teach you to fly but not



in the time that the Army is allowing for this program." There were only two of us that eventually got our wings. The other guy went into B-24's, and I got one note from him saying; "You need a strong back and a weak mind to fly this thing."

There were two key points in the Primary training program. First was the first solo flight which was usually made without warning from an auxiliary field. After about 8 hours of dual instruction you better expect it and be ready to solo, or else a check ride with an Army pilot could be the end of your pilot ambitions. My solo came after landing on an auxiliary field, where the instructor casually climbed out and told me to take it twice around the field by myself. WHAT A THRILL!!

The second step was called "checking out of traffic". This meant flying solo from the main field after checking out an airplane, and taking it up to practice whatever you felt you needed. That was neat.

Our first fatality occurred with one student checking out of traffic. He was so excited that he got in the plane, taxied out and started takeoff without checking for landing planes (first safety rule). In any event he started off right under a landing plane and was killed on the spot. Those in the landing plane were injured, but not seriously.

On my last day at Vernon, my instructor took me up saying; "If you want to be a fighter pilot, violent maneuvers are very important and could save your life." So he proceeded to show me



some. He did things I never thought a PT-19 could possibly do. We had long since learned slow rolls, loops, chandelles, snap rolls, barrel rolls, spins, falling leafs, and others. This time he introduced me to outside loops and outside spins. Though the trainer did not have sufficient power to go through a complete outside loop, it could do half of it from the top down.

CHAPTER 7

After completing Primary Training at Vernon, Texas, we were sent to Enid, Oklahoma for Basic Training in the infamous Vultee BT-13 Vibrator. Here the instructors were Army pilots, and were much more severe in their demands for precision in all flight maneuvers. I had trouble very early with "power stalls". This was a maneuver that went as follows: at normal cruising throttle setting, pull the ship up to about a 30-degree climb attitude and hold it until it stalled, then "walk it down" with the rudder controls until flying speed was re-established.

The first time I did a power stall - nervous and overcontrolling - we immediately fell off into a "power spin" which was particularly vicious in a BT-13. I thought my flying career was over as the Lieutenant/Instructor was really on my case about it. However, he took me up on a "check ride" and we did "power spins" until I could almost do them blindfolded. A side benefit of this problem was that I had a lot of practice breaking spins in a BT-13 which was the most difficult airplane I ever flew in this characteristic. Failure to master the technique could prove fatal.



Later in Basic this extra practice saved my life and that of a buddy. (For some additional examples, see APPENDIX A.)

When we started on instrument flying, another student and I went up to practice instrument flying. He was in the front seat and I was in the back where a hood was used to cover the cockpit. When my session was over, the hood was folded and the front seat guy would fly the plane back to the base. When we started back at about 7,000 feet, my buddy said he was really a hot rock at snap rolls in the BT-13, and was going to show me how.

His first snap roll went OK. On the second we went right into one of those power spins. He cut the power, established the spin, and tried to go through the proper procedure to break the spin. It didn't break. He did it again, but made the mistake of speeding up the sequence (the wrong thing to do) so that he did not give it time to break.

On the third try, I grabbed the controls, shook him off, and held them in place so the spin could break. It did. By the time we pulled out of the spin, our altitude was less than 1,000 feet! My "buddy" tried to scrunch down in his seat but I could see the back of his neck. It was deadly white. When we landed he said; "We nearly bought it that time." WE?

At Enid, we learned formation flying. We flew at night as well as the beginning instrument work. It was a busy time with a curriculum and an airplane that were intolerant of fools and incompetents.



CHAPTER 8

The next phase was Advanced Training. Those slated to be single engine pilots were sent to Foster Field, Victoria, Texas, to train in North American AT-6's, while those headed for multi-engine went to Kansas to fly twin-engine Beechcrafts.

Happily, I went to Foster Field along with my friend Paul Swetland. We met in San Antonio to "party", and then drove our cars to Victoria together. We travelled the whole 100+ miles "in formation", bumper-to-bumper, taking turns leading and following. We were very "hot pilots" you see.

Advanced Training was a big jump to a plane with flaps and retractable landing gear. Powered by a Pratt & Whitney 650 HP engine, the AT-6 was relatively slow compared to combat fighters, but would still do about 180 mph. It was faster than anything we had flown before. It could do most aerobatics with ease.

After initial checkout by the instructors, all military officers at this point, most of our flying was solo. The exceptions were for occasional "check rides" and under-the-hood instrument flight training with a front cockpit observer. I loved flying alone in the plane, but much of the time was spent practicing formation flying (which is not lonely enough.) We did a lot of "rat racing" which was a form of aerial "follow the leader".

We practiced "dog fighting" by squaring off and trying to get on the other guy's tail.



The dog fighting had a very specific objective for teaching what aerial fighter-to-fighter combat was all about. If the enemy got on your tail and you couldn't shake him you were either dead meat or floating down in a parachute. Our instructors started pounding on us to "keep your head on a swivel!" It was usually the enemy that you didn't see that nailed you. It proved to be a life saver to me, and to this day I even drive a car with my "head on a swivel", and use all the rear view mirrors.

We logged considerable time in both low (200 ft) and high (20,000 ft) altitude cross-country navigation flights. These were done both days and at night. All of the flights were VFR (Visual Flight Rules.) This meant no instrument navigation alone, relying on visual landmarks that [hopefully] looked like something recognizable on the map.

Here we were introduced to the "Link Trainer" where we spent a lot of time on instrument practice. The Link was a machine with an enclosed aircraft-type cockpit, with stub wings, mounted on hydraulic cylinders. It had flight controls and all the blind flying instruments. It could be controlled from a console outside the unit, where an instructor operated the console to give you all manner of problems from spins on to rough weather, etc. You had a hood over the cockpit so you could see nothing but the instruments.

Instrument flying is mostly a matter of having complete confidence in both your instruments and yourself. One must first be able to fly visually with precision to qualify for instruments, as one must



know what movement of the flight controls will produce.

Our Advanced Training was uneventful until we were checked out to take familiarization rides in a Curtiss-Wright P-40E Warhawk. This was a whole new ball game because flight in a P-40 was solo. There was no place for an instructor to ride with you. In fact, the cockpit was too small for anybody over six feet tall. We had to learn by a book, and sit in the cockpit to find all controls and key instruments blind-folded. Fortunately, I read the section of the book about emergency procedures well as I needed it on my very first flight.

Finally the great day came. I was given a P-40 to take up and "wring out". I was strapped in and started the engine. Wow! You could feel the power of the 1100HP, V-12 Allison, liquid-cooled engine surging against the brakes while still sitting at the ramp. This was the REAL STUFF!

Taxiing out to the runway, it was necessary to make S-turns down the taxi strip as the long nose made me completely blind directly ahead. I moved to the takeoff position. There I ran the engine up to about 1700 rpm's to check the two magnetos to see that both sets of spark plugs and both ignition systems were operating.

All was well, so the control tower gave me clearance to take off. I smoothly advanced the throttle to full power. As warned, the torque of this huge engine tried to run the plane off the runway to the left. This was countered by applying right rudder, which had to be done as this one would get away from me in a



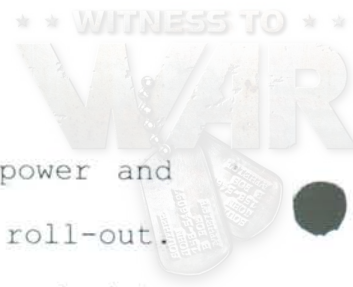
heartbeat. Some of my classmates had to abort the takeoff as they ran off the runway to the left. I held it straight.

I took off successfully, climbed the plane out of the airport area, and put it through its paces. This included dives, climbs, slow rolls, and simulated landings including wheels and flaps down but with 5,000 ft underneath the wings. I had never felt this many G's before and nearly "blacked out" on one tight pullout. I would scream or tighten up my stomach muscles to counteract this to some extent. [In later years the G-suit would inflate and help with this process of keeping blood from vacating the brain.]

After completing the mission, I returned to base and lined up for entering the traffic pattern preparatory to landing. When I put the lever down to lower the landing gear it barely came out of the wheel wells and stopped. There was no hydraulic pressure! I remembered the emergency procedure which required opening a valve under the seat, and then using a hand pump and a reserve hydraulic tank to lower the gear. When I did that, the system would only lower the main gear, but not the tail wheel or the flaps.

So, my first landing in a P-40 was to be without flaps and possibly without a tail wheel! While this was going on I was talking to the control tower, and they were clearing the field and sending out the emergency vehicles.

Without flaps, the plane would land very fast and nose-high. I brought it in on a low, power approach so that I could use all of the runway. I had no idea how long it would take to stop. I came



just over the fence at the end of the runway, cut the power and dropped it on the beginning of the runway and started the roll-out.

With only a wheelless "tail-skid" in back,, I finally screeched to a stop.

The tower came on the radio and said, "Feel better, J-87?" "Roggggggger", I replied. I must have been screaming at them over the radio! When I climbed down from that P-40, I shook both legs to see if I was safe for polite society.

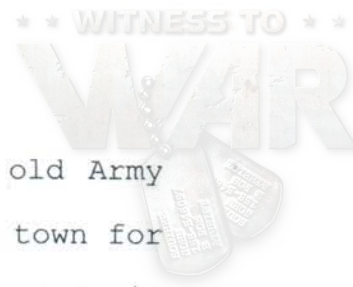
After that, all experiences at Foster Field in Victoria, Texas were totally anti-climax. I began to enjoy flying the P-40. This was good because I was headed to Florida and a lot more P-40 flying.

CHAPTER 9

October 1, 1943 was graduation day when we were awarded our coveted silver pilot's wings. The Aviation Cadets with whom I had trained also received their commissions as Second Lieutenants and the shiny gold bars of their rank. I was a First Lieutenant. I probably had the longest time in that grade because I was still a First Lieutenant when I came back to the good ol' USA in late 1945.

After the ceremony, we all had one week of leave, which I spent with my family in Grapevine, Texas. Our orders were to report to the pilot replacement pool in Tallahassee, Florida, for further assignment after the leave expired.

Tallahassee was boredom of the first order. There was



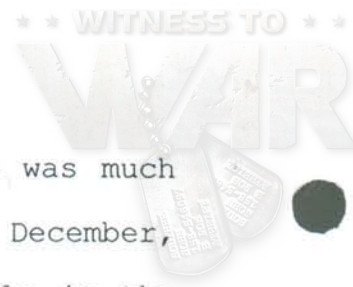
absolutely nothing for us to do. A classic case of the old Army game of "hurry up and wait". There was a girls college in town for a little diversion, and there was a P-47 training group in operation on the field so we could go down and watch the takeoffs and landings.

We did have some ground school instruction in aircraft recognition. No one ever had too much. We needed to recognize our own and the enemy's aircraft at a glance. Training was done by flashing a plane or silhouette on the screen for the briefest of looks. It turned out to be very good training though we failed to appreciate it at the time.

We were waiting for assignment (we hoped) to one of the so-called Replacement Training Units [RTU] in Florida. There we would receive our final fighter training before being sent overseas to join a combat unit. Finally, about the end of November (1943) Paul Swetland and I [plus others] were assigned to Sarasota, Florida. Paul said that was great because he had gone to high school at the Kentucky Military Institute which had its winter school in Venice, Florida. Venice is just 20 miles south of Sarasota, and the KMI cadets spent their free days in Sarasota. Paul said he knew some girls there from those days and would fix us up with dates.

CHAPTER 10

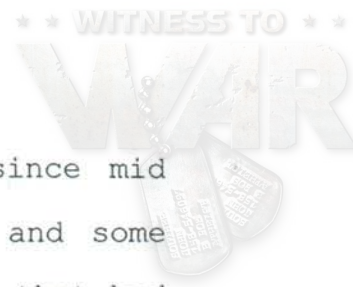
Sarasota was a beautiful town on the Gulf of Mexico, with a



population of about 15,000 people. The winter population was much greater, even in wartime. The climate was delightful for December, and the people were very friendly. We normally would fly in the morning and have the afternoon off or the other way around.

Afternoons were invariably spent on the lovely white sands of Lido Beach. It was a tough life! We would get to the beach about Three O'clock, lay around on the beach checking the girls, or go in the pool. After a couple of beers, we went to the base to clean up and head into town for the evening. Some lucky guys had made some girl-type contacts, and had dates. The rest of us would hang around Pal's Cypress Grill & Bar, go to Smack's for a delicious hamburger and milk shake, and usually end up in the Tropical Bar for the famous "vespers", a local drink of some potency.

My friend Jerry Klota developed a "friendship" with a lady bartender at the Tropical. Among other things I believe they were drinking buddies. When the bar closed, they would take a case of beer to her house for the night. She would send him back to the base just in time for the morning check-in. At times, Jerry would still be a bit loaded when he struggled into the cockpit, and would have to take some whifs of pure oxygen to clear his head. Occasionally he would need the help of the crew chief to start the engine. [Jerry appears later in this story, but the finale came some years later when alcohol finally killed him at about 45 years of age.]



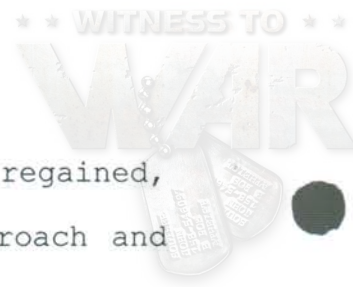
Sarasota had been host to Army Air Force pilots since mid 1942. There were a lot of married 20-year old women, and some 20-year-old widows. Many married men from the B-17 groups that had come through Sarasota who were catching Hell as the first groups in the Eighth Air Force over Europe. The first was the 97th Bomb Group. I was to meet one of those young widows. It turned out to be a permanent relationship.

CHAPTER 11

Occasionally this routine was interrupted by night flying missions. We flew them using only dim blue lights called "formation lights" rather than the normal running lights. My first night mission nearly ended in disaster. We were to take off, fly around a course, then return to land. The procedure in the P-40's we were flying was to roll back the canopy when coming in to land.

I did that as I approached the runway. I landed too long and had to "go around", taking off with wheels down and full flaps. The runway headed out over Sarasota Bay which was "blacked out". As soon as I crossed the perimeter of the field, it was absolutely pitch black, with no visible horizon. I was immediately "on instruments".

With the open cockpit the engine sounded very loud. I sensed that I was not gaining altitude, which the altimeter confirmed. I was not climbing at all, and was on the verge of sinking right into Sarasota Bay! I "fire-walled" the throttle, pulled up the gear- and started to gain some altitude. Even then I was only 50 feet



above the water! After all of my bodily functions were regained, and my brain regrouped, I was able to make a decent approach and landing. Whew! That old P-40 almost got me again!

My dislike of night flying grew even worse on our first night formation flight. We took off and joined up in a four ship formation for some gentle formation flying. When it came time to return to the field to land we formed up in left echelon on the instructor. As we had been instructed, the leader would bring us over the runway, and the tail end man [#4] would "peel-off" and go in to land. The remaining three-ship group would circle and come back again to let the next man off and so on.

Using only those dim blue "formation lights", we made the first pass over the runway to let #4 peel-off and land. We then came back around for #3 to peel-off. Unfortunately, the #4 man had apparently not known we were even over the field,. He had not left the formation as he was supposed to and was still sitting on the end of the formation when #3 peeled-off. Fortunately, #3 obeyed the cardinal rule of fighter pilots to keep your head on a swivel, always looking. He was able to pull up over #4 and avert what could have been a major mid-air collision with tragic consequences.

CHAPTER 12

We continued our training seven days a week. We covered all possible uses of a fighter plane. It was a grueling schedule that was both fun and instructive. Skip bombing is what the name implies. We flew at the ground target in level flight and



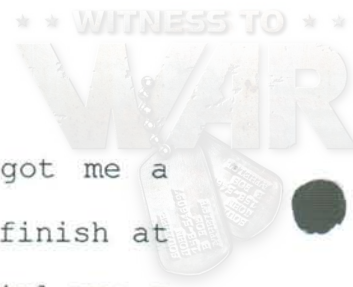
released our bomb so it "skips" into the target. At release, we pulled up and away as fast as we could so the bomb didn't blow us up also. We also practiced dive bombing. I really didn't learn how to do that until I reached combat.

Gunnery consisted of firing at a target sleeve towed by another plane. The sleeve was made of wire mesh, and all our bullets were dipped in different colored paint to distinguish who had hit the thing. It was necessary to come into the target at almost a 90-degree angle and curve in on the target while firing until the "angle-off" was about 30-degrees. We then broke off to keep from shooting near the tow plane.

We had a combat returnee named Capt. Sammy Say from North Africa, who was assigned to tow targets for a while until he was familiarized with the area and the plane. On his first tow, when he saw the tracer bullets coming under his wing, he dropped the target and went back to base. He told the CO that he had not survived several months of combat to come home and be shot down by a stupid student!

The greatest fun was "rat-racing" and mock dogfighting which we did at every opportunity. Another great sport was flying at very low altitudes [20 feet] at high speed. "Buzzing" was really exciting. Most flying at altitude does not give a sensation of speed even though you may be going 300 m.p.h.; but at 20 feet you know you are travelling. So did the cows.

CHAPTER 13



In late December my friend Paul Swetland finally got me a date. We were to go out partying on Christmas Eve, and finish at Midnight Mass at the Episcopal Church. He told me the girl was a new widow who was going out for the first time since her husband had died over Bremen, Germany, in April, 1943. He was the pilot of a B-17, and the only one who didn't bail out. Incidentally, his CO was Paul Tibbets who later became famous as the pilot of the plane dropping the atomic bomb on Japan.

Paul's date was Sue Bassett who he had known while in the Venice KMI school. We met at Sue's house, and Helen Hereford Beasley turned out to be the prettiest redhead I had ever seen, though for obvious reasons a little on the sad side. She was 19 years old while I was an old guy of 23. Most of the evening is still a blur except for going to church at 11:30 PM. That was a new experience for a "back-slid" Texas Baptist.

Though I knew that I would be there only about five more weeks before shipping out, we became a regular couple. Helen's mother was also Helen. Mother was "Helen", and daughter was "Little Helen. In that short time, I got to know Helen's family.

Inevitably the day of departure arrived, and we bid a fond farewell without any sort of commitments other than to write. Janet Bassett, Sue's mother, was one of those southern belles who sounded dumb but had a mind like a steel trap. She pronounced prophetic words that day - "Jeem, you will be back to claim Helen".

PART TWO. OVERSEAS