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# What I Remember

By Bill Hogan 827 Sq.

I had joined the 827th Squadron in Colorado Springs after a short stint of temporary duty with a Martin B-26 tow target unit in Wendover, Utah, following training in Pocatello, Idaho in B-24's; (with Jimmy Stewart as Operations Officer and instructor pilot). This same Group had commenced training on the B-17, but were switched to the B-24 bomber.

All of the crew that had been on temporary duty in Wendover were reassigned to combat training and I ended up in Colorado Springs, to join Major Don Haldeman's crew as tail gunner.

Colorado Springs. A great non-commissioned officers' club. A fatal crash of a B-24D when the pilot banked into dead engines at low altitude. I was called upon to confirm that an enlisted member of the Squadron had been injured when a B-26 crashed on takeoff in Wendover, so he would remain on non-flying status.

Harvard, Nebraska. Snow! Landing on cleared, but icy, runways with snow banked on each side as high as the waist windows. A landing B-24 sliding sideways and ending up against a snowbank at the end of the strip. Those crew members exiting via that upper hatch behind the pilot couldn't recall doing it. In normal circumstances, climbing out that hatch was a chore.

Really low level flights down a railroad cut excused as "checking out the altimeter" (yeah!) The bank on one side of the track was higher than the plane! I recall a cow calmly chewing her cud as she stood on the upper bank while we whizzed by. Cross country flights. The nose wheel collapses on one of our B-24D bombers as it lands at night at an airport we were visiting. Lots of sparks and tortured metal noise. No one injured, but the Major upset because all the internal lights were still on after the crew hurriedly departed the ship.

A B-25 piloted by one of the women ferry pilots, crashes at the end of the runway as we await our turn on the taxiway. We couldn't "back up", so took off right over the crash site. A sad moment. Receiving our brand new B-24H bombers. Went over everything on the ship like teenagers receiving their first car. Heard that girls who helped build the bombers sometimes left a personal message under that cap in the middle of the control wheel. Pulled off the cap on the copilot's side to find, "Now you let all the Gremlins out!"

The ground support personnel left Harvard some time before we did to some combat area unknown to us rank and file, so we had to perform their duties involving the aircrafts. How about a diminutive ball gunner driving a fuel truck, with trailer, guided by a crew member who didn't have a driver's license in civilian life? Unauthorized "borrowing" of Jeeps. I got one stuck in a muddy ditch and was assisted in getting it out by the officer in charge of the Motor Pool! One of the final words of advice from the departing ground crew was that we should never pull any aircraft with one of those jerky operating "cleat track" vehicles.

Low level "buzzing" of the Harvard facilities as we departed with the base, civilian and permanent service personnel waving us a goodbye and good luck. On to Lincoln, Nebraska where we gained some light weapons, jungle survival kits and lost wooden sections of the plane's interior as well as the entire de-icing system; (wing leading edges painted red.)

Miami, Florida. Saw the Navy version of the B-24; the PB4Y. They were painted dark blue with a nose turret that looked like our ball turret. We were turned over to the A.T.C. ( Air Transport Command) at this point. On to Trinidad where we slept in an open building and listened to the chorus of many nocturnal insects.

Flew low down off the northeast coast of South America to Natal, Brazil. It took a considerable length of time to cross the mouth of the Amazon river and we were low enough to feel the warm humidity off the land. Turning inland, we gained altitude and passed over thick rain forest for a while. It looked like a thick green mass with open spaces here and there. Definitely not an area to bail out into!

Natal, Brazil. Rain for an hour; then hot, sunny, humidity for an hour; hour after hour. Left with our bomb bay tanks to cross the "pond" for Africa. The consumption shown by our gasoline gages was a source of keen interest as we approached fourteen hours of air time.

Dakar, East Africa. Never landed on those steel mats before. Thought the wheels fell off! The French Quonset type huts with the porthole windows. Natives selling knives fashioned from cut up 55 gallon drums. Later, some guys had to discard the rusted up knives, along with those cheap, seized up, wrist watches that they bought in Brazil.

Difficulty in gaining altitude to cross the hills on the way to upper Africa. The reddish dust of the Dakar area had accumulated on the wing surfaces and we weren't warned about it.

Marrakech, Morocco. Toilet facilities in a building having a tile floor with ditches against the wall on three sides, where one would stand or squat to relieve himself. The French Senegalese troops wearing medium blue tunics, light tan trousers tucked in WW1 type leggings and heavy, ankle high, shoes. They wore maroon, fez style, hats that made them look even taller. Their rifles usually carried those long French bayonets whose hilt curved forward.

At the Marrakech airfield we started the practice of placing a member of the enlisted crew inside the bomber as a guard at night. When relieving the guard on duty, you made sure that he knew it was you. That really complete darkness made anyone nervous and trigger fingers real itchy! I was returning from the ship lighting my way with one of those right angled, inadequate, flashlights we were issued, when I felt a strange presence in front of me. Angling the dim light upward, one of those Senegalese soldiers was revealed. "Cigarette, Joe?" he asked. My heart slowing down again, I replied that I didn't smoke and made signs to that effect. We then parted amicably!

The Major received permission for us to visit the Casbah. With our shouldered holstered 45's in place, as recommended, we found the inner city rather dull and nothing like the movie versions. Didn't even meet, "Pepe LaMoco".

Dejeida, Tunisia. Based at an airfield formerly occupied by the "Jerries". Foxholes here and there, some with discarded German rifle ammo. A sign at a railroad crossing with a neat shell hole right through the metal support post. On the side of the road to Tunis, a shot up, abandoned Panzer tank; this one painted light