

Hang the Enola Gay

General Tibbetts, the man who flew the airplane, surely is right. Exhibit the Enola Gay and say nothing. But then I'm a writer (mere crewman to Tibbetts' authentic Moment) and argue that saying something constitutes duty. As one version of the recent story got played, the people arranging the Smithsonian's exhibit of the Enola Gay had made some perfectly reasonable comments about the war in the Pacific. These historians and archivists wanted to bring us the truth that a fifty-year perspective could now allow us to accept: the American war in the Pacific was one of vengeance and cruelty against the Japanese who fought only to protect their culture and way of life. Furthermore, the United States did not drop the bomb out of any strategic necessity, but to impress the Soviet Union with both the might and willingness of American power. The dropping of the second bomb (about which some question might be asked) is proof of American perfidy, a perfidy made all the more emphatic if only because the American Legion rose up in its predictable chauvinism to deny it. And so the Enola Gay's last mission—its own hanging—would reveal the truth of America's evil intentions.

To argue against this premise risks endowing it with a respect it doesn't deserve. Still, a sentence or two might be helpful. The decision to drop the bomb was not made easily; neither was it a callous message to impress the Soviet Union. From Port Moresby—only a long spit from Australia itself—we had come all the way to Okinawa and Ie Shima. While the Japanese still put airplanes into the air including the suicide missions that attacked American naval vessels off the harbor at Naha, we prevailed in the air war. Our B-29 raids were producing the kind of damage that should by then have persuaded the Japanese, and so—yes—by early 1945, the question remaining was just how and when we would win the war. Still, the Japanese had not surrendered, and if you had come the whole way or a fair hunk of it (I began at Nadzab, New

Guinea, a few miles inland from Lae), you were not all that certain if or when the Japanese would ever surrender. The argument that we justified the dropping of the bomb by deliberately overestimating the number of American casualties to be suffered by an invasion of the Japanese home islands is worse than specious. As measured by the number of American casualties in the island wars, Japanese resistance against an invasion of the home islands certainly could not be expected to diminish. Does anybody need to be reminded that the Japanese were fierce fighters? Ask the Marine veterans who recently marked the fiftieth anniversary of Iwo Jima.

Then, too, how many American casualties were to be suffered in order to justify the use of the bomb? At a cocktail party a year ago, I heard an acquaintance condemn our dropping the bomb as having been cynically unnecessary. Speaking about an American invasion of Japan, he said something like the following: "The estimate of one million American casualties was never even close to the truth. At worst, there might have been fifty thousand casualties. Less than fifty thousand. Maybe thirty to thirty-five thousand." My unit was scheduled to go in D+2; with respect to what would have been suffered by the first waves, those two days would have been like a century later. But I'm still impressed enough with D+2 not to have said anything at all to the man at the cocktail party. Anyhow, what are you supposed to say to somebody arguing that at worst we would have lost only fifty thousand American lives?

In agreeing with the calm and measured tones of the American Legion—far softer than I would have spoken—I say first that I am not a member of the Legion or the VFW. Back in civvies after WWII, I joined the American Veterans Committee, the veterans association founded by people like Bill Mauldin, Gilbert Harrison (then publishing the *New Republic*) and Chet Bolté. Just as the far left despised anti-Communist socialism more than it feared the right wing, so, too, did it live easier with the American Legion than with us AVC liberals. In fact, the left did its best to destroy the AVC whose motto was "Citizens first; Veterans second." Nearly fifty years later, I haven't much changed my political stripes and am among those who have not grown more conservative with age. Whether you think my brand of politics to be wisdom or senility depends on your own politics, but let's get one notion straight from the start. The

revisionism that makes the United States the bad guys in the Pacific war is in no way a premise of American liberalism. Neither is the view of the Smithsonian historians an argument between liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans. I remind you that it was Harry Truman who gave the order for the mission of the Enola Gay. If you need your memory refreshed, David McCullough's work on Truman will provide the historical perspective.

For my generation, this foolishness about the Enola Gay flying an evil mission has refreshed memories. I remember the day. I'd been working on the strip we ran on the Motobu Peninsula on Okinawa. Somebody came into the engineering shack and said that this enormous bomb had been dropped. *So how enormous is enormous? They got it into an airplane, didn't they?* No, not enormous in size. Small in size—enormous in the power to destroy. One bomb knocked out most of a city. *Tokyo?* No, not Tokyo. Some other city with a funny name. *And one bomb did all that?* One bomb. The guy said this bomb implodes. Ask the armorers what that means. *Our armorers? Our armorers don't know shit from shinola about anything.* What the guy really said was that troops stationed on Okinawa had better keep a tight asshole cause there's no telling how the Japanese will react to whatever-that-thing-was. *You say it implodes itself? And that's why it blew up a whole city? Cause it implodes? Was this implosion supposed to happen or just some kind of lucky screw-up?*

That flight of the Enola Gay has got to be the most impressive single mission ever flown. Nothing can compete with its awesomeness. Unlike a routine mission, the Enola Gay was History from the start, and those involved knew it. But for those of us who served in the Pacific, the A-bomb mission was an ending that in some ways seemed to have little to do with the Pacific war as we had fought it. For example, during the New Guinea campaign, I worked at the strip where still only Captain Richard Bong's P-38 squadron returned from missions. By the time Bong had knocked down eleven or twelve enemy planes, GIs from all over the base began to line that strip like cheerleaders at their high school football game. We waited for that P-38 to come in hot, level out flat what seemed only a dozen feet above the strip, and then climb into its victory roll. And on numbers of those days, Bong flew back around for a second

victory roll. We would look at each other, nodding and smiling and holding up two fingers. "Two. He scored two."

For me, a Dick Bong victory roll remains in memory as a thing of beauty, and those moments were an enormous lift to morale in what was a difficult war. Look at a map of the Pacific. Find Port Moresby on the southern New Guinea coast and then calculate the distance in miles to the Japanese islands. And while you're at it, calculate that distance in time. I mean the amount of time it took us to get there. We had already used up *Never More in '44* and were hoping for *Back Alive in '45* though the squadron pessimists predicted *Home or Heaven by '47* or even *Golden Gate in '48*. We were ready for the miracle we didn't begin to comprehend, a miracle involving something called atomic fission. For Fifth Air Force veterans, the years of scrounging to get airplanes in the air, the awesome distances to be traveled, the ersatz food, names never before heard like Buna and Pelelieu and Samar, the holding on to a civilization from which we had been removed: all of these represent the war in the Pacific more than the flight of the Enola Gay, and I have a hunch that nobody knows that better than General Tibbetts himself.

Our pilots flew the requisite number of missions (and more), but GIs didn't get rotated home. Most of us had been at it for a long time when The Bomb was dropped. Not yet twenty-one, I'd already been in territories designated as combat zones for nearly two consecutive years. If some old infantry veteran is reading this, let me say here and now that us air corps types aren't making any claims. At least in your presence we aren't making any claims. Being in a combat zone usually meant only that you were close enough to understand what being closer could mean. My squadron did get a bit closer, stupidly a time or two, but that was because I served in something called an airdrome squadron.

The idea for such a unit was borrowed from the British, and like a British aircraft engine was more to be admired in design than lived with. An airdrome squadron was to arrive the moment an air strip was taken or completed for use by our engineers. We were staffed and equipped to run the strip for a month after which—in theory anyway—bomb and fighter groups would move in safely with their own personnel and heavier equipment. Until then, we did everything: control tower, crash crews, weather, communications,

armament, and aircraft maintenance far beyond minor repairs and pre-flight once-overs. We took our squadron's assignments and the general mission of the Fifth Air Force as being perfectly sensible; fifty years later the wonder is how we did it. I understand more keenly now than I had time to understand then that our airdrome squadron was to move itself up to the next air strip and function. Instantly. Snap a finger. Just like that. And we did it, did it before a tent got pitched or a latrine got dug. We also learned what could be the real meaning of a "moment too soon." The airdrome squadron that had been on the boat with us arrived at Hollandia more than a moment too soon and got shot up. We disembarked at Lae and went inland to Nadzab. In addition to running a strip there, we were assigned to do the maintenance for the Fifth Bomber Command's flight section. A bit more about that later.

I always figured that somebody at the command level had fought against the very idea of these airdrome squadrons. Having lost the argument, he figured out another way to make his point. My impression of that unit—unchanged more than fifty years later—was that you were assigned duty there only if you had impressed someone in charge of you—fairly or unfairly—that you were or could become a square peg. Surely, we had more people who had done prison or guardhouse time than the typical Fifth Air Force unit. Other of our people had flunked out of air corps training schools or, to put it as kindly as possible, had not been among the class leaders. Anyone who had told us to our faces that we were at best a collection of shanghais would have committed a grave diplomatic error; he would not, however, have been entirely inaccurate.

I had done nothing terrible, yet I see now that from the very start of service I was destined for assignment to the 92nd. My first summons to a CO's office occurred as early as basic training; I was told that in Ohio a warrant had been issued for my arrest because I had not registered for the draft. Why had I not done so? I explained that I had volunteered after my eighteenth birthday which fell months before my age group was supposed to register. Rightfully unimpressed, the CO grunted and said that he'd do his best to keep me out of jail. Next, having taken the battery of tests, I was sent to the Buick motor division in Flint, Michigan, where after eleven

weeks of instruction I would become a specialist in Pratt-Whitney aircraft engines. The Flint assignment was wonderful. Our nightly retreat ceremonies were held on a public street and watched by girls working in GM war plants. These young women not only produced the equipment and weapons we would soon be using but respected our future bravery with a patriotism that could inspire from toe-to-head.

About a month after I arrived, I was again summoned to the CO's office. I still remember his name—Lieutenant Balch. In appearance and mildness of manner, Lieutenant Balch looked as if he had taught General Science at some midwestern high school. After about thirty seconds of sighing he explained to me that I had made one of the highest scores of any soldier ever to be sent to his school. He then said that my performance also placed me among the most inept students ever assigned there, and he might well have to get rid of me. How had I done so well on the test only to do so wretchedly in his school? I tried to explain that the test had been simple. For example, you might be given an illustration of interlocking gears. You were told the direction of the first gear and asked whether the last of the gears was moving to the right or left. I explained that such a test had nothing to do with fixing an airplane engine. On the line, your hands seemed to be more important than your head. And the tools had funny names. Somebody kept asking for his ratchet or Philips's head. Who was this Philips anyway? By the end of the eleven weeks I did know the difference between a ratchet and a hatchet, but anybody who flew an airplane I had worked on would have flown more easily if he did not know that I had done the safety wiring.

My final move to the 92nd Airdrome Squadron occurred at Hunter Field, Georgia, still an army airfield. In a replacement squadron there waiting to be assigned, I was once again summoned to the CO's office. He was Major Robinson, a West Pointer, called out of retirement to what for him had to be an unfulfilling assignment. Little did either of us know that indifferent gods had destined each of us to find the other. The first sergeant advised me to be scrubbed and starched, and like most GIs I wondered what I had done wrong. In posture and bearing, Major Robinson impressed me as never once in his entire life having been at ease. I stood at attention and

did my best not to breathe. The major first explained that he himself was a graduate of West Point. He then said that the army had issued a new directive. Any GI who met the requirements—age, IQ, physical condition, educational background, score on the GCT, and whatever else—could qualify for West Point. He had ordered his clerks to go through the entire roster, and I was the only man currently assigned to him who met the requirements. He was proud to have a man in his outfit who qualified for the Point, and he was going to back me all the way. That's what he said, "And, soldier, I'm going to back you all the way."

The requirements weren't that steep; there were just a number of them, including a year of college. I had graduated from high school at sixteen (a bad idea) and so had been a college sophomore when I entered the service. At that moment anyway, Major Robinson was unlucky enough to find only one person assigned to his outfit who qualified. But I didn't want to spend those years in school. Stupid as it may sound to most current presidential candidates in both political parties, I didn't want to miss the war. But what I said then to Major Robinson came out wrong—wrong for both of us. "But, sir," I said, "I don't want to be at West Point." Only four hours later, I threw my duffle bag into the back of a 6x6 and headed for the other side of the base. That's how I came to spend the war with the 92nd Airdrome Squadron, surely the only GI in the 92nd who got there not by robbing a bank, but by declining a chance to attend West Point. My friend, Brigadier General Jesse Gatlin, retired head of the English department at USAFA and himself a West Point graduate, thinks what Major Robinson did was terrible. Had I said yes, Jesse and I would have been classmates. About a year and a half later, by then in the Philippines, my orders for OCS came through. But I didn't want to go to school in Australia then because the squadron was about to leave for Okinawa. No, Major Robinson may have been right about me. And then you never know about a shift in assignments. The old major may have saved my life.

Those first few weeks in New Guinea, we experienced what surely was the typical shakedown of any initial combat duty. Some people cracked up, not one of those being somebody I would have figured to do so. The people I thought were loony bin candidates all did fine. Our squadron physician, a Cleveland Heights

obstetrician-gynecologist and thus a typical assignee to my airdrome squadron, lasted a bit longer—three or four months. Wisely, I was taken off the line and assigned to the engineering shack. Soon after, the NCO in charge was moved up to command headquarters, and I was given his duties. Then, over the next few weeks, what I discovered about our squadron is hopefully typical of any organization, military or civilian. We had the dozen necessary people who knew what they were doing and also how to make do. In a month, we were functioning adequately. A month after that, we were good.

The planes we serviced regularly were those of Fifth Bomber Command Headquarters. The tactical aircraft flown on missions were B-25D2s, a medium bomber and marvelous airplane. But bomber command headquarters was also a sort of WWII menagerie, and so at one time or another we also worked on the B-26, B-24, A-20, and one stripped down fat-cat B-17. We also had a couple of those wonderful little two-seater Taylorcrafts. When one of the pilots discovered that I was still a kiwi, he took me up in a Taylorcraft and once off the ground immediately initiated me by demonstrating stalls and loops; that flight was not a gentle initiation, but I enjoyed it. No, it's more than fifty years later, and I no longer have to say that I enjoyed it. I did not, however, get sick.

A few of our pilots had been rotated out of their combat groups. While waiting for transportation home, they continued to fly missions. More of our pilots had been detached from their squadrons for a variety of other reasons. I had a bit of air time with them, and I can attest to their having been first-rate fliers. They were also—how to put this politely?—apt to prefer their own war plans to those of Fifth Bomber G-2, and a time or two saw something on their way to a target that appealed to them more than the object of the briefing. Perhaps these days they might be court-martialed, but remember that we are talking about a bunch of civilians fighting the war in the Pacific. In retrospect, I think they were handled just right, but then for us they fit perfectly with the 92nd Airdrome Squadron. Put all the non-conformists in the same outfit and don't bother to kick butts about minor infractions, and you just might get yourself an outfit that can be called upon for bigger stuff.

The only two regular army people in our squadron were the first sergeant and the line chief. I suspect each had been chosen with us in mind. The first sergeant was tough and unyielding. At Hunter Field before leaving for embarking at San Francisco, we had played tackle football wearing only fatigues and had broken his collar bone. (Do I dare say by now that I never regretted having been in on that tackle?) The first sergeant could be one unpleasant s.o.b., but when the war ended and he had more points than anybody else in the squadron, he stood in the mess hall, tears streaming down his face, and said goodbye by telling us that he loved us. The first sergeant was an archetypal career soldier, and I'll tell you how much I respected him. When I saw him standing there and weeping, I believed that he meant what he said but still thought he was an s.o.b.

The line chief, Master Sergeant Morris Jones (Sarge Mo), a big and handsome Georgian, was quiet and self-possessed. Although we had an engineering officer, Mo Jones ran the strip and in doing so rarely spoke at all. Mo and I became good friends and with others shared quarters. Mo was determined that we would always put planes in the air, and we never failed to do so. Meeting such assignments wasn't easy, but we were superbly staffed for it. The 92nd Airdrome Squadron excelled in its use of the moonlight requisition. While he could not be represented on the table of organization, we came to employ a full-time scrounge-spy. At a midnight meeting in the engineering shack attended only by enlisted men, the scrounge might say, "The 101st Bomb Group just received a dozen new 1830-radials. They've been sitting there for a week, still crated and pickled." We never stole just to steal, and we never stole a whole engine—just the parts needed to get our own planes in the air. In that sense, the Pacific war belonged to us civilian enlisted types. I assume our officers knew what we were doing, but not even Mo Jones came to a requisition session. Mo could call for a meeting, however; all he had to do was raise an eyebrow.

After a few months in Nadzab, we moved north to Owi, an island just across a strait from Biak and maybe an hour off the New Guinea coast from Hollandia. Biak is another of those places long forgotten that saw intense fighting. We were told that the air strip on Biak changed hands two or three times so that before the island was secure, we and the Japanese had actually taken turns flying off it.

Owi was a barren hunk of coral, desolate and sun-drenched. With nightfall, the moon merely replaced the sun for more hours of white-on-white. Such constant light can be as depressing as darkness. Owi is the only place I know where the phrase "like pissing on a flat rock" is not a figure of speech.

Mo Jones did not care for the Owi assignment either. He told me that the Fifth Bomber Command was to send a detachment of three B-25s including flight crews and ground support to Anguar in the central Pacific and that he had volunteered our services. When one of the pilots overheard my saying "I hope to God they won't fly up there in formation," that is exactly what they did. But by then I knew what to worry about. I assigned myself to the lead plane, climbed into the bombardier's forward station in the nose and enjoyed the flight. One does learn. And as it turned out, that is why we were being sent to Anguar; the Seventh Air Force fresh from Hawaii and new to combat had use for a few of us nineteen- to twenty-five-year-old veterans.

We were assigned to a B-24 group that had too often failed to reach target, and we were going to fly pathfinder missions for them. I remember how healthy they all looked in contrast to us. Despite our hours in the tropical sun, we wore those atabrine-yellow faces. But by then we were also different in other ways. Landing at Anguar, one of our B-25s needed a bit of work done; I went to the tech supply tent for some parts only to discover that nobody was there. I found the squadron technical supply sergeant and told him what was needed only to learn that tech supply was closed on Sunday. For me, duty at places like Nadzab and Owi in wartime pretty much did away with my sense of calendar time, and so my question to the supply sergeant was in no way sarcastic. "Today is Sunday?"

I then found my way to the squadron's engineering officer, told him what we needed, and politely asked if he would request his tech supply noncom to be open for business. I must have managed to say it in the proper tone of voice because no captain ever responded quicker to the request of a three-striper. In speaking to that captain, I mixed the appropriate enlisted man's umbrage with the right seasoning of disrespectful battle weariness. But so, too, did everybody else in our Fifth Air Force detachment play that same role. After all, we had been dispatched there to bring just such experience. By then, we were no longer impressed that we had such

experience to bring. We kept those three B-25s in the air, flew the pathfinder missions and got the B-24s to their targets. A month later—maybe less, maybe three weeks—they didn't need us.

From Anguar we flew to San Jose on the Philippine island of Mindoro. The mission now was to fly China coast reconnaissance missions, a far piece of flying for a B-25. I've still no idea how they managed to rig it, but our mechanics put an extra gas tank in the crawl space between the front and midsection of the airplanes. While I still was not to be trusted with either a ratchet or hatchet, I had long before begun to read the tech orders rather than just file them away. Typically American perhaps, I had kept all sorts of unreported data on these planes and knew their individual eccentricities. Along with our crew chiefs, I was possessively jealous; as far as we were concerned, these were our planes which we consented to lend to the pilots who flew them. I suspect that sense of ownership hasn't changed to this day.

The pilots to whom we lent our airplanes accepted our ownership. For months, we had been advising them about the best settings for any particular flight, and they were now especially interested in asking our help for these China coast missions. Even more than on previous assignments, we waited nervously at the strip for the return of the mission. On some days, only one plane was designated to fly, and it was one of those days that the plane did not return from its mission. I hung around the operations shack most of that night. In the morning we were told that someone had seen the plane go down, not all that far off shore but nearer to a small island than to Mindoro. The problem was that these were still contested waters, and if the crew did manage to get itself to the smaller island, we could not be sure they wouldn't be captured.

Next day—sing for joy—they returned, rescued by a navy patrol boat. The pilot stared at me not quite menacingly and said, "We ran out of gas, Sergeant." But his radioman stopped by later. "We were maybe fifteen minutes from base," he said, "and he saw some Japanese shipping and went down after it. We made three or four passes and then had to climb back up." I was immensely grateful for his honesty, but that's how closely we had figured the safe completion of those missions. You simply could not vary the course without risk—well, maybe we allowed for some manageable

two-minute finagle. This pilot not only had the customary individualistic derring-do of a Fifth Bomber Command pilot, he was also—if you don't mind my saying it, sirs—a stupid jerk. I was thankful for his return, but now that he and the crew had returned safely, I wanted to tell him that he had lost one of my B-25D2s, an airplane we had been flying since the Nadzab, New Guinea days.

From Mindoro, we went to Luzon where we ran the strip at Clark Field. Some brilliant army tactician located our quarters just behind the infantry but in front of the artillery. That was not the first occasion for our involvement in ground alerts, but we did—for us—have a fairly extensive go of it. Luzon was the first place we'd been stationed that had a large and fluent civilian population, and in that sense we'd returned to civilization. But we also saw some of the horrifying consequences of Japanese occupation. A friend, the master sergeant in charge of communications, had an aunt, a Roman Catholic nun, who had been a nurse in a Manila hospital. He had promised his mother that he would try to find his aunt and asked me if I'd go to Manila with him. We found the hospital where Sister had worked but could not find her or anybody who had known her. We had only an overnight but did see the extent to which the city had been devastated. The Intramuros—the old walled inner city—had been hit particularly hard and was still smoldering; even in its ruins, we could tell how beautiful it had been.

And so we were running this strip on Okinawa the morning the *Enola Gay* lifted off with this enormous thing that imploded. We were still scrounging for supplies, and we were weary with the whole business, including each other. Our camp site sat on a high bluff from which you could look down on Ie Shima, another tough fight and the place where Ernie Pyle, the GI's war correspondent, got killed. My college roommate was also on Okinawa, and we managed an afternoon's reunion. We had entered the service and gone through basic together, but we had not seen each other for more than two years. My old roomie was a second lieutenant in the infantry and while Okinawa had been taken, there was still fighting. Some of you may remember how MacArthur handled that sort of thing. The press release would read, "General MacArthur has stated that the island is now secure except for minor mop-up operations." We were getting weary with that

nonsense as well. My roommate observed that day, "If this is the mop-up, I'm glad I wasn't here for the battle."

We were ready for that miracle. And then the *Enola Gay* made its flight. And then the second bomb. And it was over. Traffic was very heavy the next couple of weeks with flights to and from Japan. Many of the American POWs flown from Japan to Okinawa landed on our strip. I watched General Skinny Wainright being helped from the airplane. He managed to stand tall and erect even as he accepted the needed help. Shortly after, the first sergeant wept his I-love-you valedictory in the mess hall and departed. Most of the squadron went on to Japan, but those of us who had been in the detachment that served on *Anguar* and later in Mindoro were credited with time in additional battle areas and had extra points. We stayed in Okinawa and waited for a ship. On the way home, I edited the ship's paper to get an early chow pass. The ship received a news service which I used for the paper. The war being over, the United Automobile Workers Union had gone on strike, and I wrote an editorial assuring the GIs that the UAW was just getting us a raise before we got discharged. The ship's captain sent his exec to bawl the hell out of me and tell me not to write that sort of unpatriotic drivel again. I toned it down, but to honor the captain and the ship's speed, I changed the name of the paper to *The Daily Creeper*. We disembarked January 1, 1946 in Seattle where German POWs were working in the mess hall. Unlike Skinny Wainright, they looked both healthy and at ease. Ain't the United States terrible?

Now then, there's one thing I haven't talked about, and it's what motivated my writing this in the first place. Without making a big psychological deal out of it, I may well have been putting it off for years. But the nonsense about the *Enola Gay* compels me. So here goes.

After I read that in the Pacific war, the United States was motivated by vengeance and cruelty, I began again to see the faces of friends who did not return. Any war veteran knows what I'm talking about. From my freshmen dormitory alone, I count seven people. I'm going to list a few names. You won't know them and by now their parents are also gone. But indulge me. I just want to put some names in print. There was Pat Murphy, our class president, a

bright and athletic kid who led us in the annual pants fight against the sophomore class. And Emmett Corrigan, who had prepped at some fancy private eastern school and had a surer sense of who he was at age eighteen than I have now; I never thought anything could happen to Emmett Corrigan. And Don Turk, the upperclassman who lived in our section of the dorm and who gave me some help for a course I shouldn't have taken; I couldn't believe it when I heard that he'd been killed in a navy training mission—not Don Turk. And from my home town Billy Kline with whom I double dated in high school, a B-24 pilot who didn't return from a mission. When I got back home, I went into his father's small clothing store to say how sorry I was about Billy, but his father saw me coming and went into a back room and couldn't talk to me.

There is one other incident though. In Nadzab, New Guinea, our first overseas assignment, I met a kid exactly my age who had also graduated from high school early and gone on to college. We'd managed to put together a kind of day room there, and this kid and I had a series of late night ping-pong games. We were both good players, and we kept on-going statistics from night to night about wins and losses and scores. After a session, we also talked. We even discussed the possibility of going back to college together after the war. The kid was a radioman/gunner, and he was especially eager to play for hours any night before he had a morning mission. Well, by now you know where I'm going. On one of those missions, he didn't return. I've been referring to him as that kid because I cannot remember his name. I kept thinking that when I got to this point in the writing, the fingers would simply type out the letters. He was killed in early 1944, and I've been telling myself that it's perfectly sensible if I cannot remember a name from fifty-one years ago. Maybe I'll remember later, just sit up one night and say it.

I could tell a number of these stories about each of those stopping points on the way from New Guinea to Okinawa. For example, on Anguar, December 31, 1944, the detachment celebrated New Year's Eve. Somebody had managed to bring some liquor from Australia. Inspired, I removed the astrodome from a B-25 and used it as a mixing bowl. What the hell, why not? But the CO of that B-24 group heard about what we were doing and came down himself to put a

stop to it. He confiscated the booze and told me to replace the astrodome immediately. We cussed him out pretty good later and did not wish him a happy new year. And the Colonel did not return from the next mission.

On that same island, we also had a series of ground alerts. Not far from the hospital tent in which we were all sleeping, a half-dozen sailors—also detached—were running a navy weather station. As our ground troops pulled out for other places, the Japanese intensified their forays. Sixty thousand of them were still on the island of Yap, skillfully bypassed but hungrier by the day. One of those nights I had taken the jeep and driven somewhere to see a movie. I even remember that it was *Porgy and Bess*. (If I can remember the name of that movie, why can't I think of the ping-pong player's name?) When the signal for a ground alert lit the sky—red puff, red puff—I drove back to our camp site. Mo Jones told me that he'd had to set up a perimeter and had given my carbine to somebody serving on it. I said okay then, I'd take his Thompson sub, but he'd also lent it to somebody on the perimeter. Just then we heard gunfire and decided we'd relieve the people who had our weapons. Well, these air corps stories about ground war are surely both inane and amusing to anybody who served in the infantry. I'm telling this particular story because that night the little navy weather station got wiped out. They were stationed a bit closer to the shore, and from the looks of it, the Japanese had simply walked up to the door and tossed in grenades. Not one of the navy guys survived.

Enough of these stories. Most everybody has them to tell. And I haven't mentioned that many names. Maybe a dozen is all. Now what I want you to do is take any one of those names—just one. Or choose a name of your own, a name from one of your own wars. I'm going to go with the radioman/gunner ping-pong player from Nadzab. When you're sure that you see the face and hear the voice as if he's in the very same room, multiply it by fifty thousand. Or as my acquaintance at the cocktail party said, *only* fifty thousand.

I prefer to end on another note. Almost sixteen years ago, I spent a year teaching at the Air Force Academy. For one of the formal occasions, an officer friend there got all my campaign ribbons replete with battle stars and explained that civilians might wear them for formal occasions on a tuxedo. Most of those ribbons and

battle stars were awarded to types like me not for any bravery but for survival. Still, they looked prettily impressive even to me. During the evening and standing with the USAFA brass, I was presented to an older man in dress uniform who lived in Colorado Springs. He was General Crabbe, none other than the CO of the Fifth Bomber Command. We shook hands, and I said to him, "The General has no reason to remember me, but I once crew-chiefed for you out of Nadzab, New Guinea." Eyes bright and as alert as I remembered him years ago, he gave me a quick inspection including the campaign ribbons. "Well then," he said even better than David Niven could have said it, "I take it the mission was successful." He was smiling.

"Well, sir, it wasn't exactly a mission. It was in the fat-cat B-17 to Australia. I don't know what you were doing there, Sir, but we were getting booze." There was the slightest ripple of movement among my USAFA hosts. Had the civilian professor gone too far with the general? General Crabbe stared a few seconds more. Then the smile grew broader. "92nd Airdrome Squadron?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," I said. And we both burst into a laughter that neither bothered to explain to our colleagues. When we said goodnight, we held the handshake an extra second. If General Crabbe was astonished that anybody from the 92nd Airdrome Squadron could have become a distinguished visiting professor at his own United States Air Force Academy, he didn't seem to be displeased.

What else? In Pittsburgh we live in an apartment complex that houses mostly older types like us and young Japanese professionals and their families. Unlike us older folks, the Japanese move in and out of the building. Numbers of them are physicians who are specializing or doing a residency in one of the hospitals or taking courses at Pitt's medical school. Others are computer types studying at Carnegie Mellon University, and there's also a batch working toward MBAs at both schools. Those with small children send them to American schools. There is also a group of little Japanese toddlers who impress me as being exactly like little American toddlers, and I'm on special hugging terms with a number of them. These families are, of course, a very bright and special group of people, and I am very glad they are here with us and willing to be part of America's evil intentions.

And a last word to General Tibbetts. Sir, I agree. If they choose to do so, just hang it up there at the Smithsonian for a few weeks and say nothing. We don't owe the Japanese an apology. Neither do they owe us one. It's over. So let the Enola Gay fly its last mission, and people can make of it what they will. With no disrespect intended, Sir, I do not myself need to give it a gander. But I do heartily agree that it would be better if everybody kept his mouth shut. Even me. □