

This will be a narrative of certain events that transpired near the end of World War II. Prior to that discussion, however, I decided it might be prudent to expand somewhat on those events. They might be of interest to the reader in order to give some insight into the "Big picture" surrounding the events.

In July, 1944, I reached the fulfillment of approximately a year and a half of training as an aviation cadet in what was then known as the "V5" program. During that month I received a commission as an Ensign in the United States Navy and the coveted "Wings of gold". I was now an officer and a gentleman as well as a naval aviator!! Upon graduation I, along with several other newly minted aviators, received orders to the Naval Air Station (NAS) Jacksonville, Florida, to train as fighter pilots. We would be flying the F4U Corsair. What more could we young 20 year old whippersnappers ask than that! Glory be. After all the grueling ground school, and athletic programs and flying **everything** from Piper Cubs to Yellow Perils and **SNJ's** and swilling all that rotgut booze in Kansas and Texas and chasing broads into and out of every bar in Hutchinson and Wichita, **Kansas** and **Corpus Christi**, Texas AT LAST we were going to fly something that just might get us involved in that big bad war. Five of us caught a train to Florida the day **after** graduation. (I will skip some of the more lurid details of that trip -just let it be said that we were allowed seven days to get to Jacksonville and we stopped for three days in New Orleans to visit the zoos and museums and **stuff**. **Ahem**).

At NAS Jacksonville we were sent to **auxiliary** NAS Green Cove Springs, about 40 miles south of **Jax**. There we five were introduced to a Marine Captain who had just recently returned from a tour of duty in the Solomon Islands. He was to be our instructor. I still remember the first meeting we had with him. It went like this: "Listen up, hot shots. So you snot nosed kids **wanna** be fighter jocks? Well during the next three months you do exactly what I tell ya to do. Shut up and listen. When I say jump, you say how far, Cap? When I'm done with **ya**, y'all will be able to fly that Corsair like you was **wearin'** it. Remember, **fellas**, the bad guys on the other side shoot real bullets. It ain't like **shootin'** at a target sleeve. You **gotta** fly better than them guys or kiss your ass goodbye. Now here's a handbook on the airplane. When you're done **readin'** it **lemme** know. Then you can go fly the surnbitch. Got it???" What took place during our training at **Green** Cove Springs must wait to be told another day. Upon completion, in November, 1944, we were sent to NAS Glenview, Illinois, where we qualified as carrier pilots by performing eight landings and takeoffs on the USS Wolverine - a converted old merchant ship fitted with an **aircraft** carrier deck.

After carrier check out the five of us received orders to NAS **Los Alamitos** in California to join what was known as a "Replacement" squadron awaiting further assignment to an active squadron. There we flew F6F Hellcats in order to keep the edge on our flying skills. In fact, in January, 1945, we **qualified** on a real aircraft carrier by making eight landings and takeoffs on a carrier sailing off the coast of California. We were anxiously waiting to be called up to a real live squadron. In February, 1945, we got the call!! Don Budge and I got orders to report to the CO at NAS North Island in San **Diego** to determine our fitness to be assigned to an air group. (I lost track of what happened to the other three guys.) We reported to the Officer of the Day at North Island and were told to meet with Commander Strong, skipper of Bomber Fighting Squadron Eighty-Five (**VBF-85**) on the USS **Shangri-La**. We met him, he felt us to be sure were **warm** and we then were given orders-to be attached to his squadron. We were to leave for Pearl Harbor in a few days. We were assigned quarters on the ship in the Junior Officers area, unpacked our gear and prepared for life in the **real** world!

The USS Shangri-La, a 45 thousand ton long-hull Essex class aircraft carrier, known in the fleet as **CV38**, was launched on February 24, 1944. Allow, for a moment, your memory to return to April 18, 1942. That was the date that Lt. Col. James Doolittle led sixteen Army Air Corps B-25 medium range bombers from the deck of the aircraft carrier Hornet (**CV8**) to bomb Tokyo, Osaka, Kobe and Nagoya in retaliation for the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. This strike took place in order to provide a well needed morale boost to the natives back in the US. After the raid had been carried out President Franklin Roosevelt announced to the world that the flight had originated from a secret base know as "Shangri-La". Thus the name assigned to **CV38**.

Within days after the launch of Shangri-La she took aboard her first complement of aircraft and flight personnel. This was Carrier Air Group Eighty-Five (**CAG-85**) commanded by **Cdr. Wallace Sherrill**. **CAG-85** consisted of four squadrons: A Fighting Squadron (**VF-85**) flying F4U Corsairs, a Bomber Fighting Squadron (**VBF-85**) also flying F4U Corsairs, a Torpedo Squadron (**VT-85**) flying TBF Avengers and a Bombing Squadron (**VB-85**) flying **SB2C** Helldivers. The air group flew numerous practice missions during the Shangri-La's shakedown cruise in the Atlantic. Following the shakedown cruise, and undergoing minor repairs at the Norfolk Navy Yard she was ordered to proceed to North Island in San Diego California. It was during this stay in San Diego that Don and I joined the squadron. The ship left San Diego on February 7, 1945 and arrived in Pearl Harbor on February 13. For the next eight weeks she cruised the Hawaiian waters where she trained several air groups in carrier operations. **CAG-85** was detached and sent to NAS Barbers Point for training.

A few words about the F4U Corsair. The Corsairs flown by **CAG-85** were mostly **F4U-1D's** built by the Chance Vought Division of United Corporation. Also, the same aircraft was built by The **Goodyear** Corporation with the designation **FG-1D**. This was a hot, 400+ knot aircraft designed to counter the Japanese fighters and to replace the **F4F** Grumman Wildcat. Because of the enormous size of its three bladed propeller, it was built with inverted gull wings in order to give the prop sufficient clearance from the ground. It had a long, extended nose to house a 2000 horsepower, 18 cylinder Pratt & Whitney engine. The Corsair had originally been designed and built for use in aircraft carrier operations. When they were first delivered to the fleet it was discovered that they had some "odd-ball" landing characteristics due to the high propeller torque and the long nose which made landing on the carrier difficult. The Marine Corps then took delivery of the Corsairs in order to replace the **F4F's** then in use by the Marines. The Navy settled on the **Grumman F6F's** to be its first line fighter. However, in late 1943, by correcting the torque problem, adding a tail hook and allowing for the ability to fold the wings, the Navy started assigning them to some of its carrier based squadrons. Armament on the Corsair consisted of six 50 caliber machine guns, three in each wing, a bomb rack to carry 1000 pound bombs and 8 rocket racks, four under each wing, to carry 5 inch "Tiny Tim" rockets. There were a few **F4U-1C's** attached to **VF85** with four **20MM** guns in place of the 50 calibers.

**VBF-85** was a squadron with a complement of approximately sixty pilots, aviation maintenance personnel and administrative staff. It was commanded by **Cdr. Birney Strong**, a veteran of two previous tours of duty in the Pacific. He was a quiet, but all business Annapolis graduate who was strictly "By the book". The second in command was the Executive Officer, Lt. Cdr. "Tex" **O'Neil**, a big, tall, raw boned Texan who was "One of the boys", and had a previous tour of duty as well.

A squadron of aircraft is broken down into divisions. A division consists of two sections of two aircraft per section. The division leader is also a section leader and has an aircraft flying on his wing, either the **left** or right wing depending on circumstances. **The** leader of the second section flies on the lead aircraft's other wing and he, in **turn**, has an aircraft on his outboard wing. Think of a V with one leg longer than the other. On a mission, while in combat operations, there are many divisions comprising a strike force. Usually from several carriers in the fleet. While at NAS Barbers Point during training exercises the same situation holds true except here we dealt with just personnel within a squadron. Divisions fly as a group and there could be several divisions flying together on a simulated mission. Practices consisted of shooting at target sleeves or banners pulled by a single aircraft, or bombing, strafing or rocket **firing** at targets on the ground. I was assigned as a **wingman** to Lt. jg. Roy "Judge" Bean, my section leader. Judge professed to be a descendant of the old time Texas judge that was considered to be the "Law west of the Pecos"! Judge was a great guy, very patient with me at first, a struggling newcomer to the squadron. I learned a lot from him that helped a great deal in the coming days. The **skipper** also occasionally had one of us new guys fly on his wing to make sure we knew what we were doing. (As a side issue, I was flying on the **skipper's** wing the time I was unable to release a bomb over the target while in combat operations and had to bring it aboard when I landed. He was NOT a happy camper on that occasion!) (What's a moronic, imbecilic chowderhead??)

On April 10, 1945, CV38 left Pearl Harbor and on April 20, she joined the fleet as a part of Carrier Task Force 58. The fifth fleet was commanded by **Adm. Raymond Spruance** and Task Force 58 was commanded by **Adm. Mark Mitscher**. On May 27 that situation changed. The fifth fleet became the third fleet commanded by Adm. "Bull" Halsey, and Task Force 58 became **Task Force 38** commanded by **Adm. John McCain** who chose the Shangri-La to be his flagship. (Adm. **McCain's** grandson, John **McCain** is one of the current senators from Arizona). On April 26, 1945 I participated on my first combat mission, a **strike** on the island of **Okinawa**.

Now fast forward to August 13, 1945. We reported to the pilots' ready room for briefing. A division led by Lt. Dick Demott was instructed to lead a "Fighter sweep" on a seaplane base on Lake **Kasamagaura**. Several other divisions were briefed for dispatch to other targets. My memory is hazy as to **Demott's wingman** but I would be flying on Judge's wing as usual. A fighter sweep involved the aircraft being **fully** armed with 50 caliber ammunition and, on occasion, five inch rockets carried beneath each wing. For this flight we carried ammo only for our six 50 caliber machine guns. This meant the action would be confined to strafing.

We were told to do as much damage as possible to aircraft, trucks, buildings, and to cause **sufficient** damage to make the facilities inoperable.

We made normal deck takeoffs, joined up and headed for the target. Arriving over a seaplane base on the lake we circled once at about 5000 feet to get a feel for targets. There were **aircraft** tied up at a dock on the lake, many aircraft parked on the ground, many buildings, and numerous trucks and automobiles. Dick announced on the radio, "Let's go get 'em" and proceeded bring the division about four or five miles south of the target area. Then he pushed over followed by his **wingman**, Judge Bean and me. We allowed about a hundred yards between each of us in order allow ample room to pick targets and to insure the safety of each of the guys in front. I **turned** the **gun** switches on, **armed** the **50's**, and put my finger on the trigger on the front of the control stick. I watched the three guys in front blasting away at

targets, then lined the "Pipper" on my electric **gunsight** onto a row of aircraft on the ground, and squeezed the trigger letting loose a tremendous blast of fire power and watched as a row of aircraft blew apart. Pulling up after my run I followed the rest of the guys orbiting the target area to come around and make another pass. We did this several times, blowing up buildings, aircraft, trucks, **etc.** It appeared during each **run** that there was no activity on the ground. I saw no personnel. It was a little like shooting tin cans on a fence. On about the **fifth** or sixth run Dick said "Ammo" over the radio. We **all** answered "Plus" so he said "We'll make one more, then get the hell outa here. Let's go in flat this time. Use it all up, guys".

We came around for another pass. Of course, I was flying "Tail-end Charlie", which, if there was **firing** from the ground meant that this is a rather precarious position when going in low. The gunners on the ground can line up their guns on the **first** three and blow "Charlie" out of the air!! We went in this time right on the tree tops. I remember lining up on what appeared to be a barracks or large building. As I peered through the gun sight at a target I saw, drifting slowly up from the ground, orange slashes. I thought **ohmygod**, tracers. (It's amazing watching tracers fired from machine guns. They just seem to drift lazily. When shooting at target sleeves during training I was always awed by the look of tracer bullets **drifting** away from my aircraft. Actually, when using tracers only about every tenth bullet has the characteristics to be a tracer, so it doesn't look like a water hose, just slow, orange slashes in the sky.) They were floating up in front of me, and about the time I was sure what they were I heard a loud explosion somewhere in the front of my aircraft. I knew I'd been hit, but **didn't** know where. I firewalled the throttle and started a steep climb. My intention was to get as much altitude as possible and head for the shoreline hoping if I could get far enough off the beach, and my engine stayed together, I might have a chance of rescue. As I went through about four thousand feet I glanced at the engine instruments and discovered, to my horror, that the oil pressure gage read zero. I pushed the nose over to a straight and level position at about the time the engine froze. I mean **FROZE**. It just stopped abruptly like some unseen hand reached up and grabbed the prop and held it! I grabbed the mike and said "I'm hit". Judge said "Hang on, we see you." At that very instant in time I had to make an immediate choice. Jump or ditch. I was now over Lake Kasamagaura at about three thousand feet but sinking fast. It took me a fraction of a second to determine that floating down in a parachute over hostile territory with guys on the ground with guns made no sense whatsoever. I decided to ditch in the lake. I saw a small curl of smoke drifting up from the far shoreline and noted the wind direction. I made a big circular turn into the wind, straightened the aircraft out, dropped the flaps (I had residual hydraulic power in despite of no engine power) and prepared to land. (Needless to say, I **didn't** touch the landing gear handle.) As the aircraft neared the water I eased back on the stick, the nose came up slightly, she scooted along slightly above the water for about twenty yards, the tail started to drag a bit and then she went kerplop and came to an immediate stop in the water and silently floated.

I unhooked the catch on my safety belt and threw off the shoulder harness. I yanked the radio cable out of my helmet and started to stand up in the cockpit. The aircraft, with a gurgle dropped beneath me and sank. While flying, the pilot sits on a combination of his parachute and, attached to the 'chute, a one-man life raft. While treading water **after** the aircraft sank, I slid out of the parachute harness and grabbed the 'chute and life raft before it began to drift away. (The one type of training a pilot never prepares for is a parachute jump and a forced landing - for obvious reasons. It's gotta be right the **first** time!) Also, I never trained for the activity associated with detaching the raft **from** the 'chute. It was a bit of a struggle. I was trying to stay afloat with all my gear on and, at the same time, try to figure out

how to separate the two. I managed it, then looked for the little carbon dioxide bottle that would inflate the raft. I found the toggle, pulled it and the CO2 cartridge, with a loud hissing sound, and inflated the raft. Now I had to get in the damn thing! Another struggle. Try, **fully** clothed, including a jump suit, large high topped shoes, a shoulder harness with a side arm, getting into a little tiny raft which sits high on the water **fully** inflated! I finally made it, my butt parked firmly in the bottom of the **raft** and my legs hanging over the sides. I'm now in the middle of a lake in Japan, alone, with nowhere to go. I looked around, noted the tree lined shore with buildings scattered here and there, and, in the distance, the remnants of a seaplane base that was still smoking. It suddenly dawned on me that I'd be late for chow on this day! I suddenly heard aircraft overhead and, glancing up, noted three Corsairs circling. These guys stayed around and orbited me for a half-hour or so, then I noted a flight of four more Corsairs appear on the scene. The three from my recent flight zoomed over me and wagged their wings, then disappeared off to the East. My morale took a big boost at this point and I realized that there might be a possibility of being rescued in the lake. (I found out later, after rejoining the squadron that a scout-observation aircraft had been warmed up ready to go when he was called off because of the danger of trying to land on a hostile lake to make a rescue. That aircraft, **like** other similar aircraft, was one of many **OS2U's** stationed on heavy cruisers and battleships in the fleet used for scouting and rescue missions.)

The enemy was lobbing what I believe were 40MM shells toward me from the beach. There weren't a lot of them but enough to make me a bit agitated. There would be an explosion several yards away from my **raft** and a geyser of water would blow out of the explosion. Then another minute or so later on the other side of my raft. Then another a minute or so later. It was as if they were bracketing me. I was somewhat concerned that perhaps the next one might be a direct hit! This continued for a half hour or so then stopped. **During** this time the guys orbiting me would periodically make a pass at the shore batteries and strafe them which I'm sure helped calm the situation. On the other hand I had some trepidation that it might make them madder!! The corsairs hung around for, I'd say, a couple of hours. Then they made a low pass, waved and wagged their wings and departed. I had seen no seaplanes with US markings so it appeared rescue was out of the question. I was **truly** alone now. As the afternoon wore on and no rescue attempt was made I was convinced that my days were surely numbered. When we were briefed prior to missions we had been told that there were no known prison camps in Japan and that, therefore, being shot down would, in all probability, be bad for our health!

As the sun dropped lower and it became almost dusk, I heard the sound of a motor boat approaching from the shore near the seaplane base. I squinted toward the **shoreline** and saw what appeared to be a small boat headed in my direction. As it closed, I saw that it was what I could best describe as a small motor whale boat. There were four occupants in the boat. Located on the bow was one of the occupants manning what appeared to me to be a thirty caliber machine gun. The boat began to circle me. As it continued, the occupant manning the **machine** gun kept it trained directly at me. It crossed my **mind** that, at any second, he could open fire and it would all be over. They made several orbits around me, and it suddenly dawned on me that maybe they wanted me to disarm. I was wearing a shoulder harness with a 38 caliber revolver over my chest. I **carefully** reached up, took the pistol out of the holster and dropped it overboard. With that, the boat slowly came up alongside of my raft and they assisted me into their boat. As we headed for shore there was a continuous unintelligible babble emanating from the soldiers. (They all had khaki uniforms on with **funny** little khaki hats.) We pulled up to the dock, they assisted me out of their boat, and a

**group** of soldiers grabbed me and tied my hands behind my back and blindfolded me. With a soldier on each arm they led me into some sort of **building**. I heard a door open and close and they pushed me down onto the floor and it felt as though I was in a corner of the building. They continued jabbering among themselves and for the time being, left me alone. Except at one point, one of them made a chopping motion at the back of my neck and said, "Cut, cut." This did nothing whatsoever to calm my nerves!!

They stuffed salty, dry biscuits in my mouth which were difficult to chew and swallow. I was dying for some water, and when I said, "Water", I was greeted by a stiff kick in the ribs. As the hours dragged on, I occasionally dozed off to sleep, then awoke with a start to realize the situation I was in. What must have been the next morning I was taken out and put into some sort of motorized conveyance still blindfolded with my hands tied behind my back. After driving for what seemed an hour or so we arrived at what apparently was a train station. I could hear the sounds of locomotives with sounds of bells and whistles and the huff-huff of the steam. I was taken into a building, the blindfold was removed and they put me on the floor outside of a row of **offices**. I asked for some water and to be taken to a bathroom. They just laughed. But after several minutes another guard came over, untied my hands and led me into a very primitive rest room where, for the first time, I was able to pee. Then he took me back and led me into one of the **offices** where there was a soldier seated at a table and an empty chair facing him on the other side of the table. There were two soldiers in the room, each with a rifle in their hands. The man behind the table said, "Sit. Give me your name, serial number and unit." I did as I was told and he opened a large book that looked like a telephone book. He apparently found my name and announced that I graduated from training in July of 1944. He then said, in perfect English, "I attended the University of Southern California Do you know where that is?" I replied that I did and asked what he was doing in Japan. He made a grunting noise and yelled something at the guards and one of them took his rifle and belted me one across the back. Then, the other soldier did the same. I think they were having a contest to see who could hit the hardest. Apparently he didn't like my question! He asked all sorts of stupid questions like, "Where's the fleet?? What was your mission?? What kind of airplane were you flying, etc., etc." I replied as best I could telling him I had no idea where the fleet was at that moment (The truth), about the seaplane base and the Corsair. Periodically, a guard belted me with his rifle just for the hell of it! The questioner made no attempt to stop him. It hurt, but there were no broken bones or other damage.

When the USC grad got through with me, he ordered something to the guards and they promptly tied my hands behind my back and covered my eyes with a blindfold. They took me outside and we boarded a train and took off. I don't remember how long we traveled but when we arrived at our apparent destination we disembarked and got into another vehicle. After driving for a short period of time we got out, the guards led me into some sort of building and into an office whereupon they removed my blindfold and untied my hands. Standing before me was an immense man. He had to be well over six feet tall and probably weighed on the order of 300 pounds. Most of the Japanese I'd been able to see up until now were quite short in stature. This guy was definitely an aberration. He was wearing a T shirt and khaki pants. He had muscles on his muscles. He wore no hat. His hair was short cropped and he wore thick glasses. He was one mean dude. Besides him there were a couple of fully uniformed and armed guards in the room. He announced to me in somewhat broken English that I was now at the **Ofuna** Prisoner of War Camp. Halleluiah!!! My morale promptly jumped about a hundred points. Up until that very minute I was reasonably sure I'd be

killed. If one can be elated to be in a prisoner of war camp it sure **as** hell beats the alternative!! He told me to sit down at the table and gave me a piece of paper and a pencil. He said, "Write down your name, serial number and squadron." I picked up the pencil while he stood behind me. Suddenly, without warning, he cuffed me along side he head. He said, "WRITE". I wrote. Then he cuffed me along the other side of my head. Then he spoke to one of the guards. The guard grabbed me by the arm and led me out, down a long corridor to another room, opened the door and threw me into the room. The room had one small outside window, a small opening in the door, a large mat on the floor and nothing else. The guard carried what looked like a bamboo pole, about two inches in diameter and four feet long. I asked if I could have some water. He yelled something in Japanese and proceeded to whack me a couple of times with his pole. Then he left and slammed the door. I was thirsty and exhausted. I lay down on the mat and closed my eyes. Within minutes the guard opened the door, said "No lie down during day. Only at night." With that he **kicked** me several times around the lower legs and in my ribs and belted me around the shoulders with his bamboo pole. That did smart!! I got the message.

Later that day, the door opened and another guard, whom I hadn't previously seen gave me a bowl of what could pass for soup, and a small cup of tea, then left. The "Soup" stunk pretty bad, food is food. I found out later it was bamboo root soup with pieces of fish floating around in the stuff. I drank it. Then I drank the tea. I stood and paced the room and thanked the good Lord for still being alive. I must say this: I have no idea how the human brain works, but it works in wondrous ways. When my aircraft engine quit I had my hands **full** making sure I got myself and my aircraft down safely. I simply didn't have time to panic. But **from** the time I got into the **raft** until I arrived at **Ofuna** I had no fear whatsoever. This may sound self-serving but I am convinced that the brain has a way of accommodating super stressful situations. I expected that I would die, yet a calmness took over my psyche. Fear or panic was not within the **framework** of my consciousness. I was able to blot out thinking back, or thinking of home, or of family or loved ones. I never said, "Why me?" My mind was sort of a blank. It simply adjusted itself to the situation. It's really difficult to explain.

As darkness fell in my cell, (There were no electric lights), I felt like now I could finally lie down. It was uncomfortable but felt good. I fell asleep immediately.

The next thing I knew was when a guard yanked open the door and gave me another bowl of "Soup" and some tea. He left the soup and tea on the floor and motioned for me to follow him. We went down the corridor, past other cells, and he ushered me into the "Toilet facilities". Now THAT was a sight to behold. It was absolutely the filthiest, most stinky place I'd ever seen in my life. Think of an old fashioned outhouse. He motioned for me to climb a **small ladder** and I entered the "Outhouse". It consisted of about ten round holes cut into a plank of wood. There one did his thing. I found out later that beneath the holes and on the ground level there was **an** opening that allowed the prisoners on duty each day to go in and clean out the "**Stuff**". It was NOT the **Ritz-Carlton!!!!** I went back to my cell and had "Breakfast".

Later in the morning, **all** the cell doors were opened and we were able to walk outside. There were a few **spartan** benches around to sit on and the guys just sort of milled around, some sitting on the benches, some just standing around. I met some of the other prisoners and ran into some guys **from** our air group that had been shot down several weeks earlier on a raid over **Kyushu**: Pilots Ed Dixon and Dick **Mann** and air crewman Bob **Hanna**. Dixon was

from my bomber fighter squadron and the other two were in the bomber squadron flying the **SB2C**. We thought they'd all been **killed!** (The next day John Dunn from VBF-85 arrived in Ofuna having been shot down at the same seaplane base as I!!) Many of the prisoners were in pretty bad physical condition, mostly **from** just plain bad **nutrition**. Beriberi was prevalent in many of the guys. This disease caused massive swelling in the ankles. There were some guys who had been captured early in the war after the fall of Wake Island!! There were a couple of B29 crews in the camp that were in extremely bad physical condition. The 29's had been fire-bombing Tokyo and these guys had parachuted into enemy territory and had been captured by civilians. Before military personnel got involved, the civilians had beaten them up pretty good. The enemy military had saved their lives!

Mostly the talk centered around discussion of food. When you're extremely hungry discussion of food becomes an overwhelming passion. I also heard several stories about Gregory "Pappy" Boyington, the famed Marine fighter pilot who had been at Ofuna. He had been working in the kitchen but they caught him stealing food and **kicked** him out, apparently moving him to another camp. We were all sure it was just a matter of time **until** the end of the war. They all knew about "The Bomb", having heard about it **from** some pilots who had entered Ofuna after the bombs were dropped.

That night, I was awakened by loud noises outside. I got up, looked out my window and saw the headlights of cars. There was much loud chatter going on. I had no idea what time it was, (The guys that picked me up out of the **raft** had taken my wristwatch). But I think it was late because it felt like I'd been asleep for a while. There just seemed to be a huge commotion taking place. People scurrying all over the place. Pretty soon it quieted down and I lay back down and tried to sleep, wondering what had been going on. Early the next morning I found out.

At dawn, someone raced up and down the corridors, opening all the cell doors. We all stuck our collective heads out the doors and looked around waiting for the other shoe to drop. The guy next to me said, "What the hell's going on?? I heard all that noise last night. For crissakes, maybe they're going to execute us all!!" Up and down the hall there was a tense anxiety as each of the prisoners was trying to figure out what was happening. A guard appeared at the end of the long hall. A guard that I'd never seen before. In broken English he said, "All prisoners, out in the courtyard immediately." We complied, and filed out into the open courtyard awaiting we knew not what!! We eyeballed each other looking for a certain comfort in our mutual anxiety. A cadre of soldiers suddenly appeared from within the administration building. There must have been a half dozen of them. They were unarmed, which was a relief!! As long as they weren't carrying rifles or machine guns we guessed we were all safe for now!! The soldier that appeared to be in charge said, in perfect English, "Attention, all prisoners. We wish to announce that the Japanese government has unconditionally surrendered to the Allied Forces. The war is over. We have brought in a new contingent of guards who will now act as your benefactors and will see that you are taken care of. We have been told that there will be United States aircraft flying over all Japanese prison camps to make drops of supplies. The main gate to the compound will be opened and you may journey outside if you wish, We ask that you not contact any of the local citizenry. Should you be approached by anyone, please just ignore them. You will be kept advised of future developments as they transpire." There was no shouting or celebration among the prisoners. No shouts of joy. No back slapping. No hugging. But lots of tears of relief. Some of the old timers simply sat down on the ground and sobbed. Most of us just

stood there in disbelief that it was **finally** over. I felt I was the luckiest man alive. I had been a prisoner for a mere two days, while many, many others had been there for months and some, for years. It was a time of relief and **thankfulness**. Joy would come later.

**Ofuna** was in a valley surrounded by hills. Sometime in the late afternoon we heard the roar of an aircraft. **Looking** to the South we saw a B29 come over the top of the hill. As it approached the camp we could see the bomb bay doors open. Suddenly we could see a crewman **kicking** out some huge packages. The packages had parachutes streaming behind them but the aircraft was too low for the 'chutes to open. The packages hit the ground and burst into small pieces scattering for twenty or thirty yards beyond. There were "C" rations "K" rations, cigarettes, candy bars, and medical supplies - all sorts of stuff. It was everywhere. We pounced on the **stuff**, trying to separate it and put it in some semblance of order. It turns out that someone had painted a huge sign on the roofs of the **barracks** saying "P O W". Thus the air droppers were able to locate us. But this turned out to be one of the most dangerous several days of my captivity!! **B29's** flying in, bomb bays open and guys **kicking** out these supplies. Every time we heard an airplane we all ran for cover. These packages were dropping everywhere. Some went through the roofs of the barracks creating havoc inside the building, scattering stuff all over the place and **knocking** down walls. A lot of the packages dropped well outside the compound into the rice paddies where it was a race between the prisoners and the populace living in **farm** houses near our camp. It was a zoo!! But we started to eat pretty good again - even "C" rations beat bamboo root soup! This went on for several days until somehow the B29 pilots got the message, increased their altitude allowing the 'chutes to open on the drops.

Around the first part of September, I don't remember the exact date, a bunch of prisoners were standing around or sitting on benches discussing the political climate in **Aurangabad**. I was talking to a guy who came to **Ofuna** about the same time I arrived. His name was Luther Johnson and he had been a rear seat gunner on an **SB2C** dive bomber attached to the USS **Bennington**. In a raid on an industrial complex in Northern Japan his aircraft was hit by anti-aircraft fire. His pilot tried to make an emergency landing in a field but in so doing their plane crashed, **killing** the pilot. Luther got out and ran into some brush in time to avoid being captured by some civilian farmers. For a couple or three weeks, he couldn't remember how long, he was able to hide during daylight hours and come out at night to try to find food and water. He was pretty much unsuccessful, but was able to find water and found berries to eat which gave **him** a modicum of nourishment. **During** the day, **farmers** were **looking** for him with clubs and pitchforks and he felt that the only way to survive would be to find some military types to whom he could surrender. He was reasonably sure that wouldn't necessarily save his life, but anything would beat getting captured by a bunch of civilians. He found his way into a small village one night, looked into what appeared to be a tavern and glimpsed a couple of uniformed men. He walked into the place, walked up to the uniforms and announced that he would like to surrender. Needless to say, the two guys were completely flabbergasted. Here was a disheveled white man in a tavern in a tiny little village asking to surrender!! Both the soldiers were wearing side **arms** so Luther wasn't real sure they wouldn't shoot **him** on the spot. But they took him down the street to what appeared to Luther to be a police station and put him into a cell. The next day several military types showed up and took him to **Ofuna**.

While Luther and I were talking a big stake truck pulled up just outside the main gate of the compound. We stood transfixed while a bunch of guys clambered off the back of the truck.

It turned out that they were members of the press. Some were carrying cameras, some just notebooks and they started **taking** pictures and **talking** to some of the prisoners. One guy came up to Luther and me and asked if we'd mind posing with a couple of guards as if we were leaving the compound and being bowed to by the guards. We did that and discovered later that the movie film and picture appeared throughout the USA and hit every major newspaper in the country!!

On September 2, 1945 several trucks **carrying** US military personnel showed up. They announced that we would all be transported to Atsugi airport to await further disposition. We all jumped aboard the trucks and headed out. Arriving at Atsugi we discovered it was a madhouse of people, trucks, automobiles, tanks, and various and sundry "Stuff". The five of us **from** CAG 85 stuck together and I'm **afraid** my memory is hazy as to how the next event transpired. I recall we were sitting together on the ground and a pilot, Frank Boyer, showed up. I had not known Frank previously but he announced to us that he was a VT pilot from the Shangri-La and was told to fly to Atsugi and find the five guys **from** the Ofuna prison camp and bring 'em back. We all walked over to his **TBM** and somehow, to this day I don't know how, we all five managed to get into that aircraft. He took off and flew to the ship offshore and landed. We all five were greeted by the ship's Captain, our skippers and all sorts many, many other members of the air group and ship's company. We were escorted down to the wardroom and there we were served a huge, sumptuous meal. I don't recall what it was, but following the meal each of us dashed for the head and threw it all up!!!

The next day the entire complement of personnel attached to CAG-85 were transferred to a CVL, known as a "Jeep" carrier. The small carriers were being used in the so called "Magic carpet" fleet **returning** members of the military back to the US. We were on our way home!!

John Chapman  
March, 2004