

YANKEE-NEVADAN

AUTOBIOGRAPHY
OF A
YANKEE-NEVADAN

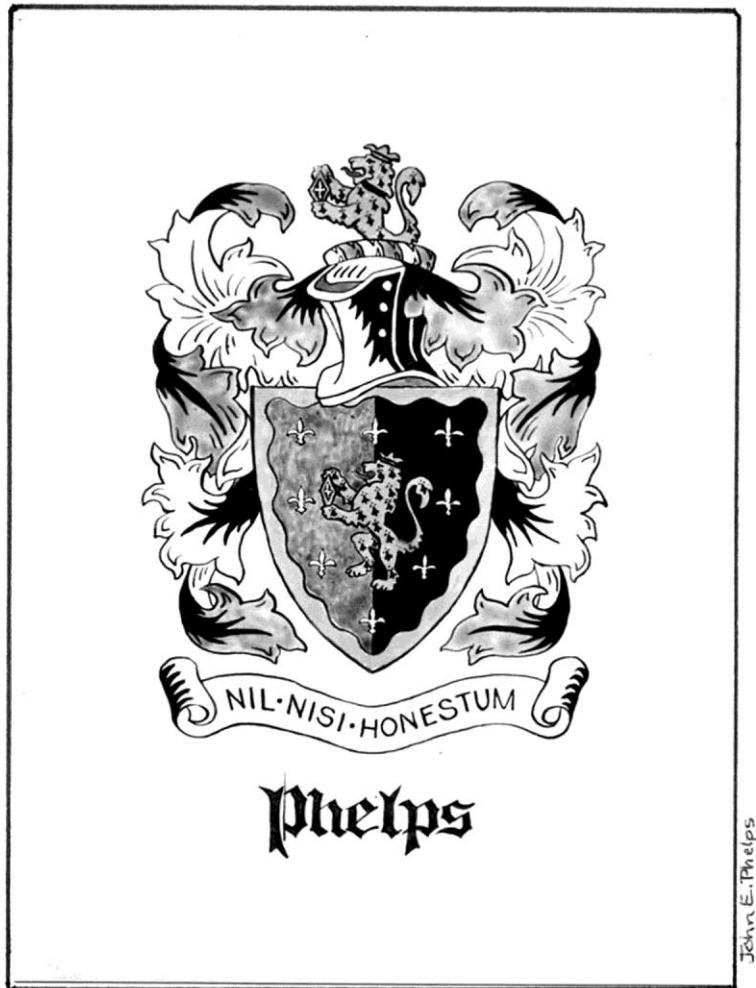
George Alfred Phelps

VOLUME I

YANKEE-NEVADAN

AUTOBIOGRAPHY
OF A
YANKEE-NEVADAN
George Alfred Phelps

VOLUME I - PART 2



John E. Phelps

YANKEE-NEVADAN

Autobiography of a

YANKEE-NEVADAN

George Alfred Phelps

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CONTENTS

VOLUME I - PART 2

Chapters 13 through 23

[NOTE: PAGE NUMBERS FOR THIS VERSION ARE NOT VALID.]

CHAPTER 13: WORK AND DIVERSIONS

147: Schell's castle, Halloween. 149: Once a busboy! 150: Western Union Telegraph office. 151: The hotel, flag raising, airplane spotters. 152: A. Gordon and pipe, filching ice cream. 153: The bicycle crash. 154: Shirley's aunt, Marian, Dorothy's letter. 155: L. Stamey, friendly rebel. 157: T. Niwa, patriotic Nisei.

CHAPTER 14: NEW JOB, AUTOMOBILE, TRAVEL

159: IGA store and Luman Barber. 160: Grocery clerk job, letter from California. 161: Britton and Barnes, cutting meat, killing chickens, putting up orders. 163: First driver's license. 164: First car. 165: Howard Johnson's. Owning an automobile in wartime. 166: Bobby Johnson, Louise, near accident on Route-63. 167: To Cape Cod and Provincetown. 169: Mt. Monadnock, the White Mountains.

CHAPTER 15: BUSY TIMES

173: Luman Barber sells store, Luman's narrow escape (story of 1936 flood). 176: The Morgans, "Evie." 177: Delivering groceries. 178: High School activities. 179: School plays, paper, teachers. 181: Mrs. Thompson. 182: School grades. 183: Senior class trip to New York. 185: June, graduation.

CHAPTER 16: WORLD WAR II WINDS DOWN

187: Family review, farm accidents. 188: Trip to Skowhegan, Maine, airplane ride. 189: Ruth and Albert in South Vernon, Albert's death. 191: F.D.R. dies, Truman takes over, victory in Europe, Shattuck's Dance Band. 192: Shelved violin. 193: Helen Spaniak, June, and car "troubles." 196: Eleanor Lee.

CHAPTER 17: THE BOMB

199: Thunder and lightning. 200: The atom bomb. 201: Trip to Boston, VJ-DAY. 202: Bob takes over chores. 203: Plan to enlist in Navy, Father signs papers. 204: The Navy ships at Albany, last days at home.

CHAPTER 18: BOOT CAMP

207: Enlistment process. 209: Bainbridge, Md. 210: Induction process, Navy issue. 212: Boot camp life. 214: Swimming lessons! 216: The boot company. 217: Captain's inspection, Navy orders and justice. 218: Smoking lamp. 219: Hospitalized with tonsillitis.

YANKEE-NEVADAN

CHAPTER 19: UPS AND DOWNS

221: First leave, home for the holidays. 222: Long walk, Jimmy Neigh to the rescue, tonsillitis, return to base. 224: Farewell to boot camp, promotion to Seaman-2nd. 225: Another leave, Great Lakes Naval Training Center. 226: Electronics Technicians school. 227: Outgoing Unit. 228: Liberties. 229: Hitchhiking, near disaster. 230: Chicago USO, Aragon Ballroom. 231: Clyra Deck. 232: Diet, work. 233: Mr. Keane, painter. 234: Extra hard duty. 235: Emergency leave. 236: To Princeton, N.J., to Philadelphia. 237: Liberty in Northfield. 238: Ferry to Norfolk.

CHAPTER 20: GUANTANAMO BAY

239: "Passenger" aboard U.S.S. Forrest Royal, seasick. 242: Naval Air Station, Guantanamo Bay. 243: Brief history of area, seaplane dock duty. 244: Line-operations duty. 245: Aerology! 246: View from the tower, the Chiefs. 247: Captain's inspection. 248: Work description. 250: Doyle Munson, radio operator. 251: Earthquake! 252: Night watches, Baldi's accident.

CHAPTER 21: RECREATION AND FLYING

255: Horseback ride, sickbay, Cash and cactus. 257: Birthday party. 258: Recreation. 260: 4th-of-July "pibal" ascension, radio-sondes. 261: micro-seismograph. 262: Visiting ships and friends. 264: Navy aircraft, observation flights. 265: PBY to Jamaica. 267: PBM flight over Cuba, rebels, one engine and a prayer.

CHAPTER 22: FINAL NAVY DAYS

271: First visit to dentist. 272: Aerology move to new quarters. 273: Another earthquake! 274: Letters from home. 275: Cigars and bananas. 276: Decision to quit navy, hurricane scuttles flight, to Norfolk by sea. 279: Leisure time. 281: Discharged, north by bus. 282: New car, homecoming.

CHAPTER 23: INTERLUDE

285: Many happy reunions. 286: Job at WMEC. 287: Unemployed, job hunting, recreation. 288: Car troubles, Doris F. 289: Sell Dodge, buy '38 Ford, trip to Worcester. 290: Letter from Father. 291: Decision to go west. 293: Leave-taking.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN WORK AND DIVERSIONS

The landmark Schell Castle, originally known as Birnham House and more recently by the genteel name of "The Chateau," was, in my opinion, the most impressive building ever erected in Northfield.

It is said that Bruce Price, the architect for the Chateau de Frontenac in Quebec, was instructed by New York capitalist, Francis B. Schell (he who would later donate to the town a new vehicular bridge across the Connecticut River), to design for him a mansion, a mansion to incorporate the best features of the finest chateau in France.

Construction of the mansion was begun in 1894 - on the bluff above Mill Brook about 250-yards southwest of The Northfield Inn - and completed in 1903. Mr. Schell's objective was met, at a cost of over a quarter-million dollars.

The Castle's exterior lines and interior decor were genuinely French in appearance. Most of the appurtenances and furniture were imported from the old country. And yet, for all its esthetic design and rugged beauty, it was not well received by the neighbors. No doubt, right from the beginning, they felt that both Schell and his edifice were but ostentatious misfits in an otherwise conservative community.

Mr. and Mrs. Schell, friends of Dwight L. Moody, resided at Birnham House until his death, in 1928. The property was then sold, except for those goods and furnishings removed by the widow, to the Northfield Schools. The Chateau, as it was now called, came under the management of The Northfield Hotel and was operated as a hostelry and venue for fancy affairs.

When I worked at The Northfield, The Chateau and surrounding acres were in quite good condition. The building was virtually square, measuring roughly 130-feet on a side, soaring 60-feet from the main floor to the spires of four circular towers. Approximately one-hundred rooms, varying in shape and purpose, were contained under its steep-pitched, many-gabled, mansard roof. The main floor, some 12 or 15-feet above ground level in front, was surrounded by wide, flagstone-paved promenades. A large porte-cochere enhanced each of the north and south elevations.

I find it difficult to adequately describe the Chateau's interior. But I remember being fascinated by its grand parlors, halls and rooms, its marble mosaics, statuettes, paintings and plaster copings, its ramps and rails, circular stairways, open corridors and dim passageways (including some that were supposedly "secret"). There was a ground floor beneath the main one, and a subterranean "dungeon"

below that. In addition to a great kitchen and a smaller one, the ground floor contained servants' quarters and work rooms.

The main floor, reached by climbing a set of thirty, wide, granite steps from the graveled driveway, was spacious and ornate. Three open parlors, extending from front to rear, were flanked by a library, a billiard room, a formal dining room, a breakfast room, a chapel and more. An open, circular banistered well above the center parlor admitted daylight.

The second floor could be accessed in many ways: by lift, by circular staircase, by a grand stairway or via a long, switch-back ramp. There were about sixteen bedrooms, at least half that many bathrooms and a comfortable sitting room on that floor.

The top floor, which received natural light from the central skylight and a couple-of-dozen dormer windows, had rooms equivalent to those on the one below, except that these were occupied by the housekeeper and servants.

To me, the most impressive furnishings in the Castle were the oversized, gilt-framed mirrors and crystal-prism chandeliers in, as I recall, the library. It was a well-known fact that they had come across the pond from France, no doubt at great expense.

Manicured lawns, trees and shrubbery complemented the angles and curves of the Castle's exterior walls. A European style, formal garden of perennials, roses and hedges - including a maze where a guy could be alone with his girl in relative seclusion - graced the south exposure.

Overall, it was a picture-postcard beauty.

In the early forties, when my sister Ruth worked at The Northfield as a maid or a waitress, some guests were still being lodged in the Chateau, at least in the summertime. By the time I went to work at the hotel the Chateau was rarely used for that purpose; though I remember escorting at least a half-dozen parties to rooms there. By mid-decade, no doubt due to wartime austerity, even that practice was discontinued.

The fact that the Chateau was then virtually unused gave it an aura of mystery, providing some credibility to local stories of resident ghosts and spirits. And some of us (boy and girl employees with access keys) would meet there, when we were off duty, to explore its heights and depths, to shoot a game of billiards on the mahogany-cased table, or to just hang around.

One Halloween, after dark, several of us gathered there for a "very informal party." With tall candles for light and atmosphere - their flames cast eerie shadows on the walls and ceiling - we spread the refreshments, crackers, cheese, chips and Cokes, on the old hardwood counter in the kitchen and dug in, eating, drinking and making merry.

Someone suggested a game of hide-and-seek. So, in couples, we stealthily crept through the moon-lit building, up and down stairways, through dark passages, in and out of rooms, scaring one another by surprise. It was a good way to spend Halloween. A good way to get better acquainted. But A. Gordon would have fired us all had he known what we were doing.

(From that time on, except for special occasions, the Chateau would lie relatively dormant; until, in the 1960s, the cost of maintenance and repairs proved too much for the Schools to endure. The furnishings were then sold at auction and the once proud building was demolished, piece by piece, till not a vestige remained. It is regrettable that The Northfield Schools could not have held out another decade or so, until the 1970s when restoration and preservation of old buildings would come into vogue. It might then have been spared the wrecker's ball. In my humble opinion, The Northfield's Chateau was far and away more worthy a site than many that have since been preserved.)

Meanwhile, back to the hotel: There came a day when the corps of busboys in the dining room was shorthanded. Allie Palmer, the maitre d'hôtel, asked if I would fill in at the dinner meal. So I did, trading my green jacket for the white cutaway of a busboy. I went to work pouring water, resetting tables and, most important of all, hauling heavy trays loaded with dinners to the tables and dirty dishes away. I quickly decided that this was a job for a stronger man than me. It was no wonder those athletic guys like Bill, Neil and Eugene were busboys.

Halfway through my first hour an accident effectively ended my short career in the dining room. This is how it happened:

One of the sweet young waitresses finished clearing a table, after a party of six, and loaded one of those big, nickel-plated trays with dirty dishes. She motioned to me, to carry it to the kitchen. I picked up the tray, worked it onto the palm of my left hand, lifted it up over my left shoulder and made my way - between a half-dozen tables of contented diners - toward the kitchen.

But that tray was a lot heavier than a fiddle, and I had a hard time keeping it level.

As I walked between the last two occupied tables, near the doorway, the loaded tray began to tilt to the rear, right above a plump, middle-aged lady diner. Well, I knew I had to get through to the kitchen but my wrist was weakening rapidly. And then salvation was mine. A waitress, coming out of the kitchen, saw me and held the door open. Good. I stepped back half a pace and, like a quarterback, "passed" that tray dishes and all through the doorway.

The sound was unnerving. There was the ringing of bouncing silverware and the crashing of fine china and leaded glass as dozens of plates, saucers, cups and drinking glasses turned into a pile of shard. Every pair of eyes in the dining room turned on me, including, of course, Miss Palmer's.

My momentum carried me through the opening, and the door, mercifully, swung shut behind me. I stopped short and put a hand to my brow, aghast at the sight before me.

Miss Palmer came immediately to the kitchen, a look of horror on her usually calm face. I wasn't sure if that look represented anger or concern, or both.

"What happened?" she uttered.

"Well ..." I began. It was almost impossible to explain, but I proceeded. "I felt the tray slipping right over a woman's head so instead of letting it fall on her I threw it."

She shook her head in dismay and turned to go, probably to apologize to the guests in the dining room, on behalf of the hotel, for the distraction.

On her way out, though, she paused long enough to give me a parting shot. "You get that mess cleaned up. Now!"

My friends helped to tidy-up the serving kitchen, but not without ribbing me unmercifully about the accident and offering congratulations for my "passing" ability.

When my tour of duty was over I went to Miss Palmer, told her how sorry I was for the incident, and turned in my jacket. For good. She chuckled (discreetly) and said (rhetorically), "I can just envision that poor woman covered with dirty dishes and leftover food."

We agreed that I should stick to being a bellhop.

In addition to the usual duties of a bellhop, we doubled as Western Union operators and messengers. Our W.U. "office" was a closet-sized room, jammed between the walls of the front desk and the dining room.

The teletype machine, of early vintage, printed characters in consecutive order along a quarter-inch-wide, gummed paper tape. On receipt of a telegram, or after transmitting one, the typed-on tape was removed, moistened and affixed to the appropriate spaces of an imprinted, yellow form.

With that machine, a file cabinet, a paste-up table and a dilapidated secretarial chair in the room, there was just enough space left over for two people - providing one of the two remained standing.

Above the work table a pass-through window allowed communication with Pris in the inner office, and it was not uncommon for us to call on her for help in handling a telegram. Irma would (understandably) become piqued if we asked Pris for advice, so we went to her only when our boss was away.

Since I hadn't taken a course in typing I had to teach myself. So I never learned to use the proper fingering. However, unlike most of my hunt-and-peck peers, I did use all of my fingers and thumbs when typing. Anyway the machine was electric and a lot easier to operate than a manual typewriter.

When an incoming telegram was ready for delivery, one of us would hop on a bike and deliver it to the addressee; or, if the address were some ways away, the Transfer driver would take it. If someone wished to send a telegram he'd come to the hotel, dictate or write out the message, pay the fee and leave. The handwritten message was then typed into the machine, following the destination code, the resultant tape pasted-up and the form filed away.

Every morning, in fair weather, the Stars-and-Stripes was raised over the hotel. Whenever possible, two of us did the honors. I fondly recall taking the elevator to the fourth floor, climbing the stairs to the attic, removing the flag from its locker, taking it up the ladder and through a trapdoor (or hatch) to the roof. While one of us held the steel halyard, the other guy snapped hooks through the eyelets of Old Glory, that had remained properly folded up to now, and it was raised to the top of its hemlock mast in the early sunlight.

It was not an official ceremony, but we always stood there for a moment to watch the morning breeze gently erase the wrinkles from our

Nation's symbol. Privately reflecting, I thought of the myriad flags flying over the United States, over our ships at sea and our troops in faraway places around the world.

In the evening at sundown, the ritual was reversed. The flag was lowered, carefully folded and restored to its locker below. It is important to note that we always handled our country's flag with respect, following the rules we had learned in grammar school. Those were the days of true, unabashed patriotism. I would be thoroughly shocked, years later, to see our country's flag being deliberately desecrated. But even more shocking was the fact that our government (especially the judiciary branch) would condone such acts as "freedom of expression!"

It is my firm belief that any citizen, of any country, who intentionally despoils the flag of his nation should be summarily dealt with. At the very least he should be exiled, so that he can no longer reap any benefit from the country whose symbol he finds repugnant. To disagree with the policies of one's government is acceptable, to demonstrate a total lack of appreciation for one's homeland is not.

A wartime feature at The Northfield, a feature found throughout the United States (and Canada), was the rooftop observatory. A small shack with windows on all four sides and a surrounding walkway, it was designed for use by "airplane spotters."

Airplane spotting, a round-the-clock operation, has been all but forgotten now, but it was then a very serious activity. Named the Ground Observer Corp, it was administered by civil defense authorities and interfaced with the U.S. Air Defense Command.

The Northfield Hotel's high-in-the-sky post was equipped with a chair, a shelf, binoculars, an aircraft-recognition handbook and a telephone. Observers were members of the community, volunteers who worked in shifts. Their objective was to spot airplanes and report salient information - such as number of aircraft, type(s), altitude, position and direction of flight - by telephone to the Air Force. The information was then correlated with that received from other spotters-and with that obtained from the nation's relatively few radar sites. If the spotted aircraft could not be accounted for, the Air Force would take appropriate action.

While not a signed-up volunteer I occasionally accompanied my friends on watch often enough to get a feel for the job. It could be tediously boring, especially after dark when, to maintain night-time vision, you couldn't even have a light to read by.

Apparently, no enemy plane ever successfully penetrated the skies above Northfield.

A. Gordon Moody, the hotel manager, was a middle-aged man of medium height with a bit of a paunch. He wore a dour expression, and usually walked about with a purposeful gait, as if in a hurry. He was seldom without his briar pipe, either sticking out of the corner of his mouth or clenched in a fist in front of his chest.

Not only was that pipe a trademark of his attire, it was also a dead giveaway to his whereabouts. Whether he knew it or not, the aroma of Rum-and-Maple enabled us to keep track of him; a useful thing when

we were in an area where we might not belong, or when doing something of a slightly shady nature.

One particularly warm July evening - after the guests had retired, the hotel lobby was empty and the dining room and kitchen were darkened - four of us bellhops and busboys finished a lively game of ping-pong in the basement recreation room. It was 11:00 o'clock. Someone suggested that a dish of ice cream would taste just fine, and we were in unanimous agreement. But there was no legitimate way of obtaining ice cream at that hour, all the stores and fountains being closed. So how about the ice cream in the hotel kitchen?

There was a time, we were led to believe, when the establishment allowed its employees discretionary use of the kitchen. But now the pantry, at least, was locked at night. One of our number boasted of knowing how to get in, though, so the rest of us called his bluff.

"Show us," we said in unison. Whereupon he led us up the back stairs to the kitchen.

It was eerily silent there, and dark. A night-light cast more shadows than light. Still we found our way to the pantry door. As expected, it was secured by a big brass padlock. And around the corner the windows, through which food was passed during working hours, were closed and locked. Except that one of the locks was defective. That was our passport to refreshment.

We had a little trouble opening the window but managed, with the aid of a long wooden spoon, to raise it enough to allow entry. Three of us climbed over the shelf, leaving the fourth "on guard." We removed a five-gallon container of ice cream from the freezer; our lookout located four soup-bowls and shoved them through the window; we filled each one with vanilla ice cream and opened a can of maple syrup for topping; I was pouring the last of the sweet stuff when our guard whispered, "I smell Rum-and-Maple!"

We made good our exit, scrambling through the window and down the back stairs even as A. Gordon came through the door from the dining room.

In less than a minute from the time of receiving that smoke signal, four delicious sundaes were being consumed by four hot, sweaty and nervous renegades. It was a narrow escape.

In our haste, however, we failed to completely close the window behind us. In the morning the chef, noting the abnormality, discovered the faulty lock and had it repaired. So much for our new-found treasure trove.

The hotel maintained a small fleet of balloon-tired bicycles for rent. Included were a couple of tandem bikes. Of course we kids all had bikes of our own, but to ride a bicycle-built-for-two was a novel experience. So, on occasion, with romance in mind I'd rent one and share the ride with a girl.

There were lots of secluded roads around Northfield, and it was worth the rental price for that kind of recreation. While the old ploy, "I think we're outta gas," wouldn't work, "Whew, let's stop by the side of the road and rest" sometimes did. A favorite road was the one over the hill by the Catholic cemetery. One was bound to get tired and have to rest on that hill.

At other times, a couple of us guys would "borrow" a tandem and make a speed run down the hotel driveway, up Highland Avenue and back. We got better and better at the sport, and began racing against the clock. All of this led to one fateful trip, one that would put an end to that particular sport.

I think it was either David Bates or Jughead who was my cohort that day. We had some free time before reporting to work, and it seemed a fine day for a bike ride. If we borrowed a tandem and rode like the wind, we could cross the river on the Schell Bridge, go down the West Northfield and Bennett Brook roads, re-cross the river at Bennett's Meadow and return through Northfield to the hotel, a distance of about eight miles, in less than an hour. It may have been an over-optimistic objective, but it would never matter.

With mercurial speed we took off: north on Highland Avenue, west down the hill by Moody's birthplace, across Main Street (with a tremendous bounce) and on toward Schell Bridge.

The hill between Main Street and the bridge was very steep. Two-thirds of the way down the road made a short, 180-degree hairpin turn. At the bottom of the hill it turned again, at 90-degrees, onto the bridge.

We would never make it that far, a fact that may have been providential. As we leaned into the first big curve we stopped pedaling, to avoid the left pedals' scraping the pavement, but they scraped anyway. Suddenly the bike skidded and wobbled out of control. Instead of following the curve it continued in a straight line. The front wheel hit the guard fence (three horizontal cables stretched between concrete posts) and promptly folded. The bike, my partner and I, all were then catapulted into the air to soar over the embankment and land in a patch of scrub sumac.

We were lucky. We had missed hitting a couple of small trees, and the thicket of sumac softened our landing.

Weakly, between groans of pain, we laughed about the predicament we'd gotten ourselves into. Then we worked our way out of the tangled undergrowth, brushed weeds and dust from our clothes and examined our wounds. Our arms and legs were scratched and bruised, but none were broken. There was nothing to do now but get ourselves and the crippled bicycle back to the hotel, unnoticed if possible, change into our uniforms and go to work.

It was no easy task, but we dragged the bike up to the road and, taking turns lifting its mangled front end, pushed it "back to the barn." Inevitably, we were unable to get all the way up the drive and into the shed unnoticed.

In the end, our little escapade cost us a new front wheel, a fork and a set of handlebars, in addition to a serious reprimand from the boss and a great deal of chiding from our peers.

Shirley, my first love, was still my steady girl. At least as far as I was concerned. She lived at the end of the lane between Highland Avenue and Main Street and I often walked her home; that is, I rode my bike while she walked alongside. At her place we'd visit a while, before I continued on to my house.

One afternoon, following our usual pattern, we were still visiting when her aunt came home - earlier than usual. She burst into the front room of the tiny apartment and caught us necking.

Was I embarrassed? I was chagrined! We both tried to appear nonchalant but it was no use. I knew we were in for a lecture.

"What do you two think you're doing?" she shouted.

I started to reply, but because of her continuing invective I couldn't get a word in edgewise.

She exhausted the usual repertoire of reprimands (as any concerned parent or guardian should have done in the circumstance), then added some of her own invention. The more she spoke the more agitated she became, until her face grew flushed and her eyes shot daggers.

In the end I had neither the chance to defend myself (I, of course, was the accused) nor the ability to think of anything defensible to say. So I stood there, meekly kicking at the carpet and occasionally shrugging off a rhetorical question.

I thought she might strike me, so angry was she, but I finally saw my chance, edged past her and made good my escape.

Outside I started to breathe easier, but Miss Purrington was not yet through.

"Don't you ever come into this house again when I'm not home!" she shouted. And then, sort of winding down, she added, "Maybe you had better stay away from Shirley altogether."

I waved good bye to Shirley, hopped onto my bike and rode off.

I felt really disturbed. Not only because of the lecture I'd just endured but also because Shirley and I had been interrupted in a moment of tender, if innocent, passion. And the fact that the blame had been directed solely at me, even though I'd been invited into the house, hurt my sensibilities.

Whether or not as a result of that episode, Shirley and I were never again really close friends.

I had a rather poor attitude that summer. I suppose it was not unusual for a kid my age. I lacked self-confidence. I felt sorry for myself, an emotion no doubt exacerbated by my father's leaving. In a juvenile effort to "impress" people I made remarks which, instead of being clever as intended, were apt to be trivial or hurtful. "The wrong thing at the wrong time." I had to learn to think before speaking. I wanted to "grow up" but the pace seemed interminably slow.

Anyway, my attentions were gradually weaned away from Shirley and I got acquainted with one of the Seminary girls, Marian Bruhns, who was working at the hotel that summer of 1943. I was in need of someone to talk to, she was cute and friendly, and she lent a genuinely sympathetic ear to my often self-indulgent discourses.

Marian was a wise woman, though young in years (she was barely older than me), and we got along well together. But alas, come fall and she would return to her home in New London, Connecticut, leaving me adrift once more.

My sister Dorothy, perhaps sensing that I was troubled, wrote to me a very long, very sagacious letter in which she recounted early family affairs and family decisions previously unknown to me, and offered some very sound advice.

"It is easier to think with your emotions rather than your mind," she wrote, "as you will find every year of your life. Life also gets more complicated, and less understandable rather than more so..... But remember this, you are the master of your fate. Your successes and your failures will be the result of what you yourself do or don't do. (Sometimes it is what we don't do that hurts us the most.)"

Her timely words were much appreciated.

Following are stories of how two young fellows from far away came to work at The Northfield:

The first was Louis Stamey, a southerner from one of the Carolinas. His move was the result of a wartime program designed to match the country's available manpower with job opportunities. New England, with its high degree of industrialization, was short of help while the South had more people than jobs. Somehow (even without the benefit of computers) job openings were matched with job applicants. The Northfield sent an invitation and train fare to Louis.

Pris had warned us that a "rebel" was coming, but none of us, not even she, was prepared for the shock on his arrival. About my height, skinny as a rail, his lean face framed by long (for those days) wild, black hair, a heavy woolen greatcoat hanging from sloping shoulders like a tent, high-water pants and hairy bird-legs, he was a sight to behold. Clutched in his left hand was a bulging leather suitcase; in his right, dangling from long sinuous fingers, a pair of shiny new shoes.

The hand-held shoes prompted me to look at his feet. There, protruding from too-small socks, were two sore big toes.

Pris had met Louis in the lobby and brought him to the basement where several of us were hanging out. She now introduced him, asked if we'd help the newcomer get settled, and left.

"How y'all," Louis greeted us with a grin, apparently not the least bit nervous in these alien surroundings.

We showed him to his room, a typically tiny one containing naught but a bed and a dresser.

"Reckon ah'l jest lay down an' sleep now," was all he said, throwing off his coat and tumbling onto the bed.

We closed the door and left him alone.

Louis had been raised in the hill country of the Appalachians. Before starting north (it was later revealed), he decided to pocket the train fare and hitch-hike the distance. The shoes, apparently the first dress shoes he'd ever owned, hurt his feet so he carried them most of the way. While he'd gotten enough to eat on the long journey, he was short on sleep and would spend most of his first twenty-four hours in Northfield in bed.

Well, this mountain boy (or hillbilly) was definitely "backward" by our northern standards of culture; in speech, dress and eating habits. What he did possess was an abundance of native intelligence and a wonderful sense of humor. He was anxious to learn our ways "So ah'l fit in with y'all," he said. And he was not in the least bashful nor easily embarrassed.

We kidded Louis a lot and he seemed to enjoy it. In fact, he seemed to enjoy everything and would try anything. He was a hard

YANKEE-NEVADAN

worker, too, something we hadn't expected in a southerner, whose stereotype was supposed to be lazy.

Before long, fortunately before the weather turned cold, Louis mastered the art of wearing shoes all day long. Adapting to the use of a fork at mealtime, as opposed to only a knife, took a bit longer. He insisted, even demonstrated to his skeptical audience, that a table knife was a very efficient tool for transporting food from one's plate to his mouth. Nevertheless he shrugged and went along with our custom. I might note that, during his first few days at the hotel, he moved a lot of food from his plate to his mouth, as if he hadn't eaten for weeks. And for all we knew that may have been the case.

He soon gained weight, got a decent haircut, and on receipt of his first paycheck bought new clothes. By the end of a month or so, except for his distinctive drawl, he could pass for one of us. As far as we were concerned, he was.

Winter arrived and the pond froze over. Louis, who had already taken a share of spills from the toboggan, wished to learn to ice skate. We found a pair of skates that almost fit him, laced them up for him, got him bundled-up against the cold and set him loose on the ice.

We were prepared to see him fall, and fall he did, innumerable times. He'd stand up, try a step and then pitch forward on his face or backward on his butt. He would laugh, get to his knees and upright again only to fall once more. The only unpredictable thing about his performance was how many falls he would take before giving up. Of course the rest of us thought the whole thing funny, and offered more in the way of applause than of help.

When dusk fell on the pond, we hauled him off the ice and into the warming hut, where there was a fire in the pot-bellied stove and hot apple cider and doughnuts on the table.

Louis liked our winter sports, and when summer arrived he delved into golf, tennis, swimming and hiking with equal zeal. He played hard, worked hard, and got along well with everyone at The Northfield, guests and employees alike. At age eighteen, he would leave Northfield to join the Merchant Marines. And that's the last I knew of our southern friend.

The second of the two fellows to come to The Northfield that summer was Tom Niwa. As one might logically conclude from his surname, Tom was of Japanese descent.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, almost everyone from the president to the least citizen of the United States was concerned about the possibility of invasion. Even in hindsight that concern was not without justification. There were too many unknowns to allow complacency. After all, if a successful attack could be made on our bases on Hawaii, against some of our most powerful warships and land defenses, what was to deter an enemy from striking our mainland?

The west coast was particularly vulnerable. There could be any number of saboteurs among the 120,000 or more resident Japanese-Americans (Nisei) there, and they would be extremely difficult to identify. Our government, then, initiated a sweeping action.

President Roosevelt, as Commander in Chief, acting on advice from his military advisors - and no doubt encouraged by California's attorney general, Earl Warren - issued an executive order calling for the evacuation of all Japanese-Americans (over half of them U.S. Citizens) from Pacific Coast regions. The relocation, begun just four months after Pearl Harbor, was to ten separate and remote inland camps.

The act, while good-intentioned, deprived many thousands of citizens of their constitutional rights. The subjects were forced to sell, often at ridiculously low prices, or abandon their properties. While the detention camps were a far cry from typical wartime internment quarters, the inhabitants were nonetheless stripped of much of their privacy and self esteem. And they would remain there until long after the threat of invasion was past, until near the end of 1944.

It would be easy, in the future, to find fault with the evacuation order. But another often forgotten factor was considered at the time: the protection of the Japanese-Americans themselves.

Emotions were at a high pitch. Americans were angry at anyone who even looked like a Jap. It is more than slightly possible that, had they not been tucked away in those remote locations, many innocent Japanese-Americans would have been persecuted or killed in their own neighborhoods.

In faraway Northfield we were more concerned about rumors of German submarines in and about New England's coast (rumors that would turn out to be true) than of threats to the West Coast (which were also more than mere threats). We paid little heed to their problems; that is, until Tommy Niwa showed up in our midst.

Tom was a natural-born citizen of the U.S., born to immigrant Japanese parents. He didn't talk much about them, and I was reticent to press him for details. But we did learn that his folks were among those sent to an internment camp. Tom may have spent some time there, too, but I think not. Anyway, because he was a citizen and agreed to move away from the west coast, he was not detained. In coming to Northfield, he'd put about as many miles as possible between himself and the problem.

Tom's arrival was not quite as shocking as was Louis's, even though a Japanese face in Northfield was about as common as a snowflake in Gardena, California, the city from which it came.

He was of medium height, built like an athlete, had coal black hair and dark eyes, and wore a perpetual smile on his round, oriental face. He was a very intelligent guy, in matters both common and complex. In subjects such as math, science and literature he was away above the rest of us.

Tommy quickly adapted to his new surroundings. He worked hard on the job, played golf and tennis, tossed the football, went skiing and skating at every opportunity, and attended movies with our gang. While he was firm in his convictions, and might differ with another's opinion, he had a wonderful knack for getting along with people.

I would often wonder how Tom really felt about the Japanese-American evacuation. Whatever his thoughts, he never once exhibited

YANKEE-NEVADAN

any sign of animosity toward our government or us Yankees. By the same token, we treated him totally without bias.

(Toward the end of spring in 1944, realizing a need for a more challenging job, Tom would leave Northfield, travel to the Midwest and work at the International-Harvester war plant. Eventually he enlisted in the U.S. Army. At the end of his tour, Tom returned to his homeland in Gardena, California. I saw him twice after that, both times after I moved to the West. The first time was when, on his way to Sun Valley, Idaho for some skiing, he stopped off in Nevada and we talked briefly about the "good old days." The second time was when Rita and I visited him at his home in Gardena. He was still the smiling, affable, good looking guy who, through a quirk of fate, had been temporarily transplanted to Northfield.)

CHAPTER FOURTEEN
NEW JOB, AUTOMOBILE, TRAVEL

The IGA Store, as previously noted, was just a short way down Main Street from our house in East Northfield; not uncommonly, in an otherwise residential part of town. The IGA occupied the north side of the building, Johnson's (formerly Miller's) Hardware, the south side. A half-dozen plank steps as wide as the building led up to a covered boardwalk in front of the two stores, whose entrances were inset between large, plate glass show windows. Between the store fronts, a door opened into a hall and stairway, which in turn led to apartments on the second floor. A steep, gabled roof covered the rectangular, clapboard structure, which was set back far enough from the street to allow limited parking.

Luman Barber, of the Bernardston Barbers, operated the IGA store at the time. He employed a butcher and two or three clerks. When one of them went off to the wars, Luman offered me a job. It was my first real adult-type employment.

Then in his forties, Luman was a well dressed man of medium height and build, with light brown or blond hair. Like all storekeepers he wore gray pants, a white shirt, a black leather bow tie and a full, white, wraparound apron.

Luman was well mannered, articulate, and he had a great sense of humor. As if that weren't enough, he was honest and fair in his dealings; demanding of those who owed him money and could pay, compassionate for those of ill fortune. More than once I would observe his filling an order for someone whom he knew could never pay.

Luman's attributes were such that the fact that he was handicapped was often overlooked. He had had polio as a lad, and, as a consequence of the disease, was left with a shortened leg, that caused him to walk with a peculiar limp, and a shriveled arm and hand. The arm normally hung rather limply in its white shirtsleeve. At the counter, though, he'd swing that appendage up and lay it on the shelf, almost unnoticeably, and go about his business in a routine manner.

Having had years of practice, he could wrap a package of meat or dry goods faster than most of the clerks. With his good hand he wound the end of the white string (from a big spool above the counter) around his limp hand to hold it. He put the goods in a bag or wrapping

paper, wound the string several times around the package, deftly tied a knot then broke the string with a jerk.

When writing out a customer's bill, he used the lifeless hand as a paperweight. When not attending to a customer, Luman busied himself with replenishing goods on the shelves, tidying the stocks or sweeping the floor.

And he was stronger, even with his handicaps, than many men who were whole. As often as I saw him do it, I still marveled at the way he'd prop up a hundred-pound sack of flour or sugar, grab the top of it with his good hand, swing it up onto his hip and, without hesitation, limp up the stairs with the load.

Luman appeared to be untiring in his efforts, yet he must have become very exhausted at times.

I worked only part-time at first, then full time in the summer months. It was a great opportunity for me, a chance to learn a variety of new things; such as how to stock shelves, display fresh fruits and vegetables, kill and prepare chickens for market, grind coffee to suit the customer, dispense molasses or vinegar from a hogshead in the cellar, cut and bone meat, wait on a customer, put up orders for delivery and a score of other skills.

Unlike today's supermarkets, back then a clerk did all the legwork. The customer either handed him a grocery list or called out her needs. He then gathered the items from shelves and bins throughout the store, stacked and packaged them on the central counter. Often the customer would follow the clerk about, inquiring of prices and identifying items. After some practice a good clerk could anticipate his customer's preferred brands and quantities.

Many food items, such as cookies and crackers, came packed in big boxes, which were opened and displayed with the lids off. (Some cookies came from the bakery in packages, but the best ones arrived in the boxes.) The clerk picked out the requested quantity and bagged it for the customer. Pre-packaged goods were becoming popular, however, even though they were of necessity more expensive. For example, a pound of pre-ground coffee in a package, or a can, cost more than the stuff we ground fresh in the electric coffee grinder.

Really fresh vegetables, obtained from local farmers, were available in season only. The rest of the year, people had to be satisfied with canned varieties. Of course most folks canned their home-grown vegetables for use in the off seasons. Locally grown fruit fell into the seasonal category as well, while citrus and some other products were imported from California or the South the year round.

One time, in the summer of 1944, on opening a crate of plums I found the name and address of the girl who had packed it: "Patty Griffin, Loomis, California." I wrote a short letter, including a brief description of myself, the town, our climate and so on, and mailed it to her.

I was both surprised and pleased to get a reply. Patty wrote that while all of the girls had been inserting their names in the fruit boxes, she was the first to receive an answer. She went on to say that the town of Loomis was only a fruit center, population 1,000...that she rode a bus to high school in a nearby town where she was a

sophomore...and remarked, "Those plums started in Calif. and ended up in Mass. Boy! That's some joke."

It was amusing to her; to me it was remarkable that plums which had traveled so far arrived in such good condition.

When I went to work at the IGA, one of the clerks (I think it was Tom Hurley) drove the delivery truck and the other worked in the store. The in-store clerk was an old-timer by the name of Frank Britton. He was a small man, gray-haired, quick and witty.

One time I observed Frank waiting on one of Northfield's prim dowagers. He dutifully followed her up and down the aisles, gathering up the articles she called for, kow-towing (behind her back) and patronizing her no end.

"And how much are those today?" she asked, pointing at some items on a shelf.

"Twelve cents, two for a quarter," was his rapid reply.

"Then I'd better take two," she decided, in bargain hunter fashion.

After she'd gone, Frank winked at me and chuckled. "She still thinks she got a good deal at twenty-five cents but I only charged her the twenty-four."

Leroy Barnes was the butcher. I'd guess that he was then in his sixties. At least his hair was sparse and gray and combed over the bald top of his head. He was slightly bent, no doubt from years of leaning over a butcher's block. He wore bifocal glasses, but still looked over their tops at customers across the counter.

Mr. Barnes would tutor me in the basic art of meat cutting; a strange occupation for one who wouldn't eat such food. At first I simply boned meat for hamburg and stews, eventually graduating to cutting roasts, chops and steaks.

With our country at war, even though rationed meat was pretty scarce on the home front. Whenever possible, to augment his beef supply, Luman would buy a cow from a local dairy farmer. The whole "beef" would be spoken for before it had cooled, and it was never around long enough to properly cure. Cutting up those old dairy cows did nothing to enhance my appetite for meat, especially beef.

Underneath the building a dim, damp, dirt-floored cellar was cluttered with goods such as barrels of molasses, vinegar, and cider, stacks of sacks of flour and sugar, and boxes of stuff in reserve for the shelves upstairs. It was also where we "dressed" the chickens, an intriguing if not an enviable job.

Chickens were brought to the store in poultry crates (made of wooden boards and dowels), each containing a half-dozen birds, which we hauled down a plank stairs to the cellar. A big black kettle was filled with boiling-hot water and a powdered resin was sprinkled on its surface. A chicken (actually a full grown rooster) was removed from the crate, its legs were securely tied together with a strong cord and it was hung upside-down from an overhead beam. In turn, all six of them were hung side by side in a row.

Using a stiletto-like blade - an old meat cutting knife that through frequent whetting had been worn to that shape - the chickens were killed by severing their jugular vein. Properly executed,

sticking was the quickest, easiest, cleanest, and quite probably the most humane method of dispatching any kind of fowl. It was certainly an improvement over the hatchet method that we had used at home.

A chicken with its head cut off makes a terrible mess, running around, flapping and spattering blood from hither to yon. For some reason, a chicken doesn't move when hanging upside down, a fact that makes the sticking method relatively easy. It was Mr. Barnes who taught me how to kill and pick chickens. And this is how it was done:

You hold the beak open with the thumb and forefinger of one hand, and insert the knife blade with the other. With the tip of the blade at the back of the throat, you make a lateral cut across the jugular vein. The bird thrashes about for just a second or two until dead, its blood drains quickly and completely. The process is repeated until all six birds hang lifeless from the beam.

Now they are ready to be plucked. You take down a bird, dip it into the vat of hot water and resin, hang it back up on the beam, and with both hands quickly strip it of feathers. (The resin tends to "glue" the feathers together and they can be removed by the hands-full.)

One day, as I was plucking my second bird, I thought I detected a movement above my head. I glanced up but saw nothing unusual. After a while I was again distracted. Still nothing. But the third time, when I looked up I was staring into the eyes of a rat; a big gray rat clinging to the beam and staring back at me. I knew there were lots of rats and mice in that cellar, but I never supposed that they were so bold. I hollered an obscenity at the varmint, he disappeared and I went back to my task.

And then I noticed another movement, this time in the growing pile of feathers at my feet. Every so often the pile would suddenly settle. That dirty rat was stealing feathers right out from under my nose, and no amount of noise on my part deterred him from his scheme.

Well, I got used to having him around, but I can't say that I appreciated his presence. Later, after I'd picked and cleaned the last of the chickens, I took a few shots at him, or his twin, with the b-b gun that was kept at the store for that purpose.

Varmints in and around the store was a continuing problem. We set traps for them and encouraged semi-wild cats to hang around, but there was no getting rid of them. I guess the rats of the world can survive just about anything, and will doubtless still be here when we humans are gone.

Another of my jobs was putting up groceries for delivery. With a customer's list, usually taken over the phone, I'd gather the items and pack them in wooden crates (flat, tray-like crates with doweled sides eight- or ten-inches high) spread out on the floor at the back of the store; non-perishables first, then meat and dairy products. When ready for delivery the crates were loaded onto the truck outside.

Saturday was a big day for home deliveries. Sometimes I'd have as many as three dozen orders to fill, and I really hustled to get them ready for the delivery clerk.

Back in 1942, I took a driver's training course (a relatively new course in the high school curriculum) and earned a certificate from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. It was signed by Agnes B. Casey, my

teacher. I suppose the document carried some weight when, in 1944, I applied for my first driver's license. It didn't hurt any, but I was still required to take all of the written, oral and operating tests.

It was along about May, well after the snow had disappeared and spring was in full bloom, when Dottie took me to the licensing division office in Greenfield. There she left me, with her car, while she went shopping.

I got through the question-and-answer part of the exam okay, then an officer joined me in the little Ford for my road test.

Up to that time I had only driven around Northfield, so I was pretty apprehensive about driving in city traffic. I hoped it would be light at that time of day. I was directed to drive west along Main Street a couple of blocks, north up Chapman and east on Pleasant to Federal. I made all the proper hand signals, turns, stops and starts.

I went south on Federal, through the busiest intersection in town, at Main Street, down under the railroad and almost to the Deerfield River before turning around. So far, so good, I thought, stealing a glance at my examiner. But I was remembering what everyone (who had taken the exam) had told me: that the real test would come if I was required to parallel park uphill on Federal Street.

Sure enough, as I drove under the railroad again the examiner said, "Park up there, next to the curb by the bank."

So I pulled up just past the only empty parking space (what luck), stopped, let gravity ease the car into position, cocked the wheels to the curb, set the handbrake and turned off the ignition.

"Okay, now drive back to the station."

Now I'd have to start the car and get it going uphill out of the space, make a left turn at that busy intersection, and another past the town square to get back to the station. At least my ordeal was nearly over.

I pulled out from the curb and was well into the traffic lane when the engine stalled. Just when a car was approaching from the rear. Inwardly panic stricken, I got the engine started again and successfully completed my test drive.

Throughout my driving test the officer, an elderly, taciturn man, never changed his expression or offered any advice or comment.

I had no idea how I was doing. Now, especially after stalling on the hill, I wondered if I had failed, if I'd have to go through the whole, nerve-wracking thing again at a later date. I was prepared for the worst.

We stood on the sidewalk, the tall man towering over me, and in a Harvard accent the officer began a quiet lecture. He covered the subject of driving from A to Z: Always drive safely and courteously; always anticipate another driver's possible actions; always be prepared to yield your right-of-way to another driver if, by doing so, you will avoid an accident, and so on. He described a number of situations I might encounter, and in each case suggested an appropriate way of dealing with it. Much of what he told me was not included in the driver's manual, but it was equally useful information if not more so.

The longer the officer talked, the less officious he appeared to me. He even almost smiled a time or two, and I took a liking to him.

At last we went inside. He shook my hand, congratulated me on my driving (including the stalled engine bit), and wished me a long and safe driving career.

Was I relieved! I didn't have to worry about repeating that experience. Elated, I walked out of the station with the all-important document, a license to drive, folded neatly in my billfold.

Dorothy, who had returned by now, was waiting for me. She seemed pleased, and not too surprised that I'd passed the test. "Well done," she said, and, "You get to drive us home."

Thus began one of my life's most treasured activities, that of driving a motor vehicle. But it was midsummer before I could afford a car, if indeed any kid could afford one. And then (once again) it was Dorothy who made my dream come true, by selling her '37 Ford Coupe to me for \$200. It was seven years old but it was - to use an old cliché - like new. Not a dent, not even a scratch marred its shiny black body, and it still ran like a clock. The upholstery was clean and showed no sign of wear. It even smelled like new. I vowed to take as good care of it as she had.

(I would keep my word. It looked the same when I reluctantly sold it in 1945.)

Although wartime fuel rationing was very much in effect in 1944, because the Ford had a little, 60-horsepower engine that got twenty miles to a gallon of gasoline, I could go just about everywhere I wanted to go. It was a gallon-and-a-half to Greenfield and back; five gallons to Springfield and back. Most of my driving, though, was confined to the Northfield area; to school, to work, or to take a girl to the coffee shop or drug store.

When I got the car I totally abandoned my once-cherished bicycle. The automobile was everything to me. When not in school, at work or asleep, I was driving, cleaning or polishing it. No wonder my school grades began to deteriorate. No wonder I could not find time to play or practice my violin. No wonder I saw less of my mother and family than ever. I, like so many other Americans in the twentieth century, was in love with an automobile.

But then, I rationalized, there were worse things on which I could have spent my time and money; as, for example, booze.

An enterprising businessman (an entrepreneur in today's parlance) built a new and unique ice cream parlor on Route 5 in West Springfield. It was modern in design and relatively small, but one could hardly miss seeing it. The fire-bright orange tile of its cupola crowned, low pitched roof beckoned to travelers from afar.

Located on a big lot near the Connecticut River, outside the busy city, it was easy to get to and offered plenty of space for parking. It was tastefully landscaped, and a big sign advertised the remarkable fact that there were "28 flavors" of ice cream to be had within; which, by the way, was spotlessly clean, bright and comfortable.

The man who caused this futuristic emporium to be constructed was Howard Johnson. The enterprise would eventually expand into a nationwide chain of restaurants and hotels.

More than once I drove the fifty miles to Howard Johnson's, just to spend a few leisurely minutes in one of the booths, with a friend

or two, over a delicious sundae or banana split. What better way to spend a muggy Sunday afternoon?

Several of my friends now owned a car. Billy Shattuck had a 1930s vintage, maroon-and-black, two-seater Chevrolet, and always kept it neat and polished (a mirror of his own image). Bob Johnson, who was a class ahead of us in school, also had a Chevy, an early thirties model coupe with a rumble seat. Bobby was not as fastidious as Billy, and worried less about the car's looks than about how much fun he was having with it. He could often be seen buzzing around town, kicking up dust, with two other kids in the front seat and two or three more in the rumble.

Owning an automobile during the war did have its drawbacks, though. Keeping it in tires was a major challenge. From 1942 until almost 1945 tires of any kind were as scarce as hen's teeth. A new tire was unheard of, at least for a non-essential vehicle. Flat tires were commonplace. It was probably a good thing that our winding, rural roads would not accommodate fast driving, because more often than not we were riding on exposed tire cord. When a hole wore all the way through the cord, a "boot" (usually a piece of an older tire) was inserted between the hole and the inner-tube.

Troubling, too, were overheated engines and radiator boil-overs. Cooling systems were not pressurized in those days, and were not very efficient. In the wintertime, alcohol was added to the water in the radiator to keep it from freezing, and with its lower boiling temperature it was even more prone to boiling over. (The recently developed ethylene-glycol coolant was extremely scarce and extremely expensive.)

Almost no one changed the oil or greased the fittings on his own car. You had it done at a garage or gas station. (The cost of labor was still cheaper than that of the product.)

The price of gas was about 18¢/gallon, roughly equivalent to that of four candy bars. That wasn't too hard for a boy to handle, even working for a minimum 50¢/hour wage. (Note that gasoline is cheaper today, relative to earnings, than it was then.) And when our gas ration was cut to two gallons a week, its cost was the least of our worries.

Bobby Johnson, while very athletic, tended toward the rotund. He was a jovial fellow, ever grinning, ever witty, ever ready with a joke or an aside.

We called him "Mert," for the reason explained below.

"Fibber McGee and Molly" was a popular radio program at the time. One of the show's running gags began with Fibber's ringing-up an operator to make a telephone call. When she answered, he would rattle off, "Oh, hello Mert.... How's every little thing Mert?" and so on. Bobby, who was prone to repeat popular words and phrases, parroted Fibber's greeting so often we began calling him Mert and the moniker stuck.

Mert was dating Ruthie Dawe (whom he would ultimately marry). She was then a counselor at a youth camp in Winchendon, a small town some thirty miles east of Northfield. It was through Mert and Ruthie that I got to know Louise, a cute, curly haired Winchendon girl who was also a camp counselor. We double-dated.

Then one time I drove my Ford to Winchendon, alone, to see Louise. That trip would almost "do me in."

I left home on a Sunday morning, drove through the sleepy towns of Orange and Athol, and arrived at the camp around lunch time. At the main building - a big forest green shed with fold-out panels and counters where cold drinks and hot dogs were being dispensed to a bunch of kids - I found Louise and Ruthie. They insisted on my eating and drinking, which I did, then I wandered around until they completed their duties.

We lazed around all afternoon, playing games, sipping cokes in the shade, chatting and so on. In the evening, after the kids were all tucked away for the night, the counselors (who represented both sexes) plugged-in a portable electric phonograph and played the latest popular tunes for dancing. Louise tried to teach me some dance steps, but I succeeded in convincing her that we should just sit and listen to the music, talk and get better acquainted.

One of the tunes we heard that night was "Every Little Breeze Seems to Whisper Louise," sung by Maurice Chevalier. It couldn't have been more appropriate. It was as if the lyrics were written for my personal use in courting my new friend.

I had a great time and was in high spirits and wide awake when I left Winchendon sometime around midnight. But by the time I got to Route-63 and Northfield Farms I was tired. And then I hit a fog bank, the kind that typically forms in the river valley at night. It was particularly dense. Even with the headlights on low beam they reflected as if from a solid wall. The black pavement was invisible. I relied on the dashed-white center line to guide me, and drove astraddle it at no more than twenty miles-per-hour. Luckily, there was no traffic. I hadn't seen another car in miles.

The all-enveloping fog, the droning of the car's engine, the shtook-shtook-shtook of the windshield wiper swinging like a pendulum before my eyes, all contributed to my drowsiness.

("Highway hypnosis," it would later be described).

Suddenly, abruptly, frighteningly, I was startled into wide awake consciousness when, not forty-feet away and directly ahead, the near end of a line of concrete posts (the highway guard fence) loomed white and bright against the black of night on the left side of the highway. And it was getting closer rapidly!

With no time for conscious action I instinctively steered to the right; enough, I hoped, to miss the fence but not so much as to cause the car to roll over. But when the sound of flying gravel reached my ears, I braced for the inevitable crash.

But there was no crash. Nor a rollover. The Ford missed the fence and didn't roll. How lucky can you get? My heart was pounding unmercifully but I was back on the road and safe.

In the immediate aftermath of that narrow escape I was again startled. This time by a loud voice exclaiming, "Well, Phelps, I hope you're satisfied!"

It was my own voice, of course, but "satisfied?" With what? I have no idea why those particular words came out, unless it was my conscience chiding me for driving when I should have been stopped beside the road, resting. Well, I was certainly wide awake now.

I thought of my brother Frank, of what must have gone through his mind in the last few seconds of his life, and of how perilously close I had come to a similar end.

"No," I answered my own question, "I'm not satisfied."

Not with my actions. But I was certainly thankful to God for sparing my life for another day.

In the fall, around Halloween time, I would take my first tour to Cape Cod. Irma Broun, whose aunt lived in Eastham, wished to see the elderly lady and had no trouble convincing me to drive her down there for a visit. Irma would pay the expenses, gas and food on the road, and we'd lodge with her aunt. By saving and borrowing gas-ration coupons, we managed to accumulate enough for the journey.

We took SR-2 east to Boston, bypassed the bustling city and travelled through a sparsely populated area to the Cape Cod Canal. (The canal, which connects Cape Cod Bay with Buzzards Bay, severs the arm of the cape at its shoulder, making a virtual island of the long peninsula.) There, just off the approach to the northernmost bridge over the ditch, we paused for a breather.

It was just sundown, and in a few minutes we were treated to the most spectacular moonrise I'd ever seen. Just to the left of the big iron bridge it rose out of the sea, full and round and of the deepest orange hue imaginable. Having never before seen the moon over an ocean I at first thought it to be a distant fireball of some kind. Irma chuckled at my naiveté. She'd witnessed the phenomenon many times. And then, reluctantly, we took up the last thirty-five miles of our journey.

Irma's Aunt Bessie Penniman lived in the house that had belonged to her father (Irma's grandfather), a turn-of-the-century Yankee sea captain who had sailed the seven seas and visited ports-of-call around the World. The house reflected his profession. It was a big, square, two story affair with a mansard roof and a tall cupola, the latter from which the Captain's wife could look to the sea in anticipation of his returning ship.

Irma pointed to a sandy driveway. I drove onto it and stopped the car before a gate in front of the house. The yellow glow from a lamp silhouetted lacy curtains outlining a window on the first floor of the otherwise dark edifice. A shaft of moonlight reflected off the slate roof above. Mist, rising from the nearby bay, swirled around us as we walked beneath a Gothic arch (the jawbones of a whale) over the walkway. I shivered, not only because of the chilly night air but also because the place looked as if it were haunted. I half expected to be greeted by witches and hobgoblins.

A light appeared behind the beveled glass of the front door. With a squeak the door swung open to reveal a small, gray-haired lady holding a shawl over her sloping shoulders. Aunt Bessie fondly greeted her niece, and then held out a thin pale hand to me. Shyly I took the hand and said "Hello," then followed the two of them into the kitchen.

There, next to a cooking range, were a small oilcloth-covered table and four hardwood chairs. Bessie motioned us to be seated, then explained that, because of a problem with the furnace boiler, she'd been forced to spend most of her time in the kitchen. A new casting had been ordered, she said, but it had not yet arrived.

She served tea and cookies and plied Irma with questions. She told us about the German U-boat recently discovered offshore, not far from Eastham, and candidly admitted that she and her neighbors were pretty nervous about it. Furthermore, she went on, they were still recovering from the effects of a recent hurricane that had brushed the Cape. After hearing about her many and varied problems, I was kind of glad that I didn't live on the Cape.

I got a good night's sleep, though, and felt better about the place in the daylight. I joined Bessie and Irma at a breakfast of cranberry muffins, juice and coffee, served in a nook bathed in subdued sunlight. When our appetites were satisfied, Irma showed me the yard in back, which, except for a tiny patch of coarse grass, consisted of natural flowers, weeds and scrub brush, and lots of sand.

The house's pale yellow clapboards and green blinds were very much in need of new paint, but were otherwise in rood repair. A picket fence, also in need of paint, surrounded the front yard and the remnants of a vegetable garden to one side. But it was the gate, the jawbone gate, which I remember best. Bleached white from the elements it stood in stark contrast to the faded fence and house, and to the grays and browns of the autumn landscape.

Back inside, Bessie led a tour of the house. It was more a museum than a dwelling, I thought, for there were more foreign artifacts and memorabilia (one room was crammed full of exotica) than I'd ever before seen in one place. It struck me as the more remarkable considering the fact that it was all collected by one man. I was fascinated, and wished the old captain were alive to tell me about his adventures. And I wondered what might become of this vast collection in the future. (I would never know.)

Later, I drove Irma to the tip of the cape and Provincetown. There we walked through the deserted streets between equally deserted weather-beaten houses and shops, strolled along the hard-packed beach, picked up interesting bits of flotsam and seashells, and shivered in the cold nor'east wind. I marveled at the weathered lighthouse, and tried to imagine what it would be like to live there and tend its giant lamp - its rays so vital to mariners - on a year-round basis.

Oh, there were a few people around, hardy types who obviously loved the sea and were determined to eke out an existence in that barren place until the end of the war should come and tourists would return once more.

Armed with fond memories (but without tangible pictures since neither of us had a camera) we left land's-end, returned to Eastham and said farewell to Bessie. She pressed my hand warmly, kissed Irma good bye, and waved us away from her friendly corner of the world. The drive home was long and tiring and I suffered a severe headache, but the trip had proved well worth a little pain.

While I enjoyed my first visit to the coast, I must admit to a greater affinity for the mountains. Perhaps if I had been raised there amongst the salt and sand and smells of rotting fish and kelp, my druthers would have been different.

My first introduction to a real mountain was when I was just a little kid, when my father took us to Mount Monadnock in southern New

YANKEE-NEVADAN

Hampshire. It stood some 3,200' above sea level, 2,700' above the valley floor, and looked like a mountain should look: symmetrical shoulders extending upward to a wind-eroded granite peak. Easily recognizable from a distance, from any point of the compass, it was a landmark for woodsmen and airplane pilots.

To Father, who was born and raised within ten miles of it, Monadnock was an old friend. He led us up one of two or three existing trails, and at the summit pointed out and named the many lakes and villages below. The climb had not been easy, but it was an exhilarating experience that I would never forget.

My next Monadnock visit occurred many years later, in 1944 or 1945, when a bunch of us kids from The Northfield climbed to its top. There were six of us: Priscilla Lawrence, Leland Lawrence (Charlie's brother), Eugene Hutchinson, Muriel Dresser, Frieda Chase and me. We clambered over the smooth outcroppings of granite and posed on ledges for snapshots. We visited the man in the fire lookout, a hut at the very apex of the peak. Curious, I questioned him and was shown how to use the plane-table, to obtain azimuths to distant geographical features.

The day wore thin and we scampered down the trail, piled into Pris's Ford and went to Keene for dinner before returning home, tired but happy after the outing.

(Fate would decree that I should not return to Monadnock for over forty years.)

But that was not the only New Hampshire Mountain I'd visit in the forties. One fine Labor Day weekend, Dorothy and I "toured" the White Mountain region, a hundred miles farther north. The forests were still green as we wended our way through the Granite State's hilly highways, to beyond the little town of Plymouth and Franconia Notch. From there we took a steep, narrow road off to the right and wound up at a parking lot. Leaving the car, we hiked up a short trail and along a wooden trestle over a quiescent stream between massive, moss-covered rock walls. The Flume, as it was called, was purported to be the oldest natural tourist attraction in the country. On that particular day, however, there were but a dozen people on hand to enjoy its beauty.

Dottie and I visited other natural phenomena in the area, then drove northward again (on US-3) to a turnout where I got my first look at the Old Man of the Mountains. Probably the most recognizable feature in the state, the Old Man is an enormous outcropping of rock resembling the silhouette of a man's face. From the view point, I joined the ranks of thousands of sightseers to photograph it.

Proceeding north and east, we commenced to look for a town with a hotel or a motel room to rent for the night. We found none. Neither a town nor a room. So we decided to park alongside the highway and sleep in the Ford.

It was not a great way to spend the night. We had but one light blanket for cover and the temperature dropped to the cold side of comfortable. And sitting upright in the Ford Coupe was not exactly conducive to sleep, with or without frigid temperatures. Neither of us would admit to it but we were freezing. We couldn't outlast the night.

It was not yet dawn when we gave in to the elements and headed up the road again. My, but that blast from the hot-air heater felt good. Within a few minutes we quit shivering and began to feel as if we might survive, so we stopped beside the road for "breakfast." Dottie opened our bag of supplies and we shared some crackers and fruit.

When the sun finally topped the rim of the mountain, we drove on and soon located the road leading to our objective, the summit of Mt. Washington.

Mt. Washington, at 6,300' above sea level, is the highest point of land east of the Connecticut River. It is probably the most formidable mountain peak in the eastern United States, and has claimed title to high-wind and low-temperature records in historic times.

In the 1940s there were only two ways to get to the top: on foot up one of several trails, or by motor vehicle on the one and only access road. Because of our limited timetable, and because we weren't about to take such an ambitious hike, we chose the latter.

In fact the road was ours alone that morning, a condition attributable to the season and the fact that it was wartime. The little Ford's 60-hp engine really labored on the steep incline, but we made it to the top without mishap; and while the sun was still low in the east. I drove the car onto the only level area there, parked it and heaved a sigh of relief. We climbed out, stretched our cramped arms and legs, and like cold blooded creatures tried to soak up the sun's warm rays. It felt good, but even the sunshine was not enough to counter the cold wind then sliding over that ridgepole of the world, where natural depressions in the granite ledges contained solid ice.

Dottie looked at me and laughed. "No wonder we were so cold last night," she said, pulling her light windbreaker jacket close about her.

Our attentions were drawn to the "observatory," two or three low buildings of rock-masonry and wood with connecting "tunnels" for passing from one to another in inclement weather. All of the manmade structures on the peak - buildings, radio antenna masts, wind vanes and anemometers - were restrained by guy wires anchored in ledge rock.

We found no indication that there was anyone in the observatory, and concluded that we were indeed alone. If there were anyone inside, he must have been fast asleep.

At the western edge of the summit we looked down upon the old, rusty, cog railway track that dropped off at a dizzying angle to the depths of the shadows below. The "good old days," when that unique form of transportation hauled the rich and famous to and from the top of the mountain, were long gone.

The wind grew sharp and we finally, mutually, agreed that it was time to leave. But not before I climbed atop the highest rock and surveyed all 360-degrees of the horizon. In the distance to the southeast, a myriad of glacial lakes glinted in the sunlight. Somewhere over there, hidden from view by an autumn haze, lay the Atlantic Ocean. To the south I made out the shape of Monadnock. Turning toward the west I saw the far-off profile of Vermont's Green Mountains. Canada was just sixty miles away in the north, but I could recognize none of its features.

YANKEE-NEVADAN

I daydreamed that one day I might work in a place like this, high above the majority population of the animal kingdom. Maybe I'd become a meteorologist, and be assigned to this very mountaintop.

(Though not as a weather observer, in the not too distant future I would indeed work on mountaintops; some as inhospitable as Mt. Washington, all standing higher above sea level.)

Once again ensconced in the Ford, that wonderful steel-and-glass, climate controlled conveyor of people, we headed down the road. It seemed a lot steeper than when I'd driven up, and I was more than a little concerned. I remembered a piece of advice that Stanley had once given to me, to "always drive downhill in the same gear or a lower one than you drove up in." I shifted down to the lowest gear. Even at that I had to use the brakes.

We'd gone only a short distance when, to my utter surprise and momentary panic, the gearshift lever popped into the neutral position and the car speeded up at an alarming rate. Reacting quickly I literally stood on the brake pedal, shoved in the clutch pedal and managed, with a loud mashing of gears, to shift the thing back into low gear. (The transmission had never before slipped out of gear. I guess it was an indication of the steepness of the Mt. Washington road.)

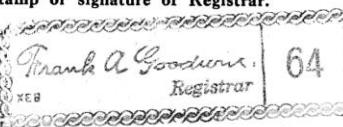
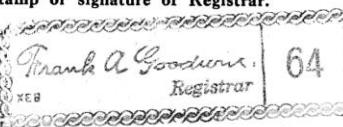
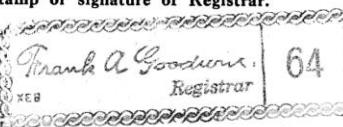
I had to admire my sister, who never showed a sign of fear as we careened around a downhill curve. Had I been in her place, overlooking the steep side of the mountain with no roadside guard rails to offer a feeling of security, I'd have been really scared.

From that time on, over nearly the whole of the seven-miles to the valley floor, we took turns holding down the shifting lever to keep it from jumping out of gear.

Back in civilization once more we found a place to eat and hungrily devoured a meal. And then we headed through the mountains for home.

Most of the winding, narrow, bumpy roads we travelled that day have since been widened, smoothed and straightened to accommodate hordes of post-war tourists. And where there were once only forest-ranger camps and a few hotels and gas stations, in addition there are now formal campgrounds, motels, restaurants and souvenir stands. Mt. Washington summit itself is now a very different place (I have read), hosting more sophisticated structures and many more people. Even the violent winds and pounding snows of Canadian-Arctic storms are not enough to keep recreationists and scientists from cluttering the heights of one of Mother Nature's most venerable mountain peaks.

YANKEE-NEVADAN

 <p>DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS Registry of Motor Vehicles 100 Nashua St. Boston, Mass.</p>		<p>LICENSE TO OPERATE No</p> <p>MOTOR VEHICLES</p> <p>Date May 2 1944</p>																						
<p>412</p> <p>George A Phelps 179 Main St E Northfield</p>																								
<p>Is hereby licensed to operate Motor Vehicles in accordance with the Laws of Massachusetts → subject to any restriction written below.</p>																								
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George A Phelps

Signature:

**CHAPTER FIFTEEN
BUSY TIMES**

I was more than a little saddened when I learned that my boss, Luman Barber, was going to sell the store. Frank Britton, Leroy Barnes and I were taking a break behind the meat counter, eating crackers-and-peanut butter (as was our habit) when he broke the news.

Oh no! I thought. Is he joking? Luman was not above telling stories, but this time, he assured us, he was speaking the truth. It would be a while until the details were ironed out, but he wanted us to know the fact before hearing it elsewhere. The new owner, a man from out of town but whom he wouldn't name, was to take over the business intact, including us employees. That was reassuring. Still it was hard to imagine working at the IGA for someone other than Luman. He seemed a part of the establishment. Its only owner that I could remember and I would really miss him.

A few years before I knew him, Luman was involved in an adventure that became legendary. It happened during the "Great Flood of 1936" but at the time I didn't know the whole story. The details may have gotten skewed in the interim, but following is an account of the story as told to me in the forties:

In 1936, while operating the IGA store in East Northfield, Luman lived in Bernardston and commuted the seven miles each way every day. When the Connecticut River inundated the Great Meadow, covering the roads and bridge approaches, he was essentially trapped on the Northfield side. Not to be thwarted, Luman decided to cross the river on the Central Vermont railroad trestle, an iron, cantilevered structure supported by a half-dozen granite piers and whose top was, hopefully, high above the flood waters. He took up the telephone, called his wife and explained the plan.

She should drive from Bernardston to West Northfield, to the end of the trestle, and wait for him. He and another man (whose identity I've forgotten) would drive to the east end of the bridge and walk across it on the tracks.

Luman's wife, Edna (possibly accompanied by the other man's wife), drove through the torrential rainstorm and arrived at the bridge just before dark, there to await with anxiety the coming of her husband.

Luman locked-up the store and proceeded with his part of the plan. He and his partner reached the water's edge near the home of the Holloways (which was flooded) just as darkness fell. They put on raincoats and hats, took flashlights in hand, climbed the slippery, muddy banks of the railroad right-of-way, found the steel rails and followed them, stumbling over the ties as they went, toward the bridge itself. Through the curtain of rain, the dim glow of headlights a long 500-yards away, was barely visible. But it was enough to spur them onward.

The roar of the wind and rushing water and pounding ice was deafening. Any attempt at conversation was futile. They paused, at the point where the tracks left the land and the trestle began, looked at one another for reassurance and went on, their flashlight beams stabbing at the darkness.

Now, beneath their feet, were only ties, iron, air and water. Mostly water. Walking on that throbbing, grinding thing must have tested their mettle, and they must have wondered at the wisdom of their decision to try the crossing.

They had gone but a short way out over the swirling river when Luman's partner tugged at his sleeve, shouted an inaudible admonition, motioned to the rear, turned around and headed back. Luman hesitated. He, too, thought it might be wise to go back. But there was no way to signal his intentions to his wife and if he didn't show up at the other side she would be devastated. So he moved forward again, Lilliputian in the midst of The Furies.

He must have gained about a quarter of the distance across when he suddenly stopped short. He sensed impending danger (he said later), or was it just fear. His field of vision, limited to the glow from his simple flashlight, prevented his seeing anything to indicate trouble; the incessant rumbling precluded his hearing anything meaningful; but a power beyond the scope of human intellect had sent an unmistakable warning. With a final, wistful glance at those "beacon lights" ahead, so near and yet so far, he turned and ran (as fast as possible with a limp) to the rear.

Just as Luman gained the land a booming, gnashing, rending, rumbling cacophony began. At his feet the tracks, ties and all, moved sideways. He leapt clear of them and watched in awe as they slid over the bank into deep water.

But he was safe, as was his partner who had made it back well ahead of him.

What the two of them could hear, but could not see in the black of night, was the trestle being swept away by the flood.

It was afterward concluded, at least by the town's most able, that a tobacco barn lodged against the bridge had delivered the final blow. The trestle was forced from its piers and, as it swung downstream into the river, two-hundred yards of trackage from the roadbed went with it.

Across the river, Luman's wife must have been horror stricken. Illuminated by her car's headlights the trestle (except for the closest span which remained intact) suddenly disappeared. She had no way of knowing whether or not her husband was on the sinking bridge, and could only hope and pray that he was not.

Luman and his partner moved out as fast as they could. He just had to get across the river now, to find his wife and reassure her that he was still alive. He drove south on muddy back roads, circumventing flooded streets and highways, reached the relatively new French King Bridge about ten miles downstream, crossed and found a way back up to West Northfield. Happily reunited with his wife, the ordeal was over.

While I was not aware of Luman's adventure in 1936, I was well aware of the bridge's demise. Right after we moved to Northfield, Raymond and I hiked the half mile from our home to see it. (I was fearful of the place and would never have gone without him.) The trestle more than anything resembled a drowned, prehistoric serpent, its tail the torn-up tracks from the roadbed, still tied to the twisted, submerged hulk in the river.

Cautiously we climbed onto the girders and out over the edge of the putrid water. Sensing the vibrations, caused by strong currents flowing through the skeleton below, I quickly returned to firm ground. And Ray was close behind me.

I remember our looking closely at the granite abutment, and seeing where huge hunks of steel had been pried loose from wrist-sized bolts. The bolts had been ripped, like buttons from a shirt, from the solid rock, and appeared as if cut by an acetylene torch. I picked up one of them (2-inches in diameter with its nut still attached) for a souvenir, a reminder of that awful happening.

On our way back to the house, Raymond made me promise to never go to the trestle alone, nor tell Mama that we'd been there at all. I kept the second part of the vow, but when the bridge builders moved in and went to work Roger and I met the Holloway boys, who had returned to their home, found a vantage point on the hill above the railroad and watched with interest the steam-operated pile drivers and derricks at work.

The men, unable to resurrect a part of the submerged trestle, left it to rust and rot in the mud at the bottom of the river. The new bridge spans, set on the original granite piers and joined to the undisturbed west span, were higher above water than the old ones had been. Perhaps that would be of benefit if another tobacco barn should come bearing down upon it in a future flood.

When the bridge builders had finished and gone, we kids made nervous forays across the new trestle on foot. I was always fearful of falling between the ties and down to a watery grave, or of being caught in the middle when a train came along.

But that was back in the days when I lived on Meadow Street, when I was still "just a little kid."

Within a couple of weeks of Luman's announcement that he was quitting the business, the new owner, Melvin Morgan, showed up at Store. He and his family moved into the south apartment upstairs.

Melvin, or Mel, was not of the Northfield Morgans (who were descendants of the original town's settlers) but hailed from upstate Vermont some place. He was a big man, probably on one side or the other of age forty. He was loud and brusque in manner, but was, I would learn, at the same time kindly and good natured.

When he took over, Mel wisely made very few changes in the store's operation. And after getting used to his style I would find him a good man to work for.

Mel's petite wife, Helen, was his opposite in temperament. I sometimes wondered how she could put up with his coarse ways but they apparently complemented one another. She did most of the bookkeeping, and after they got settled into their new home she spent a few hours each day in the store; cleaning glass, sweeping floors, waiting on customers. The prim ladies of town, oftentimes shocked by Mel's remarks, preferred to have Helen wait on them.

And then there was Evelyn (Evie to us), the Morgans' young daughter. She was perhaps a year my junior, had lovely, shining blond hair, her mother's twinkling eyes and tender smile, and her father's self-assurance. She was an only child, had suffered a bout of rheumatic fever (that purportedly left her with a weak heart) and her parents were very solicitous of her.

In all honesty, Evie was a very beautiful girl. She could have modeled for a Varga calendar; for any month of the year. I found it extremely difficult to concentrate on the job when she was around. Unfortunately, for me, she was also a terrible flirt. Mel seemed amused by her teasing and my obvious embarrassment, and offered comments designed to heighten my discomfort.

It was probably my imagination, but it seemed as if Mel wanted me to date his daughter. I thought it a very unwise thing to do and tried to avoid even the thought of it. But my perception was proven correct when he offered me ration stamps and cash for gas if I'd take her to a movie in Greenfield. Giving in to the overwhelming temptation, I accepted his offer.

Evie was wearing a light chiffon dress, a white crocheted stole and a single, white daisy in her hair when I met her at the apartment door. I was ecstatic at the prospect of squiring such a beauty that summer evening, but at the same time wondered how the old man could trust his only daughter with me. Or for that matter, me with her.

Mel and Helen bid us the traditional "Be good," and on my way out the door Mel slipped a five dollar bill into my hand.

The ride to Greenfield was filled with animated, if not trivial, conversation. We went to the Garden Theater and found seats in the balcony. From then on, for all I cared, the screen could have been blank. My total attention was to my date. When the lights came up I knew the movie was over and we left. I took her to a favorite cafe on Main Street, for ice cream sundaes and Cokes, and then headed for home via Route Two and the old Gill road, the least travelled way I could think of.

It was only natural that I felt a compulsion to pull off the highway at the Turners Falls Dam overlook, the moon being big and bright and shining across the impounded lake. The dam itself, and the bridge above it, were but silhouettes. There was virtually no traffic on the highway. Everything was working out right. Here was the perfect place, the perfect night, the perfect time and the perfect girl for spooning.

Within a half hour, however, I learned exactly why Mr. Morgan had entrusted his daughter to my care. She may have been pretty and witty

and a flirt, but she had complete control over her emotional senses. She laughed and joked and cajoled and adroitly fended off my most ardent advances. In the end I surrendered, resorted to simple conversation, drove her home and bid her a hasty goodnight.

After that date, Evie and I got along much better. We both knew where we stood. She stopped teasing me and kept a proper, yet friendly, distance, and her father quit hinting that I should take her out.

Mel seemed to have a lot of confidence in my work, for he let me use my own judgment around the store. He'd let me know if there was something special to be done but seldom told me how to do it.

Now that I had a driver's license I did most of the home delivery work; from filling orders to depositing them on the customers' kitchen tables. I loved every minute of it. Daylight or dark, rain or snow, it was always fun. Well, nearly always.

One aspect of the job, reminiscent of one of my home chores, was not so pleasant. That of delivering kerosene. Most people in those days had their kerosene delivered 50-gallons at a time, pumped from a Dunnell Fuel Company truck into a drum at their premises. But a few little-old-ladies ordered the stuff from the store, a gallon or five-gallons at a time. Each of our delivery trucks was equipped to carry up to five cans, in special racks on the rear bumper and side running-boards. But hauling kerosene was a messy job, and careful handling was required to avoid contaminating the groceries.

Our delivery trucks were Fords, two of them, both relatively new; that is, they were some of the last ones manufactured before the wartime curtailment (vintage 1939 or 1940). They were ordinary pickup trucks modified for the job; a roof over the bed, leather curtains that could be rolled down in stormy weather. The grocery baskets (described above) were stacked one on top of the other, sometimes almost to the roof, and it was common to carry three to five cans of kerosene per trip.

Saturday was the big day for grocery deliveries, and I usually worked from eight in the morning till after eight at night, with meals eaten on the run. Less often, but not uncommonly, I'd still be making home visits at ten o'clock.

In the wintertime I had to wrestle with tire chains, shovel my way out of a ditch, lug a fifty pound crate of goods through knee-deep snow to a house a hundred yards from the road. During the summer months I contended with torrential rainstorms and 95-degree heat. But the patrons were generally sympathetic and kindly, even if I was late with their order. Some benevolent customers offered monetary tips or tasty edibles for my troubles. One silver-haired lady, who lived a ways back from Birnam Road, invariably treated me to a fresh-baked chocolate éclair or cream puff. Others proffered pieces of pie or cake and a beverage of some kind. I accepted the handouts willingly and with appreciation.

There was one house, though, which I just hated to visit. It was a tiny, white frame house in East Northfield, inhabited by two old sisters of Irish lineage who obviously took exception to fresh air. Furthermore, they must have been exceptionally fond of boiled cabbage, for never once did I enter their home that it didn't reek of its

YANKEE-NEVADAN

nauseating (to me) odor. I would take a deep breath before entering the house and try to hold it until I'd unloaded all the groceries. But of course it was impossible. To make a bad situation worse, the ladies would engage me in conversation. I'd have to mumble and excuse myself as being late and hurry away.

And so it went. I continued to learn and earn in my new boss's employ. When school was out, and I was able to put in a full week, I made \$25.00. (In Massachusetts, stores were prevented by law from doing business on Sunday.) I actually worked more than eight hours on most weekdays, and at least twelve on Saturday. But Mel, as had Luman Barber, provided fringe benefits. I got to take home some of the aging produce and goods in damaged containers.

All things considered, I received ample compensation for my work. Wages, education, groceries, and most of all esteem.

The student body of Northfield High School diminished in size in the early 1940s, from 1941 through the end of the war, when scores of boys left town to serve in the Army or Navy. The final list of patriots would number over a hundred-and-fifty; a large number, I thought, for a town of approximately 2,000 men, women and children.

As freshmen, we had been a class of a couple-of-dozen shiny faced boys and girls. Over the next four years some would leave our hallowed halls in favor of the Seminary or Mt. Hermon, some would quit and go to work for a living, some would move away with their parents. Others, Carl Stone, Lee Hammond, Dave Bates and Paul Gorzocoski among them, would "join up" to fight for our country. As a consequence, ours would be a very small and close-knit group by graduation time.

In spite of my extracurricular activities and distractions - violin playing, job occupations, an automobile - I became involved in several school functions. As freshmen, Neil, Billy and I took part in "The Lazy Moon Minstrels" show. As juniors, when we were a class of thirteen, the three of us acted in the play, "China Boy," a benefit for the seniors' class trip. Whether or not I attended the Junior Prom (who remembers?), it was reported to have been "Very pretty... especially so with the girls dressed up in their beautiful gowns.... Of course the male attendance was limited."

Our senior class presentation, for the benefit of our class trip, was "Rootin' Tootin' Ranch," a fun play with lots of Western cowboy songs. The production was directed by Miss O'Neil, who had been our junior class advisor. I did not perform in the play, but was a "stage tender."

At our Senior Dance, Shattuck's Orchestra, of which I was then a member, furnished the music.

It was the seniors who were traditionally responsible, with the help of lower classmen, for the production of the school paper, the N.H.S. REVIEW. In my junior year I found a comfortable niche on the staff as art editor. The title came with the job of designing covers for the almost-monthly periodical. My sister Betty, then a senior, was the business manager; her friend and classmate, Karlene Tyler, was the editor; Neil was the assistant editor.

The newspaper reported, quite reliably and responsibly, the news of all four classes but was naturally biased toward upper-classmen. Included in the production were such items as follows:

The results of war stamp sales, scrap metal and waste paper drives; student poems and essays; alumni news; reports of athletic events; critiques of school plays and musical shows; social calendars; pertinent and impertinent gossip. I designed the covers to be humorous, topical, or both.

I wrote a 100-word article for the February 1944 issue, titled "The Post War World as seen by G.A.P." In it I suggested that a "League of Nations of some kind" should be set up, but that I did "not, however, believe in setting forth democracy for all the countries of this world. This would make us a dictator," I emphasized. "Countries are different. Their habits are different...therefore their form of government might necessarily be different.... It is up to us to see that peace is made and MAINTAINED, but not for us to govern the world."

(After the war the "United Nations" would be established. The peace was made and we, the United States, were largely responsible for keeping it. However, contrary to my belief both then and now, our nation's leaders became extremely dictatorial in demanding that other countries adopt a democratic form of government.)

The "instant copier" of those days was the mimeograph machine. Widely used and popular for many years, at best it was cumbersome and slow, at worst, which was more common, it was messy and very unreliable. It was a diabolical device but of indispensable value.

Our production efforts were somewhat impeded by the fact that, because it was wartime, we were obliged to print the paper on cheap yellow stock (8.5" by 11"), the kind normally used for carbon or file copies. The cover was mimeographed on yellow card stock.

The 1944-1945 issues (Volume 8) were, on average, sixteen pages long and boasted the following names on the masthead: Rua Jones, editor in chief. George Phelps, assistant editor. Russell Roberts, assistant editor. June Cota, business manager. Barbara Chamberlain, assistant business manager.

At year's end we put together a yearbook, which, contrary to popular definition, contained absolutely no photographs. Only words. It was thirty pages of sagacious and humorous pieces contributed by almost everyone in the class. I was responsible for its cover. I also provided the "Advice to the Undergraduates" column, in which I admonished them to "relax...don't take the teachers seriously...make them earn their money," and other nonsensical stuff.

Helen Kozloski wrote the four-year class history; Norma Leach did a cheery piece about the times, and wrote a "Character Sketch" of each of us seniors; Neil - because someone had to do it - took the role of "Class Grouch"; June Cota wrote lyrics for a class song, did the "Last Will and Testament" and contributed her second-honors essay, "Blessings in Disguise," in which she described the many benefits resulting from wartime technology; Elizabeth Browning compiled the "Class Statistics"; Barbara Chamberlain and Ralph Bentley teamed up on

the "Prophecy"; Rua Jones provided her first-honors essay "Commencement Means Beginning."

Only Paul Gorzocoski (who officially graduated with us but had joined the Navy in May) and Billy Shattuck (for some reason unknown to me) were not "writers" in our yearbook.

Also reported in the annual: The baseball team completed the season with a 6-6 record, "an improvement over the previous year's results." Both Neil and Floyd Dunnel (a junior) compiled batting averages over .300 (.353 and .333 respectively). Floyd and Jerome Gingras (also an undergraduate) were principle pitchers. The girls' softball team racked up an impressive 6-1 record, including a win over the faculty team. I think Rua Jones was the team pitcher, and was credited with at least two home runs that year.

On the staff of the school paper I had found a new outlet for expression, a chance to draw and to write as opposed to standing up and performing in front of an audience.

Each of my high school teachers influenced my life in one way or another. For example, my Spanish teacher taught me the folly of paying more attention to her beauty and personality than to the subject at hand. Since I had done fairly well in Miss Austin's Latin class, I decided to try my luck at Spanish. It should be a snap, I thought, so I signed up.

I must admit that being in her classroom was a pleasure, if only to listen to her soft voice and appreciate her shapely figure. She invariably wore short skirts, silk hose and high heels, revealing her well-turned legs, and tight-fitting sweaters (a-la Lana Turner) which enhanced her other fine features. She was a friendly young woman, perhaps too much so for a high school teacher. If one was really motivated he could learn Spanish in her class. If he was inclined to goof-off, as I was, he was doomed to failure. As I was.

By midyear it was obvious that I was going to flunk the course, so I switched to a subject taught by a less-alluring teacher.

I remember Agnes Casey, a plain, red haired, sturdy-built Irish woman, for conducting the driver's training class and for repeatedly scolding me for being a "smart aleck." Fortunately, she had a pretty good sense of humor.

Esther (Morgan) Williams was a small, energetic, many-talented woman. She taught a class in music and singing, and among other things directed school plays. As a matter of interest, she was a descendant of the preacher, William Janes, of Northfield's first settlement.

George Leonard, a tall, slim, competent teacher and future school administrator, married Esther Williams (a young widow) in 1941. They were a wonderful pair, well married to each other and to their careers. Over the years they would contribute significantly to Northfield's educational, social and historical interests, leaving marks on the community that remained forever.

When Richard Cobb entered the military service, his position as principal of Northfield High was filled first by Mr. Currier, then by Chester Parker. Mr. Parker was the principal in 1945 when I graduated. In my opinion, neither Currier nor Parker was a particularly noteworthy educator.

On completing a class in algebra under Mr. Parker, I received a passing grade but hadn't learned the subject. I would not go so far as to indict him as a poor instructor, only that had he been a better one I might have assimilated more (in spite of myself).

I should point out that I never blamed a teacher for my poor grades, for I observed that the good students - June, Rua, Neil, Billy and others - did well whomever the teacher.

Another of my high school teachers, who first taught me in the fifth grade at Center School, was Mrs. Helen (Vorce) Thompson. I didn't realize it at the time but Helen was descended, through her mother, from the same preacher-ancestor as was Esther Leonard. Her father was the awesome, to me, Constable Martin Vorce.

Mrs. Thompson returned to teaching English, History and other high school subjects when her husband, Ray, went off to war in 1942. She may not have been as stern as Misses Austin and Lawley, but was equally concerned about her students. She was openly interested in our activities and enterprises, both in and out of school. And since she invariably turned a sympathetic ear to our adolescent problems, offering sage advice and counsel when prudent to do so, we came to look upon her as our "school mother."

As luck would have it, Mrs. Thompson became our senior class advisor. Our planning sessions (mostly discussions of various fund-raising events for our senior trip) were generally held in her classroom. But on at least one such occasion she invited us to her folks' home on south Main Street.

It turned out to be a combination meeting and social event. After disposing of the business agenda, we gathered around the piano in the spacious front room and sang songs: "The Old Spinning Wheel in the Parlor," "Deep in the Heart of Texas," "Whispering" and so on. Mrs. Thompson served cake and ice cream in the formal dining room, and then the party was over. But never forgotten.

My favorite subjects were probably physics, aeronautics and chemistry. I especially enjoyed using the tools and testing devices in the laboratory; mixing chemicals, experimenting with weights and measures and fulcrums, observing the effects of magnetism, air and electricity.

The study of geometry was stimulating but I couldn't remember all those theorems. Geography and History were very enlightening. I really dug into those subjects. As for the study of Latin, I could appreciate the end result but it was dull getting there. Perhaps my easiest subject was biology. Not that I enjoyed fooling around with the specimens, but developing an illustrated notebook was fun. I received my best grades in biology.

Paradoxically, I was eager to learn and store a lot of knowledge in my brain but I thought the process far too tedious. In truth, I was a lazy student. If I found it impossible to complete my homework in study period, it went undone. It was this aversion to homework that led to a life-long practice of using the printed, rather than cursive, style of writing.

Many subjects, particularly the sciences, required the keeping of a notebook. It was customary for a student to take copious notes in class, and then, for homework, summarize the information in the

notebook, either typed or printed. Most of us, without access to a typewriter, hand printed the data.

I soon tired of the drudgery involved. Taking notes then later transcribing them seemed redundant and awfully wasteful of time and energy. So I began taking notes in their final, printed form during class. I learned to print as fast as I could write, and a lot more legibly, and abandoned Rhinehart's "Functional Handwriting System" (except when taking the writing test). From that time on I printed exclusively.

My notebooks turned out to be my best school works, perhaps demonstrating a penchant for organization and neatness in my life.

It must have been embarrassing for my sister Betty, who had consistently made the honor roll, to have to claim such a poor student for a brother. Even Bobby, who was then in grade school, occasionally made the honors list.

Family and teachers alike were critical of my attitude toward school. "You have the potential to do better," they said.

I knew that, but it made no difference.

As a senior in high school, in my twelfth and final year of formal education, my grades were worse than ever. I received ten Bs, eleven Cs, five Ds and only four As. Barely passable marks on average. I was listed as tardy some seventeen times and was probably late twice as many more. I was absent fifteen days that year.

My absences were legitimate, though, if my tardiness was not. There were mornings when, suffering a painfully sore throat, I found it impossible to drag myself to school. I'd smear Vaporub or Musterole on my throat, wrap it with a cloth and literally try to sweat it out. I'd swallow Pertusen or some other patent medicine, but nothing worked for long. Bed rest helped the most, and in a day or two I'd get back to school. But I could never really catch up, especially without doing any homework.

(Unknown to me, I was suffering from chronic tonsillitis.)

It was traditional for the senior class of Northfield High School to take a trip to Washington, D.C., a sojourn intended to provide both education and fun. However, for reasons of national security, trips to our nation's capital were cancelled "for the duration." So our Class of '45' made plans to visit the city of New York. It was for that journey that we planned and worked and put on plays, musicals, skits and dances to raise funds. We looked forward with eagerness to when we would trade a few days in Northfield for an equal number in the metropolis.

The class and Eugene Hutchinson (who would not graduate with us but was still "one of the gang") assembled at the Brattleboro railroad station on the still-wintry morning of Saturday, February the 17th, 1945. Our chaperones were Mrs. Thompson and Mr. Parker.

Because Billy Shattuck and I were scheduled to play for a dance that night, we would make our way to The City the following day. But we were at the station to see the others off.

Our train ride down the Connecticut River Valley, my first experience on the rails, was pleasant enough, although a lot more noisy and rough than I'd expected. It was a thrill to hear the wailing

whistle, the chuff-chuffing of the big steam engine, the rhythmic clackety-clack of the wheels on the track, and the rise-and-fall (in pitch) of the signal bells at road crossings.

In due time the train slowed to a final stop and deposited us passengers, like whitefish spilling out of a net, on the platform at Grand Central Station. Suitcases in hand, Billy and I were swept along with the tide of travelers to the immense terminal building. I was overwhelmed by the enormity of the place, and by the hundreds of unsmiling faces in the crowd. Worried, hurried and harried, we made our way through to the street, where we hailed a taxicab for our first of many wild rides.

Almost immediately I noted that the streets were filled with none but taxicabs and trucks. Our driver, overhearing my remark, offered, "Only a fool or a tourist drives his own car here,"

We found the rest of our gang comfortably ensconced at the Hotel Taft; girls on the second floor, boys on the third. To our surprise, we also found that both Miss Austin and Miss Lawley were there. They had come to share with us the sights and sounds of the city. Billy and I were soon moved in and settled.

Over the course of the next few days we did virtually everything that a tourist was supposed to do, at least everything that a minor could do and hope to get away with. Our days, evenings, and sometimes our nights were whirlwinds of events, starting with a tour of the Bronx Zoo where we ogled its vast collection of exotic animals. (We were not allowed to ogle the city's exotic dancers.)

We took the ferry from The Battery to Bedloe's Island and the Statue of Liberty. What an ingenious melding of art and engineering, I mused, as I climbed the interior iron stairway (some of the girls claimed it made them dizzy) to the top of the famous lady's head. From that grand vantage point, through rain-stained windows, we viewed the ship filled, mightiest harbor in the world.

Quite a lot of our time was spent at Rockefeller Center, where we gobbled down hot dogs and watched dozens of happy skaters on the ice rink; saw Ed Wynn doing a radio broadcast; took in the "Hats Off to Ice" show; and zipped breathlessly up the express elevator (with a pretty, short-skirted tour guide) to an observation platform seventy stories above street level. It struck me, as it did everyone, that the cars and people below looked like tiny animated models. Before leaving, Eugene tossed a couple of pennies over the rail to infinity, the price of a stern reprimand from our guide.

The weather was quite chilly when we all took a walk through Central Park (June and I hand-in-hand). I hadn't expected to see so much greenery in the very center of the city but I was favorably impressed. Some of us stopped off at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Never had I seen so many pieces of fine art in one place, and I vowed to return one day for a better look.

In the movie theater, where "Objective Burma" (starring Errol Flynn) was showing, Eugene "aced" me out of a seat beside June. (We were both vying for her affections at the time.)

There was a myriad of things to see in the city; modern devices ("lazy man things," Paul called them) such as the escalator, elevator and revolving door. And there was the automat, where a nickel in a

YANKEE-NEVADAN

slot got you a prefabricated sandwich, and the arcade, where a penny in a slot got you a five-minute peep show.

When at the hotel we beat a path up and down the back stairway between the girls' and boys' rooms. When caught running the course a hotel detective (there were such people in those days) gave us a stern lecture.

"Y'wanna play aroun'...do it quiet," he said, "or I'll turn yez in." We "did it quiet" from then on.

The girls had snacks in their rooms, including, of all things, milk to drink, toast and sardines to eat. Sometimes we all gathered in one of their rooms to sample the refreshments, to sit around and talk, to tell jokes and relive the events of the day. A couple of times we got kind of rowdy, as kids are prone to do, and I was surprised that the hotel management put up with it. In truth, however, we never abused the property.

To kill time, and often instead of sleeping, we played cards or other games. I played chess with Mrs. Thompson until she beat me badly, then I conned June into playing. I felt better when I checkmated her queen.

Despite the fun we had in the city I would not be dissuaded from my opinion of New Yorkers, in general. Almost without exception service oriented people - taxi drivers, bellhops and waitresses - were rude. When crossing the street you took your life in your hands, even if the signal was in your favor. On checking in the bellhop did little to earn a tip, and when tipped never even said thanks. At the restaurant one could die of starvation waiting to be served.

Of course there was a lesson to be learned in all this: "The more people are crowded together the less apt are individuals to be congenial." And a logical explanation goes along with the lesson: It is, after all, one thing to smile and say "Hello" to everyone you meet in a town the size of Northfield; quite another to practice that custom on a crowded sidewalk in New York City.

Four or five days of that life proved to be sufficient for most of us and we were glad, on the 22nd, to be on our way home, a much subdued group of youngsters to say the least. The Pullman seats were conducive to sleep, and most of us took advantage of that commodity. In between naps, Eugene and I "entertained" our unappreciative peers with quips and chatter. Eventually even we wound down, down from what was our first and possibly last (who could know?) big fling.

After our New York trip, the few weeks of remaining school slipped by much faster than I had anticipated. Spring was very much in evidence, particularly on the baseball field where the team practiced afternoons, and on the greening south lawn where couples met to "study" in the warm sun.

It was the season when a young man's fancy turned to thoughts of love, and June had by now obtained a firm hold on my heart. Actually, June had a good influence on me in those closing days of school, motivating me to "dig in." I studied hard, determined, at that late date, to make a passing grade. I just had to graduate. Not only for reasons of personal pride but also to prove to June that I could do it.

As a class, our whole attention turned toward the graduation ceremony. On the night of June 15, 1945, the exercises commenced on stage at the Northfield Town Hall. (The hall in which our eighth-grade class, much larger than this one, had celebrated "commencement" in 1941.)

There was not a big crowd in attendance (how many relatives and friends can a class of eleven muster?), but it was an enthusiastic one. We marched up the aisle behind the Flag, which was proudly carried by Eugene Hutchinson, our class marshal.

We stood for the rendition of the "Star Spangled Banner," then were seated on folding chairs behind the faculty and speakers. Rev. Joseph Reeves (Congregational-Trinitarian minister) approached the lectern and offered a solemn invocation. Next, the Glee Club raised its clear, strong voice in a rendition of the popular "Song of Thanksgiving."

When June, our class salutatorian, delivered her essay, "Blessings in Disguise," I hung on her every word. She was confident and eloquent and I was proud of her. Then, with smooth and resonant tones, Neil played one of my favorite numbers, "Simple Aveu," on his trombone. The audience loved it.

A Dr. Shipherd [?] of Harvard University gave the commencement speech. I remember not a word of it. The Glee Club did a second number and Rua Jones recited her valedictorian address. It was a good piece and very well presented but I was not really listening. Instead, I was nervously anticipating my upcoming violin solo.

Tucking my violin under my arm, bow in hand, I strode toward the footlights; the same footlights I'd approached when performing with the Young Peoples Symphony and at school events. This would be my last appearance on that stage.

With Betty as my accompanist, I played the familiar Brahms "Hungarian Dance No. 6," one of my all-time favorite pieces. Judging by the applause it was a favorite of the audience as well. I grinned with satisfaction, bowed low and returned to my chair. At last I could relax. I'd had a good spot on the program; that is, at the height of it.

The rest of the ceremony was routine: Announcement of awards by Mr. Parker; awarding of Alumni prizes by Mrs. Leonard; presentation of diplomas by Robert N. Taylor, Superintendent of Schools. That didn't take long at all. We raised our collective voices in the class song, bowed our heads in benediction, and then slowly marched in recession to the reception at the rear of the hall. There were congratulations all round, and at long last, exodus; each to his own personal celebration.

Relieved that the program was over, bright-eyed and happy and filled with the sense of new beginnings, June and I left the hall together. We may have joined some of the others for a while, I don't remember. I do remember driving toward June's home in Northfield Farms and thinking, "It's too early to part just yet."

Apparently neither of us wanted the evening to end so soon, so I drove on south to the French King Bridge where I pulled off the highway at the west end, parked, took my favorite classmate in my arms and kissed her.

YANKEE-NEVADAN

June, when she caught her breath, suggested that we go for a walk. Holding hands we strolled to the center of the high bridge and back. Then we paused, where the lamplight turned June's soft blond hair to gold, to enjoy each other's company in silence.

There we were, just the two of us on that warm summer evening, standing at the threshold between adolescence and adulthood, between schoolroom and workplace, between the little town of Northfield and the whole rest of the world. I had never felt so good, and hoped that June shared my elation.

A foggy breeze wafted over the bridge. We returned to the car and cuddled close and talked, unmindful of the passage of time. Our conversation veered in many directions and covered a variety of subjects, some trivial in nature, some philosophical, some rather intimate. We reminisced about our school days, teachers and chums, discussed our individual plans and desires for the future.

There was no question, in my mind, that we were in love. Perhaps we would one day get married. But a guy can never know how a girl feels about such things. Besides, I sensed that June wanted to pursue a career, and I had already determined to never marry before age twenty-one.

It was a very romantic time and I fervently wished that the night could last forever. But inevitably, common sense prevailed and my dreams gave way to reality. I reluctantly started the motor and drove the short distance to June's home.

Shivering (was it really so cold?) I walked around the car, opened her door, escorted her to the porch, kissed her good night (or good morning), hurried back to my car and headed for home.

It was dawn of the first day of the rest of my life.

**CHAPTER SIXTEEN
WORLD WAR II WINDS DOWN**

Not long after I stayed with Charlie on Huckle Hill (back in the 1930s) he moved to a farm in Greenfield near the Green River. From there he went to work with Stan at Sheldegren Farm. On June 21, 1942, he married Florence Hale. It was a beautiful wedding, held at her folks' home in Northfield Farms. I remember the large crowd in attendance, the cake and refreshments, and the inevitable posing for pictures. The following year a daughter, Beverly, was born to the happy couple.

Farming was (and still is) a hazardous occupation and minor injuries were commonplace. Major injuries were not unusual, either. Charlie suffered a couple of serious accidents while farming, one of them when he lost his footing on a tractor and fell headfirst onto a big, iron-lugged drive wheel. His face was badly lacerated and he suffered other cuts and bruises. The doctors at the hospital did a good job of patching him up, but he was almost "done in" by an anti-tetanus shot.

Another time he was the intended victim of a swarm of angry honey bees. After being stung numerous times in the face, neck and arms, he succumbed to their poison and had to be hospitalized. How can one avoid bees on a farm?

Stanley, in the course of his working with farm machinery, also fell prey to injuries: spills, falls, broken ribs, knocks on the head, and one potentially crippling accident.

It was wintertime when that accident occurred, when Stan was cutting firewood in the hills at Sheldegren. He was using a power saw. (It was not a chain saw, that marvelous machine had not yet been perfected. It was a gas-engine-powered circular saw mounted on a frame that could be pushed and maneuvered into position for felling trees or cutting logs. For whatever reason, perhaps the saw kicked back or Stan slipped, the whirling blade cut through his trousers, through the flesh and muscle of his left leg to the bone. He managed to stop the bleeding, and with help made it to a hospital. A doctor spliced the tendons and arteries and vessels, sewed up the nasty wound, and in a short time Stanley was back on his feet.

(He would afterward claim that the leg was as good as new, but I noticed that he had a tendency to limp.)

Two more children joined the household of Stanley and Elsie in the forties: Curtis, in 1943, and Gary, in 1945. Dennis, Lois and June were now in grammar school.

Dick and Audrey had three children. Their only daughter, Abbie Isabelle, with a birth date in 1932, was older than her Uncle Bob. They also had two boys: Edward, born in 1935, and David, born in 1939. Sadly, when David was but four years old he became terribly ill and died. It was a terrible blow to Dick and Audrey.

When John was at Fort Devons, Massachusetts, for basic training, Gladys moved down to spend some time with him. When he was transferred to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, she followed him there. I'm not sure when he went overseas but in 1943, when their firstborn son arrived, Gladys came to live with us in East Northfield. She and baby Jason stayed several months, then moved to Skowhegan, Maine, to be with her parents.

Dorothy and I made a trip to Skowhegan, to visit. It was my first time in Maine. The landscape, especially along the seashore, was different from any that I had previously experienced. Skowhegan was a relatively small place; Gladys's folks were very outgoing and made us feel right at home.

Her father, a typical "Down-Easter," had something to do with the operation of a dam and a pumping station (as I recall). I was really impressed, when he gave us a tour of the place, with how spotlessly clean everything was. Even the floors were brightly polished. I wondered if I could someday get a job in a place like that.

I don't know how it came about but we went to a nearby airfield for an airplane ride. The runway was just a mowed strip in a hayfield. The pilot, whom Gladys apparently knew, was a big and friendly man. The aircraft was fabric-covered, had two open cockpits and a big radial engine. But whether or not it was a biplane I cannot remember. I think he charged \$5.00 to take a passenger up for a few-minutes ride.

Dottie, who had previously flown with a friend at the Turners Falls airport (near Greenfield), elected to go first. With great enthusiasm she climbed up onto the wing and into the front cockpit. The pilot, after checking that she was securely belted-in, climbed into the rear pit, the driver's seat, and prepared for the flight.

From a safe distance I watched, fascinated, as a helper on the ground spun the big wooden propeller. The engine clanked, like nuts and bolts rattling loose in a can. He spun it again; this time it clanked and coughed. The pilot now shouted "Contact," the man spun the prop a third time and quickly backed away. The engine roared to life, its prop describing a giant disk of color.

(I am reminded of Joe Cembalisty of West Northfield who, while spinning a propeller to start an aircraft engine came perilously near to death. The engine coughed, kicked backward, and the propeller-blade came so close as to actually slice off one of Joe's ears.)

YANKEE-NEVADAN

After a warm-up period the pilot took off, flew several times around the field and landed, leaving the engine running and idling. He helped Dottie out of the cockpit, then motioned it was my turn.

Eagerly, straining against the prop wash, I climbed up into the cockpit. The pilot cinched a belt snugly across my thighs, and instructed me to "Don't touch that stick... don't put your feet on those pedals... don't touch anything except the sides of your seat or the edge of the cockpit." Then, satisfied that I'd not fall out, he climbed back into the rear pit, gave his partner on the ground a "thumbs up," gunned the engine and away we went.

The wind whistled over the short shield in front of me. My hair blew wildly. The aircraft lurched and bumped over the stubble down the runway. And then, miraculously, it rose up smoothly and we were airborne. The big, powerful engine was awfully loud, and every part of the machine seemed to vibrate, but what a thrill it was to be flying. It was better than I had ever, even in my grandest fantasies, imagined.

Over the rolling landscape we soared, over farms and fields and forests, over houses and winding roads and brooks, over silvery lakes and muddy ponds. For fifteen minutes I was in pure ecstasy. Then the pilot banked sharply toward the field, leveled out for a short glide and touched the wheels to the ground. The plane bounced lightly, and then rolled to a stop beside the barn.

Flying, I decided, was the greatest thing I'd ever done. Landing, however, filled me with trepidation. But I would never (until now) admit that fact to anyone.

I guess it was in 1944 that Raymond went into the U.S. Army. He started out at Fort Devens and somehow wound up at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, before being sent overseas. Prior to his leaving the states, however, he married a girl by the name of Leslae Pierce, from upstate Vermont.

Ray, like John, would serve in the European Theater of War, in Patton's famous army.

Shortly after Ruth and Albert Cembalisty were married, in 1941, they set up housekeeping in an old farmhouse just south of the Vermont state line in West Northfield. It was a nice place, albeit only a stone's throw away from the Boston & Maine Railroad tracks. The house, of medium size with a shed or barn attached, was virtually surrounded by maple trees. They had a vegetable garden in the back, and a nice green lawn around the front and sides.

Albert was a handsome young man, tall and slim and strong, a hard worker and a likeable guy. He was one of the eight children comprising Joe and Rozalia Cembalisty's family, who lived on the farm west of Bennett's Meadow Bridge in West Northfield. Ruth had known Albert since we lived on the Holton Farm.

I remember that Albert had a beagle dog. Together they hunted, when he could find the time, for squirrels or rabbits. Beagles were good at rousting a rabbit out of a hole or thicket, and Albert was good at shooting them.

I, too, sometimes hunted squirrels in the woods behind their house (which, incidentally, was not far from where my friend Neil

YANKEE-NEVADAN

lived), using Albert's 22-caliber rifle and "short" ammunition. It was not easy getting a bead on those wily fellows; they always seemed to know when I was going to squeeze the trigger and slipped around behind the tree trunk. Even if you got one there wasn't much to eat.

In January of 1943, Albert entered the Army Air Force. On the 28th of April, 1944, Ruth gave birth to a son, James. Albert came home on furlough around the end of August, to see his only child. And shortly thereafter little Jimmy was left in our mother's care while Ruth joined her husband in Casper, Wyoming, where he was in training. Sometime that winter, when he was sent overseas, Ruth came back home, alone.

Because I was no longer at The Northfield in February, 1945, I was spared what would have been a traumatic experience when a telegram, from the U.S. War Department and addressed to Ruth, arrived in the Western Union office. It was but one of many such telegrams in those days, but that would be of no consolation to my sister. As was customary, it was delivered in person by one of the adults on duty at the hotel desk.

The message was concise, containing little information beyond the fact that "Albert Cembalisty" was "missing in action."

Ruth took the news with stoicism, no doubt having steeled herself against just such a possibility. Still it was a hard thing for such a young wife and mother to face. Her entire future, and that of Jimmy's, would be reshaped.

A few days later she received a formal letter from the War Department with more particulars. In conclusion, though his body had not been found, Albert was listed as "presumed dead."

Albert, a sergeant, had been attached to the 459th Bombardment Group (Heavy), which in turn was assigned to the Fifteenth Air Force in Italy. His squadron of B-24 Liberators (the four-engine bomber which, along with the B-17, would contribute so much to the Allied victory in Europe) operated from an airfield near Foggia. Its mission: to bomb such targets as oil refineries, munitions and aircraft factories and airfields from Germany to Greece. Albert's particular job was that of turret-gunner.

Ironically his last mission, last of only three, on the 2nd of February was a successful one. His aircraft was on its way home after a bombing run but ran out of fuel and was forced to "ditch" ignominiously in the Adriatic Sea. Most of the crew survived but Albert, although a good swimmer, did not. (It was my belief that he'd been injured or knocked unconscious in the ditching.)

A memorial service was held in the Trinitarian-Congregational Church, and a large number of relatives, friends and townspeople came to pay their respects. Ruth asked me to play "Ave Maria," and, with God's help, I did so. Albert's name was added to the annals of Northfield's heroes. Like them, he was felled in the prime of life while in the service of his country.

A couple of months later, news of President Roosevelt's death reverberated around the world. He was succeeded by the fiery and little-known Harry S. Truman. Though hardly anyone even recognized his name, Truman was now the man with the awesome responsibility of

YANKEE-NEVADAN

Commander in Chief of the U.S. Armed Forces. And, in effect, of the Allied Forces around the world.

Less than a month after Truman took office we would celebrate VE-Day (Victory in Europe Day). It had been a long time coming, at great cost in human lives and materiel. But the glory of victory in Europe would be marred by the fact that our forces in the Pacific were still fighting hard, and dying. Still, many of our servicemen came home; some on leave or furlough, some for good, some having been wounded in action.

Conditions on the home front eased somewhat and there was more of everything available to citizens.

The prevailing feeling was that if only the Japanese would abandon their imperialistic attitude about surrender - a belief that they must not "lose face" but "fight to the death" - the war might be concluded and peace restored. But that was not yet in the cards.

Village dances were very popular in the forties, before the advent of television, and were held in Grange or town halls almost weekly. Since most towns where they were held allowed the sale of liquor, the crowds were generally "spirited." Once in a while a couple of guys would exchange words and fists outside a dance hall, but overall it was good clean fun.

Shattuck's Dance Orchestra, managed by William A. Shattuck, Sr., Billy's father, had sort of taken up where the old Jillson's Orchestra left off. Billy's dad played the drums and led the band, which consisted of Esther Leonard on piano, Billy on saxophone, his younger brother Dicky on trumpet, and me. Sometimes there were two of us violinists (though I don't recall who the other one was). We played for dances in a 20-mile radius of Northfield, in the towns of Vernon, Hinsdale, Winchester and Gill.

It was customary, in those days, to play three sets of three numbers each - a set of round dances, a set of squares and a set of polkas - then repeat the cycle. Our repertoire included contemporary tunes, those played by the big bands and many "oldies" from the twenties. Polkas were perhaps the most popular numbers, with Yanks and Poles alike. The whole building bounced as the high-kickers whirled to the strains of "Beer Barrel Polka." When it came time for a set of square dances, such as "Turkey in the Straw," "Devil's Dream" and the "Irish Washerwoman," my violin miraculously turned into a "fiddle."

We "worked" under the loosest of verbal contracts, from 8:00pm till midnight. Once we got started, the mood of the music took over and we were untiring, taking only a short pause between sets and an occasional "pee break." Almost always, at the approach of midnight, the hangers-on would take up a collection and entice us to play on into the wee hours of the morning. But they knew it was over when we slipped into the melody of "Good Night, Sweetheart." Mr. Shattuck would then pay us off (ten, fifteen or twenty dollars apiece depending on the take) and we'd head for home to sleep, sometimes till noon.

Playing with a dance orchestra was a new experience for me. It was hard work but less demanding than the symphony and I enjoyed the change of pace. In a way, though, it was detrimental to my social life; that is, I never learned to dance. I was always on the

bandstand, never on the dance floor. I got to watch the girls but never to dance with them. ("Always a bridesmaid, never a bride.")

My deficiency in that social grace would be somewhat of a handicap in the future, when I wished to impress some young belle-of-the-ball and could only shuffle around ineptly.

But in truth, dancing always impressed me as being a strange and phenomenal custom. Watching the people on the floor, as we played a waltz or a fox-trot, I concluded that only about half of them moved in sync with the music. Some couples appeared to be simply bored, while others should have been home in bed together. Furthermore, it occurred to me that most dancers' movements were, if not grotesque, at least unnatural.

I was amused by the ways in which dancers coped with each other's anatomical differences: A tall female smothered her partner's face in her bosom; a fat-bellied guy almost fell on a short fat girl while trying to dance cheek-to-cheek. I decided that if one really liked to dance, he'd better not be self-conscious about how he appeared to others.

(And then, a couple of decades hence, people would seldom even touch each other while "dancing" and their movements would appear more bizarre and less in tune with the music than ever.)

Whether my interest in the violin waned or was merely overshadowed by other activities, in the mid-1940s I would abandon the idea, if ever I seriously considered it, of becoming a virtuoso. Mr. Leslie advised me, with characteristic wisdom, to decide whether I wanted to be a violinist or a hobbyist. He assured me that I had the talent to be successful but not, apparently, the necessary motivation.

I didn't want to be a mediocre violinist (I could never abide a career amateur), I would never be content as a member of a dance orchestra (it was a hard way to live), and I didn't want to teach the violin (and have to deal with little kids).

I considered Mr. Leslie's words thoughtfully, recognizing that if one is to excel in the field of music, as in art or any other profession he must devote his total effort to the enterprise, even to the exclusion of many of life's normal diversions. Was I prepared to go to such lengths? Probably not.

Above all, it would be terribly inconsiderate of me to allow Mr. Leslie and Dorothy to expend any more of their time and money on my behalf.

And so it came about that, although my appreciation for good, melodic, harmonious, rhythmic and expressive music would never diminish, I resolved (not irrevocably) to abandon my career as a performer.

It was during the long cold winter of 1944-1945 (before June Cota and I began going steady) that I made the acquaintance of a new girl who had come to work at The Northfield. Helen Spaniak was a well dressed, well mannered, rather quiet but very pretty young lady. I was immediately attracted to her, and tried my best to get her attention. We were sort of dating when Christmas came around and, for the first time in my life, I was caught up in the spirit of the season. I even sent (and received) several greeting cards that year.

One evening, just before the holidays, when the snow was soft as cotton and the night air sharp as icicles, Helen and I sat in my Ford on the driveway in front of the big house where she was staying. She wore a beautiful fur coat and I a heavy woolen overcoat "against the cold." We talked; about the movie we'd just seen in Greenfield, about the weather and other things.

When I felt the time was ripe, I took from an inner pocket a small, neatly-wrapped package and handed it to her.

"Wait," she said quietly, placing a slender leather-gloved hand on mine, "I have to tell you something."

My elation slowly ebbed as I learned that she had made plans to move to New York City and would leave immediately.

"I shouldn't take a gift from you," she explained, "We don't know each other that well."

"It doesn't matter," I lied (having so looked forward to our sharing the holiday season), "I want you to have it anyway.... But promise me that you won't open it till Christmas."

The following day, Helen left on the southbound train for New York. A short time later, from the city where she had already obtained employment, Helen wrote a letter of thanks for the pendant-necklace that I'd given to her.

I remember having had a difficult time shopping for that gift. I really agonized over it, trying to find just the right thing and then, when I was satisfied with the object, I paid more for it than my Scotch conscience advised. Far more than I could afford to lavish on a girl whom I'd known for such a short time.

Helen and I corresponded for a while, and I looked forward to the time when she would return to Northfield. But that was not to be, at least not while I was still around.

Perhaps it was then that I first realized how wonderful a girl June Cota was. We'd been schoolmates for years, but I soon got to know her better. By the closing weeks of our senior year, I considered June "the only girl in the world" (as described in a previous chapter).

June went to work at The Northfield, moving up from The Farms and sharing a room with another girl. That made it a lot easier for us to get together, and I frequently drove to the hotel after work to see her.

Mother was acquainted with June, having seen her often at the library, and seemed to approve of our going steady. (Mother seldom came right out and either approved or disapproved of my friends.) One Sunday I took the two of them for a ride to Keene, for an unprecedented visit to my Great-aunt Mertie.

It was quite an event. Aunt Mertie showed off her fancy house and furnishings, took down her best silver and china and served tea, and recounted stories of her and her sister, my grandmother, when they were young girls. June was attentive and polite, and apparently enjoyed the sociability.

When we left for home, I came away with the feeling that Aunt Mertie also approved of June. Although, on thinking about it, I wondered why I should regard her opinion as important. I guessed because those things were important in the old days.

That was the last time I saw my Aunt Mertie.

June possessed a lot of fine attributes - attractiveness, sense of humor, intelligence and ambition to name but a few - but like the rest of us she harbored a peccadillo or two. One of them, not unusual in the female of our species, was a quick temper. She would oftentimes flare up and I wouldn't even know why. Luckily, as quickly as she lost it she could regain her composure. Where a moment before there were daggers in her eyes, now there were twinkles.

In all honesty, June sometimes had good cause to be irritable with me. An example of such a time was after we had been parking (sparking) on the old Sturbridge Road, east of Birnam Road, in Northfield. It was a dirt road and rough, having been abandoned since the bridge over Mill Brook washed away in the flood. As a consequence it was now only used by such as we, as a place to park and talk and listen to the radio on a moonlit evening.

Listen to the radio? Ah yes.... But alas, the age of electronics had not yet progressed to solid-state; and vacuum tubes, of the six-volt variety, consumed an awful lot of power. You've guessed it! The battery went dead. I had neglected to follow the usual procedure, to park on a hill, so when it was time to go the motor wouldn't start.

June was a bit unhappy about that, I could tell by the tone of her voice when she helped me push the car back to the downhill grade on School Street. It was probably only a hundred yards, and level, but it seemed a mile that night.

At last we climbed in, and with only a short roll the engine kicked over and we were headed for June's place. But we hadn't gone far when June, suddenly blessed with great wisdom, turned loose a verbal barrage on me.

"You shouldn't have parked the car on the level," she said. "You shouldn't have played the radio so long." "You shouldn't have taken me up there in the first place." "You shouldn't have...."

I remained silent. After all, I too was smarter in hindsight. But all's well that ends well. She at last simmered down and we chuckled about the incident. I was much relieved.

Another escapade, however, would prove to be more than June was willing to put up with. This time she would not readily forgive me even though the outcome was not totally within my control. Or so I believed.

At the end of a pleasant summer evening, after attending some affair or other, I offered to take June for a drive in the country. It was late, she complained, and she had to be at work early in the morning. However, she accepted my offer.

Without a specific destination in mind, I drove up the old Winchester Road past the Seminary, crossed SR-10 just beyond the New Hampshire state line, went up the Burt Hill Road and turned west onto a virtual trail through the woods. As luck would have it, that trail would be my Rubicon.

There was no sign of recent travel on the road, but its dirt surface was firm so I proceeded. We went up a hill and down, up another one or two and started down a steep grade. I stopped. June urged me to turn around and go back. I suggested that she "quit worrying," and eased the Ford on down the hill.

Suddenly, without warning, in the headlights I saw a deep washout ahead. Instinctively I hit the brakes and the car stopped just short of the ditch. The engine stalled. All was deathly quiet.

"I told you to turn around," June broke the silence. "But you never listen to me, do you?"

More silence as I pondered the situation.

"What are you going to do now?" she asked with a tinge of sarcasm.

What could I say? What should I say?

What I did say was obviously wrong.

"We'll just sit right here till daybreak," I offered, then added with a grin, "We can huddle under the blanket to keep warm."

I always kept an old woolen blanket in the car for emergencies, but hadn't yet learned the wisdom of carrying a shovel. Would that I had. I got out, and in the glow of the headlights surveyed the situation. June sat resolutely inside and pouted.

The wash, though not very wide, was sufficiently deep that I could never get the car through without getting it stuck. I climbed back in and attempted to back it up the hill, but the rear wheels only spun in the sandy soil. June then made a momentous decision.

"I," she announced emphatically, "am going to walk!"

With that she got out, slammed the door, hopped over the ditch and headed down the road. I had no choice but to follow.

The night was dark and ominous, with only starlight overhead for a measure of comfort. With my flashlight I pointed the way, until the batteries died about a quarter-mile short of the Hinsdale highway. The silhouette of a farmhouse loomed near the junction; however, I was too embarrassed to seek help there and concluded that June, if she were on speaking terms, would agree.

A mile of brisk walking along the deserted tarmac brought us to Wannamaker Pond. June never slowed her pace, but she did seem to be losing some of her anger. Uphill past the Seminary grounds we hiked, to Pine Street, to Highland Avenue and south to the hotel. We had come the whole distance, over three miles, in about an hour. She could still get a few hours' sleep before reporting to work.

Our parting was "stiffly cordial." I turned and walked back to 179 Main Street, tumbled into bed and worried about my Ford. How, I wondered, would I ever retrieve it?

It was 7:00am and I could sleep no longer. I had to find someone to help recover my car from the woods, but I was hesitant to call on anyone. Ironically, the one man on whom I could rely, on a Sunday morning, was my boss, Mel Morgan. Mustering what courage I could, I marched on down to the store, climbed the creaky stairs to his apartment and knocked on the door.

It was not yet eight o'clock, and I was beginning to have misgivings about being there when the door opened to reveal Mel's surprised, unshaved face. Tucking in his shirttails he invited me in, buckled his belt, pulled on a sweater and listened to my sad story. I didn't think it necessary to mention that I had had a girl with me, and it wasn't. Mel immediately jumped to that obvious conclusion.

"Sure I'll help you," he laughed, "even if you were out with somebody else's daughter. Come t'think of it, you're lucky Evie wasn't with you.... She'd be madder'n hell if you made her walk home in the middle o' the night."

I shrugged, remembering that June hadn't been exactly calm.

Well, together we went in one of his pickup trucks to the site. With very little shoveling the ditch was filled in, I drove my Ford easily across and we returned to town. Mel invited me to breakfast, and thoroughly enjoyed teasing me in front of his wife and Evie.

I might add that for weeks thereafter he gloated in telling the tale, making the whole episode one of more common knowledge than I liked.

June and I were never engaged but I was devoted to her. And so, when something came between us in the summer of '45, I felt sad and hurt by the loss of her companionship. I supposed that she may have felt the same way but I could not know. How can one ever know what life has in store for him, or with whom he might share it?

Finally, realizing that it was over, I hid my emotions and chalked it up as an educational experience. After all, I was still very young. I had a good job and good friends, and I would survive. But I was through with girls. They were too hard on the heart.

I found solace in the realm of the hotel, among the old gang. Many of my friends were still working there while others had gone. Eugene and Jughead were around, and Muriel Dresser and Virginia Bolton, to name a few. But Leland Lawrence and Dave Bates were now in the military service. Irma Broun had left, to be reunited with her husband, home from the war, in Pennsylvania.

Priscilla's husband, Charlie, returned from his tour of duty in the Army, and before long the two of them went to work for the Western Mass. Electric Co. in Greenfield.

And then I met Eleanor Lee.

Eleanor, a rather tall girl (slightly taller than me), was very personable, well dressed, had beautiful dark eyes and hair, and a generous smile. While playing ping-pong or Chinese checkers in the employee's recreation hall (at the hotel) we sort of "bumped into" one another and a casual relationship was begun.

I got to know Eleanor better and looked forward to meeting her at The Northfield. We'd sit in the shade on the south veranda or stroll along the driveway by the Chateau, all the while engaged in "weighty" conversation.

About once a week we went with other kids from the hotel, in two or three cars, to a movie in Greenfield. Sometimes I drove her to the Berkshires, to visit her family and friends in Shelburne Falls and Charlemont. We had a lot of fun together.

Eleanor was a wonderful girl, at once intelligent and sensible. I would be forever indebted to her; not only for the confidences we shared that summer but also for the encouraging letters she would write to me when I was a "lonely seaman" in the U.S. Navy.

(I wonder whatever became of her.)



GRADUATION EXERCISES

NORTHFIELD HIGH SCHOOL

CLASS of 1945

FRIDAY EVENING, JUNE 15, 1945

TOWN HALL

NORTHFIELD, MASS.

PROGRAM

Processional "The Star Spangled Banner"	Key-Smith
Invocation Rev. Joseph W. Reeves	
"SONG of THANKSGIVING" GLEE CLUB	Allison Trebarne
Blessings in Disguise June C. Cota	
" Simple Aveu " Neil W. Churchill	Thome'
Address Dr. H. Robinson Shipherd, Harvard University	
"VENETIAN LOVE SONG" Glee Club	Nevin-Bliss
In Ourselves Our Future Lies Ron L. Jones	
HUNGARIAN DANCE No. 6 George A. Phelps	Brahms
Announcement of Pro Merito Awards Principal, Chester R. Parker	
Awarding of Alumni Prizes Mrs. George M. Leonard, Vice President	
Presentation of Diplomas Superintendent Robert N. Taylor	
CLASS SONG	Words written by June Cota
Benediction Rev. Joseph W. Reeves	
Recessional and Reception	

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN THE BOMB

I finished washing and waxing my car, whisked the interior clean and, taking note of the clouds overhead, drove it into the barn at our East Northfield address. Just in time. Big drops of rain raised a thousand puffs of dust along the pathway to the back porch, and by the time I was safely inside the house the rain was coming down in sheets, spurred, as it were, by a singularly loud clap of thunder.

Anticipating a good storm, in order to get the best possible view I took up a position in the doorway between the screened-in porch and the shed leading from the kitchen. To my right were, in order, an open kitchen window, a closed dining room window, and the closed door to the sitting room at the far end of the porch. The air felt good on my face, cool and fresh after a muggy afternoon.

Half daydreaming, I was suddenly transfixed by what seemed at first glance an apparition. And then it became clear to me what it was: a ball of fire like the one I'd seen at the Russell place in Greenfield years before. Only this one was much closer at hand. My eyes followed this devil's sparkler as, with a frying noise, it moved slowly along the radio aerial and quickly dived down the lead-in wire and disappeared.

Then, while still in a trance, I felt the hair on my head and arms stand on end and saw the fireball, a cosmic sun the size of a softball, drift through the kitchen window and dissipate on the fly-screen with a loud "pop." The pungent odor of ozone filled my nostrils. My heart pounded with excitement.

In a moment, though, I regained my senses and entered the house to see what, if any, damage had been done. I found my mother, ever fearful of lightning storms, standing in the center of the sitting room.

"What's happened?" she asked, wide eyed and pale of face.

"St. Elmo's fire," I responded knowingly, and bent over the radio receiver to see what I could see.

I found evidence that the aerial terminal had been hot, but nothing was smoking or smoldering. I deduced (correctly as it turned out) that the electric potential, seeking ground, had found the connection from radio chassis to metal radiator and followed the pipes

YANKEE-NEVADAN

to the basement, to a water line and up to the kitchen sink, from which it sailed through the open window to the copper screen.

That, quite literally, was the most hair-raising experience of my life.

Two days later, on Tuesday the 7th of August, 1945, over the radio came the news that the greatest manmade fireball in history (at that time) had been unleashed the day before over the city of Hiroshima, Japan. The United States had dropped a heretofore unheard of "atomic bomb." (Unknown except to a few scientists, militarists and civilians.) Like everyone else in the world, I was flabbergasted by the announcement.

But my reaction to reports of the bombing was, "Good."

Ever since I was old enough to think, war stories had dominated the news. There were the Japanese campaigns in China; Germany's invasions in Europe; the pounding of Great Britain; the Jap attack on Pearl Harbor; the battles of the Pacific. How many lives had been wasted in those few years? War, even though I'd not seen it first hand, was very vivid in my mind.

Before the decision was made to drop the A-Bomb (as it became known), millions of leaflets were showered on the Japanese people, warning of impending, large scale bombing raids. Those warnings, as one might expect, went unheeded. The raids that followed, using conventional bombs, exacted a high toll (78,000 casualties in Tokyo alone), and yet had little effect on the empire's single-mindedness.

And now, immediately after the Hiroshima drop, there was still no sign of Japan's submission. I suppose the awesome side of the bomb - the insidious, invisible part of it - was hard to assess, and the Japanese warlords were slow in accepting the seriousness of the situation.

I was firmly convinced (as I am still) that President Truman and our military leaders were reluctant to use the A-Bomb. For one thing, they were not at all sure what it would do.

In two more days a second A-Bomb was deployed, this one over Nagasaki. The death and destruction caused by these two diabolical devices was devastating. It was later estimated that over 100-thousand people were killed by the blasts.

Now, after suffering the annihilation of two of his cities, the Japanese Emperor must surely surrender, especially since the Germans had already capitulated. But no. He was not about to "lose face," no matter the cost.

The Atom Bomb had been in the making, in great secrecy, since the early days of the war. German scientists, in addition to perfecting advanced programs in rocketry and jet propulsion, had for some time been experimenting with "heavy water," a major component in nuclear fission.

In our country, in 1941, a handful of the best atomic scientists in the world - including Enrico Fermi, a brilliant Italian physicist - were assembled to work on the (code-named) "Manhattan Project." Led by Dr. Oppenheimer, the group secretly set up shop under a stadium at the University of Chicago. There they achieved the world's first, sustained, nuclear chain-reaction.

After unlocking the secret of nuclear fission, they moved to Los Alamos, New Mexico, where they and a host of selected workers would construct an operable atomic bomb. By mid-1945, it was ready.

It was then that the decision, perhaps the most significant decision in the history of the world, to actually use the first atomic weapon, fell to our neophyte Commander-in-Chief, President Truman. He was Destiny's instrument. The man whom Fate had selected to make the call and live with its consequences. And in spite of his alleged foibles, contemporary wise men would agree that Harry stood up well to that responsibility. He made the decision and would never express any doubt of its being the right one.

It is important to note the following: Had U.S. scientists been slow in researching the possibilities of nuclear fission, had they been reluctant to build an atomic bomb, had the U.S. president been hesitant to use the atomic bomb, World War II might well have dragged on for years. Without it, General Marshall estimated, to win the war with Japan would have cost a half-million American lives alone.

(Interestingly, there were only three A-Bombs in existence in August of 1945. The first, the prototype, was detonated on a test tower at Alamogordo; the second was dropped on Hiroshima, the third and last on Nagasaki.)

The war was not yet over, and if and when it was there would be a need for men to replace those who had fought long and hard for their country. I was rapidly nearing the age of eighteen, the draft age, and since I didn't want to wind up in the Army, I decided to beat the draft by volunteering for duty in the Navy or the Coast Guard. (I knew that my eyesight was not good enough to satisfy the Army Air Force.)

There were those who wondered at such a choice, those who knew of my aversion to water, but I had read of and heard about the mud and swamps soldiers invariably encounter, and figured that in the Navy I'd be spared that kind of misery.

So, on Wednesday the 15th of August, a warm but non-rainy day, with two of my buddies I took to the highway and headed for Boston. It was our plan, Eugene and Jughead's and mine, to join the Coast Guard. Why the Coast Guard? Because it was considered the "elite" of all the services in both war and peacetime. We would sign up together and serve together, hopefully in a New England port.

We had gotten off to an early start, and made good time on Route-2 to the city. Without too much trouble we found the C.G. Recruiting office, and, filled with enthusiasm, made our entrance.

A sharp, uniformed petty officer greeted us warmly, and before long we were convinced that the Coast Guard was indeed the only place to be. In turn we submitted to a brief physical exam, then waited in an anteroom for the results. The officer was apologetic when he came out with the information; two of us had not met the visual requirements and were therefore "unfit for duty."

I was afraid that I might not pass the eye test, having worn glasses for a long time, but was surprised to learn that one of my partners had impaired vision as well. We looked at one another, shrugged, and decided to stick together like three musketeers. If only one of us could go, it was "no go." Discouraged but not disconsolate, we walked out of the office.

Since we now had no particular objective in mind, Eugene made a suggestion. "We're in Boston, let's go see Scollay Square."

Scollay Square was renowned for its "burly-que" houses and associated forms of entertainment, but it was not yet noon, a bit early for that kind of amusement.

"Let's just drive to the city center then, and see what it's all about," I offered, wherein we jumped into the car and took off.

There seemed to be an awful lot of traffic on the streets, both auto and pedestrian, and the farther we went the more there was. I had never before been in Boston but I certainly never expected this much activity. It was worse than New York City.

Soon we were caught in a line of cars at a virtual standstill. Horns began to honk, people crowded around yelling and whistling and grinning, and we were trapped.

A guy in the car next to ours, seeing that we were bewildered, shouted, "Hey! You heard the news?"

We all nodded in the negative.

"The war's over!" "It's all over!"

That explained the melee. It was "VJ DAY." The long awaited end of the war.

Men and women, boys and girls, soldiers on furlough, sailors on shore leave, all were milling about between the cars and on the sidewalks, even on the steps of brownstone apartment buildings. A man at a corner bar was handing out beer to anyone within reach; girls of every age and description were caught up and hugged and kissed by guys; men, especially those in uniform, were grabbed and kissed by girls. Old folks slapped one another on the back, laughed and yelled exuberantly. People leaned from upstairs windows and shouted, Victory! Victory! We must join in the celebration.

We got out of our immobilized car and entered the maelstrom, until it subsided enough that I could drive around the corner to a side street and relative freedom. It was agreed, since it was unlikely that we could ever get anywhere near Boston Center, that we should abandon that goal. Instead we settled for a hot-dog and a Coke from a sidewalk stand.

It was dusk before we made our way out of the city and back to Route-2, midnight before we arrived home in Northfield.

"Well what d'you know," I mused as I crawled into bed, "We went to join the war...and missed it."

The war's ending, added to the rejection by the Coast Guard, temporarily dulled my enthusiasm for enlisting. I spent the remainder of the month content with work and recreation. I still helped out at home but Bobby, now twelve years old, had taken over most of my erstwhile chores.

Bob was a big kid, about to pass me in physical stature. (He would grow to be tallest of us all.) Like me, he was a tinkerer. Unlike me, he spent a lot of time and effort in that occupation.

My first major mechanical accomplishment, when I was his age, was to overhaul Mother's old Maytag washing machine. I completely disassembled it - rollers, rods, transmission, gears etc. - cleaned the parts, replaced a few that were worn, and put it back together.

But Bob didn't just repair machines, he created them. For example, he coupled a small gasoline engine to a push-mower to produce a successful power lawnmower. (In the future he would repair and modify and restore cars and trucks and other motive vehicles, for both pleasure and profit.)

Dorothy, who had gone to Northampton to study nursing at the Cooley Dickenson Hospital, was now in Boston for further training. "It is hard work," she wrote, "and it is difficult living under discipline and shortages of sleep and restricted outside activities." (She would stick with it and make the grade successfully.)

By the end of summer, more ex-servicemen had returned to their hometown, many of them to their pre-war jobs. (Employers were obligated and happy to take them back.) And I was now getting perilously close to age eighteen. If I were not careful I'd wind up in the Army after all.

I decided that it was time to act. I would try for the Navy this time, on the off chance that its physical requirements were less stringent than those of the Coast Guard. I went to the closest Navy Recruiting office in Greenfield, took the brief physical exam and learned that I could "see good enough" to join up. I was ready to sign on the dotted line.

But no. It was not that simple. I needed the approval of my legal guardian.

There it was again, the problem of being too young to make my own decisions. I was becoming frustrated and impatient. If I waited until my birthday, a couple of weeks hence, I would not need a guardian's approval. But then I might be caught by the draft. Ah well, I'd just go home, get Mother's approval and return.

But no again. My mother's guardianship, the recruitment officer advised, must be legally established. Otherwise it was my father who must sign for me. And as far as I knew it was he who held that dubious title.

Now I was really aggravated. I had not seen my father for years, though I did know of his whereabouts having received one letter from him from Elko, Nevada. I immediately wrote to him a short, rather impersonal note explaining my plan to join the Navy, enclosed an official form and solicited his signature of approval. I couldn't think of any reason why he shouldn't endorse my request but I was nervous anyway. Time was growing short.

Near the end of the month I received a reply, dated October 22, 1945: "I am surprised to learn that you are going to join the Navy." (Why should he have been surprised? unless it was because both John and Raymond were in the Army.) "You will learn a lot and see a great deal of the world," I read on. "You have the example of two fine brothers and I know that you will take care not to disgrace them. It is a rather hard crowd you will meet up with, but if you can learn to say no you will find them fine fellows at heart... Best wishes to you and affection I close, Father."

I thought the absence of a birthday wish a significant omission, especially as the date of it was imminent and pertinent to my writing

to him in the first place. But I was relieved that he'd come through with the approval in time.

(As a matter of note, I did not then know whether Father had obtained a divorce from Mother, presumably his reason for moving to Nevada.)

I had already talked with Mr. Morgan about my plans, and given him tentative notice of my quitting. He was very understanding and supportive, and assured me that my job would be waiting when I came back. He even reiterated an offer to make me a junior partner in his store business. (He never mentioned if the offer included his daughter in marriage but the possibility crossed my mind.)

I appreciated Mel's assuring words, but my head was too full of near future unknowns to be bothered with what might be four years down the road.

My last few days at home were filled with pleasure. On the Saturday just prior to my birthday, with a couple of friends, I drove to Albany, New York, to see the Navy ships tied up at the pier. I believe it was Navy Day. At least it was open house, or open ship, to visitors. We went aboard a submarine and a destroyer escort. (For security reasons, a lot of things were covered by tarps.) I was really impressed with the freshly painted ships, and was told that Navy vessels are almost continually being repainted. I carefully observed the neat but cramped quarters in the sub, and made mental note of the fact that submarine duty was not for me. The destroyer-escort was more my style. By day's end, after rubbing elbows with the smartly-uniformed ship's company, I could hardly wait to become one of them.

Some of my friends at The Northfield took me to Greenfield to a "last movie," and later gave me a combined "going away/birthday party."

From June I received a birthday card with "Best Wishes," and optimistically considered the upside-down stamp on the envelope a good omen.

My mother and sisters, not to be outdone, baked a cake and decorated it a-la-Halloween in my honor. All the attention was overwhelming, but I enjoyed it immensely.

Perhaps the hardest thing I had to do was to part with my little black Ford. I briefly considered a plan to put it up on blocks in storage, but that would be economically unfeasible. So I sold my first car, that which had given me so much real enjoyment.

Strangely, I do not remember to whom I sold the car, or for how much. But automobiles were in high demand at the time (post-war models had not yet found their way to the market), so it is reasonable to assume that it sold for at least as much as I had paid for it the previous year.

My personal affairs were now in order. That first phase of my young life, growing through childhood and adolescence, the so-called carefree years, was fast coming to a close. In another time, an earlier time, the transition to the next phase, to adulthood, might have been different, more gradual. But I, like many of my peers, would bridge the gap from high school to voting age in the U.S. Navy. That is, if I could pass the physical.

YANKEE-NEVADAN

Was I nervous about the prospect of leaving home? I was. But I reasoned that if thousands, millions of other guys had gone through it, so could I.

In most ways, I looked forward to the experience. I was anxious to learn the ropes and live the romance of the sea. On the other hand, I was apprehensive about the new kinds of people I'd meet - Brooklynites, Negroes, hillbillies, Jews, country bumpkins and city punks, rich kids and poor kids - and wondered how I would relate to them. Some were bound to be less than honest (as Father had suggested), others might be radical. Some would be aggressive, others meek. Some would be slovenly, others neat. I'd have to learn to deal with them, individually.

But the thing that worried me most, when I thought about it, was having to learn to swim. That was a frightful prospect.

Elko, Nevada,
Oct 22, 1945 -

Dear George,

I am surprised to learn
that you are going to join the
Navy. You will learn a lot
and see a great deal of the
world. I shall expect to
hear from you and your travels
will be interesting I know.

You have the example of
two fine brothers and I know
that you will take care not to
disgrace them. It is a rather
hard crowd you will meet up
with but if you learn to say
no you will find them fine
fellows at heart. So with
Best Wishes to you and
affection I close
Father,

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN
BOOT CAMP

Even before reaching my destination, while still bouncing along on the B&M Railroad through Pioneer Valley, I sensed that my individuality was slipping away from me. I would soon be one of many, one of several would-be sailors now migrating toward the city of Springfield, Massachusetts.

We converged on the Federal Building and convened in a large room outfitted with well-worn tables and chairs (worn by our many predecessors). A young, good looking Naval officer took the floor at the front of the room, directed us to be seated and commenced to lecture. He first congratulated us for choosing to serve in the U.S. Navy, then painted a broad picture of what it was all about and how we would "fit in." It sounded pretty good to me.

And then he had some good news to offer. Recently, actually during the time I was involved in getting my father's enlistment approval, the Navy Department had come up with a new policy: The minimum tour of duty was reduced from four years to two. Knowing that, to a man we would opt for the two-year hitch. One could always sign-up for another four years if so inclined.

There were more forms to be filled out (in addition to those I'd filed at the recruitment office in Greenfield) and while doing so I received my first "constructive criticism." A petty officer, noting that I printed my signature, informed me that it was unacceptable. So I signed it again, using the same style but with the letters tied together. Thus was my new legal signature was established.

Eventually our group, consisting of some 25 or 30 men and boys, was ordered to stand, face the Stars-and-Stripes and repeat the swearing-in oath.

"I, George Alfred Phelps, do solemnly swear...."

It was the 2nd of November, 1945, four days after my eighteenth birthday and I was officially one of some 2½-million members of the United States Navy.

But the military maxim, "hurry up and wait," had already begun. I still had a ways to go before I'd even look like a sailor, much less

be one. The officer sent us home for a few days, and set a new date to report in.

I was a little embarrassed to be back in town so soon, but I managed to make good use of the extra time. In due course, though, I met up with my fellow enlistees in Springfield, boarded another train and headed south.

It was a typically dull and rainy day as our big New York, New Haven and Hartford steam locomotive sped through the busy cities and sleepy villages, gray forests and brown fields of Connecticut. Comfortably ensconced in an ancient Pullman I was reflective, as were others in the group. One fellow, a man in his thirties, had been placed in charge of us. His job was much like that of a Boy Scout counselor. When it was learned that he was an "old salt" who had re-enlisted, he was bombarded with questions about Navy life. I listened with amusement as he responded with sea stories, some possibly true, others of doubtful veracity.

The rhythmic train sounds, the chugging, the clacking, the whistles and bells, were reminiscent of my journey to New York in February, except that this was a more somber bunch and devoid of girls. After a while I was lulled to sleep, to be half-awakened when the train came to a stop. In the quiet I dozed again, this time to be jerked awake by a sudden jostling and back-and-forth movement as our car was shuttled to another train (a Pennsylvania Railroad train). I guessed we were in the vicinity of New York City, but East Coast cities ran one into another and it was impossible to identify their boundaries. I only knew that from here on it was new country to me. Back to sleep I went.

In loud resonant syllables the conductor sang out, "Phil-ah-delphi-ay." Awake now, I turned in my seat and stared through a soot-and-water-stained pane at an endless panorama of brick walls, dirty windows and yards of clotheslines draped with garments of all types hanging incongruously in the drizzling rain. Unpleasantly impressed, I leaned back in my seat once more to nap.

After another hour or more of stop-and-go travel the gray November sky lightened briefly. We were passing through Wilmington, Delaware. Another dirty city, I mused. Twilight fell quickly and just as quickly it was pitch dark outside. Our train slowed again and stopped, this time in a dark and sleepy one-horse town.

"Pearryville.... Thi-i-is is the place," the rotund conductor announced with a knowing grin. "Y'all have fun now."

With my little brown suitcase in hand I walked to the rear of the car, half-smiled at the conductor, stepped down, fell in with my companions and began the hike to the station. It was a least two-hundred yards away.

At that moment, stumbling over the uneven cinders and gravel of the rain-puddled muddy roadbed in the dark and rain, I could muster very little enthusiasm for this new adventure.

A petty officer and two SPs (Shore Patrolmen) comprised the entire welcoming committee on the otherwise deserted Perryville station platform. Our in-charge man turned us over to the PO, and we followed him to a waiting, battleship gray bus. All aboard, glad to be

YANKEE-NEVADAN

in out of the rain, we were driven to the U.S. Naval Training Center, Bainbridge, Maryland.

I cursed myself for not having taken the time to study a map of the area, but I had not and was therefore disoriented in the starless night. It would be several days before the sun would shine enough that I could point to the north again.

The training center was situated on the northeast side of the Susquehanna River, four miles upstream from where, near Perryville, that historic stream empties into the upper Chesapeake Bay. Another town, Havre de Grace, lay across the mouth of the river, across from Perryville and Port Depot. The latter, little more than a collection of docks and warehouses, was located just southwest of the center, on the riverbank. But none of those places was obvious to me on arrival.

A marine guard at the main gate motioned our driver to pass on, and within minutes the bus was parked in front of a shadowy barracks building. A single light globe illuminated a sign over the door. "420-U," it proclaimed.

Tired and disillusioned, we dutifully filed into our new home. Bunk numbers were assigned, mattresses and covers hastily issued, and we were ordered to "hit the sack." The process of induction would continue in the morning.

I thought it a rather disorganized operation but supposed my opinion was biased by unfamiliarity. No matter, I would sleep like a log after my long day on the train.

It was good that I slept well, for we were awakened in a most obnoxious manner in the morning, long before the sun was due to rise. At 04:30 the night watch came through the barracks shouting, repeatedly, "Everybody out...up'n at 'em...grab your socks," and all the while beating on our bunks with his nightstick. Sleepy and confused, I somehow got out of my new sack, washed and dressed (in my civvies) in time to join the other guys in a haphazard march to the chow hall.

It was then that I learned the reason for the early rise. Our whole company, and a dozen others, was destined to stand in line and wait an hour or more for breakfast (henceforth to be known as morning chow).

I had already decided, contrary to my erstwhile habit, that while in the Navy I would eat a hearty morning meal. My decision was based on the fact that it would likely consist of foods that I could tolerate, an assumption that would prove to be true. Anyway, by the time I got inside, out of the cold and dark Maryland air, I was ravenous.

The line cued up at one end of a long, stainless steel counter on which were several giant pans of food. Following the example of those ahead of me I took a compartmented, stainless steel tray in hand, walked along and held it out to receive a portion of whatever was being doled out by a swabbie on the other side.

There was not a lot to choose from that morning: semi-hot and lumpy oatmeal; bright yellow, rubbery, scrambled eggs; bacon strips or sausage links, dipped from pools of solidifying grease; varying shades of toasted bread. There were no cold cereals, no griddle cakes nor French toast (although those items would sometimes be available in the

future). Disappointed, I settled for a scoop of eggs and a piece of toast, took a glass of orange juice, a cup of black-and-white coffee, and headed for one of the long tables. It was good to be sitting down at last.

Before digging in I glanced around the chow hall, which was by now a hub-bub of conversation and noise, the latter dominated by steel utensils scraping against steel trays. Sleepy, hungry sailors were still entering through one door, while through another a continuous line of sailors exited, presumably having already eaten their fill.

Most of the men in the chow hall were in uniform, actually dungarees, and those nearby looked down with a superior air on us "civvies." They were senior to us by anywhere from a day to three months.

After sprinkling liberal amounts of salt and pepper on my eggs, they were more or less palatable. I relished the toast, and the orange juice was surprisingly good and fresh. I had never been much of a coffee drinker, but figured it might be good for washing down the solid food. And, I rationalized, because the coffee was boiling hot it had to be better than tap water. Diluted with cream (canned milk) and sugar it wasn't bad. I decided to keep drinking the stuff until I acquired a taste for it.

When all of our company had finished eating, the petty officer in charge (the boot-pusher) formed us up outside the chow hall and marched us back to the barracks. And then, allowing barely enough time for all of us to visit the head, he marched us over to the induction center where we were herded into a large, open room and instructed to disrobe. It was more like, "All right, you bums...get outta them civvies...down t'yer birthday suits... and be quick about it."

Like so many sheep we shed our wool and disclosed all of our anatomical secrets. There we stood, a bunch of white-skinned men and boys of various shapes and sizes, all attempting to appear nonchalant. We were not a pretty sight. Now I understood why, way back in time, man took to wearing clothes. (It was also plain to see that the old adage "all men are created equal" did not apply.)

Less than a day in camp and standing in line was already becoming second nature to us. In two columns we shuffled forward, while a battery of doctors gave each of us a cursory exam and a set of shots. In keeping with some kind of warped tradition wags near the front of the line gave warning, describing the various needles we'd encounter: the "corkscrew," the "hook," the "grapple," the "expander" and so on.

When my turn came I clenched my teeth, avoided looking directly at the doctors or their diabolical devices, and took the shots (two in one arm, one in the other, concurrently) with contrived stoicism.

Still naked, we were ushered to a ship's store to be "fitted out" with everything from hats to shoes to bedding: T-shirts, boxer shorts, blue socks; pea coat (overcoat); dress uniform (navy blue jumper, trousers with a thirteen-button flap or fly in front); white dress uniform; neckerchief; dress blue flat-hat and several white hats; dungarees and chambray shirts; black, ankle-high shoes, black marching boots, white deck shoes; mattress covers (sacks), pillow covers, khaki woolen blankets and miscellaneous items. All of the above fit in a

YANKEE-NEVADAN

white, heavy-canvas sea bag about four feet long and two feet in diameter.

A hammock, used by sailors aboard ship for centuries, even throughout WW-II, was no longer being issued to new recruits. Instead we got real, but rather thin, mattresses.

The final phase of my conversion to Navy life was a haircut. While waiting in line I noted that those who talked or complained received the shortest cuts. And though I wasn't the least bit happy about the prospect of acquiring a crew cut, I would remain silent. Even then it was by far the shortest haircut of my life. It would be weeks before I'd have need for a comb.

Following instructions I packed all of my civilian belongings, except for a toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, safety razor and shaving cream, into my old suitcase. On good advice I had left my wristwatch at home. There was a regulation against having an electric shaver in boot camp so, with great reluctance, I shoved mine into the suitcase with my old clothes. I'd have to shave with a simple razor, an act that would result in my wearing cuts on my chin and neck almost perpetually. (The Navy shipped my suitcase home.)

Finally, dressed in brand new clothes, I shouldered my sea bag of possessions and hiked on back to the barracks. I was beginning to feel more like a sailor.

A note about a seaman's clothing: Unorthodox as it may have seemed to an outsider, it was an extremely efficient mode of dress. Not one item required ironing; everything was rolled in a proscribed manner for storage in a locker or sea bag. There was no necktie to strangle the throat, but a loose neckerchief. The navy blue uniform was warm in cold weather, and the whites were cool in warm or tropical climates. The all important pea coat, the result of centuries of seafaring evolution (as were the jumper and trousers described above), was a truly marvelous piece of gear, an effective barrier against cold, snow, wind and rain. For warmth it could be excelled by none but a down-filled parka.

The remainder of my first day in boot camp was occupied by listening to orientation talks, marching to and fro, standing and waiting in chow lines, and settling in at the barracks. When I hit the sack that night and recalled the events of the past few days, they were so new and different they might have been figments of my imagination. Was it all a dream?

Then I thought of my friends and family so far away, experienced a brief moment of homesickness and fell asleep.

There was no allotted time for getting used to Navy life; it was all military from the time we passed through the Bainbridge gate. Our boot pusher said it in just a few words: "For the next three months it'll be all work and no play for you swabbies." I guess it was best that way, to get the basic training we needed as quickly as possible.

Muster was routinely held every morning, noon, and night, and spontaneously in between times to make sure that no one slipped away to goof off. Marching exercises were carried on daily, on a huge, centrally located drill field or "grinder." I rather enjoyed drilling, except that I was frustrated when those of our company couldn't, or

wouldn't, follow commands and we'd all have to do "extra time" on their account. At least the exercise kept us warm.

Another kind of exercise was available (mandatory) at the gym. First we were given a series of tests to determine our "before" capabilities; that is, how many push-ups and pull-ups we could do, how many hurdles we could jump without tripping and so on. The results were noted and we were expected to do twice or thrice as well at the end of our training period. Some of the guys, thinking ahead, purposely held back. I was not so clever, and went all out to prove how well I could do. Then, in the end, I'd have to work especially hard to double my score.

We would attend a variety of classes, covering every aspect of military discipline and seamanship. There were classes on boat and ship construction; line (rope) handling, knot-tying and splicing; signaling, using international Morse code or flags; gunnery and small arms practice (I became quite proficient with a Springfield rifle); ship's organization and duties; aircraft recognition (my favorite); fire fighting and gas attack drills. We marched down to the bay and learned how to launch and row a whaleboat. Cold and tedious work. There was chow hall duty (KP in the army), generally but not always assigned as punishment for a minor infraction. I was lucky to avoid that duty while in boot camp. But I did a lot of janitorial work, sweeping, swabbing and waxing of administration building floors. Every activity was, in one way or another, good training.

A few of our company were lacking in a rudimentary knowledge of personal hygiene. It was a shocking fact. How could it be that here in the United States, supposedly the most advanced country in the world, such people existed? You can bet that they soon shaped up, mostly because of peer pressure. Since everyone in the company had to pay whenever a guy screwed up, corrective action was often administered by the group before he was found out by the boot pusher. The pusher, because it made his job that much easier, condoned such actions.

For example, one kid hadn't taken a shower for several days. Six of his fellow swabbies ganged up, stripped him naked, shoved him into a shower and scrubbed him from head to toe with stiff-bristled floor brushes until his skin was raw and bleeding. His complaint went unheeded, but he was a model of cleanliness from that time on.

The deck of the barracks was made of narrow, close fitting hardwood, comparable to the parlor floor in the Northfield Chateau. It was one of the most attractive floors I'd ever seen, and I soon learned the reason why. It was the way it was maintained. No wax or varnish ever modified its natural beauty, but every morning, more often if deemed necessary, each of us "shuffled" around his bunk area with a pad of steel-wool under one foot, to remove any marks or abrasions that might have appeared. The entire floor was then swept by an armada of swabbies with soft dust-mops. (Steel-wooling the floor was also used as punishment, such as for unauthorized smoking.)

Another routine chore was window cleaning. The barracks was lined with windows, of the multi-paned, sash type, and more often than was really necessary we were armed with clear water, sponges and toilet paper (for wiping, of course), and ordered to render them spotless. It was a boring job but we made light of it by seeing who could clean the

YANKEE-NEVADAN

most windows in a given time. I swore that I'd never wash another window after serving my time in the Navy.

Our clothing was actually quite easy to care for. Every item was washable, and neither dust nor lint was allowed in the Navy. Only when on leave, when around civilians, would lint show up on our blue uniforms.

The wash house was a communal sort of place, with rows of square, slope-fronted, concrete tubs in which to scrub our clothes. We had no clothespins, but used 1/8-inch cordage, cut to one-foot lengths, to stop (tie) the corners of each garment to an overhead line. A bit slow, perhaps, but a positive method of attachment. Thievery of clothing was minimal, since every item was stenciled in a specific manner with its owner's name or initials.

It was obvious that our daily routines were geared for shipboard duty, having evolved through years of close-quarter living. It was a pretty efficient way to "keep house," and in spite of the long hours and hard work, within a couple of weeks I began to feel at home.

With one exception: As winter approached I sometimes found it impossible to keep warm. I had not anticipated so cold a climate. Was not Maryland below the Mason-Dixon Line? (Bainbridge was actually a few miles south of that famous demarcation.) Wasn't this the South? I had never minded the cold so much, even in sub-zero temperatures in Northfield. I kept my feelings to myself, though, to avoid being classified a complainer.

Depending on the season or latitude of operation there were different dress codes, Blues were the uniform of the day in the north, whites in the south or in the tropics. When operating in really cold areas, I was told, long underwear was considered standard issue. Perhaps if Bainbridge were a few miles farther north we'd have qualified for that luxury. (I wonder?)

At least we were active, and thus warm, during the foggy, misty, windy, often icy always miserable daylight hours. It was the nights that I found almost unbearable, shivering under my two woolen blankets. Even with my pea coat thrown over the top I suffered.

Maybe it was the high humidity (from the Chesapeake Bay) that made me feel so cold. Or was it the evenings spent in the swimming pool? I'd always believe it was the latter. Whatever the cause, I developed a chronic sore throat that would evolve into tonsillitis.

It made sense that every sailor should know how to swim. I couldn't argue with that logic, and had anticipated having to master the rudiments of that activity. Most of my peers looked forward to it, but I was reluctant when we marched to the gymnasium and suited up for swimming tests.

I took my alphabetical place in line, only partly relieved to be among the latter half of the group. I tried hard to contain my apprehension, but I was so nervous I shivered uncontrollably. Aloud I complained that it was too cold in the gym.

The sole purpose of this session was to learn who could and who could not swim. One's word on the matter didn't hold water; those who liked to swim were apt to say that they could not, just so they might attend the classes, while others, like me, might lie to get out of it.

The officers in charge, with wisdom born of experience, had a very practical method of determining the truth.

The line inched slowly toward the pool. I considered telling the boot pusher that I was sick (only half a lie), then realized that if I were excused it would only postpone the inevitable. So I stood my ground with mock courage.

As I drew closer I got a good look, and decided that it was definitely not a conventional swimming pool. It was rectangular in shape, much bigger and probably much deeper than I had expected. Off to my left a high bulkhead - with a narrow platform and a rope-railing at the top - rose up some twenty feet above the water. I heard someone say that it was meant to simulate the outer hull of a sinking ship. I sincerely hoped that I would never have to jump from it, or from anything it resembled. Directly in line ahead was a long springboard. It was from that device that we would enter the pool, one every minute or so.

The more I watched the more formidable the ritual appeared. Each man in turn was ordered to walk out to the end of the board and, without hesitation, step off. The method of entry into the water was optional. You could dive headfirst, jump feet-first, hold your nose, your toes, or anything else you liked, but you had to go in. Then you must swim to the opposite end of the pool and crawl out by yourself. That was it.

Oh yes, if you appeared to be drowning you would be rescued. How reassuring! At least seven of my predecessors failed to swim, and I felt better already. It was not the kind of situation where one wanted to be singularly outstanding.

A pale, skinny kid about my size refused to walk the plank. Two petty officers pleaded with him, for about five seconds, then seized him by the arms and legs and heaved him toward the center of the pool. He hit the water with tremendous force, gasped, inhaled a lot of it and promptly sank. After a minute or so, a life guard hooked his suit with a long pole, pulled him out, laid him face down on the concrete and pumped about a gallon of water out of the poor unfortunate. He would survive.

After watching him I resolved to jump in unassisted when it came my turn. No one was going to throw me in, even if I were to drown. And that possibility crossed my mind.

Suddenly there was no one ahead of me. So, as if in a dream, I walked wobbly-kneed to the end of the springboard, took a deep breath, held my nose, closed my eyes and stepped off into thin air.

On hitting the cold water I went into shock. The liquid mass quickly enveloped my puny body. I forgot to hold my nose. My nostrils and lungs stung with pain as I inhaled the chlorinated water. My arms and legs instinctively flailed about in an effort to reach something solid, but in vain. I was totally confused.

Man has no natural instinct for swimming. It is an acquired ability, an ability that I had never acquired. My senses were trying to figure out what to do in this alien environment, but everything was going wrong. My lungs called for oxygen and breathed in. That was wrong! My arms wanted to crawl and reached out, but there was nothing solid to reach for. What should I do? What could I do?

I had just about given in to Father Neptune's world when the fingers of my right hand closed around a firm object - the rescue pole - and held on with a death-like grip. It was my salvation. I was quickly pulled to the surface, sputtering and gasping for air, and out of the water.

"Does this mean I flunked the test?" I asked.

What it really meant was that I would have to attend swimming classes. Those guys who loved the sport were envious, and I would gladly have exchanged places with any one of them. Instead, along with several other unfortunates, I would trudge through the damp, evening air to the pool house two or three evenings a week.

I assumed a positive attitude but found it impossible to muster enthusiasm for an activity that caused me so much grief. I suffered cramps in the muscles of my feet, ankles and legs every time I went into the pool, and without exception my eyes and nose hurt from the effects of the chlorinated water.

In the course of the next couple of months I learned to tread water, float, and to swim on my back. It was explained that one's vital organs are less susceptible to injury, in the event of an underwater explosion after abandoning ship, if he remains on his back. So the backstroke was the only method taught.

Finally, the time to test my swimming abilities arrived, and this is the way it went:

In normal dress I climbed to the top of the dreaded bulkhead, and jumped off into the deep water. After an eternity I came to the surface, treaded water, removed my trousers, tied-off the legs and captured air in the resultant "bag" for a float. This was no mean accomplishment, and I surprised myself by succeeding. After demonstrating that I could float with this device I abandoned it, swam twice around the perimeter of the pool and pulled myself out.

Whew! I was in a state of total exhaustion but was I ever relieved. Sitting there at poolside, drying myself with a towel, I thanked The Almighty and prayed that I should never again have to enter that awful environment.

Our company, as were most of those at Bainbridge at the time, was made up almost entirely of Caucasians from the Northeast. Not just white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants (the acronym "WASP" had not yet been coined), but also descendants of other European countries, particularly Italian and Polish. Although one's religion was not always apparent, I'd guess that Protestants and Catholics were equally divided.

A predominant number appeared to be from New York City, the Bronx and Brooklyn. At least those guys were the most vocal and easily identifiable. Many of us were small-towners. There were a few "rebels" among us, who, much to my surprise, seemed ready to resume fighting the Civil War. All in all, though, and despite our differences, we got along with very few altercations.

Considering the fact that this was not, after all, the army, it seemed to me that we spent an awful lot of time marching and drilling. And there were times when it was not exactly fun, such as when there was a freezing rain or spitting snow. (At least we never suffered from sweltering heat.) When the sky opened up, which was every other day or

so, we donned ponchos (a new kind of raincoat to most of us) and went right on drilling.

When someone fouled-up he was made to "duck walk" (walking on your toes while in a squatting position) as punishment. It was a very strenuous exercise. An individual was not always singled out for discipline, sometimes the whole platoon had to pay for his transgression.

Once, during a pretty hard storm, our boot-pusher ordered us all into the duck-walk mode because a few guys, who didn't like being out in the freezing rain, were sassy. We resembled a bunch of malfunctioning robots, left-facing and right-facing in total disarray. Our ponchos dragged on the ground and every so often someone would tip over headfirst in the mud. In the end we were soaking wet and filthy dirty. Half of us had ripped our ponchos; most of us had lost our hats. Ah well, it proved to be an interesting diversion.

Inspections were made on a daily basis, or more often if the mood struck an officer. There were barracks inspections, of the overall appearance of our living quarters; locker (or sea bag) inspections, to check the condition of our clothes and personal gear; and captain's inspections, when everyone and everything in or out of sight came under scrutiny. A captain's inspection was conducted by the ranking officer of the training center, whose actual rank was less important than the respect he automatically commanded.

I stood in awe of any man with gold braid on his sleeve, from warrant officer to captain (the highest ranking officer in whose presence I ever stood), but particularly the latter. When conducting an inspection the "captain" was always trailed by a retinue of lesser, often self-aggrandizing officers and our company petty officer. The latter was obliged to make copious notes of infractions found.

While most inspections were routine or spontaneous, we were always informed when a captain's inspection was imminent. At first I considered that a strange way to operate, then realized that the objective was to see that we maintained ourselves and our equipment in good condition, and if, in anticipation of the event, we turned to and made everything shipshape then the mission was accomplished; even if he never showed up, as was sometimes the case.

I'll never forget one inspection. It was a rare, warm day and we were lined up in front of the barracks in our dress blues. The captain walked along our ranks, scrutinizing each of us in turn, occasionally making a remark relative to posture or dress. Ray Tardiff, a tall, skinny kid from Concord, Vermont, who perpetually slouched, stood next to me. The captain stopped in front of him, puzzled for a moment then asked, "Sailor, where's your T-shirt?"

Whereupon Tardiff reached under his jumper, pulled up the apparently missing article and proudly replied, "Right here, sir."

The captain grunted something incoherent and, still not satisfied with this sailor's appearance, ordered, "Stand up straight."

Tardiff sucked in a deep breath, but was still not really "up straight."

The captain then reached around and poked Tardiff in the small of the back with his left hand, and at the same time pushed his chin up and in with his right.

"There. That's what I mean," he avowed. "Now...do you think you can hold that position?"

Ray, obviously in pain, replied matter-of-factly, "No, sir, I don't."

I fought the urge to laugh as my friend slowly melted down to his usual posture.

"Neither do I," the captain muttered to an aid, and continued on down the row of otherwise ramrod-straight seamen.

Following orders was never a problem for me. It was quite obvious that without firm rules, concise instructions and resolute discipline, no military outfit could long survive. It was also apparent that there was no place in the military for any kind of democratic rule. Even our little company of roughly a hundred individuals could not be run by "voting on the issues" or making "committee decisions."

But the Navy was governed in a civilized manner. No one was ever required to do anything un-human or degrading. As for fairness, the Navy's methods of meting out justice were, in my opinion, far superior to those practiced in civilian society. For one thing, justice was swift. For another, an accused was considered guilty until proven innocent.

The longer I live the more I am convinced of the logic in that latter philosophy. In practice, very few people are ever accused of wrongdoing without there being a strong possibility of guilt. Considering the "big picture," it makes less sense to overprotect an enormous number of obviously guilty, oftentimes dangerous criminals (people who blatantly act outside the law) than to occasionally, rarely, punish an innocent in error.

Though I didn't much appreciate it then, I would come to understand why a whole company must serve penance for the misdeeds of an individual (or a few) who could not be identified. The method served two purposes: First, the officer-in-charge didn't waste an inordinate amount of time investigating the incident; second, the culprit's peers generally found him out, and later administered their own brand of justice.

"Smoking lamp's lit" and "Smoking lamp's out" were two of the most common orders heard in the Navy. (Seldom was there an actual lamp.) Smoking was permitted in many areas at the training center, but only at the discretion of the officer in charge. Since most sailors smoked, rescinding the privilege was a quick and easy form of company punishment.

For some time, off and on, I had smoked. Preferably a pipe. But sometimes, because carrying a pipe and tobacco was inconvenient, I took to the paper-wrapped things, usually "Kools," a brand of mentholated cigarettes. As noted in an earlier chapter I did not inhale, but enjoyed the taste nonetheless.

By the end of my first week at Bainbridge I grew tired of the "smoking lamp" rule. I resented being told just when I could enjoy a puff, so I stubbornly decided to quit for the duration of my tour. From then on I could ignore the smoking lamp altogether.

Sometime after the first of December, my throat became unbearably sore. So, immediately after muster one morning, I reported to sick bay. The corpsman on duty took one look and sent me to the base

hospital, where I was shuffled off to bed in a room off the main ward with a half-dozen other sickies. It was relatively quiet and I quickly fell asleep.

Less than two hours later, though, I was awakened by the pain in my throat. I could no longer swallow my own saliva. I wanted some kind of attention. No one came around. One of my ward-mates, recognizing my plight, went to talk to a nurse and came back with the message, "You will be visited in due time."

In desperation I got out of bed, walked to the nurse's station and told her that I had to see a doctor.

"Well," she returned with annoyance, "if you want to see him, his office is down the hall...first door on the left."

It was open and I walked in.

The doctor, a young officer (fortunately, for me, a man of perception) looked up from the paperwork on his desk and ordered me to sit down. "And put your head between your knees," he added, coming around from behind the desk. Just in time, because I almost fell over in a faint.

When I had somewhat recovered he went through his ritual of temperature taking, stethoscope listening and pulse feeling, then peered at the back of my throat.

"You have an advanced case of tonsillitis," he diagnosed.

I was not surprised.

The doctor wrote something down on a piece of paper, and then called for the floor nurse. When she arrived he questioned her: Why was I allowed out of bed alone? Why was I not examined on entry (to the hospital)? And more. None of her answers were apparently satisfactory, and he gave her such a reprimand that I would have been embarrassed had I thought she didn't deserve it.

The doctor gave me a sulfa drug right then and there, handed the nurse a prescription, then personally escorted me back to bed.

By nightfall I was able to swallow again, even to sip water through a straw from a glass. The following day, after taking more of the sulfa, I found it possible to ingest a small glass of grapefruit juice. It was several days before I could eat solid food, but then I put on some weight.

As I got to feeling better I took note of my surroundings. In spite of the ubiquitous cockroaches, the hospital was spotlessly clean. I thought of what my mother had told me about her grandfather's experiences in the Civil War. Timothy Messer had served nearly four years in Lincoln's Army before being mortally wounded in front of Petersburg. Like so many others in that war, he was routinely inflicted with intestinal diseases, and spent days and weeks at a time in primitive, crowded, often filthy hospitals. Still (as shown by his letters to home) he seldom complained.

By comparison, my hospital stay was luxurious. The place was equipped with modern machines and medicines, and staffed with well qualified doctors and nurses. (With the exception of that one floor nurse, whom I never saw again.)

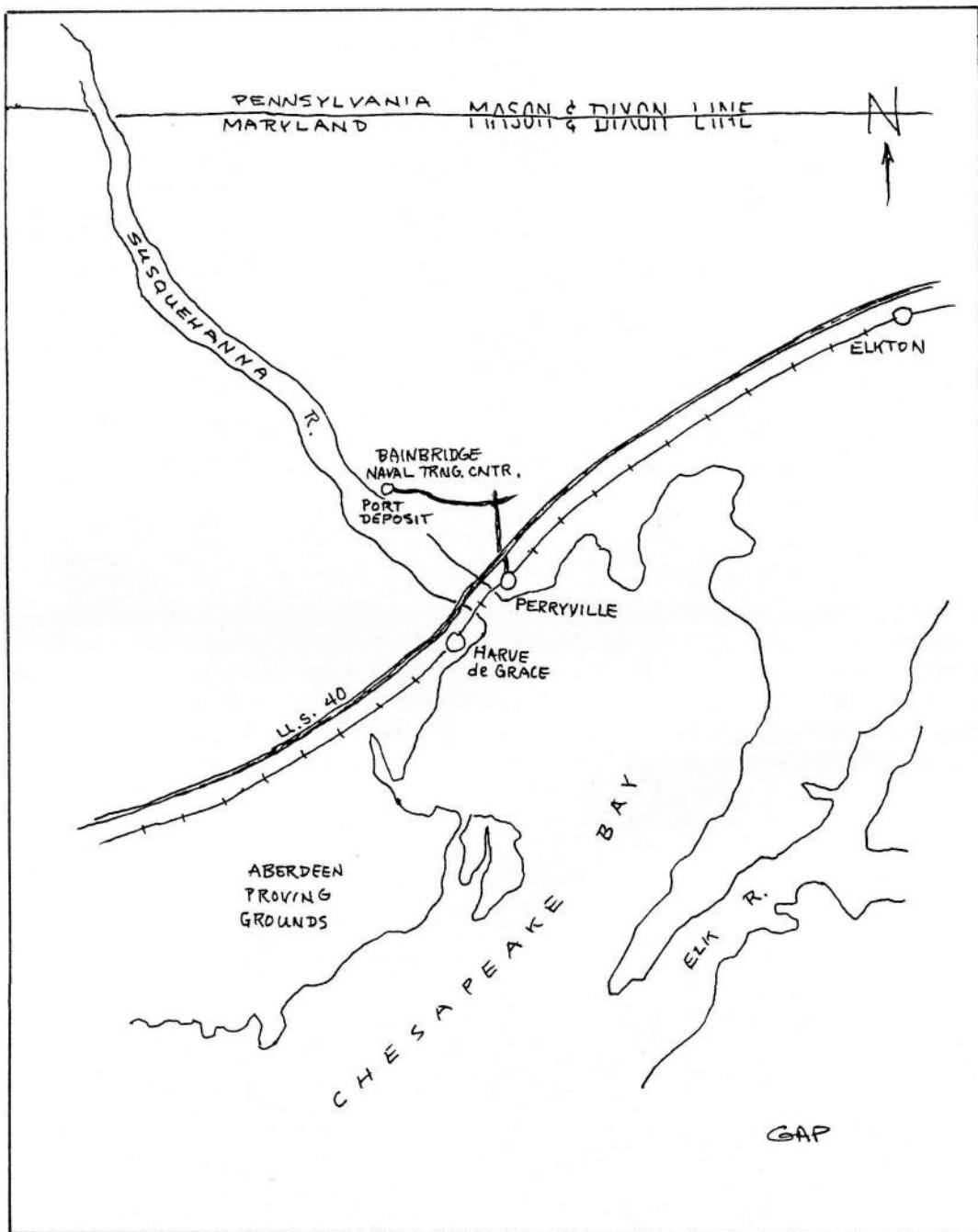
It was almost ten days before I was declared "fit for duty." Then the doctor advised that, when the swelling went down, I would be hospitalized for a tonsillectomy.

YANKEE-NEVADAN

Before completing my basic training I would spend several more days in hospital with tonsillitis, but for now the ordeal of surgery was postponed.

While in the hospital I had missed a lot of classes. So many that on returning to duty I was assigned to a new company (Company 4363, Barracks 430L). The names and faces were different, otherwise everything appeared the same.

YANKEE-NEVADAN



Map Showing Location of Bainbridge Naval Training Center

**CHAPTER NINETEEN
UPS AND DOWNS**

Friday, four days before Christmas and only two-thirds of the way through boot camp training, we were awarded a ten-day leave. I lost no time getting to the little Perryville station and aboard the first train headed north.

The trip was uneventful. At home in Northfield, a neophyte swabbie with less than two months service, I proudly showed off my uniform (but wore a hat to hide my crew-cut) and was welcomed by everyone I met.

The climate was typical of the winter season, with several inches of snow on the ground and temperatures hovering below freezing in the daytime and dropping to near zero at night. I relished my comfortable featherbed. It was the first time in weeks that I slept warm.

Because I no longer owned an automobile, and because I felt handicapped without one, my sister Ruth kindly loaned me her gray Ford coupe. It was similar to my little old Ford, but with a bigger (85-hp) engine under the hood. With it I could go farther afield.

I visited with Priscilla and other friends at The Northfield, where the ice on the skating pond was firm and the toboggan chute beckoned. Some of us got together to ride the chute, and then borrowed one of the roll-fronted boards to use on the big hill at Roundtop.

I was reminded of the time when Neil and I (and two or three others) were on that hill with our old ripper. We were virtually flying down the crusted northwest slope, and were halfway to the bottom before discovering that a road had been plowed directly across our path. Some of the crew, quickly figuring the odds of survival, jumped clear. But Neil and I, either glued in place by fear or filled with uncommon valor, stayed aboard. (I was driving.) We bounced hard through the hazard but stayed right-side up until we reached the frozen pond below, where we flipped over and spilled onto the ice. We had walked away from the spill but were bruised in both body and ego.

Now there was no crust on the snow, and our toboggan proved too sluggish for thrills. But it was a nice change from swimming lessons at Bainbridge.

While I was away at boot camp, one of my former girl friends moved to and went to work in Keene. Anxious to renew our acquaintance

I drove the twenty-miles on a cold, but clearing, Saturday afternoon to see her. I suppose we had a good time that evening, but what remained indelibly fixed in my mind was the trip home.

We said our good byes about midnight; I climbed into my borrowed car and headed toward Northfield. A blast of hot air from the gas-fired heater warmed my legs, and I remembered how inefficient the hot-air heater in my Ford had been. There was good music on the radio, I had good thoughts in my mind, and it was good being behind the wheel again. I was in control. Things couldn't get much better than this.

Almost no lights showed in the little village of West Swanzey. The few inhabitants were no doubt all asleep. I came to a section of new highway; a straight section cut through a wooded, gravelly hill, and again noticed how nice and warm it was with the heater on. Too warm, I suddenly realized. A glance at the engine-temperature gage prompted a reason for it; the motor was overheating! My high spirits collapsed. I pulled over to the side of the highway and stopped the car.

A quick search in the glove compartment, under the seat and behind it failed to produce a flashlight. And since I no longer smoked, I carried no matches. There were probably no tools in the car either.

Undaunted, I left the parking lights on and got out in the cold, walked to the front of the car and opened the hood. The dim lights were of no help in the engine compartment, I'd have to rely on senses other than sight. Luckily, I was familiar with the placement of critical components there.

The smell of alcohol was a good clue, so with my fingers I checked the radiator hoses. Sure enough, I felt a two-inch slit in the underside of one of the top ones. The coolant, I concluded, must be completely gone.

Back in the warm car, I sat and evaluated my predicament. It would soon be too cold to stay with the vehicle (the outside temperature was about five-degrees above zero) so I decided to start walking. But which way?

I would go south, the direction in which I was headed, toward Winchester and home. If someone should by chance come by I would hitch a ride. With the high collar of my trusty pea coat pulled close around my neck and ears, I stepped off.

The roadway was difficult to see at first, but as my eyes became accustomed to the darkness I was guided by the white center line and the snow banks on either side. A few stars shone through a thin overcast sky, shedding enough light to barely outline the distant horizon. Moving along briskly I was plenty warm enough, even exhilarated.

Three miles down the road I crossed over the Ashuelot River, on a new wide bridge downstream from the old covered one. A pickup truck rattled up from behind, stopped, and the young couple inside offered me a lift to Winchester. I quickly accepted the offer.

Everything's working out fine, I mused, staring through the small, defrosted patch on the windshield, but I was being overly optimistic.

Certain of finding help in town, I thanked my benefactors and waved them on to Hinsdale, their destination. The restaurant/gas station was dark, so I rapped loudly on a door next to it in the hope that the owner lived there. A sleepy old man answered my signal, but his response to my question was far from comforting. The station owner didn't even live in Winchester, he said, but drove over from Hinsdale on weekdays to run the place. I explained that all I needed was a hose and some alcohol, but he shook his head saying there was no one in town who could help.

Dejected, I apologized for disturbing his sleep, turned and began the long walk back to the car. I had decided that, since it was so damnably cold, I could probably run the car without coolant. I would try to drive it home.

I was not so lucky as to catch a ride back. Not one car passed me in either direction. It was a lonely six miles, with only my own thoughts for company (albeit very fine company) and I felt good when, an hour-and-a-half later, I was seated once more in the Ford. I started the engine and drove, keeping a watchful eye on the temperature gage, and when it began to rise sharply I stopped to let it cool. In this stop-and-go manner I was able to get eight miles closer to home, a couple of miles at a time, to the base of the steep hill between Winchester and Northfield.

There I stopped for good. The engine would surely overheat on that grade, and the road was too narrow up there to pull over and park. So I left the car and set out walking again.

Sunrise was not far off. It was but five more miles to home and a bed.

All that drilling and marching at Bainbridge had prepared me well for this. My legs easily propelled me over the summit, and then it was all downhill. I took the cutoff to the Seminary, passing by the school's dairy barn just at milking time. Another ten minutes and I turned up the driveway at 179 Main Street. The sun was just breaking over Northfield Mountain.

Mother greeted me at the kitchen door. "Oh, I see you've been out for a walk before breakfast. How ambitious you are."

Secretly pleased with my accomplishment, I began the story of my night's experience.

"Oh my," she interrupted. "You must be terribly tired and cold and hungry."

Within minutes she heaped a pile of hot griddle-cakes on a plate and placed it before me. I covered it generously with butter and maple syrup, and devoured the whole plateful. What a meal! My all-time favorite breakfast.

But I could not tarry. There was much to be done before I'd have time to relax.

Jimmy Neigh operated a one man, car repair garage on a corner of his father-in-law's lot on Birnam Road and Pine Street. It was a ritzy, residential area and seemed a strange place for such a business, but there it was. Jimmy was meticulous by nature, though, and there was never any clutter in or around his shop (a rare phenomenon in the garage business).

YANKEE-NEVADAN

I had always taken my car to Jimmy for oil changes, lubrication and repairs, and knew him well enough to call him my friend. I used to drop by just to chat with him while he worked. Now, when I needed help, or at least a radiator hose, I naturally thought of him and hoped that he would be up and about. I went to the phone and called.

Though it was Sunday morning and I had interrupted his breakfast, Jimmy seemed pleased to hear from me. He listened patiently to my sad story, and then replied matter-of-factly, "I'll be right over."

In less than twenty minutes he came up our driveway - having gathered up hoses, clamps, antifreeze and tools - picked me up and drove to the disabled Ford. Before noon he had made the necessary (permanent) repairs and followed me back to his shop.

For this outstanding service, my friend accepted an amount of money covering the cost of parts; none for his time and effort. What a guy.

I had been awake 28-hours, had walked at least fourteen miles in zero weather, and had helped replace a broken radiator hose. Small wonder that I found the idea of home and sleep an enticing one. After hastily downing a sandwich I hit the sack, and never budged for twelve hours.

And then, toward the end of my stay, my tonsils flared up again. The pain got so bad I stayed in bed. My mother and sisters attended to me, friends called to wish me well, Priscilla sent me a "get well" card.

Still suffering a few days later I got out of bed. The New Year arrived, with no fanfare on my part, and I reluctantly boarded a south-bound train, thus ending my first Navy leave.

Ultimately I was "graduated" from Boot Camp and promoted to Seaman 2nd-Class. With the promotion came a raise in pay, from \$50 to \$54/month. I heaved a sigh of relief and sewed a second white stripe on the cuff of my jumper sleeve.

When the war had effectively ended, back in August of 1945, so many commissioned and petty officers were discharged from active duty there was a shortage of specialists in the Navy; particularly in the field of electronics, which was of fast-growing importance. So a crash program of training was initiated, designed to refill those ranks as quickly as possible.

Several of us graduating boots (those of us who'd scored high on the regular test) were given a special aptitude test (the Eddy Test) related to electronics. Those who passed were designated to attend one of the two Electronics Technician schools (then) in the U.S. One was in Corpus Christi, Texas, the other at Great Lakes, Illinois.

From the beginning, from the time of my enlistment, I had wanted to be an aerographer (a meteorologist). But when I passed the electronics exam I reassessed my priorities. This was a windfall opportunity, an opportunity that I couldn't pass up.

So, having served my apprenticeship, I was ready and eager to move on. Our company broke up, each of us to attend a school of some sort or be assigned to a ship. A couple of my buddies took off for the electronics school in Corpus Christi. Others, like me, were destined for Great Lakes.

There was not much about Bainbridge that I would miss. There were many things that I would never forget. But first I got to go on leave, my second since joining up.

My school chums, Eugene Hutchinson, Neil Churchill and Billy Shattuck, were in training at Bainbridge when I had arrived, back in November. I don't recall ever seeing Eugene or Bill, but Neil and I got together a couple of times at the bowling alley. Harry Zaluzny, a husky lad who had been raised on a farm in the south-east corner of Vermont, and who was still at Bainbridge, had a leave scheduled the same as mine. So, on the fourth of February, 1946, we travelled together by train to South Vernon. Although we had grown up in the same community I hadn't really known Harry before. I found him to be outgoing, amiable and really good company on the trip.

I was ten days at home, presumably in pursuit of happiness (though I don't recall any specific events) and then I had to return to duty; this time in the Midwest, a thousand miles from home, more than twice as far away as Bainbridge.

The scenery, what I could see of it through dirty train windows, was bleak and dreary at first, then snow covered and postcard pretty. A near blizzard was raging when we crept along at a snail's pace over a myriad merging and crossing tracks, past miles of cattle pens, between dozens of passenger and freight trains, to come to a jolting stop by a crowded platform in the Chicago railway terminal. I hurried to the station center, and asked a friendly attendant the way to Great Lakes. With a winning smile, the cute young thing pointed toward the Chicago & Northwestern passenger train, and I was soon climbing aboard. As it pulled silently and smoothly away from the station, I realized that I was on a new kind of train. At least new to me. Its motive power was electricity.

It was snowing all the way to my destination, the Great Lakes Training Center gate. There, with the visibility near zero, I could get no idea of the lay of the land, or for that matter where the land ended and Lake Michigan began. But I could tell by the chill in the air that that great inland sea was not far off.

As I walked toward my new quarters, carrying my sea bag on my windward shoulder against the cold, I thought, "Here I go, from one frigid training camp to another." Not exactly "from the frying pan to the fire," but the same idea.

Great Lakes (as I will hereafter refer to the training center) was situated on the very shore of Lake Michigan, about thirty-miles north of Chicago, just south of Waukegan - the tiny city of Jack Benny's birth - in Lake County. When the weather cleared I was able to get my bearings, and found that I was in a vast, flat country. No mountains. No hills. Unless one considered a 100-foot rise a hill. It was not a barren land; there were enough trees that when leafed-out they would further attenuate the view. But it was now winter and, except for the paved streets and concrete walks, the campus-like center was blanketed with snow. On the good side of things, the buildings were much better built, and warmer, than those at Bainbridge. Furthermore, I'd be spending most of my time indoors.

The Electronics Technician course was presented in two parts. The first part, essentially a "crash course" covering basic math,

fundamentals of electricity, radio and electronics, would last about twelve weeks. The second phase, an advanced, specialized training course leading to a petty officer rating, would require another nine months. A high rate of flunkouts was expected, but those who survived would be well-trained men.

There were initially about 120 students in our primary class, a large class by any standard. Roughly twenty-five percent of us were destined to go on to the advanced class. I was sure that I would be among that group.

From the very beginning I applied my utmost energy to the task. I was particularly attentive in class, and often worked on homework till the wee hours in the morning. And we had few distractions. For the most part we were excused from routine drills and standing watch, a sharp contrast to operations back at boot camp. I even found a certain enthusiasm for this new kind of concentrated busyness.

At first I did fairly well at math, did quite well in radio and electricity, and really excelled in lab and shop work. But then, in the middle of the second month, I began sliding downhill in math. In that short time we'd gone from simple algebra to complicated trigonometry and calculus, and it was getting to be, for me, just too darn tough. If only I'd worked harder in high school, to myself I lamented.

So I studied even harder, harder than I had ever studied, to achieve my objective. I poured over the books after every evening chow, sweating through page-long formulas and trying to memorize complex theorems. Four hours of fitful sleep was the norm.

On the 27th of June, about a hundred of us were drafted for a work party to move material. The Navy had recently shut down its EE & RM School up in Washington and shipped it - hardware, textbooks and all - to Great Lakes. It was our task to off-load and move it into a big warehouse. There were carloads of boxes and crates containing exotic transmitters and receivers, pieces of waveguide, giant radar antennas, and thousands of miscellaneous items. It was my first glimpse of sophisticated communications equipment, and the most exercise I'd had since leaving boot camp. We were two weeks in that occupation.

At last the time came for the big exam, the first-phase exam that would separate the men from the boys. (A few of my compatriots had already flunked or dropped out of the program.) On the night before the first test, I attempted to cram a college semester's worth of material into my brain. Would it work?

I noted that some of the guys were secreting pertinent information on a wrist, a shirt cuff, the back of a slide-rule or a wristwatch for future reference. I briefly considered following suit, but concluded that it would be a disservice to the Navy as well as myself to cheat for a passing grade. If I were to fail, then it would be because I didn't know the subject. I must take my chances, I resolved, without the aid of a crutch.

And so, armed with a pencil, a slide rule and a head full of confusing facts, I went for the exams; which continued for two or more days depending on one's ability to quickly come up with the answers.

In the end I failed. Mathematics, especially the calculus, proved to be my downfall. To put it mildly, I was discouraged. To put it in proper perspective, I was downright disappointed. I had hoped that my extraordinary effort would pay off but it had not. My only consolation was in not being alone. (Misery loves company.)

In fact I was one of a majority. Only about thirty of our original number would go on to the advanced course. Of those who didn't make the grade, several had taken math in college and some were already petty officers. But most of us were just young and lacking in background. Oh yes, the guys who cheated were discovered and automatically disqualified. At least my conscience had spared me that ignominious fate.

No longer students, we were immediately transferred to an OGU (Out Going Unit) and assigned to a work group. It would be our home until the Navy figured out what to do with us.

It was a good cooling off period, as far as I was concerned, for I was at last able to relax and enjoy my surroundings. True it was hard working details and standing regular watches, but I was free most evenings.

There was also an opportunity for recreation. For the first time in my life I learned to play cards: Black Jack, Rummy and (of all things) Bridge. I also found that people who play cards are prone to making-up rules to suit themselves. So I bought a book of Hoyle, and with it settled countless arguments. Sometimes we played chess, but I could never seem to plan far enough ahead to be good at it. I did not play poker or gamble, and observed that those who did were usually broke.

As was my habit (and a Navy rule) I never loaned my personal property. And I seldom loaned money. When I did, it was a small amount and with the knowledge (on my part) that I could afford to do without repayment. I was always repaid.

Before leaving Bainbridge I had loaned a guy five dollars. A short time later he was transferred to Corpus Christi, Texas, and I never expected to see him, or the five, again. Several weeks transpired and, unknown to me, my erstwhile friend was transferred to Great Lakes. One day he walked into our barracks, spotted me, removed a "fiver" from his wallet and handed it over.

"Thanks for the loan, buddy," he said with a grin. "I bet you never thought you'd see me again." It was a happy reunion.

I took advantage of weekend liberties by traveling, usually with a friend or two, to Chicago, Milwaukee or Minneapolis. Chicago was a good liberty town, with a diversity of things to do and see that even a young sailor might enjoy. We usually stayed overnight at the YMCA, located in a big old brick building near "The Loop" on Michigan Ave. From there we could walk to almost any place worthwhile.

During daylight hours we wandered the streets (some might say "swaggered"), window shopping the department stores and street walkers. I saw my first television picture that way, on a Dumont set displayed at Marshall-Field's. The picture couldn't have been larger than six-by-eight inches, though the cabinet was much bigger than a breadbox.

Across the Chicago River (a dirtier stretch of water I'd never seen) was the shining Wrigley Building. We took the elevator to its observation roof for a look out over never-ending Lake Michigan, and down on the canyon-like streets below. We would casually walk through Grant Park, hang around the Buckingham Fountain or sit on the grass by Chicago Harbor and ogle the beautiful, swim-suited girls - of which there were plenty. We took a bus to Jackson Park and the Museum of Science and Industry, the latter a wonderful collection of machines and scientific instruments left over from the Great Chicago Exposition.

At night we were attracted, like moths to a flame, by the bright lights. At State and Randolph Streets, the theater district, one could take in the latest movie, a symphony concert or a "big band" show. It was there that I first saw the great Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw and Glenn Miller Bands (the latter led by Tex Beneke after Miller's death), Spike Jones, the Mills Brothers and Danny Kaye, among others, "live" on stage.

Not far away, barkers lured us into comedy burlesque theaters, where nearly-nude but not-very-attractive girls and baggy-pants comedians were featured. The shows consisted of sensuous movements, bump-and-grind music and ribald humor. I enjoyed the acts, but felt uneasy among the audience of mostly sleazy, unkempt men.

(The burlesque show, by today's standards, was as pure as the driven snow.)

A couple of us hitchhiked to Milwaukee, up the two lane highway through Waukegan, Kenosha and Racine. We toured the downtown part of the "City of Breweries," attended a local fair and sideshow (the fat lady, the rubber man, the girl contortionist et al), then took the train back to Great Lakes. Nothing happened to make it a particularly memorable liberty, but I could add Wisconsin to my list of states visited.

A long weekend in Minneapolis/St. Paul was a nice change of pace. I really enjoyed the scenery thereabouts; it reminded me of New England and home. Some of the fellows, by dropping water-filled balloons on unsuspecting pedestrians several stories beneath our window, very nearly got us kicked out of the hotel. Tch-tch, such immaturity.

The highlight of my cultural activities occurred that autumn, not too long before I was scheduled to leave Great Lakes. It was November 24, 1946, on a very cold Sunday afternoon in Chicago. A friend and I were walking the streets, looking for something to do, when I saw the marquee at Orchestra Hall advertising "Yehudi Menuhin." What a break! Of course neither of us had reservations, and the matinee performance was about to begin when we inquired at the box office. However, because of our uniforms we were admitted (at half-price) and directed to join a group of servicemen, mostly sailors, standing in the foyer. Within a few minutes we were led, in two groups, to either side of the stage and seated on hastily set-up folding chairs.

I was barely settled (uncomfortable with the idea of being in full view of the audience) when the accompanist seated himself at a grand piano in center stage. Then Menuhin appeared, walked to the

fore, made a low bow, tucked a beautiful violin under his chin and commenced to play.

Among the numbers he performed were sonatas by Beethoven and Bach, "Symphonie Espagnole" (reminding me of Mr. Leslie), "Hungarian Dance No. 4" and Zigeunerweisen's "Gypsy Airs." The audience demanded an encore, so he favored us with "Hungarian Dance No. 6." What an experience!

As the theater emptied, several of us joined the fashionably dressed men and women of Chicago's social set backstage. We could hardly do otherwise; there was no other way out. Yehudi graciously accepted our accolades, made a few spontaneous remarks, and shook our hands till he must have tired of it. He was a remarkable man, then thirty years old and already world renowned.

The C&N Railroad provided convenient passenger service from Great Lakes to the aptly named Windy City. A nice, clean electric train stopped near the main gate every hour or so. But when summer arrived, when "whites" were decreed the uniform of the day, a union strike shut down that mode of transportation. We then took to the Skokie Highway with our thumbs out. Seldom did we wait very long for a ride, for the local citizens were kindly to uniformed hitchhikers. In those days there was little danger of assault, but there was always the possibility of being in an accident. I came fearfully close to the latter.

Slicked up and eager for an overnight in the city, three of us stationed ourselves by the south bound lane one sunny Saturday. A long, black, Cadillac convertible with its top down slid to a stop fifty-paces down the road; and lest the driver change his mind we took off running after it. The man behind the wheel was a big fellow, with skin the color of his car and an ear-to-ear grin on his face.

"Goin' to Chicago? Hop in," he invited.

My two friends literally hopped into the back seat while I opened the door and slid into the front. I had hardly closed the door behind me when the driver drove on. I soon began to wonder just what we'd gotten ourselves into, for our benefactor was not exactly a candidate for a safe driver award.

In spite of the wind and road noise he wanted to talk. He avowed that he'd been in the South Pacific and had a destroyer blown out from under him. The more he talked the faster he drove.

"I's damned glad t'git back in civvies aftah th' hell we took from the Japs." he said.

I sneaked a look at the speedometer. The needle was swinging around the numerals "85." I just knew something bad was about to happen, and then it happened.

WHAM! The hood flipped open and folded itself back against the windshield, effectively occluding our forward vision. Not that it mattered if I couldn't see, but I wished that our driver could. Well, he got serious real fast and did the right things in the circumstance; he held the wheel straight and carefully applied the brakes. Even so the Cadillac veered to the left onto the median, and kicked up a tornado of dust before coming to a stop in the tall grass.

We all sat in silence while the cloud settled over us, then someone muttered, "What the hell happened?"

I thought, "Thank God we're alive."

The black man, now about as white as he'd ever been, remarked in a steady voice, "Now that wa'nt no fun a-tall."

A gross understatement if I ever heard one.

Together we pulled the warped hood back over the engine and tied it down with a piece of twine. Then we were on our way again. Every once in a while our driver would chuckle and shake his head from side-to-side, no doubt thinking how, after surviving the Japs, he could have met his maker right here in the peaceful Illinois countryside.

Just for an instant, back there, I'd had some dire thoughts of my own.

In 1946, downtown Chicago still boasted of a USO Club. Though nothing like it had been during the war, it was still a friendly place and easily accessible from the "Y" on Michigan Avenue.

The USO was not particularly popular with the majority of sailors (hanky-panky was not condoned), but for those of us too young to legally patronize the bars it was a good place to go for entertainment; to read, play games, shoot pool, or dance to music from a phonograph record. The girls were near our age, and I almost learned how to dance. (Alas, the USO would close in September.)

For at least a decade, across the United States, lavishly decorated ballrooms provided the ideal environment for "big bands" and dancing. Radio stations broadcast live music from most of them. Late-night listeners could tune in and hear a different band every half hour as the broadcasts moved from the East to the West Coast. It had long been my habit, back home, to follow their performances.

Two of the most famous of these ballrooms were the Aragon and the Trianon, both located in Chicago. I never saw the Trianon, but once went to the Aragon on a double date with a buddy of mine. As usual I didn't feel like dancing, but this time I was not alone. There were as many or more non-dancers as dancers on the floor.

The interior of the Aragon resembled a romantic, Moroccan village. False turrets and minarets loomed above a colonnaded veranda. Fake palm trees encircled the courtyard-like dance floor. A black domed ceiling represented the sky, where bright stars twinkled and thin, wispy clouds drifted slowly from horizon to horizon.

Behind the arches, off the immaculately polished floor, were ornate chairs and tables where we could sit and sip soft drinks or beer. We danced a little, then stood in front of the bandstand with scores of other couples listening in rapt attention to the sweet, swinging music.

(I'm ashamed to admit it but I can't remember which of the big bands was then playing the Aragon.)

On another weekend liberty, several of us sneaked into a prominent hotel-lounge in Chicago. For a half-hour or so, before being ejected by the management (we were all of minor age), I enjoyed a spectacular performance by Gene Krupa, the greatest drummer (before Buddy Rich) in the business.

When in Chicago on Sunday mornings I would hit a hotel lobby, buy a newspaper, walk across the avenue to Grant Park, find a bench

without a resident bum attached and relax with the funnies (as we called the comics in those days). It was really peaceful at that time, calm and quiet with only the squirrels and birds for company. As the day wore on, people would migrate to the park until they outnumbered the wildlife and I would move on to other pursuits.

It was just such a day when I chanced upon a cute young girl seated upon the broad, granite steps in front of the Chicago Museum of Natural History. She was eating a sandwich and reading a small paperback book.

I sat down nearby, introduced myself and struck up a conversation with her (by permission of course). I learned that her name was Clyra Deck, that she worked as a receptionist in the museum, and that she was enjoying the fresh air on her lunch hour. Being interested in natural history, and hoping to continue our acquaintance, when she finished eating I escorted her back to work then toured the building. At closing time, Clyra accepted my offer to walk her to the streetcar and promised to see me again sometime in the future.

Over the course of the next few weeks, I would spend many an enjoyable weekend afternoon with Clyra. She was my guide to the lakefront area, the aquarium, the planetarium and Soldier Field.

I was really impressed by that grand, classical stadium. It was like an ancient Roman coliseum, especially as it was empty at the time. Clyra told me that a hundred-thousand people could be seated there, and often were. In spite of its awesome dimensions, I could not imagine so many human beings in one place.

I was asked to dinner at Clyra's home, and eagerly accepted the invitation. It was a Saturday. I waited at the museum till she got off work, and then we took a streetcar west from the loop (I think on Van Buren Street) through some of the worst looking slums in the world. It was rundown and filthy dirty; the sidewalks and gutters were littered with trash and human derelicts.

As we traveled west, though, the scenery improved; the farther west the better. We passed old middle-class, brownstone apartment houses, identical in form, each with a set of steps leading from the sidewalk to a narrow stoop and front door. One would have to memorize his street number, I thought, or surely wind up in his neighbor's front room.

At last we got to Oak Park, a fashionable suburb where the upper-middle-class resided. Modern apartment buildings and homes were surrounded by green lawns and trees and, best of all, clean air. From the car-stop we walked a couple of blocks to Clyra's residence, on Austin Boulevard, where I was warmly greeted by her parents and (as I recall) a younger sister.

Clyra's mother and father, probably in their early forties, were good looking, well mannered, moral and hard working people. Her father had a responsible position in Chicago, as a manager for Sears, Roebuck and Company.

Dinner was great. The conversation flowed easily; the food was simple and well prepared. After dessert, Clyra and I walked to a nearby park and, among other things, sat and watched a group of jolly old men engaged in the sport of lawn bowling.

Later, back at the apartment, when bidding my hosts thanks and goodbye, Clyra's father invited me to join them on Memorial Day, to attend the famous Indy-500. Wow! Was I surprised?

"I'll be here," I replied with a grin, and walked on air all the way back to the base.

When I was in boot camp, I had made an effort to eat a variety of foods at meal time; even meat, though it was not particularly palatable. Now, at Great Lakes, I resolved to quit forcing myself. From then on I took only that which looked appetizing, and passed up most of the main dishes. I settled for potatoes, navy beans (they were great), certain vegetables, biscuits, rolls or bread.

I still liked chicken, until I chanced to draw galley duty and observed how they were handled, or mishandled, behind the scenes. Whole chickens were tossed about, dropped on the floor, picked up "as is" and cooked pinfeathers and all. It was not an appealing sight. I seldom took chicken after that.

As a result of my selective diet, I wasn't getting enough to eat and started supplementing my meals with foods purchased at small-stores; that is, hot dogs, crackers, potato chips, nuts and candy bars. Of the latter, Butterfinger and Heath bars were my favorites. It's a wonder I got sufficient nourishment to sustain my activities.

And then, wouldn't you know, the bakers' union began a lengthy strike against the area's commercial bakeries. Our Navy cooks came up with an ingenious substitute for white bread, though: cornbread. It was served three times a day, six days a week. On Sunday, for a treat, they baked white bread. Fine thing. Most of us were away on liberty on Sunday.

I had always liked cornbread (we called it Johnnycake at home) but before long I developed an aversion to the mere sight of the crummy yellow stuff.

I never suspected, when I enlisted, that I would spend a significant part of my hitch at mundane labor. But that's what I had come to. I was assigned to a paint crew. As with every job, big or small, it would be educational.

The Navy had a penchant for keeping things painted, whether or not it was needed, and had the manpower to satisfy the practice. I was now a part of that manpower. Our first order was to report to barracks so-and-so, to a civilian painter named Harvey Keane.

Mr. Keane was an old man, perhaps in his seventies, working under contract with the Navy. Retired after a long career with the Pullman Company (famous maker of passenger and express cars for the railroads), he had come to work for the Navy during the war and was still at it. Of medium build, a little stooped, white haired and bespectacled, unshaven, dressed in paint-spattered overalls he was the typical painter, such as Norman Rockwell might have chosen as his model.

Gathering us around him, Mr. Keane explained that this particular barracks was being converted to an enlisted men's library. The entire interior was to be repainted. Moments later I found myself atop a scaffold, paintbrush in hand, transferring a dripping, white liquid from bucket to ceiling. I wouldn't say that I hated painting,

especially ceilings, but it was very low on my list of acceptable ventures. However, I was determined not to show it.

Two hours went by. Mr. Keane called for a break and we all climbed down. He wagged a finger in my direction and led me off to one side. "I can tell by the way you handle a brush," he said, "that you've painted before."

"Yeah, a little," I acknowledged, wondering what he was getting at.

"Well, I can use you on another job," he offered. "You don't want to paint ceilings anymore, do you?"

When the break was over, he sent the rest of the gang back up on the platform and took me under his wing. I would never again paint a ceiling at Great Lakes.

In the days that followed, which stretched into weeks, old Keane tutored me in the tricks-of-the-trade: How to draw a straight line with a brush, freehand; how to clean and store brushes (he personally owned none but the best bristle brushes and let me work with them); how to apply shellac, varnish and stain; even the art of "graining," a technique to simulate the grain of wood on a non-grained surface.

Keane had spent a lot of years graining the interiors of Pullman cars, painting metal doors, window frames and panels to look like exotic, expensive woods. He explained that initially the work was done painstakingly by hand, later by using engraved rollers that repeated the design.

It was his plan to make over the stanchions (posts) and other woodwork in the library to resemble knotty pine. It kept me busy for days, working with paint, stain, brush, comb and cloth. The results were rewarding, and the once-drab barracks was ultimately transformed into a homey chamber.

I learned more from Mr. Keane than how to paint. I must have heard a hundred stories about wild, old Chicago, about prohibition, bootleggers and gangsters, even about Mrs. O'Leary's cow kicking over the lantern that (allegedly) started the great fire that burned out the gamblers and prostitutes of west Chicago, and most of the rest of the city as well. His tales were probably mostly true.

He was forever filling our tender ears with jokes, some rather salty, and tried to educate us to the foibles of the opposite sex. I took it all in, to be sorted out later.

On completing our work at the library we moved to another barracks, this one to be made over into a hobbies and crafts shop. (The postwar Navy was beginning to resemble a college of liberal arts.) We set to work finishing furniture benches, desks, tables and cabinets recently constructed by base carpenters to accommodate those activities. Layer on layer of shellac and spar-varnish were applied to the work benches and desk tops, each one rubbed forever with sandpaper or pumice.

The shellac was nasty stuff. One of my peers, overcome by the fumes, passed out while working under a desk. The rest of us learned from his mistake, and from then on everyone periodically came up for air, just as Keane had instructed.

While it was fresh in my mind, and nostrils, I asked the old man how he could stand the smell of turpentine and shellac after all those years.

"A shot of good Irish Whiskey after work and the smell is gone," he replied with a knowing wink.

I suspected that he didn't always wait till after work.

Harvey Keane was a great painter and teacher. He was also a good boss, and was especially adept at getting work out of a crew of young scatterbrained swabbies.

One end of the barracks had been piled high with boxes and crates of hobby materials and tools. Some of those crates, those containing model-airplane parts, were of significance to me; as I shall explain:

It was still springtime when the materials (alluded to above) were brought in and stored in the barracks. And then, despite the fact that a round-the-clock watch was established, some person or persons made off with thousands of dollars worth of model-airplane parts. The loss was discovered and I, along with a dozen or more other guys who had stood guard on the weekend of the theft, was involved in the investigation.

The first I knew of it was on Monday morning, when all hell broke loose. We were summoned to a Captain's Mast; a trial presided over by the commanding officer who in turn would mete out appropriate punishment. The trial began with the charge of "theft" being leveled against each of us, then the interrogation commenced.

At least one of us was obviously guilty, either of the theft itself or of allowing an outsider to get away with the goods. But no one confessed and no one was proven guilty, which left but one alternative. Punishment for all. The order was directed to each of us by name, and at the same time put on our personal records:

"Three weeks loss of liberty; fifty hours extra duty."

Did I still believe in the superiority of military justice? Well, yes, but I was pretty disgusted with my peers, with at least one of them, maybe more, who'd made a mockery of the adage "Crime doesn't pay."

Ordinarily, being confined to base would not have bothered me. But at that particular time it prevented my going to Indianapolis on Memorial Day with Clyra and her folks. That fact gnawed at me unmercifully, and I began my extra duty with an energy born of frustration and fueled by anger.

After a while, though, realizing that this was one of those things I couldn't change, I resigned myself to the inevitable.

The extra duty was rough, dirty, menial work, steel-wooling and scrubbing everything in and out of sight in the base galley. For fifty hours (on consecutive weekends) my comrades and I worked over the floors and counters, washed windows and reefers and sinks, and converted a long line of kitchen ranges from filthy-greasy to shiny black-and-chrome. I guessed that the galley was never so well cleaned as when the assignment fell to someone on extra duty.

My ordeal ultimately ended and I enjoyed more summer weekends in Chicago. But I could never forget that incident, nor forgive the unknown thief who had caused me so much undeserved misery.

Toward the end of September, I received word that Mother and Bobby were going to move out of the old house in East Northfield. They would live with Ruth, and little Jimmy, in West Northfield. Since I was not engaged in any really essential duty, and because Mother could use the help, I decided to try for a leave. With the aid of the Red Cross (a most worthy organization) I was awarded an "emergency leave" of ten days, longer than I had requested.

It was my first time home since being awarded a third cuff-stripe (I was now a Seaman 1st-class earning a fabulous \$66/month) and my first time home with a full head of hair.

Mother had gotten rid of some of her furniture, and with the help of Bobby and my sisters we made quick work of the move across the river. Included in the stuff she kept were my roll-top desk and an old trunk full of my papers and treasures.

It was not a case of all work, however, for I had ample time to enjoy the company of my friends and relatives before returning to Great Lakes.

Back at the base, I continued to work with old Mr. Keane while the season warped through autumn and on to winter. Once again I felt the chill of northerly winds off the lakes from Canada. Once again blues became the uniform-of-the-day, and pea coats were much in evidence both on and off the base. I began to wonder if I was destined to spend the rest of my tour in Illinois. I yearned for a change.

Anyone who ever served in the military, at least in the 1940s, can attest to the fact that one's assignment seldom matched his desires or qualifications, even though petty officers went to great lengths to convince a recruit that that's the case. For example, if a guy could cook they'd make him a fireman; if he was a mechanic they'd make him a cook. I had always wanted to be an aerologist, and they had tried to make me an electronics technician.

When my name was put up for reassignment, after flunking out of Electronics Technicians school, I naively believed that I'd have a list of alternative specialist schools from which to choose; or at least an opportunity to strike for (apprentice to) a rating of my liking. After all, I reasoned, if I were good enough to have been chosen for the electronics school in the first place, then I must have the ability to become a radar operator or electrician. Neither job was as demanding as that of an electronics technician.

So I was quite surprised to learn that only two options were open to me; submarine school or sea duty. I supposed that there was a real shortage of submariners, but I entertained no thought of joining that elite group. My choice was sea duty.

I looked forward to going to sea, cruising around the world, visiting romantic ports-of-call, and waited patiently in OGU for orders to that effect. But the term "sea duty," I would learn, was rather ambiguous. It could mean assignment to a ship's company, or it could mean land-based duty somewhere overseas.

The leaves fell and the grass turned brown. I received a nice letter from Betty, who was then matriculating at Westminster Choir College, in Princeton, New Jersey, and decided to take a weekend liberty to visit her.

The train trip was colorless and dreary, but the weather in New Jersey was fine. Betty introduced me to her friends and showed me around the campus. Typical of eastern institutions of learning, all of the buildings were constructed of practical yet esthetic red brick or granite, and separated by large, well-maintained lawns.

We posed for snapshots, dined together at the commissary, and talked of many things before it was time for me to return to base and she to her studies. It was a fine reunion.

Not long after my trip to Princeton, I received orders to report to the Philadelphia Naval Base. About a dozen of us said good bye to Great Lakes and Chicago, boarded a train, travelled through the bleak, white-and-gray Appalachia Mountains and settled in at the receiving station in Philly for another session of "wait for the unknown." This time it was in total idleness. No work details, no guard watches. I would have lots of time to read, while on base, and frequent liberties to spend in the City of Brotherly Love. And Philadelphia would live up to its name.

Through a mutual friend I met a young girl, Doris Derrickson, who proudly showed me around. It may have been Christmas Day when, in a twenty-degree temperature and a sharp wind, we stood at curb-side with thousands of other spectators to see the Mummers parade.

I had never even heard of the Mummers, but was told that it was an organization descended from an ancient religious society of some sort. Whatever its significance, nearly 3,000 scantily clad men and women, many of them in fool's costume, moved down Broad Street before us, dancing and singing in a kind of Mardi Gras of the North. The festivities lasted four hours, and I was chilled to the bone before they came to an end.

I then escorted Doris, who had remained warm and comfortable in a full length fur coat, by streetcar to her home, where I was invited by her folks to stay for dinner. It was not a bad way to get acquainted with some genuine Philadelphians.

A "covey" of WAVES was billeted at the Philadelphia Naval Station. Several of the girls, like us, were waiting for assignment. Having been advised to "Never mess with a WAC or a WAVE" (or words to that effect) I steered a wide course clear of them. It wasn't a difficult course to steer, however, for three very good reasons:

One, while WAVES contributed a very important service during the war, relieving men from land station to sea duty, it was a well known fact that an enlisted man could find himself in a lot of trouble if he got too friendly with one of them. Two, none were the least bit attractive. Three, every one of them held a rank of petty officer or lieutenant.

A.E. "Bud" Weinrich, a Westerner from Bozeman, Montana, and I had been acquainted for almost a year. We had attended school together, worked on the same details together, and "shipped out" from Great Lakes to Philadelphia in the same unit. While in Philly we took trips down to Washington, D.C., Baltimore and other points of interest. And then, toward the end of the December holiday season, he accompanied me on a 72-hour liberty to Northfield.

YANKEE-NEVADAN

On our way north we stopped off in New York City. Bud wanted to see what it was all about. It was cold, being midwinter, but that didn't prevent hundreds of servicemen and civilians from filling brightly-lit Times Square. What a crowd. Shoulder to shoulder, pushing and shoving, drinking and rowdy, wall to wall people. Once in a while a rift would appear, a mounted policeman would pass by and the rift would close behind him. Amazingly, despite the rowdiness, there was no sign of lawlessness, nothing to give a feeling of insecurity in the inner city.

Bud took a liking to New England, what he saw of it in that day or two before we took the long train ride back to Philly, and seemed to enjoy meeting and being with my family and friends. He especially liked Priscilla, and told me, "She reminds me of folks back home.... She likes people and people can't help liking her."

Time passed. I checked the bulletin board daily, looking for my name among the lists of orders. At last it was there, followed by: "... is ordered to the Naval Air Station, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba." Not a ship but a land station. Guantanamo! I had never heard of the place. Couldn't even pronounce it. I asked around and learned that the air station, part of the Guantanamo Naval Base, was situated near the southeastern end of the island.

The thought of my new assignment triggered a long-dormant optimism within me, and I listened eagerly to anyone who knew anything about Guantanamo Bay. Among other things I learned that air station personnel enjoyed a higher standard of living than was normal on a ship base, and that overseas duty was preferable to stateside duty. What luck! Another happy turn of events.

I said good bye to my friend Bud, who was assigned to a ship (but his orders would change) and we parted company. Now I would have to get acquainted with a new set of sailors, the fourth set in a little over a year.

The first leg of my transit to Guantanamo Bay was by ferry, down the Delaware River and Bay to Norfolk, Virginia. It was my first time on a vessel bigger than a whaleboat. The trip would take the better part of a day, so I had ample time to observe this new mode of travel. It's great, I thought to myself, I'm sure to like going overseas.

While wandering around the "ship" I came upon a group of people seemingly working on some shiny machines. From a distance, I observed. A man stood up to one of them, inserted an object into a slot, pulled a well-worn handle and released it with a flair. A noisy mechanism caused three, internally-mounted wheels to spin behind a glass window. In a few seconds they clanked to a stop, revealing a set of symbols. The worker then repeated the operation. Occasionally, rarely, when certain symbols lined up on the wheels, coins dropped noisily into a tray at the bottom and the man shouted as if he'd struck gold.

I had heard about slot machines, but had never before seen one. They were legal in faraway Nevada but here they could be operated only when the ferry was out-of-state, on open water. It was unlawful for minors to play them, but I noted that sailors could get away with it. None were winning any money.

The approach to Norfolk was disappointing. A thick haze hung over the bay, so thick I couldn't tell where the salt water left off and

YANKEE-NEVADAN

the shoreline began. Vessels of every size and shape cluttered the busy harbor, everything from tiny fishing boats to huge warships, from cocky tugs to gallant floating derricks. Beyond them, wharves, warehouses, railroad cars, trucks, cranes and piles of materiel beyond description existed in such profusion I wondered if anyone knew the order of it all.

Closer in, the water was virtually obscured by flotsam. And the shoreline, what I could see of it, was awash with rubbish. Sea salt, rotting marine life and spilled fuel oil - and God knew what else - all contributed to a malodorous stench that made me want to vomit. Some said it was the "smell of the sea" and they loved it. I'd sooner take a ripe barnyard in Northfield.

Once ashore, on U.S. Navy property, things were a lot better. It was proof that our surroundings didn't have to be untidy and dirty. If the Navy could maintain order and cleanliness, why not civilian operators? Well, I couldn't be worried about such weighty matters, I'd settle into my temporary quarters for a good night's sleep.

CHAPTER TWENTY
GUANTANAMO BAY, CUBA

U.S.S. Valley Forge, the Navy's newest aircraft carrier, lay at anchor in deep water in the Hampton Roads. She was being made ready for her shakedown cruise to the Caribbean Sea. Three destroyers had been assigned as escorts, one of them, the U.S.S. Forrest Royal (DD-872), would be my transportation vehicle to Cuba.

The Forrest Royal was a Gearing Class ship: 2,400-tons, 390-feet in length, 41-feet abeam, powered by 60,000-hp, geared-steam turbines (for the benefit of my readers interested in such data). She carried a crew of 275 men. Those of us assigned to the base at Guantanamo Bay would be her passengers.

The term "passenger," as used in the Navy, requires further definition: He is a traveling sailor who earns his way by working at various assigned details about the ship, inevitably the least desirable ones. Members of a ship's company, those permanently assigned, delight in having passengers aboard, for they are thus freed from a lot of dirty jobs.

I had the great misfortune of being assigned to duty in the Forrest Royal's galley. I suppose if one enjoyed eating, being near all that food might be enjoyable. For me it would be, literally, more than I could stomach.

But I am getting ahead of my story. First I had to go aboard. I walked smartly up the gangplank, sea bag on my shoulder, excited about the pending voyage. I'd actually be on the high seas, if only for a few days. Having previously rehearsed the procedures for boarding I stopped at the top of the gangway, faced the colors at the stern, rendered a smart salute and turned to the officer of the deck.

"Request permission to come aboard, sir," I said, holding the salute.

"Permission granted. Welcome aboard sailor," the officer responded with his salute.

A petty officer took me below, pointed out a bunk and locker, made a short speech about shipboard regulations and told me to report to the galley as soon as I'd stowed my gear. It was time to prepare the noon chow.

YANKEE-NEVADAN

I was not the least bit familiar with galley procedures, but it didn't matter. There were plenty of people around to tell me what to do.

"Open that bucket...stir that brew...scrub those pots and pans...haul that bowl to the mess." And every order seemed to end with, "...on the double."

Most of the food was at the steam tables by eight-bells (noon) when the first wave of hungry chow hounds poured through the hatch. From my position behind a giant steaming pot, I ladled soup into each man's bowl as he passed by.

"Glad t'have y'aboard," one guy grinned. "Enjoy yer cruise," another chided.

The seaman (passenger) next to me dished up mashed potatoes, another served meat, another vegetables and so on. We served almost continuously until four bells (14:00 or 2:00 pm), spent another half-hour cleaning the mess hall and galley, and were then granted a break until time to start the next meal. Within minutes I was topside, standing by the starboard rail, taking long deep breaths of air in an effort to rid my olfactory passages of obnoxious galley odors.

By now the ship had gotten under way and I stood at ease. The weather couldn't have been better; a virtually cloudless sky, a warm light wind blowing across our stern. I watched the indistinct, manmade horizon slip away behind. In the clear I saw a marshy lowland off the starboard bow, and beyond it a line of low trees.

"Cape Henry." So said the old hand at my side.

We rounded the cape and made for the open sea, Valley Forge in the van, our ship trailing to starboard, the other two destroyers trailing to port. Tiny caps broke white from pea-green waves alongside. Our bow rose up with a swell; we rolled slightly, settled down and began the cycle all over again. I was fascinated by this gentle, repetitive motion. Perhaps I should have pushed for sea duty after all.

Snatched from my reverie by the bosun's pipe, I reluctantly went below to join in the preparation of the evening meal. It was a repeat of noon chow as far as I was concerned, except that the names and odors of the food had changed and the degree of difficulty increased with the ship's rolling and pitching.

Standing at my position, I noticed that the bulkhead behind me transmitted the pounding of every wave. Right through my body. Before the meal was concluded, even before I had eaten, my stomach signaled its unhappiness with the situation. Two of my fellow landlubbers were not feeling well either.

A perceptive cook, seeing that we were getting queasy, advised eating lots of bread. "It'll keep you from bein' seasick," he said.

I did.... But it didn't.

Maybe a good night's sleep would work as a cure. I hit the sack as soon as I could get away from the galley, but sleep came fitfully if at all. It was a very bad night indeed.

Rousted out at 05:00 for morning duty, I took on a bowl of cereal, ate a slice of toast, then tried to forget about food; a difficult task when you're surrounded by the stuff. I concentrated on the thought of break-time, when I could go topside and breathe clean

air. I would overcome this malady, I kept telling myself, but alas, the force was against me.

We had almost finished cleaning up after the morning meal when, without warning, the lights and ventilation system shut down. Further, the familiar sound of turbines and screws ceased and the ship began to roll and toss dramatically.

Silence! And except for the dull glow of an emergency lamp, darkness. We had no idea why, but the Forrest Royal was "dead in the water."

The galley quickly became hotter and more stifling than ever, and I was now seriously nauseated.

Information came down over the intercom that the ship had experienced a minor problem requiring a power shutdown. A minor problem? Repairs were underway, estimated completion time thirty minutes. We were released from duty to go topside for air. I wasted no time getting there and made it to the rail, luckily on the lee side, before up-chucking everything I'd eaten in the last two days. I was, in a word, seasick!

The Forrest Royal bobbed like a cork on a pond. I longed to be aboard the Valley Forge, up ahead, which appeared as solid as the Rock of Gibraltar.

For the next two-and-a-half days, until setting foot on terra firma at Guantanamo Bay, I would suffer all the familiar affects of "mal de mer," the malady that many an unfortunate man or woman had experienced over the thousands of years since humans first put to sea on rough water. But not everyone succumbs to the illness, why me?

In spite of it all, I felt that I was doing pretty well to stay on my feet when every bone and muscle in my body ached and rebelled against it. I grew weak from lack of nourishment, but was too proud (and scared) to give up - if indeed I'd been allowed to do so. Only while on deck, in the fresh air, did I feel relatively comfortable.

At night I took my blanket aft, and slept among the depth charges stored near the fan-tail. At least once I caught myself hoping that I'd roll overboard in my sleep and be done with it. In the daytime, which may have been sunny and beautiful for all I knew, I tried eating more bread and crackers. It was to no avail. Nothing stayed down for long.

It is amazing how one's sense of judgment can be impaired when he is miserably sick. At least that's the way it was with me. It was toward the end of our second day out when, convinced that I had to eat to survive, I gulped down almost half-a-loaf of bread. It tasted so-o-o-o good. But what my taste buds relished my stomach rejected and I soon heaved it up in the passageway leading from the galley to the up-ladder.

By now I was quite familiar with the location of the swab, so I grabbed it and set to work cleaning up the mess. At that moment a salty Chief Boatswain's Mate happened by, and volunteered the following bit of advice.

"Y'know, sailor, there's no reason to get seasick. There's nothin' wrong with your belly...it's all in your head."

Without thinking, without considering the possible consequences of my actions I blurted out, "Hell! If it's all in my head then you clean it up," and shoved the swab handle toward him.

The bosun hesitated a moment, no doubt thinking what extra duty he could add to my already work-filled day, and then, much to my relief (for my aggressiveness had totally disappeared) a slow one-sided grin crept over his leathery face. He had a heart after all.

"Just clean up the damned mess and get the hell outta here," he offered, then shrugged, turned to the ladder and disappeared topside.

Reflecting on that incident, I decided that it was probably lucky for me that the chief was an old salt. A new, younger chief might well have taken offense at my inappropriate remark and made it really tough on me. I'd gotten off easy.

So we cruised to the Caribbean, with little recognition on my part, through the Bahamas, none of which I saw, through the Windward Passage, where a tremendous thunderstorm prevented my going up on deck, and finally through a narrows into Guantanamo Bay. The big aircraft carrier dropped anchor well out in the harbor; the Forrest Royal proceeded around a point of land to tie-up alongside a dock. At long last we had arrived.

January 26, 1947: I planted my two feet firmly on the island of Cuba. However I may have appeared, I felt good. By simply returning to man's natural environment I was cured. Were I not in public view I'd have fallen to my knees and kissed the ground, I was that happy to be reunited with Mother Earth. Instead I wobbled on sea legs toward a nearby petty officer to ask for direction.

With several other swabbies I rode an old gray bus around a cove and onto the Air Station, to my new home address, Barracks AU-50. It was an elegant-looking place, the best quarters I had yet seen in the Navy, a two-story, H-shaped building surrounded by grass and shrubs and flowering trees and palms.

Situated on a low bluff, on the north rim of Corisano Point, the rear of the barracks overlooked the bay while the front faced a small, well maintained park. Inside, the lower decks in the outside wings were filled with bunks. The upper decks were given over to recreational facilities: a library (not as fancy as the one we re-decorated at Great Lakes), comfortable wicker chairs, radio, card tables, ping-pong and pool tables. A community shower and a laundry occupied the center of the "H," both supplied with "hot" water from a sun-warmed tank on the roof.

(The sun would never provide truly hot water, and since there was no other source of heat the term "hot shower" held little meaning for us.)

I was assigned a bunk and a locker on the lower deck in the east wing of the "H."

From the barracks, it was less than a hundred-yards to the ship's service store and the chow hall to the east, and only a little farther to an open-air movie lyceum in the opposite direction. There were tennis courts close by in the park, a fishing pier out in back, and an eighteen-hole golf course over beyond the ship base. To my way of

YANKEE-NEVADAN

thinking, the amenities were not unlike those at a resort hotel. No doubt about it, things were really looking up for me.

Cuba had been an important island in the West Indies since the sixteenth century. It was mostly ruled by Spaniards until the late 1800s, then the people demanded independence, formed rebellions and civil wars, and asked the United States to intercede in their behalf. The U.S. did so. Not just to be neighborly, but for geographic and economic reasons. Our Naval Base was an offshoot of that involvement.

Forty miles west of Guantanamo Bay were Santiago and San Juan Hill. Both names were familiar to me, for it was from San Juan Hill that Teddy Roosevelt, then a cavalry officer, attained fame by leading a daring attack on Santiago in the Spanish American War. It was that same war (I would learn) that made clear the advantage of establishing a U.S. Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay.

The bay, protected by a narrow entrance, was deep and large and could easily accommodate a fleet of warships. Further, it was situated in a strategic position relative to the Windward Passage. The base was established, by treaty with Cuba, in 1903 and became our nation's most important overseas station on the Atlantic side of the New World. During World War II its role was expanded.

In 1947, Cuba, under President San Martin, was on friendly terms with the U.S. - socially, politically, economically and militarily - and our base was still being operated under the conditions of a long-term lease.

The closest liberty town was Caimanera, about six miles by boat northward across the bay. It was little more than a village, with a few bars "et cetera" for the benefit of gringo sailors.

Guantanamo City, once a popular Cuban resort, lay ten miles farther north. A city of 40- or 50-thousand people, as far as I knew it was devoid of cultural entertainment.

Strange as it may seem, I visited neither place during my tour at Gitmo (nickname derived from the abbreviation Gtmo. for Guantanamo). Based on sordid tales brought back by those who had, I was better off for the omission. As a matter of policy, because of the cities' reputation for bad booze and venereal disease, the base commander frequently restricted all liberties across the bay. And there was nowhere else to go. Anyway, I was content to remain on base where, except for the company of girls, we had all the recreation we needed.

My first assignment at Gitmo was on the seaplane dock. The planes serviced there were usually of two types: the PBY Catalina, an amphibian used for surveillance and sea-rescues, and the PBM Mariner, a non-amphibious seaplane but similarly utilized. The Catalina could land on the runway but the Mariner, without any landing gear of its own, was a regular customer at the ramp.

After a PBM "landed" on the bay, it would taxi to a buoy some fifty yards from shore and tie up. Four swabbies would pair off and push two sets of buoyant wheels to the aircraft, attach them to either side of the hull and swim back to the ramp. Meanwhile, another swimmer hooked a tow line to the bow and the huge machine was winched ashore. The wings and hull were then washed down, using fresh water to rid them of corrosive sea salts.

Since seaplane landings were rare, the job was a lazy man's dream. If you liked swimming in the warm Caribbean waters and basking in the sun, as most sailors did, it was ideal.

While on that assignment I participated in no more than four landing or takeoff operations. But even that was too many for me. While swimming (floundering) around in the clear water I observed all sorts of weird creatures, including manta rays, eels, barracuda sharks and jellyfish. I was sure to be bitten or poisoned by one of them. It didn't matter that such a likelihood was statistically improbable; it was still a worry to me.

Good duty? Au contraire. It was one of the most undesirable jobs I could think of. But not for long. My tenure at the seaplane dock was to be, fortuitously, short lived.

One morning the Chief came to me and asked, "Well, sailor, how do you like this duty?"

I answered that it was interesting but slow, and then added, "To be honest I can't swim worth a damn."

"Fine," he said. "You can trade with one of the guys over at land-plane operations."

Within the hour I was being briefed on my new duties at the hangar and aircraft maintenance facility.

This job required my being trained and certified to operate all kinds of motor vehicles, from the little Cushman scooter to an 18-wheeled tanker truck. I hauled and pumped high-octane aviation fuel, moved freight, carried messages, washed, sanded, waxed and pushed airplanes, cleaned oil and grease from tarmac and concrete. It was more fun than working, as a new job often appears.

Every type of naval aircraft operated in and out of the air station at Guantanamo Bay. It was home to a squadron of JDs (attack bombers), and carrier-based planes practiced landings and takeoffs on the runways.

Gitmo was a regular stop for overseas flights, including NATS (Naval Air Transport Service) planes enroute between the Navy's mainland and Caribbean stations. They landed to refuel and obtain weather information regardless of other business.

NATS used a four-engine R5-D (Douglas DC-4) to haul personnel, mail and some freight. We looked forward to the arrival of a south-bound R5-D from the states, for often the crew would donate fresh milk or ice cream, commodities not normally found in our mess hall, to our cause.

One day a 35mm camera in the showcase at the ship's service caught my eye. So, after some deliberation, I parted with half-a-month's pay and made the Argus C-2 my own. It would turn out to be one of the best investments I ever made. I would fill an album with photographs of nearly every aspect of my tour in Cuba: landscapes, buildings, aircraft, ships, and especially shots of my many friends and acquaintances.

Believing that I'd found my niche at last, the disappointment of failing the Great Lakes school no longer preyed on my mind. I hoped I would be allowed to stay at the air station for the rest of my tour. Maybe I would strike for an A&E (Aircraft and Engines) rating. Life was so good I didn't think it could get any better. But it would.

A couple of weeks into this new career and it, too, came to an end, as Fate once more smiled in my direction. Of all places, there was an opening in the aerographer group. I had put in a request for that particular duty the day after I came aboard, but not with a lot of optimism. Now the assignment, exactly what I'd wanted from the start, was mine.

I left the line operation job, satisfactory though it was, for the clean, scientific surroundings of the "weather tower." It had been a long and circuitous route getting there, but now my destiny was met. The rest was up to me.

There was a bounce to my step and a quickness in my heart as I hurried up the curved pathway to my new duty station in the administration building on McCalla Hill. (The "hill" was a little over 100' above sea level). It was a long, two-story structure with a flat roof and large, many-paned windows running the full length of both floors. A wide set of eaves extended over each line of glass, to provide shade for the offices within. A square tower rose up two stories above the roof in the center. The top deck of that tower housed the airport's control operations. Directly beneath it was the weather station.

I climbed the steps to the main vestibule two at a time, entered, and approached the Officer of the Day. He returned my salute, looked over my orders and directed me to the aerology office two flights up.

The office was about twenty-feet square, with windows in three walls, a closet, a door to the roof and a ladder to the control tower on the fourth side.

Chief Aerographer's Mate William Wolfe, an "older" man whom I guessed to be about forty, extended a hand, introduced himself and a couple of my new co-workers who were on duty at the time. Wolfe was not a big man, physically, but, as I would soon learn, he was industrious and knowledgeable in the field of weather forecasting.

We would refer to Bill as "Old Man Wolfe" but it was Chief Wells, who came into the office about midmorning, who was really old. He was the chief-in-charge of the aerology group.

In the next few days I would meet the rest of the crew, about a dozen in all, comprising the round-the-clock, seven-days-a-week operation. The shifts were assigned on a rotating basis so no one would be stuck with permanent night duty.

The tower, situated as it was high above the rest of the air station, afforded an excellent view to all points of the compass. Just to the north, on the brow of the hill, stood a tall steel tower with an enclosed deck halfway up from which signalmen could run-out coded flags - like skivvies on a clothesline - or operate a powerful light to communicate with ships in the harbor. With the advent of radio, signal flags and lights had lost a degree of importance, but were still used at times.

The stars-and-stripes flew from a mast at least as tall as the tower, and was symbolically protected by a brass cannon on an iron-and-concrete base to which was attached a bronze plaque bearing historical information. One could sight along the cannon's barrel to Caimanera, though that city was quite often obscured by residual smoke and haze from burning cane fields.

Turning toward the east, one looked down on Corinaso Point, a peninsula which formed a cove between the air station and the ship base. The ship base, a great deal larger than the air station, consisted of the usual array of docks, warehouses, barracks, housing units and so on. There was also a hospital and a chapel over there, whose services I would come to use. Still farther to the east, a marines' camp and training grounds extended to the base boundary, the latter marked by chain-link and barbed-wire fences.

In those days the fences served two primary purposes: one, to keep sailors in; two, to keep pilfering Cubans out. Every morning a fair number of native Cubans came through the East Gate - to work on the base or to bring in fresh produce - and left by the same avenue in the evening.

The view to the south from McCalla Hill was brought up short by a range of hills beyond the airstrip. Its most prominent feature was referred to as Radio or Radar Hill, named for the radio transceivers located there and because the site was used to calibrate the radar equipment.

To the west, on the wide level bench between our hill and the near side of the bay entrance, was the main north-south runway. Just beyond the runway, on the edge of the bluff above the ocean, stood the Cable Station; a principle communication link between the base and mainland U.S.A.

Still looking to the west, across the bay's four-mile-wide opening to the sea, was Leeward Point, so called for its downwind position. There the Navy had established an ancillary air station, an airstrip and facilities for pilots in flight training.

The Caribbean Sea itself stretched away beyond the curvature of the earth to the southwest. It was out there that cumulonimbus clouds built up during the night, their towering tops to reflect the sun's pre-dawn rays in the morning. I was to become very familiar with those clouds.

Chief Wells ran a good ship. He did not demand a lot of pomp and circumstance, just good hard work and no foul-ups. Standing about six-feet tall, stocky, leathery faced, pugnacious by nature, he was the archetypal career chief. For over thirty years he had lived the life of a bachelor sailor. Once, he said, he actually quit the Navy and made an attempt at civilian life. But it turned sour. He couldn't get a job, had to pay room and board, and had too much "liberty" for his own good. Then, while standing in a San Francisco bread line he decided, "to hell with it," went around the corner to a recruiting office and signed up again. He guessed he would stay in the Navy till they kicked him out, or until he could no longer make it back from a weekend liberty.

If the Chief had a fault, it was definitely his love for liquor. Every time he went on liberty, to Caimanera or to Guantanamo City, he got blind drunk. Literally. He once spent three days in sick bay before regaining his eyesight, and then his vision was impaired for weeks. He almost always wore dark glasses after that.

Duty at Guantanamo Bay in 1947 was ideal. World War II had ended, officially, at the end of the previous year, but a peacetime regimen had not yet found its way to Gitmo. So we enjoyed a period when

wartime restrictions were relaxed (such as a ban on picture taking), but were spared the picayune regulations reserved for peacetime.

The uniform-of-the-day was dungaree pants and chambray shirt, rolled up sleeves if you liked, and a white hat when out-of-doors. I think the only times I wore dress whites was when I visited a ship in the harbor, attended chapel services, or on those occasions when the captain held an inspection.

Even the chiefs seldom wore a uniform. They dressed like the rest of us. Furthermore, Chief Wells managed to be "indispensably occupied" at inspection times. But in spite of his aversion to dressing up, he would get caught one time and forced to make an appearance in formal attire.

The base commander called for a full-scale inspection. Even the contents of our sea bags would be laid out for examination. It was to be held in the hangar, and virtually no one was excused from attending. It meant dress uniforms, haircuts and all.

As usual, Wells decided to not go. But the captain, having known the Chief for some time, sent a special messenger around to inform him that his presence was mandatory. He mumbled and groaned and tried to think of a way out but it was no use. The captain had ordered him to go. He'd have to attend. (He was to be awarded some kind of a commendation.)

Would you believe it? The old boy didn't even own a dress-white jacket. At the very last minute he borrowed one from Chief Wolfe, but it showed only one hash-mark (denoting one full four-year hitch) whereas Wells had earned a whole sleeve-full of them. Not only that, it was too small. But it would have to do.

When it came time to stand up for the awards ceremony, Wells was thoroughly embarrassed. He even tried to hide his left sleeve by holding his arm behind his back. If the captain noticed anything amiss he didn't let on. When the show was over we congratulated our Chief, but kidded him for being out of uniform.

It was my turn to take the mid-watch. As usual I had tried, unsuccessfully, to get a few hours of sleep that evening. Also, as usual, sleep seemed imminent just when it was time to go. I shook off the notion, took a lukewarm shower and headed for the tower office.

It was nearly midnight. The air station rested under a cloak of darkness, darkness only somewhat relieved by a few stars and street lights. Over in the housing unit the officers, after an evening under the magnolias sipping mint juleps with wives and friends, were already bedded down for the night. What a way to live.

I hurried along the paved walkway - which, thankfully, was outlined with white painted rocks - to the Ad Building. I paused at the front desk, exchanged greetings with the OD and commented on the weather, then bounded up the steps to Weather Operations.

Earl "Smiley" Thompson (who hailed from Missouri) looked up from his desk, said Hi, and went back to drawing a weather map.

Paul Baldi (from Connecticut) was entering climatic data in a log book.

"Great build-ups tonight," he observed. "Tops to sixty-thousand (feet) in a wall from Port au Prince to the Caymans.... Flight from Panama had to fly a hundred miles out of his way to find a hole."

"Yeah?" I asked rhetorically.

It was much the same every night, giant thunderheads building up over the sea. On the other hand, during the day the clouds built up over the mountains. Ironically, due to its geographical location on a windward isthmus, the air station fell into a null in the cycle and seldom experienced measurable rainfall. As a consequence we enjoyed a desert climate within sight of torrential rainstorms.

I walked out onto the roof, away from the office lights, to gaze at the silent flashes playing among faraway cumulonimbus clouds. Dreaming, I could see Henry Morgan's ship caught in the tempest, sailors frantically battening down hatches and furling sail under those searing bolts of lightning and torrential rains. Those must have been fearful times, even for bold, swashbuckling buccaneers. I shrugged, thinking how extreme the sea is: Serene, blue, warm, clear, wild, wet, violent, dark. I returned to the comfort of the office.

By now my watch partner, Morris "The Colonel" Pollack (a North Carolinian) had come aboard. The evening crew filled us in on the status of things, then left. I filled the coffee pot with water, dumped an eyeballed measure of grounds into the top basket, replaced the lid and put the pot on the hotplate. Soon the magical aroma of perking coffee filled the room.

Once every half hour, one of us would leave whatever he was doing and make weather observations. My turn: I went out to the white, slat-sided box on stilts containing the psychrometer, opened the hatch, dampened the wick on the "wet bulb" thermometer, turned a crank to spin it (to cause the water to evaporate), and recorded the resultant readings. There had been no rain for days, so I bypassed the rain-gage.

(During my tour at Gitmo, the total accumulated precipitation amounted to less than four inches, most of it from clouds associated with a nearby hurricane.)

A wind vane and an anemometer, mounted on a tall mast above the tower, transmitted wind direction and speed to gages that I read when I got back inside. I glanced at the brass-and-glass enclosed aneroid barometer, which continuously registered millibars of pressure on a roll chart, and checked the similarly encased hygrometer which traced the percent of relative humidity.

Using the wet- and dry-bulb readings taken outside, I obtained the precise value of relative humidity by referring to a chart. A precise barometric pressure reading was found by measuring the height of a column of mercury in its three-foot-tall glass tube. That barometer was a truly beautiful instrument; of glass and brass mounted on a polished mahogany backboard.

When I had collected and recorded all of that pertinent information, I transmitted the data via teletype machine to the Naval Weather Center in Annapolis, Maryland, where it would be collated with reports from other stations and ships across the land and sea. These data were summarized; the results periodically disseminated to ships and stations far and wide, including Guantanamo Bay.

With this information, along with available pilots' reports, we drew our weather maps, a new one every six hours, kept abreast of

weather patterns and changes, and had the means to make remarkably good forecasts (if I say so myself).

Another of our jobs, in addition to gathering surface weather data, was the taking of upper air readings. These were obtained from pibal (pilot balloon) and radiosonde (radio sounding) devices.

A pibal reading, taken every six hours, entailed sending aloft a three-foot, helium-filled balloon and tracking it with a theodolite. This was a two-man job: one to keep the balloon in sight (up to 20,000-feet with good conditions), the other to read and record the azimuth and elevation readings at one-minute intervals. (The rate of ascent being a known factor, the degree-readings were then used to determine the direction and speed of winds aloft.)

At night, a small light source (a 1½-volt lamp powered by a D-cell) was attached to the balloon and tracked with the theodolite. On a clear, calm night it was easy to lose the pibal among the stars, but with a strong wind blowing we could sometimes follow it better than in the daytime. (At least we were not, in those days, distracted by manmade satellites.)

The radiosonde was a bit more complicated. It consisted of a package of information gathering devices and a small radio transmitter, weighing about two pounds, carried aloft by a larger (than a pibal) balloon. Winds aloft were measured using the theodolite. Pressure, temperature and relative humidity readings were transmitted, throughout the ascent, to a ground-based receiver and printed out on a moving chart.

On reaching its maximum altitude - when the balloon burst - the radiosonde assembly fell to the earth or into the sea. Because of its relatively high cost, only one radiosonde per day was launched; fewer if the need for upper air data was not critical. If found it was hoped that the finder would return the radiosonde to the Navy. I remember hearing of only one of our radiosondes being retrieved, from some place in Florida.

Perhaps the most interesting of our jobs was that of preparing "weather profiles" for NATS pilots. A profile was a cross-sectional picture of the weather conditions, from sea-level to cloud-tops, which a pilot should encounter along his charted route; for example, from Guantanamo Bay to Panama. I really enjoyed drawing profiles, and was pleased when a pilot, after returning from a successful flight, complimented me on my work.

But this was a quiet night. Only routine observations to make and maps to draw. It was the worst kind of a watch to stand and stay alert. So, between chores, I ran up the ladder to chat with the radio operator. Doyle had the duty. I could always count on Doyle's brand of humor to keep me awake.

A tower operator's job was a difficult one; demanding when there were aircraft in the area, boring when there were none. There was no traffic at all that night and Doyle welcomed my company. I accepted his offer of a cup of hot, stout coffee, added liberal amounts of sugar and canned-milk, seated myself in a swivel chair, leaned back and kicked my heels up onto the desk-top in mimicry of Doyle's own relaxed position. He grinned.

I took a slow, deliberate sip of Java, expressed my satisfaction, then we talked until it was time for another weather observation.

During my tenure at Guantanamo Bay I would become pretty well acquainted with the tower operators. So well that, years later, I would have trouble remembering which of my erstwhile friends were aerographers and which were tower operators. We worked in close proximity while on duty, and joined in recreational activities when off duty. But it was Doyle Munson, a native of Nevada, whom I'd get to know and remember best.

Doyle hailed from Ely, a city that I had never heard of before coming to work at the weather station. We received reports from several Nevada locations and, until Doyle set me straight, I mispronounced at least three of them.

"Winnie-mew-cah...Tun-oh-pah...Ee-lie," I enunciated.

"No, no, no," said Doyle. "Winneh-muck-cah, Toe-no-pah and Ee-lee."

He also took umbrage with the way I pronounced Neh-vah-dah, explaining that it was Ne-vad-ah, the middle syllable rhyming with had.

I should mention that Doyle's pronunciation of my state of "Massachusetts" wasn't exactly proper either. I guess the natives of a given place, even though in a minority, have a right to determine the correct way to say its name.

"Muns" appeared older than his age (20-years), perhaps because he had joined the Navy before completing high school. Anyway, he seemed more mature than most of us. Tall, raw-boned, with dark and curly hair, he walked and talked like a Westerner - as Zane Grey had described them - and wore a perpetual smile on his angular face.

If I remember correctly, Doyle was aboard the carrier U.S.S. Midway on her shake-down cruise, served as a radioman/gunner on one of her torpedo-bombers (an SB2-C), and saw action in the Pacific. He had even survived a couple of aircraft accidents, one of which resulted in his winding up in the sea. The dunking may have led to his latest assignment. He attended tower-operator school in Florida, and was then transferred to Guantanamo Bay.

A small, natural disaster struck the base not long after I joined the aerology group. It happened when I was on the day watch, with Baldi and Wolfe. Doyle was on duty in the radio tower.

I was drawing a weather map when something startled me and I looked up, quizzically, at my crew mates. They returned the look, as a distant rumbling grew louder in our ears. The boom of big guns was not unusual at Gitmo, but this sound was somehow different.

In a very short time it became all-encompassing. The building began to shake and rock fiercely. Windows rattled in their casings. Everything in the room commenced to move, including the chair on which I was seated.

"Earthquake!" I volunteered, leaping unsteadily to my feet. What else could it be? I tried to think what to do, but I had not been trained for this kind of action. Nor had my mates, apparently, for they too were immovable. The three of us stood like sailors on a

pitching deck, legs apart, speechless and at the mercy of Mother Nature.

The shaking continued and a loud crash emanated from the tower overhead. It was almost immediately followed by another...and still another.

"Hey Muns!" I called out.

Before I could ask the question, Doyle appeared at the bottom of the ladder, without, I'm sure, using the steps on the way down. But then he did a curious thing. Almost as quickly as he'd appeared he disappeared back up the steps without saying a word.

Although it seemed much longer the shake lasted only a minute or so, the rumble finally trailing off to infinity. Regaining my composure, I rushed up the ladder to see what had happened. There was Munson, standing amidst a shambles of equipment and furniture, all of it out of place.

Several heavy radios had broken loose from their wall mounts and dropped down, onto the plate-glass desk top. That explained the crashes. Miraculously, the windows encircling the tower were still in place, though some were badly cracked.

I could think of no good reason for Doyle's returning to this havoc, so I turned to him and asked, "Why'd you come back up here?"

In his calm, resonant drawl, Doyle began his story from the beginning: "Well, when the shake started I was sitting there (he pointed at the console) and that radio came loose and fell down right in front of me and broke the glass top. I reckoned I better get the hell outta here."

He paused, as if reluctant to tell the rest of the story.

"But when I hit the deck below I remembered what they do if you abandon your duty station...so I came back. I don't wanna be court martialed."

The whole thing seemed pretty funny, now, and we laughed about the way we had acted. And then it was time to assess the damage.

The radio tower had suffered the most, but there were broken and dislodged items in our weather station too. A couple of window panes were cracked, furniture had shifted positions and, to my dismay, the mechanisms in both our chart-instruments were broken. Worst of all, the coffee pot lay on the floor in smithereens.

After a while, when Doyle got his radios back on the air, he received a report that the quake was centered somewhere off the coast of nearby Haiti, and was felt over a very wide area. There was minor damage throughout the Naval Base, but our tower (being so high, I supposed) had gotten the worst of it. It was the strongest tremor I ever experienced - up to that time.

About the only real "seaman's duty" we had, at Gitmo, was an occasional guard watch. Most of them were easy, but the 04:00 to 08:00 watch was disagreeable, at least from the standpoint that you had to get out of a comfortable bunk well before dawn and try to wake up. The barracks guard was a willing helper, though. He seemed to enjoy rapping his night-stick on the end of your bunk and announcing the time-of-day. And if you didn't jump up in a few seconds he'd rap your toes, just like they did back in boot camp. That was usually enough stimulation to awaken the heaviest sleeper.

There was one advantage to that early morning watch; it coincided with the bakers' hours. Every morning before sunup they reported to the bakery to turn out a variety of hot breads and sweet rolls.

While waiting for the goods to come out of the ovens, I would join the bakers in a most unusual sport: "cockroach bombarding." Armed with fresh dough-balls (stuff that hadn't made it into the oven), the door to one of the storerooms was slowly opened. On cue, the lights were switched on and hundreds of cockroaches could be seen hurrying across the floor, walls and ceiling. The object of the game was to "nail" the critters in their tracks. He who nailed the most before they disappeared was the winner.

Of course the cockroaches were the losers. For us there was a supply of hot fresh sweet rolls to feed on, and hot black coffee to drink. Those diversions at the bakery helped to ease an otherwise monotonous watch.

Still I hated to have to get up so early, and for my personal satisfaction I made it a habit to leave an early call on the morning after a watch, just so's I could tell off the guard who woke me. I then went back to sleep. As with any clever plan, this one sometimes backfired, when the guard (allegedly) disbeliefed my story and repeatedly rapped on my bunk.

The most difficult guard-duty was the mid-watch. At that time of night, everything was quiet and interminably dull. One looked forward to anything unusual to break the tedium, no matter how insignificant.

Such an unusual event occurred near the chow hall one dark night. I had just completed a walk-around the bakery, barracks and ship's service, and paused on the bluff to watch the lights of a ship move slowly out into the bay.

A strange sound behind me grabbed my attention. I turned to identify it, thinking it must be some kind of a rat or a mouse, or perhaps a land crab scratching around in the weeds. Whatever it was, it seemed to be crossing the paved street. I could hear its claws rattling on the hard surface. I took a firm grip on my nightstick, snapped on my flashlight and caught the critter in its beam.

It was none of the above mentioned animals at all, but a lowly cockroach ambling across the road headed for the bakery. But what a cockroach. A giant! Over three inches long and the most disagreeable looking fellow I'd ever seen, or hoped to see.

It was a good thing that I wasn't carrying a weapon (only when we stood guard at the seaplane hangar were we required to carry a sidearm, a .38-caliber, automatic pistol) or I might have been tempted to shoot it. Anyway, I wasn't about to touch the roach or dirty my nightstick on it, so I smashed the son-of-a-prehistoric-devil with a rock and went about my business.

Cockroaches (as you may have surmised) were not uncommon at Gitmo. Even in the chow hall. More than once, while dining, an uninvited roach popped up over the rim of my bowl or plate. They usually disappeared as quickly as they appeared and I got accustomed to their comings and goings; albeit reluctantly. It is said that the species, so adaptable is it to any environment, will be around when mankind is extinct. I believe it is so.

YANKEE-NEVADAN

There were other, more desirable kinds of wildlife in that part of Cuba: pigeons, song birds, bats (that we tried, unsuccessfully, to catch in our white hats), lizards and snakes to name a few. Most impressive was the iguana lizard. Not only because of its great size, often three-feet long or longer, but also for its lack of beauty. With its dragon head, scaly skin, ridged back and long tail, it looked like a survivor from the age of the dinosaurs.

One time several of us cornered an iguana on the apron in front of the hangar. However, after getting the upper hand, none of us knew what to do with it. So we called in the shore patrol to take over. It was hauled away in the back of a pickup truck, and presumably turned loose in the hills.

That was when I met Cash, a big, tall, SP. He was a cocky guy, always wore white pants and T-shirt, a white hat mashed down on the sides, and a .38-caliber pistol slung low on his hip.

Cash was the picture of "relaxed authority." Like most big people I have known, he was even-tempered and good-natured, and admittedly lazy. We liked having him around, for in addition to his being a friendly guy he had a set of wheels, a Dodge pickup truck, and could be persuaded to give us rides or fetch things from ship's service when needed.

Our only other means of transportation, other than a bus that occasionally ran to-and-from the Naval Base, was a Cushman scooter. Sometimes we'd fill its tank with 100-octane gas, drained from the hose of a tanker-truck, making it the hottest scooter at Gitmo. Like all two-wheeled vehicles it was dangerous to ride. I took a couple of spills with it, but Baldi, who always drove with singular recklessness, almost broke his neck when he missed a turn at high speed and crashed onto a pile of rocks.

The accident didn't slow him down very much. When he got out of the hospital, and after the scooter was repaired, he was back at the same, fast-driving sport. In fact, from that time on we all called him "Sport."

**CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE
RECREATION AND FLYING**

"What say we take a ride up in the hills," Doyle suggested one bright and sunny morning.

There were six of us, including "G-G" Hudgins, Pollock, Ed Krahling and Cash, lounging around the hangar entrance. All of us were off duty and looking for something to do.

"Ride? What in?" I asked.

"Not in.... On," he replied. "On horseback."

Except for one time when I was a kid and Dorothy took me to a riding stable, I had not been in a saddle. But I thought it a good idea to learn to ride, and enthusiastically agreed to the proposition. The other guys were all for it too, so we piled into Cash's pickup and headed for the stables, which were located in a "draw" (as Munson called it), south of the airstrip.

The stables were a crude collection of rough, unpainted, open-sided sheds and corrals of half-eaten boards (wherever the horses could get their teeth into them) in an atmosphere permeated with the smell of hay, horse turds and sweaty leather. Cash was familiar with the operation there and Doyle was an old hand with horses, so they helped the stable keeper saddle up.

The tack was of Spanish style (I was told) and might have been left behind after the Spanish-American War. The saddle was designed with openings in the "seat," I supposed to provide ventilation. Whether this feature was for the benefit of the horse or the rider was unclear to me.

On observing the six swaybacked, mangy looking nags, I was convinced that they, too, were leftovers from the S-A War, perhaps even ridden by Rough Riders at San Juan Hill. "Ah well," I reasoned, "they're so old they can't be too frisky."

We "mounted up" and "hit the trail," the four of us acting for all the world like the tenderfoots we were. The trail was a wide, well-beaten path or roadway winding between small trees, brush and cactus plants into the dry, rolling hills to the southeast. Cash "took the point," riding "tall in the saddle" (I was learning a lot of Western terminology). Doyle rode next in line, the rest of us were "strung out" behind.

My evaluation of the horses' spirit proved to be correct, for only with continual prodding and rib-kicking were they motivated to proceed. My horse frequently looked forlornly over his shoulder at me. All of them, except possibly Cash's, were dragging anchor.

It was a slow, tedious trip up the hill, and I got so involved with encouraging "Old Blue" I missed seeing most of the scenery. By the time we reached the brow overlooking the sea, I was more tired than if I had hiked the distance. What a way to go!

The view from the top was well worth the effort, however, and after dismounting to stretch my legs I drank in its beauty. Off toward the mountains, fleecy, fair-weather clouds raced their own shadows across the ridges. Opposite, the Caribbean reflected emerald from in-shore shallows, cobalt from the off-shore deep.

Our attention was drawn to a circular, concrete gun emplacement, one of several that once guarded the harbor approach. With a plug in its six-inch muzzle, its aiming mechanism in disrepair, the weapon no longer presented a threat to anyone. It was a mere reminder of the past, when it stood ready to hurl steel and powder onto an enemy ship. Like boys in make-believe playing with a Civil War cannon on a hometown common, we enthusiastically manned the piece, cranking the elevation and bearing screws to zero-in on our imaginary foe.

"Fire when ready!" G-G hollered, and I shot him with my Argus.

The gun, though useless, was real enough to convince me how lucky we were to be playing at war rather than fighting one. We mounted up and rode on down to the shoreline, for a closer look at the white, exploding surf on the rock-and-coral bluffs. But it was getting late and some of us had to report for duty soon, so we turned our horses' heads toward home.

Was I in for a surprise? As if by magic, every last one of those hitherto-plodding cayuses was suddenly endowed with literally uncontrollable energy. They flew over the trail at breakneck speed, and no amount of restraint was effective. I hung on for dear life, certain that sooner or later I and my now exuberant steed must part company.

It might have been a blessing were I thrown, for the physical and mental abuse I took was almost more than I could bear. I would never know just how, or why, I managed to stay aboard that beast all the way back to the stables, but I now knew the true meaning of the phrase, "headed for the barn."

When I gratefully dismounted at the stables, every muscle in my body cried out for mercy. And my buttocks was not just sore, it was actually bruised and bleeding as a result of repeated, out-of-sync contacts with the saddle. Under my breath I swore at my horse, and swore at myself for getting on him in the first place. Then I swore to never again occupy a saddle on the back of an animal. And that was that!

(Much as I admire those who ride horseback, and envy them their swift and easy mode of transportation, especially in the mountains, I have kept my word to this day. My philosophy is: "Never ride anything that doesn't have a 'key' or a 'switch' with which to turn it on and off."

But my story is not yet ended. In addition to my ego's being wounded, my injuries became infected and I was forced to visit the sick bay. The doctor offered the following diagnoses: "One, you're allergic to horseflesh. Two, you don't know how to ride a horse."

For a week I went twice a day to sick bay, to receive a shot and have the dressing changed. Inasmuch as possible I maintained a standing position at work, in the chow hall, even at the movies, until the medicines did their job. Could I be faulted for avoiding horses after that? I think not.

Just as I was getting back to my normal self again, Cash, the equestrian, suffered an accident which convinced me that, bad as my ride was, if I had been unseated that day I'd have been a lot worse off. My injury was pale by comparison to his.

Cash had ridden a horse out behind Radar Hill, to pistol-shoot at lizards for practice. While thus engaged his horse shied and threw him clean over its head; unfortunately, right into the welcoming arms of a giant cactus. Bloody and bristling with thorns from head to toe, he limped to the base hospital. There, the good doctors put him on a table and removed the obvious spines from his flesh, but those not-so-obvious took time to fester and come to the surface.

Poor Cash was a sorry looking sight and I felt sorry for him, right up until the day when he grinned and pronounced, "I can't wait to get back on a horse again." Some people never learn.

For reasons unknown to me, a lot of people enjoy the taste of beer. Several of my Gitmo buddies were in that class and quaffed liberal amounts of Cuban beer, particularly that which came in a bottle under the brand name "Chief Hatuey." Our ship's service store served it by the glass or by the pitcher-full.

The brew was so popular that a copy of its label - featuring the legendary hero of Cuba, Chief Hatuey, a hook-nosed Indian wearing an Olivella-bead headband and feathers - was adopted as the unofficial logo of the Guantanamo Bay Air Station.

I never acquired a taste for beer, nor did I try very hard. I preferred Coca-Cola. Drinking rum and Coca-Cola was also popular then, perhaps encouraged by the contemporary song by that name. While it tasted a lot better than beer, I seldom drank it either.

If ever a sailor needed an excuse to take a drink, the occasion of someone's birthday was reason enough. And that someone was always around when needed. On at least one such occasion champagne was the favorite beverage; partly because the price was right. In Cuba, the cost of champagne was on a par with beer. I had no idea if it was good champagne, only that it tasted a lot like beer but had livelier bubbles.

It was Paul Baldi's birthday (or so he claimed) and arrangements were begun for a party.

Baldi, an East Hartford Italian (Eye-talian, my father would have said), was handsome, athletic, energetic and witty. He was also somewhat of a con artist, and I'm sure that if he was caught sneaking the champagne past the OD he'd have talked his way out of any possible punishment. But he was not caught. With a brown bag full of bottled bubbly he walked right on by the officer and up to our office.

One of the other guys had scrounged fresh bread and doughnuts from the bakery, and that was the extent of the refreshments. At the appointed time, sundown, a dozen of us gravitated to the tower roof for the party.

Thin ribbons of gold and silver and vermillion tinted the uppermost fringes of billowing cumulus clouds overhead, treasures left momentarily behind by the setting sun. A cool breeze off the ocean wafted the essence of native flowers across the parapet walls of the tower. The only sounds, outside of our own chatter, were the droning of a distant motorboat and the squeaking of bats. Twilight gave way to moonlight; incandescent streetlamps peeked through swaying palms. Someone popped a cork releasing golden, foaming nectar, and the party was on.

In turn we trapped portions of the stuff in paper cups and spilled it down our thirsty throats. Sitting cross-legged in a circle, like so many Indians at a pow-wow, we munched on bread and pastries, washed them down with champagne, and laughed at one another's jokes and stories. A typical gathering of sailors, except for the absence of girls.

The moon rose high in the sky and all was well with the world. That is, until the OD decided to put an end to our fun. He'd known all along what was going on, but waited till we got overly noisy before exercising his authority. In any event, we were pretty well partied-out by then. Some of us were in a state bordering on inebriation.

The officer recited the "rules and regs" of behavior, added a thousand words of his own on the "evils of alcohol," and said that he'd press no charges "this time, but don't do it again."

We were lucky to have been caught by a lenient officer.

I don't know about my comrades but I felt a bit ill in the morning. It was almost as bad as being seasick. The illness, I supposed, was in retribution for reneging on my vow of abstinence from alcohol. Under the duress of the moment I renewed my pledge, and my stomach was happy once more.

The Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay was blessed with a unique golf course. (One that has no doubt been architecturally modified since I was there.) Because it was located on an abandoned small-arms practice range, and because there was insufficient rainfall to support the natural growth of grass, the fairways were totally devoid of green. They consisted of sand, pebbles, lead bullets and shell casings, the latter being as numerous as pebbles. Except for the tees and putting greens, which actually boasted of (irrigated) grass, it was one big sand trap.

The remains of old, broken-down concrete bunkers served as hazards. Real hazards. If your ball hit the face of one of those things it bounced backward for negative yardage. Off the edges of the fairways was a rough that defied imagination. A tangle of undergrowth, weeds, low bushes and cactus in which it was virtually impossible to find an errant ball.

I most often played golf with Doyle, Brad or Al. Brad (Russell Bradford of Bath, Maine) was tall and lean and drove a good long ball. Al Mangold, of Mayfair, Penn., was closer to my size and build. He did

YANKEE-NEVADAN

his best work with a putter. Doyle, on a good day, could out-drive, out-chip and out-putt any of us.

The loaner-clubs we used were, not unexpectedly, dreadfully beaten up despite a local ground rule that allowed the ball to be teed-up on the fairway.

In time I would learn to wield a woodie - always hooking or slicing the ball - and swing a mean iron. I remembered the basics of putting from my days on the clock-golf course at The Northfield, and did fairly well on that end of the hole. But along the way I spent an inordinate amount of time in the rough, searching for my ball. I usually found it, or someone else's, but always in a place from which it was impossible to play. Add another stroke or two.

The part of the game I learned best, that part which seemed to be essential to the sport, was cursing. The more I played, the more I found a need to swear. I never lost my temper and wrapped a club around a tree, but I couldn't keep from grumbling when the little ball didn't go where I aimed.

The golf course was seldom busy. Especially on weekdays when most officers, the primary players, were on duty. Even so it was not unusual to be overtaken by the captain's foursome. Because they were accomplished golfers and we were rather slow, we politely "allowed" them to play through.

As with most golfers, it was the nineteenth hole that we most appreciated. Ours was a long, thatched-roofed "shack" in the style of the islands. Inside there were bamboo tables and rattan chairs, where Cokes and conversation could be enjoyed in luxurious ease.

Another available recreation was fishing. I tried my hand at it, casting a line off the end of the pier at Corinaso Point. Since I had no rod-and-reel, I followed the example of others. I baited a four-inch hook with a fist-sized hunk of meat (from the chow hall), attached it to the line with a yard-long, steel leader, and then heaved it as far as possible toward deep water. I was lucky enough to land a two-foot barracuda and went back for another try a couple of days later.

Outfitted as before, I threw my baited hook into the choppy bay with great anticipation. It barely hit the water and I felt a strike. My heart skipped a beat. I set the hook but the line ran through my fingers. I couldn't hold him.

"Must be a big one!" I shouted to my partners.

By looping the line around a piling I was able to slow his run and bring him to a stop.

A small crowd, recently joined by three sailors off of the U.S.S. Kearsarge (then lying at anchor in the bay), had formed on the pier behind me. All offered advice on how I should handle the monster on the end of my line. The guys from the Kearsarge, who had apparently become well acquainted with Chief Hatuey, were full of council.

It took quite a while, but my prize eventually tired and I hauled it, with some help, to the edge of the pier.

Surprise! Instead of a fine specimen of a fighting barracuda it was a monstrous, writhing eel, over eight-feet long and as big around as my forearm. You could bet that I wasn't about to handle that fellow, he was ten times as repulsive as the one I'd caught as a kid

YANKEE-NEVADAN

fishing the Connecticut River. I was preparing to cut the line with my pocket knife when over my shoulder I heard:

"Don't cut 'im loose!"

Turning, I saw that it was one of the carrier swabbies who was shouting. I gave him a "why not?" look.

"We'll take 'im off yer hands," he said.

With a shrug I handed him the line and backed away. Two of them then wrestled with the ugly monster, while a third took off his shoe and began beating it on the head.

"Eel is delicit...delicus...delicsus. It's good stuff," the guy explained. "We'll take 'im back t' the ship an' cookie'll cook 'im for us."

Still wriggling, the potential meal was carried away by the wobbling, staggering sailors. I hoped that they were on good terms with the ship's cook, and with the officer of the deck as well.

So much for deep sea fishing.

Of the various forms of recreation at Guantanamo Bay, tennis was my favorite. Whenever the courts beckoned, there was always one or three other guys around for a game. They included Munson, G-G, Al and Larry Connoly to name a few. Larry was a big boned, self confidant lad from Illinois.

We turned out in shorts, socks and tennis shoes, and a visor to keep the sub-tropical sun out of our eyes. While I had never been good at outdoor games, especially those that required throwing or catching a ball, I really enjoyed the game of tennis. I guess I spent more of my off-duty time on the tennis court, at Gitmo, than in any other pursuit. And I would continue to enjoy the game for many years to come.

Being young and foolish we sometimes found the means to entertain ourselves while on duty. In other words, we goofed off. For example, after learning that breathing helium affects one's vocal cords, enabling him speak like Donald Duck, we squandered considerable amounts of time and expensive gas playing with it.

On the night of the Fourth of July, when Balzano, a tall skinny Brooklynite, and I had the duty, the two of us came up with a unique way to celebrate the holiday. We tied two-dozen D-cell lamps along a 50-foot length of line, attached an inflated pibal balloon to each end of the line, and turned the contraption loose from the tower roof.

The balloons gave just enough buoyancy to lift our catenary-curve of lights 300-feet in the air and allow it to drift lazily northward across the bay. It was headed for Caimanera, where, if seen at all, the significance of our commemorative garland was most certainly lost on the Cubans.

And that was the extent of our celebration of the birth of the U.S.A. that year. No firecrackers, no rockets, no aerial bombs, just silent, tiny lights a-mingling with the stars.

One day, a particularly windy day, Al and I took off for the transceiver shack to launch a radiosonde balloon. A newcomer to our group, Robert Lake, a slender lad from Sturgis, South Dakota, came along to observe. It was probably far too windy for a successful launch but we hiked on down the ridge-top anyway; past the concrete

YANKEE-NEVADAN

bomb shelter - which, thankfully, had never been used for its intended purpose - to the Quonset hut containing the equipment. I had my camera with me and hoped to get some pictures of the operation.

Inside the hut, I turned on and adjusted the radio receiver while Al installed a battery and calibrated the transmitter unit. Together, with Lake's help, we filled a large six-foot balloon with helium, attached the sending unit to it, by means of a 10-foot cord, and made ready to release the thing into the atmosphere.

I held the instrument package and Al grasped the bottom of the balloon. He waited for a lull in the wind, and then released the eager white sphere. I followed it with my charge until the balloon was sufficiently high that I could turn it loose.

Alas! Just as I let it go a crosswind swept the whole affair - balloon, string and instruments - directly into the crest of a palm tree. The balloon burst on impact with the sharp fronds, the radiosonde unit was left dangling alongside a bunch of coconuts. So much for that launch.

Undaunted by failure, we made ready for another launch. This time I held the balloon and Al the transmitter. But the wind was now even stronger. Every time I started to release the balloon it was dashed to the ground, and Al dared not let go of the equipment package for fear of its being wrecked. Two more attempts convinced us that it was a useless venture. Besides, by now the balloon had shrunk to two-thirds its original size, no doubt from punctures received when hitting the ground.

There would be no sounding that day. Knowing the conditions, the Chief would understand.

Well now, since I had come prepared for taking pictures, pictures we would have. Using the depreciated balloon and gear, one of us served as cameraman to photograph the other two in a variety of attitudes; the resultant series of photos was entitled, "How not to take a Radio Sounding."

Understanding though he may have been, Chief Wolfe was not favorably impressed with our production.

One of the most intriguing of our aerological devices was a relatively new one: a micro-seismograph. Installed in a deep, dark, underground bunker in a remote part of the base, its purpose was to detect and record minute vibrations in the earth, vibrations that might result from a hurricane far out to sea.

Unlike the instrument used to detect earthquakes, this one was extremely sensitive. Tiny vibrations, such as those caused by one's walking across the floor or by waves crashing on a distant shore, caused a narrow beam of light to deflect across and expose a slow-moving, photo-sensitive film. (The instrument was enclosed in a light-tight box.) The resultant latent image, when developed, would reveal a series of saw-toothed lines describing the light excursions with reference to time. An increase in the magnitude of the excursions, over the "norm," was interpreted as an abnormality; usually caused by such things as trucks passing by, guns firing on the practice range, small earth tremors or our own footsteps. A prolonged increase in magnitude, however, was an indication of wave build-ups at sea, caused

by rising wind velocities, possibly those associated with a hurricane in the making.

Three of these instruments were located in a triangle on the base, and by triangulation the direction of the tremors could be determined. At least twice a week, more often if deemed necessary, the machines were serviced. Using a red safe-light, the exposed film (a closed loop one-foot in diameter and eight-inches wide) was removed to a darkroom, for development, and an unexposed roll installed in its place.

Elementary as it was, this was my first experience with darkroom photography, the first time I would know the thrill of seeing an unknown image appear, as if by magic, in the solution. I'd peer at the lines under the safelight, hoping to see an anomaly among the squiggles. When dry, the chart was rolled, tucked into a cardboard tube, and taken to the aerology office for detailed analysis.

With a series of charts we could ascertain where gale-force or stronger winds were blowing; i.e., within a 200-mile radius of the station. But the information merely confirmed data obtained from other, more conventional sources, such as aircraft and ships. As I recall, never once was our subterranean gadget the first to predict a tropical storm. It was an interesting research device but was not, to my knowledge, worth the cost of operation.

The Caribbean Sea was an ideal training pond for the Navy, and with Guantanamo Bay as its focal point sooner or later nearly every sailor in the Atlantic Fleet, and many from the Pacific, put in there. More than one of my Navy buddies was among them.

Harry Zaluzny (my friend from southern Vermont) was serving on the cruiser U.S.S. Ault. Not long after his ship dropped anchor in the bay he surprised me with a visit. And over the next few days, while his ship was being re-fueled and re-stocked, we several times got together at the air station or on the Ault. It was good seeing someone from home, though it tended to make me homesick.

Tom Colbeth was another visiting seaman. We'd served together at Great Lakes, and earlier at Bainbridge (as I recall), and now he was "traveling" with the U.S.S. Philippine Sea, an aircraft carrier of the Essex Class (same as the Valley Forge and Kearsarge). The Phil Sea lay at anchor for two weeks or more while her fly-boys practiced landings and takeoffs on the flattop and our airstrip.

Tommy was a likable guy, lean, of medium height, with dark hair and eyes and a generous smile. He was unusually tan when he stepped ashore at the air station, an indication that he'd spent a good deal of time topside. He managed to come ashore almost every day while in port, at which times we'd take in a movie or swap sea stories over a cool one at the ship's service.

One Sunday, Tommy came ashore and attended a chapel service with me. Afterward we enjoyed a "gourmet" meal of steak and fresh-grown vegetables in the chow hall. And then, since I'd never been aboard a carrier, he invited me out for a look-see.

At the pier we climbed down to the boat, a motorized launch that provided taxi service to and from ships at anchor. It was a large boat, and could easily accommodate a couple-of-dozen sailors. Officers travelled in a higher class of boat.

When ready the cocky coxswain (I came to believe that all coxswains were cocky) shoved the throttle over with his right hand, and with his left spun the wheel to port. Reacting to his subtle adjustments of throttle and wheel, the diesel purred, the boat moved smoothly away from the dock and gained speed. Cutting through the gentle swells, spray coming over the bow and gunwales, it was an exhilarating ride.

On approaching the Philippine Sea my eyes widened in awe. It was a giant of a ship, especially as viewed from our lowly angle. At the foot of a very long (stepped) ladder leading from the main deck, was a narrow platform. We climbed, or jumped, onto it. From here I could not recognize the ship at all; just a huge gray wall jutting up out of the bay, its ends somewhere off in infinity.

I was out of breath by the time I reached the deck, but came up with the proper words and a salute, along with Tommy and the others, to secure permission to come aboard. Without hesitation, Tommy gave me a grand tour of the ship, from stem to stern and from top to bottom. In the end I had to admit that, except when on the hangar deck or flight deck where I could see off, I was disoriented the whole time.

At least three football games could have been played at once on the Phil Sea's flight deck, a couple-of-stories above the main deck. At one side was the "island," the center of operations including the bridge. Above, the lofty masthead must have been 200-feet above the surface of the sea.

Overall there were few similarities to the Forrest Royal. She was more a city than a ship. One needed a street map to find his way around. By way of comparison, she was home to a population 1½-times greater than that of Northfield. There were certainly more amenities here than in my hometown: stores, cafeterias, a large movie theater and other recreational facilities. (But no girls.)

As long as he'd been aboard the Phil Sea, Tommy said, there were far more areas that he'd never seen than those that he had.

I stayed long enough to join Tommy at "dinner" in the giant chow hall. Of course I was never a good judge of cuisine; suffice to say that the food was well prepared and served in generous proportions.

In addition to the tried and true torpedo and attack bombers, the Philippine Sea was host to the Navy's newest and best fighter aircraft, the fighters were Grumman F8-F Bearcats. They'd been put in service in 1945, too late to see much, if any, wartime action, but ready for any future contingency.

The Bearcat was essentially the last of the Navy's propeller driven aircraft. Jet propulsion was the wave of the future. But with its wing-tips either folded up or extended to its side, the short, fat F8-F commanded respect. On deck it held its nose high, to accommodate an out-sized, four-bladed prop. When in flight that "windmill" was screwed into the air by a big, air-cooled radial engine. At speeds of over 400-mph, it was one of the fastest prop-jobs in the world, on a par with the Army's North American P-51 Mustang (though the latter "looked" to be the faster of the two).

Like the Bearcats, the Phil Sea's lumbering torpedo-bombers - three-seater Grumman TBM Avengers - folded their wings rearward when

YANKEE-NEVADAN

at rest, as do birds in nature. Over 10,000 TBMs had seen service in WW-II, beginning way back in January of 1942.

The carrier also carried a complement of Helldivers. Manufactured by Curtis, the SB2-C was considered the most successful dive bomber in the war. It, too, was in action from 1942 on.

Bearcat pilots, while proud of their aircraft, admitted that it was sometimes hard to control. During training exercises at Gitmo one of them lost control and crashed at Leeward Point.

He'd flown from the carrier and was practicing touch-and-go landings; where you touch down briefly then apply full throttle and go around again. When he pulled up his Bearcat rolled, stalled and nosed into the ground. The plane burst into flames on impact.

Right after the crash, Chief Wells flew me to Leeward Point in the station's SN-J. Officially we went to make certain that the weather instruments had been functioning properly (they were), and incidentally to view the crash site.

I had never before seen such a sight; twisted, broken and burned aluminum and Plexiglas half buried in the dirt and still smoldering. I was thankful that the dead pilot had been removed before our arrival, but the smell of death was still present.

Chief Wells shook his head in sorrow and, with reverence, uttered, "What a terrible waste!"

I was relieved when he suggested that it was time to leave.

After thoroughly investigating the crash site, Navy officials concluded that the F8-F pilot had inadequately compensated for the torque induced by its engine at full throttle.

It was a lesson learned too late by the unfortunate aviator. Hopefully, others would profit by the harsh example. We were all pretty humbled by the accident.

(Many years later, when I would attend the Reno National Air Races and see those big, WW-II airplanes in action, I would be rerevisted by the ghost of that crashed Bearcat on Leeward Point.)

It was only natural, I suppose, that serving on the Naval Air Station enhanced my interest in airplanes. It was an interest that I would retain forever, though never as a pilot. In addition to watching and studying them I was an eager passenger. And being in the weather business gave me a legitimate reason to fly, for the purpose of making observations. Whenever I had some time and could talk a pilot into taking me, I went up.

My first time up was with Chief Wells, when he took me to the scene of the Bearcat crash (on Leeward Point) in the North American SN-J trainer (the army called it an AT-6). There was only one SN-J at Gitmo, and it was mostly used by station pilots to "get-in" their flight time for extra pay. That was the Chief's reason for flying it. I felt lucky whenever he invited me along.

We'd fly over the bay, over the cities of Guantanamo and Caimanera, over cane fields and dense jungles and tiny villages. Occasionally he'd bank low for a better view, so low I could almost reach out and touch the excited, waving workers below. It was a wonderful way to see the country.

Another one-of-its-kind airplane at the station was the Consolidated-Vultee PBY-5 "Catalina." Its unique design made it easily

recognizable: a boat-shaped hull suspended from a high "parasol wing," and two big radial engines. It was a slow but versatile airship, and was well known for its anti-sub and sea-rescue missions during the war. I yearned for a chance to ride in the PBY, and was finally rewarded with a trip to Kingston, Jamaica.

I climbed aboard and took my assigned position on a jump-seat by the starboard waist-blister. From there I could observe the whirling propeller above, and see the pavement slipping away to the rear as the big plane lumbered forward. It caught the wind, lifted ever so gently into the air, banked slightly away from the sun and leveled off over a white-flecked sea. The engines' roar reduced to a comfortable drone and we were on our way. Soon the rugged southern coast of Cuba disappeared entirely.

I remained transfixed, overwhelmed by the view. Thin, white dart-shapes on the deep blue caught my eye; a small fleet of ships was steaming toward the base we'd just left. Then they, too, were out of sight. Nothing broke the endless expanse of the Caribbean.

My eyelids drooped and I dozed off, to be awakened some time later when the hitherto smooth ride became suddenly bumpy. A long row of billowing clouds rose up ahead of us, directly over a narrow dark line which I correctly assumed was the coast of Jamaica.

We made a long, gradual turn east of the island, to circumvent the cloud-associated turbulence, dropped low over the turquoise shallows offshore and approached Kingston Harbor from the south.

Half-naked native fishermen looked up, grinned and waved from a dozen outrigger dugouts. Our pilot circled the landing area, I supposed to be sure that there were no boats in the way, and then made his final approach. I braced myself in anticipation. I had never experienced a water landing and was admittedly apprehensive. But the touchdown was, as they say, "smooth as silk." I had worried for no good reason at all (which is usually the case with worrying).

We had landed not far from the site of old Port Royal, the port established on a narrow peninsula southeast of the bay way back in 1692. It was used extensively by buccaneers, before being literally sunk by an earthquake, a massive tremor that killed 2,000 of the city's inhabitants.

It was that act of God which led to the founding of Kingston, at the back of the bay between the sea and the mountains. The mountains were now obscured by the black-bottomed clouds that I had observed from the air, but the city loomed up dead ahead.

The PBY was moored to a low pier, and while the crew transferred goods from and to the plane, our two flight officers, another sailor and I went ashore. The officers went about their business, my partner and I took off for a quick look around.

What a place! Hundreds of people, most of them dark-skinned, milled around the wharf and adjacent streets and alleys. Several of them, tall, black, skinny, smelly individuals, crowded around us, all of them speaking in a lyrical, sing-song English, all of them either wanting to sell something or asking for money.

We managed to force our way through the masses to an open air bazaar. Stacked on war-surplus boxes, barrels and cans were bundles, bunches and piles of fruits, vegetables and other foodstuffs, knick-

knacks and merchandise, much of it indescribable. It was a marketplace all right, though I could discern no organization about it. And for all the finger-pointing and jabbering, there was very little actual buying and selling.

I purchased a key chain and a cup, both made of fine Peruvian silver and embossed with (I presumed) Andean designs. A big, black fellow bumped into me, on purpose I thought, and I instinctively felt for the bulge of my wallet under my jumper.

It was still there.

We each bought a coke and continued up the street.

The structures on either side of us were either flimsy shacks or palm-thatched roofs on stanchions. I was disenchanted with the place, and suggested that if we moved away from the waterfront we might find where the upper-class Englishmen lived.

So we walked toward the city center, past broken down, rusting, corrugated-metal warehouses, hole-in-the-wall shops and bars. Sure enough, we finally came to an area of substantial brick and stone edifices; government buildings, hotels, banks and merchants' establishments, even high-class bars. But now that we'd discovered the better part of the city our time was up and we had to return to the PBY. Ah well, I had come along for the ride not as a gawking tourist.

It was good to be back on the PBY, away from the noisy masses. In just a few minutes the officers were back aboard, and in no time at all the engines stuttered, roared, and pulled our flying boat across the lagoon. Again we threaded our way between the fishing boats, which now appeared to be heavily laden with the catch-of-the-day, and turned into the wind. The throttles were opened and the plane's hull separated from the sea. We were airborne.

Within the hour, a little after noon, we set down on the airstrip at Guantanamo Bay. Despite my disappointment with Kingston, it had been a great outing, a fine respite from routine activities at the air station. And I observed some weather along the way.

An old saying in the armed services, obviously born of bad experiences, goes, "Never volunteer." I seldom jumped at anything before learning what it was all about. But when Chief Wells came looking for "a few good men" to work on an old airplane, with a promise of a ride in it when done, I stepped forward.

The aircraft was a virtual antique: a Grumman J2-F, a single-engine, two-seater amphibian biplane known as a "Duck." And an odd-looking duck it was, the first of its kind having been produced back in 1933. This one might well have been made surplus but it was the "pet" of one of our executive officers.

Chief Wells, who flew the Duck occasionally "to keep it limbered up," took it upon himself to see that the aircraft was kept clean and polished. And that's where we came in. The Chief was an administrator. He was not about to engage in menial work.

In the shade of the hangar, along with some of my peers, I spent countless hours caressing that duck's skin with scouring rag and polishing pad, all the while looking forward to the promised ride. Alas, I would leave Cuba before achieving that goal.

My most adventurous plane ride, though, was in a PBM. The Martin Mariner (described above) was being used for routine reconnaissance

flights over the island's coastal areas, so catching a ride in it was relatively easy. Besides, there was always room in that "boat's" cavernous fuselage for an extra passenger, even a weather observer.

It was a typical day, calm and bright with fluffy, fair-weather cumulus clouds casting polka-dot shadows on the smooth waters of the bay. From the rubber dinghy, I hauled myself up the rope ladder and entered the rear hatch of the flying boat, which was lying at her mooring off the seaplane ramp. An old hand by now, I knew where I was expected to be during takeoff and took my seat amidships, next to a starboard porthole. The pilots, navigator and engineer were already busy on the flight deck, the gunners had settled into their nose, waist and tail positions.

The engines coughed and sputtered and backfired (as they inevitably did) then came to life with a roar that sent vibrations through both the ship's and my frames. We began to move toward the center of the bay. Plumes of sea spray, churned up by the starboard engine's giant propeller, rained past my window as we passed astern of the Kearsarge - its flight deck a flurry of activity - anchored a mile offshore.

Prevailing easterlies moved across the bay, tattletale ripples marking their direction of travel. Our pilot turned the PBM to face into them and made ready for takeoff.

Slowly at first, then picking up speed, we labored across the water like a gluttonous bird too heavy to fly. I wondered if the sea would ever break its tenacious hold on our hull.

And then, POW-POW! Almost simultaneous blasts, like firings of a double-barreled shotgun magnified a thousand times, resounded in my ears. With that the big PBM literally shot forward and lifted free. Success!

The pilot had used JATO (Jet Assisted Take Off) a rocket attached to each side of the fuselage, to provide additional thrust. I had observed the procedure from ashore, but this was the only time I got to experience it from within. Quite frankly, I was sure that we were being blown up. I regained my composure when I observed one of the gunners laughing at me from across the cabin.

At cruising altitude I was free to move about, so I wandered from one port to another to see the sights. The initial leg of our flight was across a sugarcane field and over a series of verdant mountains. Up there, the clouds were already growing heavy. By early afternoon they would irrigate the forests and crops below.

Over the city of Moa, on the north coast of Cuba, we turned to the northwest and followed the shoreline. Soon the shallows were interrupted by numerous small islands or cays (cayos).

I kicked myself for not having the foresight to equip myself with a chart, for without such an aid it was impossible for me to determine our position. Never mind, the pilot must know. And then the monotonous roar of the engines, combined with the redundant scenery, compelled me to sleep.

I had no idea how long I'd been dreaming, when the hum-drum sound changed pitch and I was alerted to reality. We were in a slow turn, so I moved to the downhill side of the fuselage for a look-see. Below I saw a narrow, flat, barren island, perhaps 500-yards long, on which

YANKEE-NEVADAN

were forty or fifty structures; some fairly large rectangular buildings with tin or thatched roofs, the rest simple shacks. The pilot dropped down and I counted at least a dozen men on the ground. Running about like ants on a disturbed anthill, they were obviously agitated by our presence.

A WW-II-vintage landing craft was beached on the sand at one end of the island. (I observed no piers or other moorings). Two more vessels, one similar to the first and another, smaller craft, possibly some sort of merchant freighter or "banana boat," were offshore a mile or more and making for the island; whose position, I reckoned, was out of sight of the mainland about halfway up the north coast of Cuba.

In answer to my questioning look, one of the airmen shouted that the island was home to a revolutionary force. It was their headquarters, and the boats comprised their whole fleet, he said.

Later, back at the air station, I would make an attempt to learn more about these revolutionaries but with little success. I was told only that it was the Navy's job to make routine observations, note the rebels' activities and report to the upper echelon. Beyond that I had "no need to know."

However, it was common knowledge that Fulgencio Batista, who had ruled Cuba either directly or indirectly for a decade, was then temporarily "out of power."

Batista was officially in power from 1940 to 1944, and had sided with the U.S. in the war. In 1944, he was deposed in favor of Grau San Martin. I suspected that the rebels we observed were somehow connected with Batista's regime. On the other hand, considering the revolutionary nature of West Indian cultures, it could have been an entirely unrelated group.

With a final turn over the rogues we gained altitude and headed south, flying over the city of Camaguey, in the central part of Cuba, to Cabo Cruz on the opposite coast. At that point, the pilot assumed a course just offshore and headed toward Gitmo.

Lunch was served. Box lunches of cold beef or bologna sandwiches, potato chips, fruit and pie or cake. Not a bad picnic, washed down with cold cokes from an ice box. By the time we had finished this repast, the Sierra Maestra Range, rising sharply from the sea, showed up to port ahead. We were now 150-miles from home base. It was time for gunnery practice.

While the pilot was descending to a lower altitude, I helped the port-side gunner remove a hatch and load his 50-caliber gun. A floating target was then shoved through the hatch. We watched it splash down. Now for the fun part of the exercise.

I stood to the left of the gunner where I could be out of the way yet still observe the target. The nose-turret gunner took first crack at it, scoring a few hits. Then my gunner swung his barrel through the hatch and commenced firing. From my vantage point I could see both tracer and non-tracer bullets as they described a crisp arc to the sea. At the other end of the arc, a string of splashes crept toward the orange float, finally connecting. The gunner held his aim and the trigger, and poured a score of rounds into the would-be enemy object.

But he, concentrating on his work, failed to see what I saw. Something that caused my heart to skip. I tapped his shoulder for

attention, hoping he'd quit firing. He did, and turned to me with a look both quizzical and angry.

My words were lost in the din but my pointing out a stream of liquid pouring from the rear of the port engine nacelle was clear enough. It was fuel. High octane gasoline!

The airman stowed the gun, then spoke into his microphone.

"Fuel leak in the port engine!" he enunciated.

"Belay all firing," came the captain's command, "And close that hatch S-A-P!"

It took the two of us to swing the hatch into its opening and to dog-it-down. Meanwhile, the pilot shut down the errant engine and feathered its prop. I heard it sputter to a stop.

"What happens now?" I worried aloud but unheard.

All kinds of dire imaginings raced through my mind as I donned an inflatable vest. Uppermost was the thought that we might have to ditch.

Could this big ship fly on only one engine? The obvious answer was "yes." Although we'd lost some altitude at first, we were now flying straight and level.

(I would subsequently learn that earlier model PBMs, equipped with lower-horsepower plants, could not fly on one engine.)

The flight engineer came aft, to take charge of lightening the load. "Throw the ammo overboard," he ordered, "and everything else non-essential."

I was glad that he wasn't looking at me when he said that. I knew I wasn't needed but I'd as soon go down with the ship as go over the side, even with a life jacket.

Just about everything that wasn't fastened down was shoved through the open starboard hatch; ammunition, tools, duffle bags (I didn't know what they contained), spare gun mounts and several cans of drinking water. Then we closed and dogged that hatch.

The officer directed the airmen to take their normal positions, and with a jerk of his thumb he said to me, "You ride up there."

I climbed to the top gun-turret and tried to get comfortable. How could a guy possibly maneuver the gun in such cramped quarters?

It was admittedly the best seat in the house; I commanded a virtually unobstructed view in all directions, from the wide blue sea to my right to the green coastal mountains to my left. And, I mused, I'd be the last to go under if the plane should crash-land and sink.

We were maintaining a low altitude, roughly 500-feet above sea level, and had a hundred miles yet to go to touchdown. I noted that the ocean surface was relatively smooth, a fact that somewhat allayed my fears. And if we did have to land on the water, then this was the kind of aircraft to be in.

I prayed, clutched my "lucky" silver dollar (the one that Cousin George had given to me when I was a kid) and even relaxed.

In less than an hour, thanks to the designers at Martin, to our flight crew and to God, we made an almost routine landing on Guantanamo Bay.

That incident, while never a real threat to my life, was sufficient to reinforce my faith in the Almighty. It also caused me to reflect on the experiences of airmen in the recent war - many of them

YANKEE-NEVADAN

kids like me - who had faced real danger. Men who had flown in aircraft riddled with bullet holes, with broken wings, with burning engines, with dead and/or wounded comrades on board.

What thoughts must have preyed on their minds?

How had they kept their faith?

And how about those who had faith but did not survive?

I pondered those and other questions, not broodingly but seriously, and concluded that every man who ever fought a war, whether dead, wounded or living, deserves our continuing respect. Not only for his patriotism, for doing what was right for his country, but also for his individual courage at a time when the future was but a nebulous unknown.

Further, that each of us should consider the vicissitudes of war, and contribute to the means of preventing them.

**CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO
SAILOR SUIT TO CIVVIES**

"A tour of duty at Guantanamo Bay was, for me, an unparalleled experience. I reveled in my good fortune. The climate was almost perfect (though I missed having a change of seasons), there were plenty of new and interesting things to do and learn, my living quarters were comfortable and the food was outstanding.

As an example of the cuisine, let me describe a typical breakfast. Instead of passing in line along a counter, holding out a tray as a target for servers, we walked back to the ranges where bacon, eggs, ham, pancakes, or whatever were cooked to our individual tastes. Not even a civilian restaurant would let you stand at the cook's elbow while he tended your eggs.

For logistical reasons, noon and evening meals were less customized. But there was always a choice of foods. Fresh fruits and vegetables, purchased from Cuban farmers, were included with every meal. Those who ate meat claimed that the beef was not very good, but I could attest to the excellence of the desserts, which ranged from puddings to pastries (excluding ice cream).

For the most part, I enjoyed good health while in sub-tropical Cuba. I even put on some weight. However, a year and some months after entering the Navy, with a perfect set of choppers, a trip to the dentist for remedial work was necessary. He found three cavities in my molars. With no prior experience in a dentist's chair, I didn't quite know what to expect when the guy came at me with his disconcertingly noisy apparatus. But a half-hour later I knew all about that diabolical drill, about the odor of burning ivory, and about pain, for he used no Novocain or gas.

I could never figure out why my teeth suddenly eroded, unless it was due to the many changes in water and diet. One good thing, though, my tonsils never flared up while I was in Cuba, a great relief after having suffered so much in Bainbridge and, to a lesser degree, at Great Lakes.

It was about that time, when I was getting my teeth attended to, that our aerology operations moved from the tower to larger quarters, to the second deck of the main hangar. It was a busy time for us, relocating office furniture and weather instruments while maintaining

round-the-clock service. The new location was much more efficient, though, not only because of its size but also because it was more accessible to pilots.

The only drawback, apart from the fact that we missed the view from atop the administration building, was that it was extremely noisy. The hangar was made of steel, with concrete-block rooms and storage spaces at either end. Our office was located in the block section at the west end. A row of multi-paned windows allowed us to look out onto the apron and runway, a similar set on the inside looked into the hangar proper. As a consequence of all that glass and steel, the sound of a roaring airplane engine, a pounding hammer or a dropped wrench was magnified as if by an amplifier coupled to a loudspeaker.

Those acoustical properties were aptly demonstrated one evening, when I had the duty along with one of my peers. The watch began routinely enough, with weather observations to make and charts to draw. Outside, several pilots practiced landings and takeoffs in their JD-1 Attack-bombers. The sun set. They ceased flying. All was quiet.

A NATS R5-D from Miami landed, the pilot and navigator came up to our office for a weather briefing. Together we looked over the latest-edition weather map, discussed the cross-sectional chart for Panama City (their destination), checked the current conditions at the station, and they left.

After a while, caught up on my duties, I rolled a chair over to the outboard windows, sat down and idly watched the big four-engine transport make ready for its next leg of flight.

By the time the last of several crates were stowed in its hold and the hatch battened, the flight officers were aboard and going through their pre-flight ritual. Soon five other officers, passengers, mounted the portable stairway, entered the cabin and closed that hatch behind them.

Now it was time to start the engines, one after another. The prop of number-one engine began to turn slowly. In a few seconds a belch of smoke poured from its exhaust, signaling a successful start. The routine was followed for each of the remaining engines.

When the last propeller whirled in synchronism with the rest, the airman who had stood by with a CO-2 fire extinguisher hauled it back to the sidelines. Another guy bent down and pulled the chocks from the wheels. The ground controller exchanged "thumbs up" with the pilot, and another flight was underway. My eyes followed the R5-D as it taxied to the north end of the runway.

The August twilight was fading fast. Runway lights, building lights, street lights, even lights from Leeward Point across the bay were prominent against the dusky earth and sky. With a roar the airplane sped down the runway, yellow-blue tongues of flame darting like Roman candles from its engine exhausts. The hangar throbbed in sympathy with the airplane's tune, and then the craft disappeared.

But the hangar continued to vibrate. In fact, it was now vibrating more than ever. And shaking and rattling, even rocking.

The reason for it was suddenly clear.

"**Earthquake!**" my partner and I shouted in unison.

I jumped up and moved away from the windows, and was met by a chair rolling across the room toward me. I reached for it with one

hand and grabbed at the map-table with the other. The table was unloading maps and charts from its sloping top.

My partner, meanwhile, was wrestling with the teletype machine in an attempt to keep it from tipping over.

"God, how I wish I was on that airplane," I muttered.

"Me too," he echoed.

And then our situation worsened. Every inch of the hangar now agonized. Steel girders, corrugated siding, giant doors, glass windows, bricks and boards, all were in motion, though not necessarily in concert.

I ducked instinctively, when a square-yard of ceiling plaster landed on the desk beside me and exploded in a cloud of white dust. I started toward the stairwell, then hesitated, fascinated by a crack appearing, like a slow-motion lightning bolt, in the south wall. Finally, gathering my wits about me, I half-fell down the steps in the darkness and ran out onto the tarmac, away from the stuttering structure. My cohort was right behind me. Or was I behind him? Who remembers?

The distant glow in the west reflected off the windows but otherwise it was dark, the kind of dark that seems more so without any sign of manmade illumination. I remembered, then, that the base power plant was designed to cut off all electricity in the event of an earthquake, to minimize the possibility of fires.

For a while the earth continued to tremble and rumble, then the rumble lessened, like a train disappearing into the distance. I caught the sound of the NATS plane, which should have been out over the sea by now, and spotted its navigation lights. It had come back, and would circle the station for fifteen minutes or so before flying away again.

The two of us stumbled up the stairway to the office, located the emergency battle lanterns and surveyed the damage. What a mess! Desks, tables, the floor, all littered with plaster and glass and dust. Everything in the room was out of place. The barograph was damaged, as were the hygrometer and the clock.

Miraculously, none of the outer window panes had fallen out, though many were badly cracked. A large number of those on the other side of the room were smashed.

The power came on and we set about cleaning up the place. (It was a job that would continue for two days.) And we heard the story behind the R5-D's return.

The plane was barely airborne when the lights below winked out. Puzzled, the co-pilot radioed the tower in inquiry, but received no reply. The tower radios were temporarily without power. The radiomen were hanging on for dear life at the time but soon switched to a backup power supply, which enabled them to receive the next call.

Advised of the earthquake, the crew circled while the radioman telephoned the Officer of the Day and asked if there was a need to hold the flight for emergency purposes. The reply was negative, the co-pilot so advised, and the plane turned toward Panama.

In the morning we checked the micro-seismograph sites for damage. The concrete bunkers showed no sign of there having been an earthquake, but the instruments were all out of commission. Among other things, the sensor bearings were broken. The charts were removed

and developed with special interest. The tracings revealed a buildup of seismic activity, increasing till the zig-zags extended off the sides of the photo-sensitive charts, which then went blank pinpointing the time of the first big shock wave. (We would learn that this tremor originated beneath the Naval Base.)

That same day, August 7th, I took advantage of an opportunity to fly with the Chief to Santiago, which reportedly had suffered some damage in the quake. We went in the "OY," a light, high-wing, two-seater monoplane (maybe a Piper aircraft) used for liaison work.

We approached from the southeast over San Juan Hill. A pall of smoke hung over the city, making it difficult to distinguish between normally squalid shacks and those damaged by the quake. The Chief dropped down over the business section, and we noted a lot of buildings with caved-in roofs and crumbling walls. Hundreds of people, men, women and children, were milling around, putting out fires and picking up pieces. On the way back we flew over Guantanamo City and Caimanera, both of which were hidden under smoke.

Later, back at the base, I observed a crew loading the PBY with medical supplies. I do not recall how many, but several planeloads of emergency materials and food were delivered to Santiago that day and the next.

An earthquake is a unique natural event. Compared to a flood or a hurricane a tremor, even though short-lived, is by far the most unnerving. One has a feeling of total helplessness. There is nothing he can do and there is no place to go to get away from it.

At least the earthquakes, the two that I experienced in Cuba, provided news to "write home about." But then, I seldom lacked material for correspondence. I had already learned that the best way to ensure getting letters is to write lots of them.

Mother, now the head librarian at the Northfield library, wrote quite regularly and kept me apprised of family goings-on. I learned that Ruth was to be married in June, to a man named Leroy Patnode, who had a daughter, Dianne, of about the same age as Jim. Betty returned home from Princeton that year, and went to work at the Northfield Seminary. Dorothy became engaged to a fellow named Elmer Russell, and they were to be married in October, before my hitch was due to end.

Priscilla wrote about the old gang and town news. Even though she and Charlie worked in Greenfield they maintained close ties with folks in Northfield, where they still resided.

I also received letters from guys I'd known at Bainbridge and Great Lakes, and from girls in Chicago and Philadelphia.

I wrote one letter with little hope for a reply, and was surprisingly rewarded for my effort. It was addressed to the Remington Company in Connecticut, manufacturer of electric shavers.

On leaving boot camp, one-and-a-half years before, my first act was to throw away the Gillette razor that I'd wrestled with for three months and buy an electric shaver. I chose a Remington. (It was then that I first grew a small mustache.) But even after going back to the shaver my tender skin suffered. So I purchased a pre-shave powder (a cardboard-encased stick of it), also marketed by the Remington Company, which helped to alleviate the problem. The thing worked well

YANKEE-NEVADAN

but nothing lasts forever. The Navy small-stores had none in stock, and when mine wore down to almost nothing I began to worry.

I wrote to the company, explained my predicament - with only a little embellishment - and asked for help in procuring a new supply of sticks. The power of the pen in the hands of an overseas sailor was greater than I anticipated. Within two weeks of my posting the letter I received a complimentary box full of pre-shave sticks, a dozen of them, plus a letter expressing the company's appreciation for my using its products and the hope that I would always find them satisfactory.

It was good of the Remington Company to be attentive to my needs, and good business practice as well. For while I got a free ten-year supply of sticks (many of which I shared with others), I've used none but Remington shavers ever since.

One of Cuba's two best known export products, in those days, was the cigar. (Sugar was the other one.) A Cuban cigar was considered the best in the world, and commanded a high price in the United States. On the island, though, one could buy the finest Havana for a nickel or a dime. So cheap were they that I would occasionally buy and smoke one myself, putting on hold my vow of abstinence for the duration. It was then that I learned that, while the aroma of someone else's cigar is hard to abide, "smoking" a good cigar is very pleasurable indeed.

Remembering that Charlie, the only one of my brothers who ever smoked much, and who liked a cigar now and then, I sent a box or two of the cedar-wrapped jewels to him (in circumvention of the tariffs, I might add).

Another of the islands products, easily available to us at Gitmo, was bananas. Almost every day a native vendor came to the barracks with a bunch of monkey-fruit over his shoulder. At first, being used to seeing them bright yellow in color, I rejected his offer of a smallish green sample. But the fellow insisted that it was "tree ripe" so I tasted it. From that time on I bought bananas on a regular basis. And since they were so cheap, I always paid the vendor more than his asking price.

But alas, once you have tasted tree-ripened fruit you are spoiled forever.

By the end of September, 1947, the Secretary of the Navy had decided - wisely, I thought - that a two-year hitch, as opposed to the traditional four-year enlistment, was impractical. In the short term, a sailor spent most of his time in training and had little left over to make good on the Navy's investment. Those of us who had enlisted under the two-year plan were encouraged to "sign over" for four years. Otherwise, as we were informed, we could expect an early discharge.

Chief Wells took me aside and talked for an hour, espousing the many advantages of Navy life (and indeed there were many) in a most persuasive manner. He also told me that the work I'd been doing was commensurate with that of an aerographer's mate, and if I would re-enlist a promotion to that rank would be almost automatic. He was certain that I could pass the examination.

Further, he would guarantee a transfer to the air station in Miami, where I would become a member of the "Hurricane Tracking Team." It was a relatively new group, whose mission was to fly around and

YANKEE-NEVADAN

into active hurricanes and gather vital information relative to their composition and behavior. I had met some of those boys, and the temptation to be one of them was great.

I thought about my options for a couple of days, weighed the pros and cons, and finally elected to go for a discharge. I liked being in the Navy but was anxious, perhaps over-anxious, to return to civilian life. Besides, the nit-picking peacetime regimen had come to Guantanamo Bay, along with a new Base Commander.

Having arrived at that decision, arrangements were made to fly me to Miami for mustering out. I rather hated the thought of leaving Cuba so soon, but was excited about the prospect of flying to Florida, of visiting the famous city of beaches and bare-skinned beauties, and of traveling through the eastern coastal states to Massachusetts. But it was not to be that way at all.

A big tropical storm, one that we'd been tracking for several days, effectively drove a wedge between me and my expectations. All NATS flights to Miami were grounded until the storm, now a full-fledged hurricane, abated. It was rumored that it might be a week or more before normal scheduling was resumed.

I was perfectly willing to wait, but the Navy, once I had made up my mind, seemed anxious to get rid of me. I would have to travel back the way I had come, by sea. What a horrible turn of events. It would undoubtedly be a repeat of my southbound journey, seasick and miserable, especially as we'd be sailing on stormy seas.

With great reluctance I packed my belongings, including a few souvenirs of the islands, and prepared for the trip. The weather was abnormally dismal and gray, the worst I'd experienced since my arrival. The temperature fell to the low sixties and a strong wind from the "bottom side" of the hurricane drove heavy rain across the bay and base. In spite of those conditions, Chiefs Wells and Wolfe, along with Munson and Al and others, gathered at the barracks to bid me adieu.

I tossed my sea bag into the back of Cash's pickup truck and, with a lump in my throat and a wave to my friends, took leave of the air station. Around the cove we went to the dock area, where Cash left me to find my assigned ship. I fell in with several other sailors, also due to be discharged, who would be fellow passengers on the way to Norfolk.

The Crescent City (APA-21), a Delta-class transport ship, just happened to be in port and ready to sail for the states, and just happened to have plenty of room for passengers. At 491-feet she was 100-feet longer than the Forrest Royal, displaced almost four times as much water, and with a top speed of 16-knots would creep along at half the destroyer's speed.

At that, the Crescent City was but half the size of an ocean liner, and could accommodate only 1,200 troops. But again, she had room enough for me.

Braced against the wind I struggled up the gangplank, was welcomed aboard and conducted to quarters below decks. I quickly stowed my gear and went topside for fresh air, and to observe the ship's getting under way.

But I was wrong again! A deck hand informed me that, because of the position and intensity of the hurricane, our departure would be delayed a day or two.

"Damn!" I thought, "I could better have stayed in the barracks than on this tub."

But Navy orders prevented my returning. Worse yet, as it would turn out, the NATS planes would be flying again before the Crescent City would leave the dock. Destiny, it seemed, insisted on giving me another shot at a sea cruise.

So, after two days of forced idleness, during which time the weather cleared to sunny and calm, the big ship moved away from the dock, slipped past Corinaso Point, my old home, and out to the Caribbean Sea.

It was probably fortuitous that I should travel north by ship, for the journey would be totally different from my uncomfortable trip south. I should get a new and better picture of life at sea. Actually, the first leg of the trip was what I'd expect of a cruise ship, without the frills, of course.

One factor that greatly contributed to my pleasure was that I was assigned to duties on deck instead of in the chow-hall below. There was plenty of work to be done swabbing decks, coiling and faking-down line, chipping paint and painting, but it was all on deck where there was clean air to breathe and a view to be had.

The Crescent City had barely cleared the point, where the old gun emplacements were located, when the boatswain handed out chipping hammers to me and my new acquaintances, pointed to the lifeboat davits and left us. I hauled myself up onto the wide railing and commenced flaking off thick, loose gray paint. While thus employed, it occurred to me as amazing how quickly saltwater works to destroy a ship; peeling surfaces, rotting planks and boards, transforming metals into oxides.

It was a wonderful vantage point, that rail, and I was often distracted by flying fishes and diving birds, colorful coral reefs and distant islands green with vegetation. What a way to travel!

And that's how I spent my first day out, with ample time for coffee and lunch with my buddies and members of the ship's company.

In the evening, after a meal of navy beans and franks, I went to the port rail and watched the sun set behind a faraway wall of towering cumulonimbus. It was my last look at those spectacular, tropical buildups. Nearer at hand I noted that the swells were running slower but higher; evidence, perhaps, of another tropical storm in the track. We were nearing the Bahamas.

Night fell and I took my bedding up to the afterdeck, placed it in a cranny between two bulkheads and turned in for the night. I wasn't about to sleep below decks if I could avoid it. The ship rolled markedly but I slept well. And without a hint of mal-de-mer.

Sunrise found me warm and cozy, but rocking from side to side. The sea was getting rougher. I went below, stowed my gear, performed my morning toilet, then joined the crew for chow. But it was a sparse breakfast that I ate, just toast and coffee, before hurrying back on deck. I dared not stay below for fear of getting seasick. Besides, I wanted to observe the weather.

At eight bells, the boatswain assigned a few of us passengers to cleanup jobs, which we rapidly dispatched, and then the word came down from the bridge: "Now hear this. Now hear this. All deck crews will cease work details and lay below."

Because of the heavy seas, routine work above decks was suspended. The "cease work" order was a welcome break, but I didn't favor the idea of spending time below decks. So I found the weather shack, just aft of the bridge, and sought permission to enter.

The aerologists were amenable and invited me to hang out up there whenever I wished. I could help with odd jobs, such as sweeping up, taking weather observations and making coffee. What luck.

Meanwhile, the Crescent City was doing all those things that I'd read about in the *Saturday Evening Post's* Horatio Hornblower series (back in the '30s). She rolled, she yawed, she pitched, and she smacked her bow hard. Her screws came out of the water, she shuddered from stem to stern and then the cycle was repeated, hour after hour for hours on end. Soon after the noon mess, from which I abstained, the order came to "secure the forward weather deck from occupancy."

Jim, one of the aerologists, took my arm and led me through a hatchway. "C'mon, let's take a look," he said.

I followed him along the outer passageway to a protected area under the flying bridge. There I clung to a stanchion and stared wide-eyed through the heavy glass pane that protected us from the storm. But even Hornblower had not prepared me for this.

There was no sky, but an all-encompassing swirling, gray-green, mass of sea, rain and spindrift framing the ship's bow. Sheets of water ran down the other side of the glass, distorting the picture like a bad movie film. I pressed closer, carefully, so as to not strike my head when the ship pitched, and saw the bow rise, stand motionless for what seemed an eternity, then drive a wedge into the heart of the wall of water. The wall curled upward and, like a demon, pounced on the foredeck. Hundreds of tons of frothing seawater then obliterated everything forward of my vantage point.

It was eerie, as if the bow had been separated from the rest of the vessel. I was more than a little astonished.

But the play was not yet over. With a dreadful thud the heavy mass struck the superstructure over our heads and swept off to the side, leaving us soaked to the skin. The ship groaned in complaint, righted herself, then began another round with the elements.

Jim had obviously been through such storms before, for he just grinned and asked, "What d'ya think o'that?"

"I dunno," I replied.

I wondered if there were a danger of our sinking, but was too embarrassed to ask his opinion. We returned to the weather shack.

The aerographers on duty, after studying the latest available weather reports, came to the conclusion that we were caught in a northwest moving storm that had combined with the remnants of a hurricane - the one that had spoiled my opportunity to fly - coming off the coast of Florida.

I stepped outside. I had trouble estimating the true height of the towering waves but thought it must be thirty feet or more. High overhead, the anemometer spun like an airplane propeller, signaling

YANKEE-NEVADAN

wind speeds up to sixty knots, just under hurricane force, close enough to a hurricane to suit me. The show could be called off at any time. I stepped back into the shack and poured myself another cup of Java.

As night fell the wind abated a little and the ship's motion, by comparison to its earlier gyrations, seemed almost pleasant. I slept below decks in my bunk that night, and the next, amazed and thankful that I was not seasick.

Our course was along normal sea lanes, just off the coastline where, during the war, German U-boats had lain in wait to harass and sink such ships as this. We passed famous, or infamous, Cape Hatteras, whose frivolous winds and sea currents had claimed hundreds of ships and sailors in the last four centuries.

It was early afternoon of our fourth day at sea, somewhere near the end of September, when, under a gray but clearing sky we rounded Cape Henry, turned west into the Hampton Roads and made for the harbor at Norfolk. It was good to be on a calm sea once more.

Two Navy tugboats chugged out from the yard, swung around and tucked their fat noses under the side of our ship, one fore and one aft, and nudged her into an empty berth. Enormous hawsers - as big around as a pretty girl's waist - were hauled over the side and placed on massive iron bitts to hold her securely.

The ship then burst with activity, as officers and crew alike made ready to go ashore; some on business, some on liberty or shore leave. We passengers grabbed our gear and headed down the gangway as well, to be met by a petty officer and escorted to temporary quarters. It was there that we would wait to be mustered out. If all went well, I might yet make it home by the fourth of October, in time for Dot and Elly's wedding.

What was expected to be a few days turned into weeks of boring inactivity. The Navy was apparently neither ready for nor equipped to process our discharge papers. So we waited, with no assigned duties or orders, or communication of any kind from anyone. One day ran interminably into another.

I visited the ship's service store and bought a small radio, an ivory-plastic, battery-powered portable made by Emerson. It was the latest thing in radios, featuring "peanut" tubes - so called because they were the size of goobers in the shell - and measuring only two-by-four-by-eight inches.

(As of this writing, that radio is still in operating condition; that is, if the appropriate batteries can be found.)

I sat in the barracks or outside in the sun, tuned in a local broadcast station and listened to such music as Hoagy Carmichael's "Old Buttermilk Sky" and Freddy Martin's "Symphony," while assembling an album of photos taken at Guantanamo Bay. Some good comes of everything. I might never have found time for that project, were I not detained at Norfolk.

At the first opportunity, three of us took a one-day liberty in Norfolk. To our dismay, many places were off-limits to sailors. It was there that I actually saw posted signs reading, "NO DOGS OR SAILORS ALLOWED WITHIN." And most of what was in-limits was beyond rational belief.

The old and narrow streets were dark and dirty and amuck with drunken derelicts, and not a few wayward seamen. There were sleazy bars where, I was told, a guy could have the company of a callous woman for the price of a couple of drinks.

Tattoo parlors, seemingly a hallmark of a port city, occupied spaces too small for any other type of business. There were those who looked upon the tattoo as an art form. To me, it was more of a brand than anything else.

We took in a burlesque show, as bad a one as I'd ever seen, walked the streets, avoided the panhandlers and drunks as best we could, ogled the working girls, and ultimately settled for ice-cream sodas in a relatively clean parlor before returning to base.

In time we learned that there were indeed places in and around Norfolk where we, and our money, were welcome. One time, several of us rented a taxi and visited "The Atlantic Club, Inc." It was way out on Granby Street and the selling of alcohol to sailors under the age of twenty-one may or may not have been legal. Anyway, the privileges of this club were extended to us, for a membership fee of one dollar each.

Some of the guys pooled their money and bought a bottle of cheap whiskey. A tough-as-nails waitress brought mixes - Coca-Cola and ginger ale - to our table, for an exorbitant price. We had to mix our own drinks. Remembering my experience with liquor at Gitmo, and my solemn resolution, I settled for Coca-Cola, straight.

I must admit that we had a ball that night, telling ribald jokes and exaggerated sea stories, dancing and talking with the local girls. I was fortunate to make the acquaintance of a real Southern Belle who avowed, "Ah jest love Noatheners."

Another time, four of us got together for a round of golf at the Commissioned Officer's Club. It was a beautiful place, all green and curried and quiet. But I had a terrible time getting used to those grass fairways, and my game went from bad to worse as I hacked the ball back and forth across both roughs and adjacent fairways.

(That was the last time I ventured onto the links.)

Finally, on October 27, 1947, five days short of the two years I had signed up for, after two days of physicals and filling out forms, I received an honorable discharge from the Regular Navy. And promptly enlisted in the Naval Reserve. I figured it wouldn't hurt to be in the inactive reserve, in case I should someday decide to re-enlist in the Regular Navy. (I retained my military life insurance, with Mother and Dorothy as beneficiaries.)

So, with a shiny new discharge pin (the "Ruptured Duck") displayed on my jumper, official papers stashed away in my sea bag, separation pay folded into my wallet, wearing dress blues and flat hat and a pea coat against the cold, drizzling rain, I was ready to go.

I said goodbye to my friends, hauled my heavy sea bag to the gate, made my last official salute, to the Marine guard, and happily left the Norfolk Naval Operating Base. I hired a waiting taxi to take me to the Greyhound station, where I bought a one-way ticket and climbed aboard the north-bound bus. For a change of scenery, a new experience and to save a few bucks, I had decided to travel home by bus. At least as far as Springfield.

Through Richmond, Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York and Hartford, and a hundred places in between, through rain and shine, seldom the latter, the bus groaned and swayed, stopped and moved at a snail's pace. Of course there were no luxurious throughways in those days.

Every three or four hours the bus stopped and off-loaded its human cargo at a greasy restaurant. As a rule there were sufficient booths and stools to accommodate everyone while eating, but there was always a waiting line in front of the men's room door.

Except for a half-dozen of us in military uniform, and two or three matronly ladies, my fellow passengers were a plain lot, some even uncouth in manner. But everyone minded his own business. As for the scenery, I could see but little of it through the dirty windows. By the time we reached the District of Columbia I had determined that train travel, though subordinate to flying, was far superior to this. I made a subconscious note to avoid riding a bus in the future.

Six-hundred miles and twenty hours after leaving Norfolk, through daylight and darkness and daylight again, after changing busses three times, I arrived at the Springfield station a little after noon. I bought a ready-made sandwich and a candy bar, ate them, purchased a copy of the Springfield Union, for the classified ads section, pulled my coat collar up and hiked through a pouring rain to the YMCA.

I checked in, stowed my sea bag in a locker, settled into a big overstuffed chair, opened my newspaper and studied the used-car ads.

Ever since Virginia my mind had been working on a plan to buy a car in Springfield, so I could arrive home in proper style and never again be afoot. It was my number one priority. I could wait no longer. I had to have an automobile.

Three of the car lot ads looked promising, so I stuffed them into a pocket and headed for the nearest address, a corner lot at 240 Worthington Street, where a small sign proclaimed, "Worthy Daily Parking, Inc."

A tiny square building sat amongst a couple-of-dozen pre-war vintage cars. The cars, awash with rainwater, glittered under a hundred incandescent light-bulbs strung between poles overhead. I was almost immediately attracted to a gray, 1938 Dodge Coupe.

The salesman, no doubt mentally rubbing his hands with glee (or greed), handed over the keys and I drove it around the block. It was a clean car, the motor seemed quiet and the ride smooth as silk. The brakes worked, proven to my satisfaction when a little old lady pulled her Ford out of an alley directly in my path, so too did the windshield wipers. And well they should have in that rainstorm.

I returned to the lot, and without ever looking at another car I sold myself on the idea that that Dodge was the one for me.

A twenty-dollar bill clinched the deal. The balance, \$480, was due in cash the following day. And that was that. No fooling around in the rain. No haggling over price. No problems.

With a light heart I picked up my sea bag at the "Y," drove across the Memorial Bridge and headed up-river on Route-5.

While I'd been idling away my time at Norfolk, Ruth and her new husband sold and moved away from the place in West Northfield. At the

same time, Mother, whose possessions were now dwindling, and Bob moved to 73 Main Street, next to the Town Hall in the center of Northfield. It was the big old building that I remembered as Harry and Josephine Haskell's. Now it was comprised of three tenements. Mother rented the one on the south side.

They had also moved my few belongings: The trunk full of odds and ends and my civilian clothes, my desk, the mantel clock that had belonged to my grandmother, a wooden writing box given to me by Cousin George, letters, books and school papers, two round-pointed shovels and some hand tools that had belonged to my father.

My homecoming was not what I would have wished it to be; that is, to return to the place in East Northfield with its memories. Instead it was to a house that, while outwardly familiar, would be strange within.

It was still raining hard when I drove onto the driveway. Mother met me at the doorway, with arms open and tears in her eyes, the latter a sight that evoked a similar reaction on my part. We went inside where it was warm and homey, and Mother immediately began to "Mother me." I was hungry and was fed. I was tired and was shown a bath and a bed. The warm bath put me in a mood for sleep, and sleep I did, like the proverbial log.

I must have spent ten hours in that comfortable old feather-bed before awakening to the tantalizing aroma of griddle-cakes in the making. Rejuvenated, I quickly dressed and went to the kitchen, where I tore into a plateful of my favorite breakfast food.

While satisfying my appetite, Mother recounted the activities of the past few weeks; which, I gathered, had been very trying for her. She then plied me with questions. (Standard procedure for a mother.) What was my life like in Cuba? Had I been well? Had I behaved myself? What were my plans for the future?

The first questions were easy to answer. I talked about the people and things at Guantanamo Bay, about the hurricane and my stormy sea passage to Norfolk, and about my forced idleness. But my future plans were vague. I'd have to get re-acclimated before answering that one.

When I explained about buying the car, she shook her head and expressed the opinion that I "should've waited and looked around a bit." But the deal was done and she didn't pursue the matter.

In due time, when I figured we'd talked long enough, I found my bank book and made a beeline for Greenfield.

Back in 1943, a \$15 deposit had started an account in my name at the Franklin Savings Institution. Thereafter, infrequent deposits and meager dividends increased that amount to some \$400 in 1944. I then withdrew \$200 to pay for my first car, and from that time the sum had grown to a whopping \$955. Not a fortune by any stretch of the imagination, but enough to give me a sense of confidence. It was with that (perhaps misguided) philosophy that I marched into the bank and withdrew almost two-thirds of my life's savings.

It was my twentieth birthday. Smart and worldly after my tour in the Navy, and relatively well-heeled after visiting the bank, I entered the Mayflower Hotel in Springfield to fulfill my part of the car deal. At that time, if not before, I should have suspected that I

YANKEE-NEVADAN

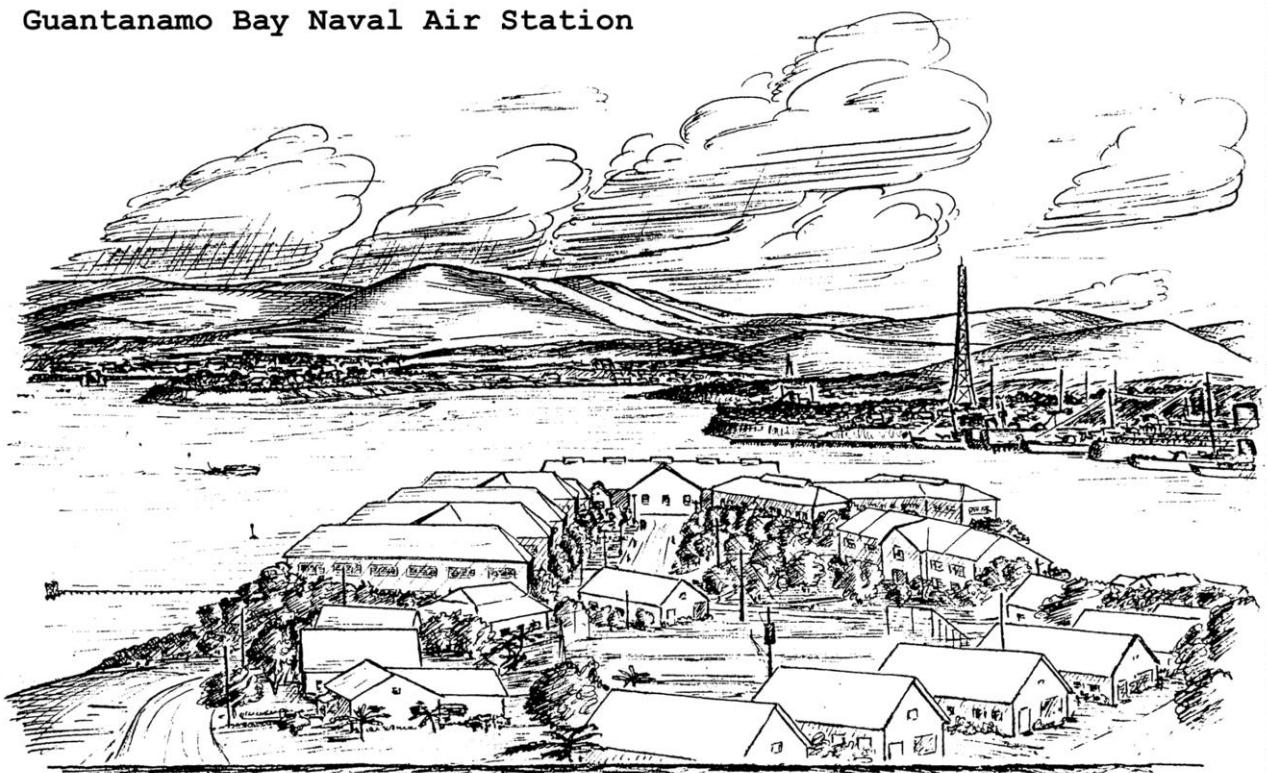
was being had. He who conducts business in a cheap hotel room should not be totally trusted. But even if I had misgivings (and I did) I was not about to back out. So I met Harold as prearranged, handed over the \$480, obtained a valid receipt and papers of ownership, shook his proffered hand and returned to my car.

On the way home, pondering the details of my car buying experience, I began to feel like a sucker. I didn't know why, the transaction was perfectly legal, it just didn't seem right. I could only hope that the Dodge was as good as it appeared to be, and half as good as the salesman purported it to be.

In hindsight, I suppose I could have "survived" a lifetime without the benefit of wheels. But having a motor vehicle would always be important to me. It was the instrument responsible for most of my pleasures and satisfactions. In the case of that Dodge, however, I would learn that my mother's assessment was totally correct. I had made too hasty a decision, a bad one at that.

YANKEE-NEVADAN

Guantanamo Bay Naval Air Station



G. Phelps 1947
~~G. Phelps~~ ④

Corinaso Point - Gtmo. Bay, Cuba - (and N.O.B.)

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE INTERLUDE

Northfield had changed but little during my absence, though the population had increased since 1945. Most of the guys my age were still in the service; including my friends Neil, who was a corpsman at the Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Navy Yard, and Billy, a radioman at the Navy's Adak, Alaska, facility. But a majority of the men and boys, and girls, who had served during the war were back, and by now were pretty well established in their old jobs, or in new ones. Some were even taking part in the running of the town's businesses and government.

The Hurley twins, Ed and Tom (who had worked at the IGA before going to war), were both back in Northfield. Ed was in the grocery business, Tom was with the U.S. Postal Service, and before long would become a postmaster. Robert "Mert" Johnson, recently married to Ruthie Dawe, had also joined the Postal Service. He, too, would become a postmaster. Stanley Johnson was back in the plumbing and hardware business. Leonard Barnes, old Leroy's son, was managing the A&P Store. Lee Hammond, my erstwhile classmate, he who had been a prisoner-of-war in Europe, was now at home in Northfield Farms. Carl Stone, another classmate, and his brother Niles were back. Richard Cobb, our former high school principal, had returned. Ray Thompson, our teacher's husband, now had a thriving automotive business in East Northfield. Ed Powell was a busy insurance man.

Those were some who had gone to war and returned to take up where they had left off in Northfield. Others, probably in the majority, went on to jobs and careers elsewhere.

As for my siblings; John, who had proven himself a most capable soldier and leader, had earned the grade of staff sergeant in the 328th Infantry Regiment, and had been awarded a Bronze Star and the Croix de Guerre in the European Theater of War. He had now donned his artist's clothes and set up a studio in Greenfield. He and Gladys lived in an apartment nearby, with their two sons, Jason and Joel, the latter now about a year old.

Dick was still employed at one of the big machine-tool factories in Greenfield (or millers Falls), and I believe that Audrey was teaching school in Bernardston.

Stanley and Elsie, with their five children, had moved to a farm on the River Road in Walpole, New Hampshire. He seemed happy to be back in his native state.

Dot and Elly, not yet one-month married, had set up housekeeping in Florence, just west of Northampton, Massachusetts.

Charlie and Florence, whose second child, Norman, was born in 1946, were, I believe, then living on a small farm in Greenfield.

Ruth and Roy talked seriously of moving, with their two children, to California; the post-war "land of opportunity."

Raymond and Leslæ had settled in New Hampshire, where he was in the business of felling trees. They now had a daughter, Michele.

Betty was living with Lucretia Marshall's folks in East Northfield, and working at the Seminary.

My younger brother, Robert, was in high school. In Mother's words, "He's getting to be awfully independent...like his father."

I was not overly concerned about getting a job, as Melvin Morgan had promised that my old position at the IGA would be waiting for me. But for some reason - either he could not afford any more help or had already sold the store, I don't recall which - that door was closed. Anyway, just as she had helped me get my first job at The Northfield, Pris put in a good word for me at the Western Mass. Electric Company and I was hired as a temporary laborer.

The job was digging pole holes. It was hard work. The hardest I had ever been subjected to on a sustained basis. But I enjoyed it, especially because it was all out-of-doors. The company was constructing a power line southwest of Greenfield, in the Berkshire Hills up around Conway. It was an area that presented every kind of challenging terrain and condition for digging; except one. There were no "easy" holes.

In a short time, though, my hands grew calloused and adaptive to the tools of the trade; that is, a long and heavy digging bar, a shovel and a spoon (a long-handled shovel shaped like a spoon used for getting dirt out of the bottom of a deep hole).

Every new hole was different from the last. One was in alluvial gravel; one in loose sand; one in a swamp; another in slate or solid ledge-rock. Open ended, fifty-gallon drums were utilized in the gravel, sand and swamp holes, to prevent the sides from caving in. Dynamite, in the hands of our boss, an experienced powder man, was used to loosen the rocky stuff.

The late fall season was cold and rainy, quickly evolving into cold and windy and snowy. It was a dramatic change from my recent sub-tropical habitat, but digging kept me remarkably warm. By mid-December, the going got really rough with zero temperatures and/or snowfall the order of the day.

Our crew boss, J. Omer "Red" Bergeron, a native of Canada now a U.S. citizen, was 52-years old and as hard a working man as I'd ever seen. He was of medium height, had muscles of iron, and red hair now turning gray. He was the archetypal line foreman; that is, experienced and knowledgeable, rugged and demanding, and with a good sense of humor. His orders were given in an articulate manner (loud and clear) and he dealt fairly with everyone on the crew.

One day a blizzard of giant proportions closed in around us. Sizing up the situation, Red gave orders to grab our lunch-buckets and head for a particularly large hemlock tree. We crawled under its spreading boughs and got a fire going at the perimeter, and in a matter of minutes we were warm and cozy with our sandwiches and hot

YANKEE-NEVADAN

coffee. Red sat down with us and, between bites, spun tales of the "old days" when winters were really tough.

I suppose we spent two or three hours under that tree, while the wind whistled through the needles overhead and the snow accumulated beyond our circle of comfort. The storm did not let up.

It became apparent that this was no passing flurry, and Red elected to move out lest the truck get bogged down between here and the highway. The new snow, added to that already on the ground, was up to our knees. Deeper where it had drifted between the trees. Visibility was good for about ten feet, unless, like me, you wore glasses and it was zero.

It was a struggle but we made it to the big truck, where we stomped and brushed off as much of the white stuff as possible before boarding the truck; Red and the linemen in the cab, the rest of us "flunkies" in back with the tools. It was covered there, except for the very back, and we had a padded bench to sit on. I was extremely wet and cold, but happy as hell to be headed for the barn.

The storm spelled an end to the construction season, and an end to my experience on a pole-line crew. I worked for the company a while longer, shoveling snow at the operations center on Federal Street (in Greenfield), clearing driveways and parking spaces and walkways.

So much snow fell that there was no place to put it on the premises, so it was loaded - by means of snow-shovels in the hands of the likes of me - onto trucks and hauled down Main Street to the Green River, just west of town, and dumped over the banking. (Snow hauling was a major industry in Massachusetts that winter.)

Eventually the company ran out of work for me and I was "terminated."

Out of a job and without prospects, I went to Greenfield and signed up as a member of the unemployed. I was issued a salmon-colored card and instructed to report on December 14th, if not notified of a job offer before then, to receive \$20 in compensation.

In the meantime I looked for employment on my own. Any type of work would do, but I came up wanting. I'd have to rely on the government. However, I was so embarrassed by the idea of accepting "charity" I went for a whole month without collecting the weekly stipend.

After a while, the handwriting on the wall became clearer to me. During my absence, the workplace had been filled by returning servicemen - which was only right since they'd fought our war - and there were no jobs to be had. At least not in rural Massachusetts. I was at an impasse.

At least the snowstorms kept me in good physical condition. Every third or fourth day, from mid-December through the end of February, it snowed; each storm putting down from four to twelve inches of new snow. The need to clear my long driveway, to get the car out and drive Mother to and from the library, gave me plenty of exercise.

For recreation, I located a pair of bear-paw snowshoes and went for long walks in the woods east of town. I liked the bear-paws. Unlike skis, or even the long, narrow snowshoes popular in open country, they were easily maneuvered between the trees and bushes of New England's forests. I'd drive out School Street, park the car where

the snow-plows quit, and trek through the woods. I'd follow a remnant of the old Boston Post Road a ways, then cut off through gullies, climb low hills and wind down hidden streambeds. Often I carried a .22-caliber rifle, with the intention of shooting a rabbit or a squirrel, but those fellows, being smart, were either holed up for the winter or scurrying through tunnels in their snowy underworld.

Few conditions in nature compare with the forest immediately after a snowfall, when a crystalline blanket lends enchantment to a myriad naked deciduous trees and bundled evergreens, and a near-absolute quiet speaks of paradise. This was such a place. A place where, alone, I could think and dream and plan. In fact, it was the first time I'd been really alone in years.

(Such an environment is hard to find nowadays. Even in the remotest area one must contend with the sounds of snowmobiles and airplanes. But there existed no such distractions then in that little corner of the world.)

Not all of my spare time was spent in the woods. I had enough cash, after contributing to expenses at home, to buy gasoline; enough that I could drive to Greenfield to a movie now and then. And there was still The Northfield, where I could fraternize with my friends without spending much money. As a matter of fact it was there, in November, that I met a young lady by the name of Doris.

It was about the time when I became painfully aware that my Dodge was truly a lemon. The first real indication was an alarming "knock" under the hood; the second was an extravagant use of motor oil. I decided to seek the advice of my friend Jimmy Neigh.

With the hood up and the engine running he listened. He revved the engine and listened some more. He shut it off, pulled the dip-stick, studied and smelled the black stuff on its end, hm-m-m-ed like a doctor and delivered his diagnosis.

"You got took when you bought this clunker."

I really didn't want to hear those words, but I knew that he was right. "It sounded good at first," I said.

"Well, that Springfield city slicker doctored it up with heavy oil to make it run quiet till you got out of town. They all do it down there...and make money at it too." Then he added, with a grin, "Especially when they find a pigeon like you."

The only cure was an engine overhaul, something which I was loathe to have done to a ten-year-old vehicle, and Jimmy agreed that it would be throwing good money after bad. I'd have to bite the bullet, admit that I'd goofed, try to unload the Dodge and look for another car.

How embarrassing; not to mention "discouraging" and "costly."

Once again, Pris and Charlie, on learning of my predicament, came to my aid. An acquaintance of theirs at Mount Hermon, Arthur Platt, had a '38 Ford sedan that he was willing to sell for \$300. It was a windfall opportunity. Platt was the original owner and the car was in virtual mint condition. On the 23rd of November, I paid Mr. Platt a visit and a down-payment of thirty dollars on the Ford. On the following day, I borrowed \$300 from the Lawrences, returned to Mt. Hermon and took possession of my third automobile.

Jimmy Neigh found a buyer for my Dodge, and I sold it for \$150 less than I had paid for it. I felt lucky at that. I then repaid Pris and Charlie, and was much relieved that that costly mistake was finally behind me. (The '38 Ford would prove to be one of the best of my automobiles.)

And so two new loves came simultaneously into my life: Doris Figgins and the Ford. Initially, my affections were equally divided between them; when I was with the one, the other was nearly always present. If someone should have asked which of them I'd be willing to give up, I'd have been hard pressed for an answer.

Doris, a vivacious Scottish lass about five-feet, two-inches tall, was blessed with a pretty face, a trim figure and an outgoing personality. She was about my age, and hailed from Worcester where she had resided with her mother before coming to work at the hotel.

As the weeks went by, Doris became more than just an acquaintance. My affection for her developed and she took first place in my heart. It was an emotion that I had not felt since breaking up with June, back in 1945.

I introduced her to Mother, who, in her inimitable way, did everything possible to make my new friend feel at home. When the weather allowed the three of us went for a ride on Sunday or to a movie in Greenfield.

One cold day in February, 1948, Doris asked me to drive her to Worcester, to meet her mother. We were on our way before noon but it was slow going on hard-packed, squeaky snow all the way. And Worcester, like most New England cities, was suffering one of its worst ever winter seasons. I never saw anything like it.

The snow had been pushed and shoveled into mountainous windrows alongside the sidewalks and in the middle of the streets, so high I couldn't see over them. Cycles of melting and freezing had turned the roadways to icy skate ways, not unlike frozen canals in the Netherlands.

An already bad situation was made worse (we learned) when a city official ordered crews to begin melting the piles of snow, using war surplus flamethrowers. Theoretically, the snowmelt would have run down the drains. But it was a plan soon gone awry. To be sure, the hot flames melted the stuff but it quickly froze again, this time in the drains as well as in the streets.

The experiment was finally abandoned in favor of a traditional method of snow removal. It was loaded onto trucks and hauled away, a task that would last until spring; such was the size of the city and the enormity of the problem.

With some difficulty (Doris had trouble recognizing anything under all that snow) we found the place where her mother lived. It was a tiny apartment in an old part of the city. Mrs. Figgins was surprised to see us. Especially me.

Doris's mother was a rather slender, good looking, middle aged woman. She lived alone, having been widowed (or divorced) for some years. She greeted her daughter with an affectionate hug, me with an economy of words spoken in a Boston-Scotch accent.

Doris and I were directed to sit at a small table beside the warm kitchen range, then her mother set before us a loaf of French bread

and some cheese, poured tea from a pewter pot into fine china cups, then seated herself.

We chatted about the weather, naturally, and Doris's mother complained how hard it was living alone: getting to work and to the grocery store and back, attending to household chores and so on. From the tone in her voice, I sensed that she disapproved of her daughter's moving away. Doris clammed up. I made a stab at conversation.

Before long the mother's attitude did a turn-about. She was a warm hearted creature after all, and had a fine sense of humor. She enquired about Northfield and the hotel, about my family and my work (or the lack of it), told a couple of embarrassing stories on Doris, and in the end seemed to approve of my dating her daughter.

As we visited, I caught myself wondering if it were true (the old saying) that with maturity a girl grows to resemble her mother in looks and traits. If so, in this case it was not a bad prospect, for I took a liking to the elder Figgins.

Time passed quickly. The winter sun - a fuzzy, silvery orb diffused by high, thin clouds - abandoned the sky and the temperature plummeted. Doris and I donned our heavy coats, said our goodbyes, climbed into my Ford and headed for home.

(As a matter of interest, I would never again see either the city of Worcester or the hospitable Mrs. Figgins.)

My mother's birthday, March 7th, usually a reliable harbinger of spring, came and went with few signs of the vernal season. I was still without work and worse yet, I was becoming used to accepting unearned pay. And that grated on my Yankee conscience something fierce. I was beginning to believe that I'd have to move to a city (heaven forbid) in order to find a job.

And then, to my surprise, I received a letter from Father. I had written to him in the fall, telling of my work in meteorology and that I was being discharged from the Navy. Now he wrote that there was a job opening in Elko at the U.S. Weather Station. He explained that there was no way of knowing how long the opportunity might exist, but if I were inclined to come west, soon, the job just could be mine.

Here I was, at another fork in the road of life. Which fork should I take?

I carefully re-read my father's letter, again noting that the odds of success were long, but at least it was a chance. I studied a map of the United States. My but it was a long way to Nevada. I contemplated my options, which were few indeed considering my state of unemployment.

The most persuasive factors, all based on emotion, favored my remaining in New England, the land of my heritage, family, friends and intimate surroundings. Perhaps most compelling of all was my love for Doris.

On the other hand were logical factors. I had already taken too much from my mother, sponging on her good will for weeks-going-on-months. Never had I been idle for so long. It was time to make a move, some kind of a move, right or wrong.

But oh, how I was tempted to stay. Doris and I felt strongly about each other and marriage seemed inevitable. We had discussed the subject and I was emotionally ready. But that was about the only way

in which I was ready. My twenty-first birthday, when I would be totally responsible for my own actions both legal and moral, was still eight months away. Furthermore, I had vowed to avoid the "entangled web of matrimony" until I had secured a good paying job.

My rationalization continued: A trip to Nevada should be very educational. At best it could mean the start of a career in meteorology, at least it would be an opportunity to see new country and meet new people. I now had a reliable automobile, and it was paid for. With the balance of my savings, \$400, I should have enough money for the trip to Elko and, barring unforeseen problems, back. Spring was just around the corner, driving conditions should be good. There was always the possibility of encountering a snowstorm in the Rockies, but that would hardly deter a guy like me, familiar with snow country as I was.

Most of all, I had a desire to visit my father, whom I had not seen in over seven years. Despite the passage of time, which is supposed to heal all wounds, a bitterness still simmered within me. It's a bad thing to harbor ill-will for one's father. Perhaps if I went to Elko, met him, talked with him, got to know him better, then any antagonism would disappear. Even if I could never forgive him for his earlier actions, I might come to understand his reasons for taking them.

The fact that my father had written about the job opportunity was an indication that he wished to help me in some way. It was a small gesture (he'd sent no money), but a gesture nonetheless.

And so it went, the pendulum of decision swinging from pro to con, go or stay. The more I weighed the factors, the more I was self-convinced that to "go west" was the way to go. It was what old Horace Greeley had advised back in the eighties, his counsel might still be good.

I suppose my mind was already made up when I broached the subject with Mother. She was obviously taken off guard, and could not hide the fact that she was disheartened. Not just because I was leaving, but because I was going to my father. She didn't say so outright (she would never say such a picayune thing) but I could tell how she felt and it didn't make things any easier for me. Anyway, we both knew that I was getting nowhere in Northfield, and she offered no compelling reason why I should remain.

"You've pretty much made your own decisions these last few years," she said, "and this one is also yours to make. It's your life and I won't persuade you one way or the other. If I say stay, and you do, you will always wonder if you should have gone. And deep down you'll hold it against me. The same is true if I advise you to go, and you go. No, the decision must be yours alone."

Once again, admiration for my mother soared. In spite of her own troubles, in spite of the problems and worries I'd caused her, in spite of the things that I had done, and not done, contrary to her fond hopes, her selflessness was predominant.

Breaking the news to Doris was a little easier. Though she wasn't happy about my leaving, she understood my motivation. In truth, she wanted to go with me. And were I not benevolently cursed with Victorian principles I'd have asked her to pack her things and join me, without regard for money, morals or merit.

Instead, I persuaded her that if I landed a secure job in the West, and when I turned twenty-one I would send for her. (It was the first such promise I ever made to anyone.) If, on the other hand, I should not obtain a good job in Elko, I would spend a few weeks in the area, get re-acquainted with my father, then return to the East and try again for employment.

Subliminally, I had a feeling that my trip to Elko would be simply a tour. I would miss getting the job and return home. Outwardly I was full of optimism, and that was the impression I hoped to convey to Doris.

I went to see Priscilla and Charlie Lawrence at their Warwick Avenue home, and told them of my resolve to "go west and seek my fortune." Pris appeared to be astonished, finding it hard to believe that I would actually leave Northfield.

"See how you are when you get a decent car," she said, "You abandon your old friends and take off for the unknown."

Based on their traveling experiences in the West, when Charlie was in the service and Pris had joined him, they described the kinds of country and things that I could expect to see. And Pris repeated her standing offer: "Call collect if your car breaks down and we'll come and get you."

They probably would, too.

I tried my best to properly thank them for their many acts of kindness over the years, but made a bad job of it. Stumbling over the words, I failed to express what I really felt. Then, after an exchange of good wishes and farewells, I swallowed hard, turned and drove away.

There was insufficient time to make the rounds and see everyone, family and friends. There was no going-away party. Nothing like when I left to join the Navy, even though this was an equally significant step. Leaving Northfield to seek one's fortune, you see, was more commonplace than staying home.

It was Monday, the fifteenth day of March, 1948. The air was clear and crisp. A heavy frost blanketed Northfield, reflecting the early morning sunlight. I was almost ready to go, having previously packed a few clothes (virtually all I owned) and some personal belongings into my old brown suitcase and my sea bag.

I now stowed them in the trunk of the Ford and checked to see that my tools, tire chains and shovels were securely in place. With care I placed my violin case on the back-seat cushion, and covered it with my Navy pea coat and two blankets. And that was it.

What I was leaving behind - old papers, books, memorabilia, my Navy uniforms - had easily fit in my old steamer trunk. Oh yes, my wonderful old roll-top desk must stay behind as well.

I said goodbye to Betty and Bob, and then it was time, the dreaded time, when I must say farewell to Mother. Her eyes watered when I embraced her. Not because she'd be left alone (my siblings all lived nearby) but because I was going so far away. Perhaps, too, the thought of my being near my father, the husband she had loved and lost, was on her mind.

What could I say? How could I tell her how much I appreciated her? How could I thank her for being tolerant of my shortcomings? How could I comfort her?

YANKEE-NEVADAN

I could not, for the lump in my throat prevented my speaking.

After a while I managed a feeble "Bye bye, Mama," and "Don't worry about me." (As if it's possible for a mother to not worry.) I climbed into the driver's seat of my pretty blue Ford. At my command the motor came to life. Turning, I looked into Mother's now-smiling face. It was a good picture to remember her by. With a wan smile on my own lips, with a wave of my hand, I drove away. Away from home. Away from Northfield. Away from New England. Away from the first phase of my life.

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