Memoirs of World War II (An Odyssey, Chiefly Concerning the China, Burma, India Theater)

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Introduction

When reading the eye-witness accounts of individuals who experienced first hand our Civil War, I was impressed by the interest which their tales awakened, even those facts which they related off hand as it were while getting to what they thought was really important. Therefore, I take pen in hand to give an account of World War II as it was lived by me, one of millions who experienced in one way or another this great adventure.

On December 7, 1941, I had traveled on the streetcar from Ludlow, Kentucky with brother Jack and a friend to see a movie at the Keith Theater on Walnut Street in Cincinnati. There was a short film before the movie which described and showed films of the naval base at Pearl Harbor and other scenes around Honolulu. After the movie we walked down the street passed Fountain Square. The newspapers sold there and at the Dixie Terminal Building on Fourth Street were full of headlines about the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor. It all came as a great surprise. Most people realized that the tensions in Asia could lead to some sort of war, but nothing like beginning with surprise attacks on the home port of the U. S. Pacific Fleet.

Both my brother Jack and I, first-year college students at Xavier University, were members of the Reserve Officer Training program (ROTC) and had completed our first semester of training in the field artillery. We were 17 and under the draft age. We did not volunteer for active duty but enlisted in the Reserves to stay in school and in the ROTC until called up for active service. Summer vacation in 1942 was all canceled and our ROTC and college continued non-stop through the winter, spring, summer and fall of 1942.

* Professor Kelly composed this essay in 1997.
Active Duty in the United States

At the completion of our spring semester in May 1943, those of us in the ROTC program were called to active duty as Privates to take basic artillery training on 105 mm howitzers at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. It was up at 5:00 a.m. and non-stop, except for Sundays, for almost four months, rain or shine.

There were many young men drafted and training with us from the North Carolina and Tennessee western mountains. They were intelligent but could hardly read or write. Since we had two and one half years of college, they would ask those of us who seemed friendly to write their letters home while they sat with one of us on a bunk and dictated to us. After the letter was finished they always would ask us to read it back to them. Some of us also volunteered to teach them reading in a class conducted some evenings in the mess hall so that they could read the bulletin boards. I was teaching reading to several of them one evening and one of them said "I got the banjo and guitar right off, but this learning reading is getting nowhere for me."

We all slept in rows of bunks on two floors of a wooden barracks. There were no private rooms except for the non-coms [non-commissioned officers] who trained us. Privacy was unheard of. Some snored so loudly that efforts were made to go to sleep before they did or the noise may keep one awake. I was never in better shape in my life than I was after basic artillery training in the late summer of 1943.

After basic training, all of us from Xavier ROTC went to the artillery Officer’s Candidate School (OCS) at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. The fort was old, going back to the 19th century. The land was empty, rolling and mostly treeless, affording many good artillery ranges for practice firing of the artillery pieces. We had to learn how to lay the 105 mm howitzers on a certain point in the target area and get the ranges and deflections from that point to the targets. Starting from pulling the pieces by truck to the designated firing areas, to setting up the charts for firing and then actually firing and adjusting the range and deflection to various points in the target areas was exciting. Once surveyed in, the method was extremely accurate for moving from one area to the next in the target zone.

It was certainly cold in Oklahoma in the winter of 1943-44. The tar paper huts we lived in, six to a hut, had a stove but were very cold in the morning before the stove was lit. In the spring of 1944, we graduated as 2nd Lts. in the field artillery. This ended our formal military training, which had lasted almost a full year.

I was assigned to an eight-inch howitzers unit stationed in the mountains of Tennessee. The eight-inch is a very big piece compared to
the 105 we had in basic training and at Fort Sill. They had to be hauled by tractors. We were in a real wilderness and could fire them with some safety. Once an eight-inch shell missed an old cabin which was the target, landing in back of it. However, the shell exploded with such force that it blew the front door off of the cabin. The area was real "back woods and hillbilly," not like the Smokey Mountains now [1990s] with its paved roads and resort motels. The houses were wooden shacks. There was often a private cemetery near old houses with wooden head markers. Most roads were dirt. I remember that one was called "Billy Won't Work" Road. It was ideal for artillery training on big artillery pieces like the 8" howitzer. There was little population or traffic to contend with.

The United States Artillery in World War II was the best, I believe, of any country in the world at that period. The French had the same reputation in World War I with their 75 mm. gun. The 105 and 8" howitzer of the United States, plus the U.S. 75 mm. pack howitzer, were superb weapons for rough terrain and jungles.

One day in the fall of 1944 I was called into the headquarters building of our battalion near Tulehoma, Tennessee with five other officers for a drawing to see who would fill a recent levy of one officer to report to Ft. Meade, Maryland to join a small group for overseas shipment. At the drawing some other officer drew "you are it." He was flabbergasted, thinking of his wife and child. He wished another drawing on the technicality that one officer eligible to go was not there for the drawing. I seconded his motion because I really wanted to go; I had been in the Army for over a year and had spent too much time since Pearl Harbor finishing ROTC and going to basic training at Ft. Bragg and Officer's Candidate School at Fort Sill. I wanted to go overseas where the fighting was.

So a second drawing was held and this time I drew "You are it." The officer who was now off the hook came up and thanked me. I finally had a chance to get into the war. It was here that I left Jack. He was not in on the drawing because he had already volunteered to go to jump school and become a paratrooper.

The Trip Overseas

After a brief leave home in Ludlow, Kentucky, I reported to Fort Meade outside Washington, naturally thinking that I would go to Europe. However, five of us, all lieutenants, were sent from Ft. Meade to Miami Beach, Florida to an army requisitioned hotel right on the ocean front. It was quite a surprise. It was the first time I saw Miami Beach. It was almost deserted. The weather was cool and time spent there, about
one week, was devoted to waiting and wandering around.

From Miami we flew to Bermuda and stayed over night. A different plane flew us the next day to the Azores for another stop. I saw little of either island because we never knew when the plane would be ready to go again and, consequently, had to wait around the air field. The Azores was, it seemed, just a relatively short refueling and maintenance stop on the way to Casablanca, Morocco. We drove through the city of Casablanca in trucks around dawn. The city looked interesting and strange, my first real trip out of the U.S.A. Many small cooking fires were burning along the curbs and the smell of the smoke and food was, to a foreigner like myself, rather romantic. The people paid little attention to us, having been exposed to many such trucks full of soldiers.

We were all exhausted from the flight from Miami, no real rest having been obtained in Bermuda or the Azores. We got out of the truck at what looked like a Moorish Castle, but whatever it was, it had Army cots in it with blankets and we all slept soundly.

Late in the same day it was off again by truck to the airport where we again boarded a plane. This time we flew to Tripoli in Libya. These stops would not now occur with modern jets, but at that time, with propellers, it was a needed stop for fuel and maintenance. We still did not know our destination. It was dark when we landed at Tripoli so we did not see much of the city. We did see oil wells at one point, as I recall. We left again before dawn. We were still heading east when dawn broke. What a sight below we now saw! As far as the eye could see in all directions, nothing but sand, like an ocean that had suddenly dried up. That scene is still vivid in my mind.

The plane was headed for Cairo, Egypt. Before landing, the pilot circled the pyramids so we could see them from the air. They were an imposing sight with very little build up of structures around them, i.e., sort of alone in a desert.

At Cairo we all got off and stayed in an army camp outside the city. I had hoped that this would be the end of the trip – that I would be assigned somewhere from there. However, it was not to be. A few days later we boarded another plane, still heading east. We landed at Basra, in southern Iraq, almost on the Persian Gulf near Kuwait and Iran. It was night and we could see, distantly from the airport, oil fires from the top of oil wells. It was a strange and interesting sight at night.

From Basra in Iraq we flew along the coast of Iran in the Persian Gulf to Karachi, in what is now Pakistan. Outside Karachi is a large British military installation, Camp Mulair, which looked, at least then, like something out of the movie “Lives of a Bengal Lancer.” The military barracks were all one story. The land was arid and flat. It was
quite warm and humid. In the evening at the Officers Mess an Indian soldier in a white tunic with a red sash as a belt pulled slowly on a rope, which caused a long white cloth hanging from the ceiling to move back and forth creating a welcome breeze in the warm humid night air. Air conditioning anywhere in the Camp was in the future. There was none in World War II. Today, Camp Mulair is the headquarters of the Pakistani Army. Karachi itself has at least tripled in size and is a modern city now.

After about a week, we all boarded a plane for Calcutta on the eastern side of India. On the way, the pilot flew over the Taj Mahal and we all observed it from our porthole windows. Each of our plane rides from Miami was on a military transport plane. There were rows of bucket seats along the two sides of the interior of the plane, facing each other. There was no air conditioning; as a result, it was usually quite cold inside the plane. Soldiers wrapped themselves in Army blankets and slept on the floor where possible.

Upon arriving in Calcutta we boarded a truck for the ride to a military tent camp about twenty miles north of the city. This camp was an assignment center for newly arrived soldiers from the States. Thinking that I would be assigned somewhere in India, I wrote home that India was to be my assignment. Because of my handwriting, India looked like Judea to my mother and sister. They spread the word among relatives and friends that I was stationed in Judea. It was weeks before that error was straightened out.

While waiting for an assignment, I was assigned as investigating officer for accidents involving U.S. military vehicles and Indian citizens which had occurred outside the camp, principally in Calcutta. As a consequence, I made many trips into Calcutta where accidents had occurred. I got to know well parts of Calcutta and the road between our camp and the city.

There seemed to be a great number of wild animals in the jungle surrounding our camp. One night, walking from my tent to an outdoor movie something large dropped from a tree about 30 yards ahead of me and ambled off into the brush alongside the path. The weather was hot and humid. I stayed there about a month.

Finally, the assignment came. It was to go to Calcutta and board a troop train heading to Assam Province in northeastern India, from where a further assignment would be made. The train ride was long and slow but very interesting, passing through jungles and tea plantations. One night when we stopped to load and unload soldiers at a station, a group of British civilians was on hand serving hot tea. It really tasted good. The days were warm but the nights were a little chilly.

Troop trains carrying British troops seemed to be everywhere. At that time, the British were fighting the Japanese all along the central
India-Burma border.

After several days on the train we reached our destination along the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra River in the extreme northeastern part of India. We all piled into trucks which then took us along narrow jungle fringe roads. Every once in a while, our truck would stop and the driver would get out and go to the rear of the truck and call out several names. The individuals called would answer "No. No. Not me here at this place." All the places looked so overgrown and run down. At first sight it all was quite depressing and in the middle of nowhere land. We were at the southern terminal of the Burma Road which was built to bring war supplies from India to China.

My Assignment

Finally my name was called out. I got out and reported to a Chinese Army Headquarters. I was to be assigned, the American liaison officer told me, to a Chinese unit which was south of us in Northern Burma near Bhamo, along the upper reaches of the Irrawaddy River, then engaged against Japanese now on the old Burma Road.

I took a small cub plane which flew me near a unit of the Mars Task Force, an American force which was fighting along the left flank of the Chinese 30th Division in northern Burma. I could see a plane strafing a hill to the left of me and walked over to an American Unit which was northeast of the hill. I asked an American where the Japanese were. He said "Just down this road." It was a long trip from Fort Meade, Maryland to the "Front Line" in Burma. The Pacific Ocean was closed as a way to reach the Asian mainland so I had to go via the Atlantic and North Africa. The tracer strafing continued until the pilot hit a gas tank which he had previously dropped on the hillside. It exploded throwing burning gasoline allover the hill. This was a crude early ancestor of the napalm bomb used in the Vietnam War. Japanese were dug in on the hillside that commanded the small road below, down which the American Unit wished to go.

It appeared that there were three columns facing the Japanese. The Mars Task Force, composed of American soldiers, was on the left, and a Chinese Division, the 30th, composed of three regiments, the 88, 89 and 90th, was on the right. The Americans and Chinese were driving southwest toward Mandalay. Further to the south, the third column, the British, was driving northeast and east. The British were also heading for Mandalay, which stood between both the British and the Chinese. The latter accompanied by the smaller U.S. Mars Task Force. The idea was to clear the old Burma Road going northeast into southwestern China.

The 88th Chinese regiment to which I was assigned was on the left
of the Chinese front, not far from the American Mars Task Force. The Chinese units in Burma were part of the Chinese New First Army, meaning that it had been reorganized, partially trained, equipped, and supplied by the United States. General Sun was its commander. He was a tall, handsome man who wore riding jodhpurs and had attended the Virginia Military Institute before the war. After the war and during the retreat of Chiang before the Communists to Taiwan, General Sun accompanied him. However, he fell out of favor and was placed in house arrest in Taiwan for several years, Chiang having considered him a rival.

I took a jeep ride up a mountain trail to get to the 88th Regt. The valley, when it appeared at times on the left, seemed very far below. When the trail stopped another officer and I walked the rest of the way, finally reaching the 88th Regt. There were no tents. People slept on the ground with coverage under a lean-to to keep out the rain. A cot was of great value if you could find a mule to carry it. There were about four of us Americans with the Chinese 88th regiment. I soon learned that our principle mission seemed to be to keep the supplies of food, medicine, and ammunition coming to the regiment since it depended on the United States for such necessities. The tactics and command remained with the Chinese. Transportation was by foot along narrow trails. Mules were used to transport the food, ammunition, and other heavy supplies. These mules came from the United States. Their voice boxes had been cut so that their braying would not give away our position at night to the Japanese. They were silent but very affectionate. When we rested in a long line on the trail they would bend down for some petting. I have learned to have great respect for a mule. They were sure-footed and did not panic if something strange jumped up from the trail ahead of them as a horse would do. Even a blowing piece of paper would unnerv a horse. Horses were ridden only by senior Chinese officers.

Since the jungle was on all sides, it was very difficult to know just where the Japanese were. Even air observations were limited because of the foliage. Scouts out front were absolutely necessary. The strangest I saw were tall, thin natives with a tattoo all over their bodies, composed of a single thin blue line which started at their legs and went continuously up to their necks. They walked in a single file on the trail. One day I saw an elephant ridden by a native who was also a scout.

Many times we passed people living in little huts up in the trees. They just sat silently in their huts peering out at us. Once we went through an area full of monkeys in the trees. They were very curious and set up quite a racket when they saw us. The Chinese soldiers would capture some as pets by putting food in the bottom of a thin necked bottle. The monkey would put his hand in the bottle, grab the food, but
would not let go of the food to undue his fist so that his hand could travel up the narrow neck of the bottle.

They would tie him on a leash and try to tame him, which seemed easily done. I came across a group of Chinese soldiers who were sitting with a captured monkey during a rest on the trail. He seemed tame and was leaping from lap to lap. When he got to me he suddenly struck out and scratched me on the nose with his paw. What bothered him, I think, was the fact that I looked different from the Chinese, particularly my nose. The little beast! A monkey could be tied to a tree with a long leash so that he could roam. But he would never get the leash tangled in the trees or brush. He knew, somehow, how to go back exactly as he came. One even jumped on my shoulder for a ride and hopped off when he got to his destination. To me, they were all too human like. Maybe we did spring from the apes.

Back to the Japanese. They had resisted fiercely in Northern Burma, but the Chinese were slowly driving them back south toward Mandalay. Fighting would erupt, particularly at night, where they would stop retreating and come back toward us and attack. One night the firing on both sides was so loud that we were imprisoned, as it were, by sound. It was everywhere. The artillery and the rifle sounds all melted into one big lake of sound. If anyone wants to know what a battle is like, I would say that it is an enormous sound in which you move and think.

The Japanese snipers would on occasion try to shoot the first Chinese scouts out on the narrow trails in the morning, when the advance continued, in order to slow it down. With no system of handling the dead in such a jungle, the Chinese would bury them along the trail with neat bamboo markers as head stones, and record their deaths in the regiment's record books.

Our march, a long line, sometimes would be stopped by the failure of the column to keep moving. I would walk along the seated columns, usually on a hillside, to see if I could see what was preventing us from moving. Usually it was just a group somewhere ahead of us which decided to rest a while, thus blocking all movement on the narrow trail behind them. All the way up the Chinese soldiers would shout "hello" or "America is number one" at me in Chinese. They were all a friendly gang of young men.

The 88th was supplied mostly by air drops as there were no fields in which to land supply planes. These air drops could be dangerous to those below because of the way the droppers would conduct them. The Chinese needed many bags of rice for the soldiers and many bags of oats for the mules. C46 transport planes would fly over a previously designated clearing or drop zone and these heavy bags would be kicked out the side door of the plane. I would run and hug a tree as these bags
came crashing through the trees. However, Chinese soldiers would get on the rim of the marked drop zone not only to haul away the bags for their units but also to loot the contents of bags that broke open on impact. The drop was not all that accurate, so the designated zone was missed by some of the falling bags. Consequently, soldiers close by waiting for a free quota of rice were in danger of serious injury or death.

We kept so close to the Japanese that their small, hidden cooking fires, still warm, would be passed as the day's march commenced.

A day with the Chinese Army, particularly when they are on the march, starts with the filling of the canteens with a very weak tea. First the water in a larger open container was heated and a handful of tea thrown into it. When it had cooled, the Chinese soldiers would dip their canteens into it. On the march, it was refreshing to drink this very weak tea, rather than just plain water.

The food came from the air drops of sacks of rice. Meat was not plentiful. Sometimes a bit of chicken was on top of the bowl of rice. We Americans supplemented this diet with the contents of “10 in 1” cans, which would reach us from time to time. They contained a sort of stew which we heated. Washing was done out of our steel helmets, used as wash bowls.

When the march stopped for the night – whenever possible, on a hill – a guard was put out at all points in a circle. It was like a fort then and could only be approached with great caution. Pickets were out at all points to prevent a surprise attack.

As we moved south out of the jungle, the landscape changed. The high mountain plateau we were on narrowed physically and, as a consequence, one Chinese regiment on our right was moved off the hill to the valley below. We watched them attack a Japanese road block in the valley. It all looked like a game in miniature because everything looked very small from our vantage point. The road block itself looked like a pile of junk. One group of Chinese fired repeatedly at the road block while another group moved to its right, into a marshy area, and outflanked the Japanese. At that point, resistance ceased and the Japanese retreated out of our sight. It was a delaying action on their part and not really a determined stand.

The landscape was becoming varied. A bare mountain ridge appeared to our right with sharp teeth like a saw. Information we had said that the Japanese were behind the ridge. So, our artillery lobbed shells just over the ridge to burst high up on the Japanese side of the mountain. When a shell would detonate, it would start a rock slide which sounded like thunder. For the Japanese over on the other side, the rock slides must have been terrible sight to behold.

Mail reached us, along with canned food, very sporadically. At
night we slept under shelter halves. We had no tents. The few horses the Chinese had were put to pasture with the mules. Sometimes I would be awakened at night by the horses kicking each other, or otherwise making noises. The mules were docile and quiet.

We were assisted by air strikes as the jungle began to clear a little. One night an American bomber pilot mistook his target and was coming right at us. The Chinese started shouting “figie, figie, figie,” which means “plane, plane, plane,” and we all started to run somewhere, but “where” was difficult to figure. So, I just got down where I was and waited frozen in place. It flew over us and bombed a relatively short distance ahead. We were, for a moment, like chickens with our heads off going every which way.

Not long after that, our paths converged with the American unit on our left, at the bottom of a hill. The place had been bombed heavily and huge bomb craters, some full of water, tended to break up the lines of march of the soldiers. We actually met in that mess the American Mars Task Force, which we had not seen since the drive started several months ago. They appeared to be a worn looking bunch, compared to the Chinese who may have been more used to such hardships. Everything was ship-shape and clean with the Chinese, including their clothes, which consisted of shoes, leggings, short pants, and a shirt. They laughed and smiled easily, while the Americans seemed to be low on morale and tired. The Americans reminded me of that old song “Many are the hearts that are weary tonight wishing for the war to cease.”

While stopped, waiting for the lines to be untangled, I met the Catholic Chaplin. He said “Do you think that the chaos of this war will ever get straightened out?” It did not look so at that time, but only a few weeks after that meeting Mandalay fell to the British driving east from India. The Japanese then abandoned all of Northern Burma, some going into Thailand and the rest making their way, if not captured, to the southern part of the country. As a fighting unit, they were through in North Burma, and the road to China was now reopened to truck traffic after over three years of blockage by the Japanese Army.

So ended my Burma days. The Chinese withdrew and prepared themselves for truck transport to China via the now opened Ledo or Burma Road. A great deal of black market goods went with the Chinese trucks. The innertubes were taken out of the spare tires, and the tires stuffed with merchandise which they had somehow obtained in India.

Campaigning in Burma has been graphically described in the following quote by Arthur Swinson, a Britisher, in Purnell’s Illustrated History of the Second World War:

More than perhaps any campaign in the Second World War, save the Russians’ defense of Stalingrad, the Burma campaign has the
elements of a great Homeric saga. It took place in a fantastic terrain, isolated by great mountains and jungles from any other theatre. It went on unbroken for three years and eight months. It covered vast areas. It sucked into its maelstrom nearly 2,000,000 men. It encompassed great disasters and ended in great triumphs. It produced prodigies of heroism, patience, resolution and endurance. It brought about great suffering, but fascinated and enthralled those taking part in it, both victors and losers. It was like no war that had ever been in the history of conflict.

**Flying the Hump**

I was designated with some other Americans to fly the “Hump,” i.e., the Himalayan Mountains in northwest India to Kunming. Kunming is the capital of Yunan Province in southwest China, not far from the Burma border. I would have rather made the trip by truck with the Chinese troops. It would have been an experience to see the countryside. I am sorry now that I took the easy way.

The term “flying the hump” originated when the Japanese cut off land access to China from India by occupying northern Burma, thus preventing supplies from going northeast into southern China via the Burma Road. The U.S. Air Force then began to fly cargo planes from India over the Himalayan Mountains to air fields in southern China. Many, many flights were made and some of the planes did not make, instead crashing into the mountains. Consequently, it was necessary to send on foot Army Graves Registration teams up and over the mountains to find and register the approximately 2000 dead airmen, and to recover their remains if possible.

I saw one member of such a team whom I had first met in the States before going overseas. He looked very bad with much loss of weight. To be assigned to such a team was not to be sought after, I quickly concluded.

After a few days wait we boarded a troop plane. Oxygen masks were required while in flight and warm dress a necessity. The cargo planes we rode in were very cold at such high altitudes. Once in a while, the mountains could be seen a short way below us. How anyone could climb them was difficult to imagine.

**China – Kunming**

As the plane came down on the Chinese side of the mountain range, the air grew warmer and we all looked out the windows for our first glimpse of China. It was sunset and the sun lit up the bare foothills in a golden hue. Rice paddies were evident. We were in Yunan Province near Kunming, its capital. The scene was very beautiful and a good
I was assigned to an artillery training center which the U.S. Army had set up about 20 miles outside Kunming. Its purpose was similar to our Fort Sill or Fort Bragg, i.e., to train Chinese artillery units in the use of U.S. artillery. Our billets were small rooms in one story buildings which overlooked rice paddies and other ridges stretching out below and east of us. We were on the very edge of a high ridge. At night in the rice paddies lights could be seen. They were small yellow lights, like a firefly but larger, which approached from nowhere and ran for a while before going out, as if someone were out there. I understand that the moving lights were caused by gas from the paddies. The local Chinese had ghost stories concerning them.

I was an instructor and accompanied the Chinese units who were there to train to put in place their 105 howitzers and to survey in and fire them at targets. It was a busy training center and the Chinese artillery men were in good spirits.

One interesting incident occurred when we were in a motor march to the firing area and one weapons carrier ran into the rear of one in front of it. The driver explained that spirits in the transmission had caused him to fail to stop, that he had heard them in the transmission earlier in the march.

Since China had many dialects, it was sometimes difficult for officers to give commands to troops in formation. Some of the soldiers would understand the command and others would not. These different dialects stemmed in part from the fact that China had no alphabet and, consequently, the Chinese characters represented no inherent sound. So, different areas would pronounce the character they were saying or reading in a different way. Today that is no longer the case as the Communists later introduced standard pronunciations for the characters. Presently, I understand China is working on an alphabet. Conversely, Korea has a very good alphabet, made up by its scholars long ago for women and children who had difficulty with the Chinese characters. Now, Korea uses both, with letters for part of a sentence and characters for the other words in the same sentence. The Chinese characters had the same meaning everywhere, in all counties, but the pronunciation was not necessarily uniform. For example the word “day” in China and “day” in Korea used the same character, but pronounced it differently.

In the summer of 1945, the Chinese Army had suffered a severe defeat by the Japanese in southern China and Kunming and, as a consequence, was in danger of falling to the Japanese Army. As a result, there was a seriousness in the training by all concerned.

Every morning I would arise early and go to the motor pool. Among other duties I was also the motor officer. There was always
something wrong with one truck or another. We also had training sessions to teach the Chinese soldiers how to drive.

To get to the motor pool, I had to walk through the village of Gan Heitz Sa. It was small, and I got to know some of the people living there as I saw them almost daily. There was a blind boy about ten years old who was always led by the hand by his mother. Looking back, I wish I could have been more helpful to them.

Kunming was at least 20 miles away. Occasionally I drove there with one or two other Americans. It was an old Chinese walled city with cobble stone streets. On the way there and back, the roads were all dirt, only 1 1/2 lanes wide at most. Consequently, the jeep or military truck ahead of you would throw clouds of dust back at you all the way to your destination unless you could get around the vehicle. No one wanted to be passed and eat someone else’s dust. Once a Chinese weapons carrier full of Chinese soldiers tried to pass us in our jeep. Several of them had hand grenades out and threatened us as they tried to pass us, pretending to be ready to throw the grenades unless we let them pass. We let them through thinking that they looked nutty enough to throw one under our jeep if we did not acquiesce. They laughed and waived as they passed us.

It was a great artillery training center which the U. S. Army had established for the Chinese units equipped with U. S. artillery pieces. Spirits were high and the training programs were well developed.

One night I and two other Americans were sitting in our small room overlooking the rice paddies when an officer came bursting in shouting “Japan has surrendered!” It was so unexpected that it knocked us all out of our wits. Soldiers began gathering in groups outside overlooking the rice paddies far below. There was no U. S. liquor or beer because it would have had to be flown in or trucked overland by way of the newly opened old Burma Road, now called the Ledo Road after the town in India where it originated.

A genius in our group thought of the medical alcohol in the dispensary and went and got that. Drinking started by mixing the alcohol with canned juice. Also, the Air Force had carried a few bottles of whiskey or gin on their flights from India. Very few Americans tried drinking the local Chinese brews. A big party was started in a very small cabin called the “Officers Club.” It turned wild and the bar and other fixtures were all broken up by the next morning. A big picture on the wall was taken down and broken over the bar. I thought it was irrational and did not represent the better part of the American character. It was frat house type of carrying on.

The entire U. S. military training of Chinese troops in Kunming
closed down very quickly. Screening of personnel for return to the States or for further assignment within the China-Burma-Indian Theater started. Return to the States depended on a points system that was figured on time, if any, in combat and on time spent overseas. I was selected, along with some others, for return to the States because of my combat in Burma and time in Kunming. When told of my selection I refused to go and asked for further assignment within Asia. All were surprised about my decision but it was based on a child-like preference for “adventure” overseas in a foreign land, compared to a return to Fort Sill or Fort Bragg or even Ludlow, Kentucky and discharge. They all could wait and would come in due time. I was, in my mind, Terry in “Terry and the Pirates,” a popular comic strip of the time based on China as the backdrop to Terry’s adventures.

Just after the war ended, in August 1945, a battle took place in Kunming. China’s Nationalist Army attacked the army of the Governor of Yunan Province. Like warlords, each of the governors had his own army. This private army looked good and wore World War I French-type helmets. They had cooperated with the Nationalists in the war against Japan. The battle lasted about two days. We were forbidden to go to Kunming until it was over. Naturally, the Nationalists won. Chiang ended the warlords as local powers. However, by doing so, the takeover of China by the Communist Army was made much easier once the local governors were disarmed by Chiang.

The Japanese surrender did not result in the reduction of the Chinese Nationalist Army. The end of the war with Japan meant the beginning of another war, a Civil War with Mao and his Chinese Communist Armies. I noticed a let-down in morale among the Chinese soldiers. Many had been fighting against the Japanese since the Marco Polo Bridge Incident in the 30’s with the Japanese. Now they faced only more warfare while the American soldiers were celebrating and going home, as were the Japanese soldiers. It was going to be a race between the Chinese Nationalists under Chiang and the Chinese Communists under Mao as to who would get to the China Pacific ports first and seize them from the surrendering Japanese. The Communists were closer, but Chiang asked for U. S. Air transports to move his armies east and beat the nearer Communist armies to these prizes. The U. S. military commander reluctantly agreed, cautioning Chiang that he was splitting his armies and may never get them together again. But Chiang said that political considerations demanded that he occupy those ports rather than the Communists. Hence, U.S. transport planes moved his armies to the ports on the Eastern seaboard.

As a consequence of these developments I received an assignment to Shanghai, which was being occupied by Chiang’s Army.
China—Shanghai (September 1945)

The plane ride from Kunming to Shanghai was interesting. China passed below us as we looked down at the countryside and at the small villages which dotted the landscape. We would pass over a steep mountain with villages on each side and wonder if the people living in one village knew of the other village’s existence. There appeared to be no passes over the mountain.

We reached Shanghai and took a truck into the city. The streets were paved. It was the first pavement I had seen since leaving Calcutta. I was assigned to a job in the Whelock Building, downtown and just two blocks from the harbor. We lived in an Army requisitioned hotel nearby. I was assigned to be a dispatcher of U.S. Army trucks to Chinese contractors that worked for the Army, and of sedans for official business. The U.S. Army was building storage depots and Chinese contractors had no trucks of their own. U.S. warships were anchored in the Wang Pu River which served as the harbor for Shanghai. The river was wide and deep and emptied into the southern part of the Yellow Sea in the Western Pacific.

Shanghai was bright at night. We could walk along the Bund, the area between the dock and the first buildings, and enjoy the river, the ships, and the sights of the city. Unloading of cargo went on 24 hours a day. There were bars and night clubs everywhere, plus good restaurants. Shanghai never slept. At the first Sunday mass we attended the U.S. Army Chaplain gave us a sermon in which he said “Be careful men. You are in a port city and vice is rampant.” How true he was.

It was an unusual city, an open international city, not really belonging to any one country before the war. Passports were not required for entry. Consequently, there were many White Russian and German Jewish refugees in the city. The U.S. Army hired many of them as civilian employees. Before the war, the police force was run by the French. The United States had the public utilities, and the British had the government.

The European and American civilians living in Shanghai at the time of Pearl Harbor were all rounded up by the Japanese and put in concentration camps. Their apartments, homes, and businesses were all looted and taken over either by the Japanese or local Chinese. When the war ended and they were all released from the camps they had no property and no businesses. Their only hope was a job with the American Army or repatriation to their country of origin. Most were lifelong residents of Shanghai, like their counterparts in Hong Kong, and the only home they ever knew was Shanghai.

I was very busy at my job dispatching U.S. Army trucks for use by
the Chinese contractors and others. Our office was run by a U.S. Army Engineer Officer in a Shanghai office building, the Whelock Building. We were all called in one day by the Chief Engineer, an Army colonel, and cautioned to take no kick backs or favors from the Chinese contractors. When I left his office and went to my desk, a Chinese contractor was there with a gift for me, a cocktail shaker in the shape of a penguin. When its mouth was opened the contents of the shaker poured out. I had it until it was lost in a move in the 1960s.

On January 1, 1946, the Chinese Nationalist Government took complete control of Shanghai. It’s status as an open international city came to an end. The first act of the government was to change the traffic pattern from driving on the left to driving on the right, thus reversing both the British and Japanese practice and adopting the American traffic pattern. There were no traffic accidents. It all went smoothly.

One day I received a call from a nun who ran a Chinese orphanage. She had received notice that a ship was in the harbor with some UNRA (United Nations Relief Agency) sacks of flour for her orphanage. She was asking if the U.S. Army could send a truck down to the dock to pick up the sacks of flour and deliver them to the orphanage. I replied that we could do so. She added “Thanks, but please don’t send a Chinese driver or there will be some funny business at the unloading of the flour at the orphanage.”

She was being practical, not uncharitable. What she wished to guard against was the “squeeze,” a widespread corrupt practice which gave to the middleman some profit when turning over money or items to an intended third party recipient. Here, she suspected that the driver would not unload all the flour but keep some on the truck and have her sign a receipt for all of it.

We were allowed to travel on U.S. Army planes to visit other Chinese cities as our duty permitted. I chose Canton because winter had set in and that city was on the warmer southern coast. Through a mistake, I went to Beijing in the north. It was extremely cold there but all the old buildings were worth seeing.

The city was full of Chinese soldiers who were going north to engage the Communists who held a part of the Great Wall just north of Beijing. The Chinese Army units in Beijing were a smart looking group, well equipped and fit as they marched by. They were in contrast to the Chinese soldiers in Nanking, a city I visited in the fall after first coming to Shanghai. The Nanking soldiers looked depressed and were just hanging around with their hands in their pockets.

When we left Beijing the pilot of our plane flew over a part of the Wall so we could see it, having been kept from doing so by the Communist Army if we tried to do it by road.
IndoChina—Haiphong and Hanoi (February 1946)

I enjoyed Shanghai but I missed the life with the Chinese soldiers. So, when I heard one day in the office that a small group was being organized to go to Haiphong, Indochina (now Northern Vietnam) to coordinate U.S. shipping for the purpose of sending the Chinese Army in Haiphong to a port in north China, and the Japanese Army there to Yokohama, Japan, I jumped at the chance and volunteered.

When the war suddenly ended, the Chinese Army immediately entered North Vietnam to take the Japanese surrender there, and the British Army entered South Vietnam to accept the Japanese surrender in the south of the country. The French Army in Indochina, at the time of Pearl Harbor, was small and did not resist the Japanese occupation of the country after Pearl Harbor.

The Vietnamese then began to organize a local army to resist the French return once the war had ended. This revolutionary spirit was, unfortunately, taken over by Ho Chi Min, a Communist, whose goal, similar to Mao’s in China, was to install a Communist government when World War II ended and to resist France’s return to her colony.

With the end of the War, the Japanese governance of Indochina ended and Ho Chi Minh installed himself in Hanoi as the new ruler. The French civilians who lived in homes in the countryside, and who owned farms or other businesses, were driven into the cities by Ho Chi Minh, their property confiscated. They sought shelter in hotels and with local French residents.

The Chinese Army occupied Hanoi and Haiphong. They took no orders from Ho Chi Minh or anyone else, considering themselves an occupying power under the law of war. As a result, there were three armies in northern Indochina, i.e., the Chinese Army which had accepted the Japanese surrender, the Japanese Army, and Ho Chi Minh’s Communist Army. The French Army had yet to arrive from France. Our job was to arrange for the transport of the Japanese Army to Japan, and of the Chinese Army in Indochina to ports in Northern China for the showdown with Mao.

We were a small group of about seven Americans. We flew in cargo planes – with all our equipment, including a radio transmitter and three jeeps with small trailers – from Shanghai, with an overnight stop in Canton (now Quangjo). One of our planes caught fire after landing in Canton. No one was hurt but our supplies in that plane were destroyed.

The air field near Haiphong was too damaged to take our planes so we landed several miles from Hanoi. The jeeps were unloaded and our supplies put in the small trailers. We then started through small overgrown country roads for Hanoi. The Japanese soldiers were very
curious about us and sat on small hills watching us. They even invited us to take part in a baseball game they had going. At one point we stopped because a creek ran across the road. I got out of the jeep and went forward to determine the depth of the water. While doing so, a Chinese soldier stole my field jacket which was left in the jeep. A Japanese soldier saw him and came running, shouting, and pointing at the Chinese soldier. I returned quickly and retrieved my field jacket, wondering for the first time if perhaps we had been fighting on the wrong side.

We stayed a week in the Metropol Hotel before going on to the port of Haiphong. Hanoi was a pretty town, very French in the design of its streets and houses and public buildings; a tropical French design was common as the weather there was very warm, even when we arrived there in early January 1946. Ho Chi Minh’s headquarters was right across the street. One of our Chinese interpreters, Dexter Yeh, came in our office and said that he had just come from Ho Chi Minh’s birthday party going on across the street and wanted me to take part in it. At the time, I did not know who Ho Chi Minh was or the politics of the country. Besides, I was adjutant of our unit and I was busy doing the morning report. Now I wish I had gone because of the important role Ho played in communizing Indochina and resisting the much later U. S. support of his non-Communist rival in what was to become South Vietnam.

After a week we moved to Haiphong, which was about a two hour jeep drive from Hanoi. We were housed in a small hotel, the “Hotel du Commerce,” on the main street in Haiphong. Mosquito nets were mandatory or the mosquitoes would eat you alive. We had reported to the Chinese High Command in Hanoi at our arrival there and were treated most lavishly by them. From time to time, there were dinner parties given by the Chinese High Command. They were called “Gom Bay” parties, which literally means “dry cup” parties, where the drinking was rather heavy during and after a big dinner. The rules of the party were that, when toasted by a Chinese who said “Gom Bay” to you, you both had to empty your glass of liquor. It could become a game. For example, three Chinese would toast you one at a time. You, therefore, have emptied your glass three or more times and they only one each. So your friends had to toast the three who had toasted you to even the score. All this drinking occurred during and after the meal, which meal was of the finest Chinese food. Due to the low Chinese tolerance for alcohol, the Americans could handle more alcohol than could the Chinese. We always won the drinking battles. The Chinese would pass out. I believe that this characteristic is true also among the Koreans. Their body chemistry does not tolerate as much alcohol as does that of their typical Western counterpart.

There was a tragic accident one night after leaving a Chinese party
in Haiphong. The Vietnamese driver of a vehicle ahead of us did not stop for identification at a Chinese check point. The guard there fired at the vehicle wounding seriously the Vietnamese driver. A U.S. military doctor, who was part of our small unit, directed that the driver be taken to our small dispensary for first aid. A Vietnamese at the scene said that the driver was asking for a priest. So I went to the local Catholic church, got a Vietnamese priest, and took him to our dispensary where he gave the last rites to the wounded man. The driver died later that night.

I have been mentioning that Ho Chi Minh was a Communist who sparked the revolutionary desires of a Vietnamese people anxious for an end to French colonial rule. However, Communist slogans were not apparent. In fact, the slogans on the walls and on banners hung across the streets were taken from the American revolution against British colonial rule of the American colonies. "Give me liberty or give me death" and "It is our inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," in English and Vietnamese, were on the signs and banners. Also, another incident of Vietnamese liking for America occurred when another American officer and I went out of curiosity to a Vietnamese fundraiser and rally in a local theater in Haiphong. We were in uniform and stood out in the crowd. We were directed to box seats in a small balcony overlooking the main floor and stage. The Chief of Police came up and sat with us. Others in the audience below were looking at us all throughout the fundraising event.

After we were in Haiphong for about a month we got word that the ships earmarked to transport the Chinese and Japanese soldiers would be delayed for several months. We then immediately lead the life of the desolate in a tropical island novel. We had nothing to do in all that heat but go to the ocean beach with French champagne or sit in the hotel lounge sipping a drink in the evening as the tropical night's humidity engulfed us.

Every night the open air hotel dance floor was crowded with Vietnamese women in their native dress dancing to the latest tunes which they reproduced from records we had, or traditional Vietnamese "walk around" type of dancing. They certainly loved to dance. It was beautiful to watch them.

Both the Vietnamese and the French civilians thought that we were the first of many Americans who would follow who would be favorable to them. Both would be disappointed.

Our easy and degenerate life would be shattered soon by news from our headquarters in Shanghai that units of the French Army were leaving Saigon on French naval ships for debarkation at Haiphong. This was startling news. The Chinese Army, the occupant of Haiphong, was not consulted it seems. As a consequence, they immediately began to
prepare to defend the harbor area against any landing of French troops.

We stayed in touch with our Shanghai headquarters who wished reports on developments. The Chinese began to dig in all along the harbor area. As the news came that the French ships were coming up the Red River to dock at Haiphong, three of us decided to go to our wireless transmitter about four blocks from the hotel to wire the French not to come up as they would be fired upon by the Chinese. The Chinese, in the meantime, were hurriedly building bunkers at the street corners and herding the Vietnamese civilians off of the streets. Three of us got in a jeep with a big American flag on it and went about one block. But by this time the firing was so heavy that bullets hitting the street looked like rain. When we neared an intersection, it was literally raining bullets at that crossing. So, we then just rolled out of the jeep and into a ditch. The jeep, still moving, hit a curb at the intersection and ran up on the sidewalk, thereby killing the motor. Even the jeep had sense enough not to cross the intersection.

The first landing crafts of French troops were shot up and turned back to their ships, which were also being hit. The war ships returned the fire with their guns. Chinese wounded were being evacuated to aid stations in rickshaws. Then the French hit with their shells warehouses full of captured Japanese weapons and ammunition which they earlier had surrendered to the Chinese at the war's end. These warehouses exploded for three days non-stop. I knew then what shell shock meant. It really got on your nerves after a while, particularly when unexploded shells were being thrown around like rocks.

The fighting stopped after one day and the French troops were allowed to land. The French people lined the streets cheering as the French troops marched down the street toward their camp on the outskirts of town. They looked German to me rather than French. Since the Chinese Army was still in charge of Haiphong, incidents would occur mostly when a Chinese sentry in his sandbagged lookout on a corner had detained a French soldier for some reason. A crowd would gather to see if there would be a French effort to release him. These incidents were always settled peacefully.

A day or two after the French had landed at Haiphong I drove in the morning to Hanoi to pick up three Shanghai Chinese who were to join us as telegraphers and translators. I knew the road between Hanoi and Haiphong quite well, but this time it was different. The few villages along the road seemed empty. There was a quiet about it all. And I thought I noticed someone peeking at me from behind a building as I drove past a village.

It had just turned dark when I picked up the three Chinese and we started down the road to Haiphong. Soon, Vietcong soldiers jumped out
in the road to stop us. I showed them my papers indicating who I was, prepared by the officials in Haiphong, and pointed to the American flag armband I wore. These armbands had been knitted for us by some French nuns, primarily to distinguish us from the French soldiers.

This type of incident occurred at least five times as we proceeded down the road to Haiphong, with a big stop just before we got to Haiphong. I always stopped at once and showed that we had no weapons and were not French, i.e., just one American and three Chinese. I never really looked at the Chinese in the backseat until we passed the last roadblock and entered Haiphong itself. I was very nonchalant at the beginning of the drive but became very concerned for our safety as we drove toward Haiphong. But when I looked back at my passengers as we passed a streetlight in Haiphong, they were a huddled group of living fear, with wide eyes and short breath.

Looking back it was foolish of me to try that drive in a single vehicle at night. I had not considered the Vietcong reaction to the French landing and overrated my status as a neutral, immune from all harm.

I showed the Chinese their rooms in the Hotel du Commerce, but part of the wall had been damaged by shells thrown from the ammunition warehouse at the dock plus cracks caused by the vibrations from the warehouse explosion. The Chinese then said that they should have stayed in Shanghai.

A female American war correspondent was coming from Saigon to Haiphong to get a story on the French-Chinese fighting. I was to pick her up in a jeep at the small Haiphong airport. The road out to it had been blocked by trees cut down by the Chinese so that the French could not send reinforcement by air when the Chinese Command decided to resist the landing. So, to get to the airport I had to drive a zig zag S-type trail to avoid the trees covering the road.

I picked her up at the airport and while driving in I started to tell her about the battle. She cut me off saying “I know. It was IWT-IWT.” Translated this means “I was there. It was terrible.” As a result of this crack by her we did not get along. When we got to Haiphong she said “Take me to the French Commander.” So I drove her to his headquarters. His aid told us that he was having his lunch and we would have to wait. She replied that she did not come all the way up here from Saigon to see him and have him say he was at lunch. The aid then went back in and very soon out came the tall French general, whom some French officer later told me was a priest who had taken leave to serve in the French Army. He actually gave her an interview of almost one half hour while she asked questions and took notes. His English seemed adequate.

Then she asked me to drive her to the Chinese Commander. We
could not drive as close to the Chinese headquarters as we did to the French general's headquarters. We had to pass through many levels of security guards. At each level a Chinese soldier would move quickly against us with a bayonet on the end of his rifle. We would stop and identify ourselves and move on another 50 or so yards when the same thing would again present itself. After the third time she actually grasped the end of the bayonet and pushed it away saying "I am tired of all these Cowboy-and-Indian games." The Chinese soldier did nothing. If I had grabbed that bayonet it would have been the end of me. She got to see the Chinese general and got his statement of the events.

I then drove her back to the airport. She got out of the jeep and just walked away never looking back or saying "Thank you." But she got her story. That seems all that mattered to her.

We received a message from our headquarters in Shanghai instructing us to give word if the French force attempted a move to Hanoi and in what strength. We contacted the Chinese who had information that the move would take place the morning of a certain near date. How they knew I have no idea. Our commander then asked me to verify the date and to get the strength of the move. On the designated date I arose at 3:00 in the morning and secluded myself with a paper and pencil under the bridge that leads from town to the Hanoi road. At daylight the French convoy moved out as predicted. There were spaces between the boards on the bridge so I could identify the size of the trucks and the artillery weapons which many of the trucks pulled. I waited until the last truck had departed then came slowly out from under the end of the bridge where I had been for several hours. We then put into code my figures and the date and time of the French move and telegraphed it back to Shanghai.

We finally got word that the ships were on the way to take the Chinese to north China. When the ships arrived, the Japanese soldiers helped us by spraying each soldier with a sort of DDT powder as he boarded the ship. The only strange incidents in boarding occurred when a Chinese soldier boarded who had gone AWOL rather than ship north. When captured by the Chinese MPs and brought back, these soldiers would be beaten up, particularly around the head, and then taken aboard the vessel for shipment north. The Japanese would call attention to such a soldier's condition and not spray his injured parts with the DDT.

The reason most of these AWOLs occurred was because of a poor decision by the Chinese government to send soldiers from the south of China to the north, and to keep the northern soldiers in the south, out of a fear that a soldier sent near his home would go AWOL. The error in this was that northern Chinese would likely have fought hard to save their province and homes from the Communists. The soldiers from the south
would have no such feeling for the northern areas they were called upon to defend.

After the Chinese had all been sent by ship to the north from Indochina, the question of security for Haiphong immediately arose. For a brief period the French instituted a joint French/Vietnamese jeep patrol at night. It did not last long. Almost every night there were clashes between the French and Vietnamese. At night, Vietnamese snipers were on the roofs of some of the houses and, in the morning, a body of one would be visible on a slanted roof with a small crowd gathered below talking and pointing at him.

The French began to attack the public buildings in Haiphong held by the Vietcong, i.e., the railroad station, the port authority office, and other buildings representing the city and provincial government. When another American and I would hear firing or explosions in the daytime, we would drive to the scene to view the attack by the French and the resistance by the Vietcong occupying a certain building. The fighting for the railroad station was the first we observed. A wide broad street leading to it gave us a good view. In another public building, a Vietcong soldier appeared at a window. The French fired a small artillery piece at the window, missing it by a yard but blowing the whole wall out. Why we exposed ourselves like that I cannot now imagine, except the obvious excitement of foreign soldiers watching another army in action. But no longer would we go to Vietnamese rallies which were taking place around the city. We could easily have been assaulted by a mob. I witnessed one sudden shoot-out on the street. The only casualty I saw was a poor cigarette street vendor who lay among his cigarettes while several young Vietnamese civilians were stealing all his cigarettes.

It was obvious that the long war in North Vietnam between the French and the Communist north was beginning. No more open air dances were held next to our hotel. The atmosphere from the time of our arrival six months before had totally changed. We were glad to see the ships start to arrive for the transportation of the Japanese soldiers. The Japanese had always lived outside of the city of Haiphong and had kept to themselves. The loading went swiftly and without incident.

Among the last to leave was a Japanese civilian named Kenneth Kurasuru. We had been in Haiphong only a few days when he stopped by, introduced himself, and offered his services as a coordinator between our office and the Japanese commander in the shipping of the Japanese troops to Japan. It seemed that he had been an economic advisor in the Japanese Embassy in Washington before the war. He was middle-aged and spoke excellent English. He also liked American food, which he got to enjoy during his ten years in Washington. He came by and ate with us almost every day and became a fast friend. It was he who got the
Japanese to help us in the loading of the Chinese Army, and who arranged for the Japanese troop units to be ready for the ships when they started to arrive one by one at the Haiphong Harbor.

He was naturally on the last ship to leave. He invited another American and myself to come to his small stateroom (which he had secured for himself while most of the rest of the Japanese were in the cargo areas of the ship) for a farewell drink. I could hear the motor start on the ship and what appeared to be gang planks being pulled up. I panicked, said a quick goodbye while the other two said that there was still plenty of time for another drink. I did not believe them and rushed out of the room and was the last one down the last gang plank. The ship then started moving away from the dock. My friend's face then appeared at the railing, looked down, climbed over the railing, hung by one arm, then dropped straight down into the river. He used a swimming method like a butterfly stroke which kept the material churned up from the river floor away from his face. When he reached the shore, he got into our jeep and I drove us back to the hotel where he bathed and came out like a new man. After the war, I met him again as a civilian in 1966 in St. Louis, MO.

Kenneth Kurasuru remained a good friend and I used to stop and see him in Tokyo when I was stationed in Seoul in the 1960s, and later when visiting Seoul in the 1970s. He passed away around 1975. He had owned an antique shop in Tokyo and gave my wife and I a very lovely Japanese vase which still sits in our living room in Carlisle.

With the Chinese and Japanese armies gone, our job in Indochina was over and we prepared to return to Shanghai. We had been there six months but with all that had happened it seemed a great deal longer.

**The Boat Trip to Shanghai**

We did not return to Shanghai by plane. For some unknown reason we were to take a small boat which had a cargo space below deck, a small kitchen, and a luncheon space. We were to sleep in the cargo hold where our luggage was, or in cots on deck. Most chose the deck because of the humidity. It was pleasant sleeping out, except for the fact that our cots moved about the deck. The ship was so small that she had little draft, so she tended to bob about in the water. One night I tied my cot by a rope to an object on the deck. However, the cot, when it had moved to the end of the rope, turned over and dumped me on deck.

At night, the crew seemed always to be sounding the depth of the water because we were not far off the coast. When weather messages were received of a possible typhoon or other rough sea weather we would put in close to shore and drop anchor. The Chinese local
fishermen would come out to see us. Their small fishing boats had dragon or other oriental eyes carved on the bow of their ships. It was interesting sailing up the coast of China.

When we reached Hong Kong, the ship needed repairs which would take almost two weeks. We were free to come and go from the ship during this period and visit Hong Kong. A view from the harbor of the city at night was very beautiful. In 1946 Hong Kong was lit by electric bulbs, not neon tubing. Consequently, it looked like 10,000 diamonds shining from the hillside. When I saw it twenty years later, it was lit by neon signs which made the scene one large blur of light, not the individual bright lights like the stars in the sky as it used to be.

We did not have to return to the ship for ten days. However, no one had enough money to stay ashore that long. All were back with days to spare.

There were also some U.S. warships in the harbor. Their crews were young and immature. They tended to get intoxicated while ashore. A small U.S. ship was close to the dock and it was to take them to their larger ships which, in turn, hauled them up late at night in cargo nets. The sailors looked like sacks of flour in their white sailor suits in those nets as they were hoisted aboard. I thought that it was rather scandalous to the American flag for so many of them to become so intoxicated.

It took us over three weeks to make that trip back to Shanghai, including the 10 day stop over in Hong Kong. But it was extremely interesting: watching the Chinese fishing boats, the put in of our ship at small harbors in bad weather, and the talks with a mostly Russian crew, who were White Russians from Shanghai, in the cabin of the ship at night.

**Shanghai Again**

When the ship docked we took our belongings to a U.S. Army requisitioned hotel and were assigned different jobs until we got a ship to the States. I got a job proofreading the copies of messages sent by the U. S. Commander in China to the Chinese government and to our State Department, and replies he received. When proofed, these messages were to be sent to the archives in Washington. There were no fax machines then so they had to be retyped. That is where the proofing came in. It was extremely interesting reading this correspondence between the higher echelons of the U. S. Military in China and the Chinese government, particularly on the disposition of Chinese forces after Japan surrendered.

Things had not gone well for the Chinese government during my six months absence in Indochina. The Communist Army appeared strong,
affecting the political stability of the Chinese nationalist government. The best indicator of this was the Chinese currency issued by the Nationalist government. When I was first in Shanghai, in the early fall of 1945, the exchange rate was about 500 to 700 Chinese dollars to one American dollar. The Chinese dollar was starting to lose its value as I was leaving for Indochina. "Custom Gold Units" were circulating, which were worth around ten to twenty Chinese dollars. When I returned to Shanghai six months later the exchange rate was one dollar to 300,000 Chinese dollars. Business had to be done in foreign currencies or in Chinese dollars which were bundled into stacks, or larger and larger bills printed as Germany did after World War I.

Another indicator was a U.S. military plan for the evacuation of Shanghai by U.S. Army personnel. This may not have meant much, however, because the military always seems to have a plan for contingencies.

While in Shanghai I often went around with the three Chinese I had picked up in Hanoi and driven at night to Haiphong through all the road blocks months earlier. We played golf together on the golf course in the center of the Shanghai race track. We remained friends. Two are still alive and we keep in touch.

The Trip Home

After about a month in Shanghai, I boarded an Army transport ship for the sea voyage to the States. The trip was calm and uneventful. The Army wartime spirit seemed to be on the wane because I saw one officer wear an orange shirt, although almost all wore at all times their uniforms. Still, something was changing, an attitude if nothing else.

As the ship went down the Whang Pu River to the Pacific Ocean, and as the coast of China receded into the sea and sky, I wondered if I ever would see it again. I did see Shanghai in 1984 and 1990. In 1984 it looked dismal and was dark at night with little shipping in the harbor. However, in 1990 it was its old self again. The Communist dress and government department stores of 1984 were gone and modern styles in dress, particularly women’s, had taken over. The harbor was crowded. Shanghai had come back.

The only thing I can say about taking a troop ship across the Pacific Ocean is that it was boring and frill free. Also, the attitude of those on board was discharge and a return to civilian life. Most felt that they had "lost" some years, which was not so. Most had gained a world view whether they realized it or not.

We docked in San Francisco on a very cool day in late August of 1946 and went to a depot where we were all processed for reassignment.
After a few days I was sent by train to Fort Sheridan, Ill., outside Chicago, for separation. The train ride across country was interesting just looking out the window. While in Chicago, I visited our old homes – on Sear Avenue and Oakdale Street – of my childhood, as a 5 and 6 year old in 1929-31.

As I had the maximum two months leave coming, I was granted this leave at Fort Sheridan which would end in discharge from active duty with an artillery commission in the Reserves effective in October 1946. I then took a train to Cincinnati. I noticed that those in military uniforms were all sent to one car. The treatment was not as grand as it had been during the war. But a full year had passed since Japan surrendered and war time attitudes had changed.

At the Cincinnati Union Terminal I took a taxi home to Ludow, Kentucky because of all my gear. I had circled the globe since 1944. The taxi stopped in front of 417 Elm Street. I got out and walked up the walk to the porch where my mother and sister were waiting with our little dog, Ginger.

World War II was over!