

George Lewis Petoff, Sr.

This is an account of some of the 35 missions we flew in our Boeing B-29 Superfortress (A-Square 54 A/P No. 44-69724) during World War II. We were stationed on the island of Saipan – part of the Marianas chain in the South Pacific. Tinian and Guam – also part of that chain - had B-29 bases as well. We were part of the 20th Air Force, 73rd Bomb Wing, 497th Bomb Group and 871st Bomb Squadron. Most combat airplanes of WW II vintage had nose art. Ours was “**Panchito**, The Fighting Cock”, one of Walt Disney’s *Three Caballeros* cartoon characters. None of our crew members remembers who came up with that name.

Our crew, known as the Jerry Francis crew, consisted of:

Jariel B. Francis* - Airplane Commander (Pilot)

Donald R. Pedroni* - Co-pilot

Vernon L. Karstens - Navigator

George L. Petoff - Bombardier

Jess W. Riblett* - Flight engineer

William B. Monroe** - Radio Operator

Harold Luettschwager* - Central Fire Control

Herbert Small - Radar Observer

George Meranshian* - Right Side Gunner

Edward Shahinian* - Left Side Gunner

John Shahinian* - Tail Gunner

* Deceased

** Unaccounted for

Each of our crew members was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with up to six Oak Leaf Clusters for meritorious action during bombing missions on our tour of duty.

Twin brothers in the same outfit were not all that uncommon but identical twin brothers on the **same bomber crew** were rare indeed. We know of no others that carry the distinction of Ed and John Shahinian. George Meranshian, along with the Shahinian brothers, gave us three airmen of Armenian descent on the same B-29 crew – another rarity unmatched in the entire 20th Air Force.

After WW II we pretty much went our separate ways except for rare notes or cards at first then nothing as we proceeded to lead our individual lives. But I always wondered what happened to my close buddies. Then came retirement in 1987. I had time to look for and find the 73rd Bomb Wing Association (it found me, actually) consisting of surviving airmen and other support personnel who had been stationed on Saipan (northernmost of the Marianas). I was astounded to find six of our crew members listed on their roster and proceeded to contact all of those still living (nine in all) – we knew our pilot had died in 1967 and I have been unable to find our radio operator. We started attending the association’s yearly reunions in various cities all over the U.S. We have had up to seven crew members (plus wives) in attendance. It goes without saying that we have a wonderful time at these reunions recalling our experiences and enjoying each others’ company (spouses have bonded too). Being of that age we are all – with one exception – married to our first wives

This is what a typical mission was like:

With our B-29 fully loaded to its maximum payload of bombs, we proceeded on our takeoff run down a 9,000 ft runway – one of two parallel runways – flying off a 200 foot cliff - providentially located there to give us room for nose down airplane attitude to accelerate to climbing speed. After reaching that speed we climbed to our assigned cruising altitude on our way to a target on the Japanese mainland, some 1400 – 1500 miles distant, with **no possible** emergency landing facilities on the way. Sailors have a saying that the sea is unforgiving – and airmen know that the air is unforgiving absolutely – minor problems or mistakes can be (and often are) fatal. Then after reaching mainland Japan and climbing toward the bomb run altitude (30,000 feet and above) we were met with fierce fighter plane defense and heavy antiaircraft fire – the Japanese did not take kindly to our presence there – for the entire length of the bomb run (some twenty miles). Then, after dropping our bombs and getting safely out of fighter and antiaircraft range, we started our journey back to Saipan. This was another 1400 – 1500 miles in that same air and over that same expanse of water. Most of these return flights were uneventful except for one notable mission – our first – which I will tell you about later.

To survive 35 such missions, each crew member had to do his job and do it well – and we trusted each other to do just that. Out of that trust came friendship, and out of friendship love. We became a very close knit family as did many other wartime bomber crews.

Our first mission, a high altitude bombing raid over Tokyo, nearly became our last. First some background information to set the stage. I was sworn into the Army Air Corps in September 1942 and called to active duty in January 1943, then proceeded to all the schools leading up to becoming a navigator. I was progressing nicely in this training until I got to the celestial part of navigation when the Air Corps determined that I had considerable difficulty identifying individual stars. Dead reckoning navigation, where you use land marks and speed calculations was no problem (a breeze, actually). But, celestial is **based** on one's ability to obtain and use fixes on individual stars. So I washed (flunked) out of navigation school – an ego shattering experience as I had an easy time with math in high school. I was really looking forward to earning my wings and becoming an officer so I could attract the young ladies of that era, and was feeling depressed after being sent to gunnery school in Kingman, AZ. A sympathetic WAC (Womens' Army Corps) clerk wrangled me an assignment to Bombardier School. I was elated – this was a second chance to become an officer, and I passed easily, obtaining the dual rating of bombardier/navigator. Now to the story.

About halfway home to Saipan our navigator became hopelessly lost (it was nighttime and overcast – undercast in this case - and while we could see the stars OK, picking out any of the few landmarks (tiny Pacific islands) was impossible. I knew something was wrong when he asked me on the intercom for help and found him in tears at his work station. The responsibility for crew safety weighs heavily on one's mind, and this was overwhelming to him. I realized that first I had to reassure him that together we would find our location (took a lot of convincing). Turns out there is a **LORAN** system that works great in determining longitude (east – west position) but is worthless for latitude (north – south). We were at a far enough south latitude to make any fix on Polaris (our North Star) difficult if not impossible. I managed to get several **good** fixes so then we knew our latitude and groundspeed. Our calculations showed that we were near one of the little Pacific islands. Miraculously, there was a break in the cloud cover and we could **see** that island. Now we were on course and headed home – ironically my celestial navigating abilities were just good enough to determine our location. It was the one and only time I used my celestial navigating “expertise” during our tour of duty although I helped with routine calculations on several missions. During all this frantic activity the rest of the crew was busy with their own duties and unaware of any problems,

While all this was going on our flight engineer had calculated that we barely had enough fuel left to reach Saipan still some 500 miles distant. Our pilot started a gradual descent so as to conserve as much fuel as possible. We all had visions of ditching far short of the friendly Saipan runways or at least a dead-stick (no power) landing. But there was enough – we could have flown another hour or more if necessary. The Flight Engineer – usually extremely accurate with calculations – had made a mistake. Those were a nerve-wracking worry-filled 500 miles. The prospect of ditching at open sea is an airman's worst nightmare. This was our longest mission (over 16 hours) and being our first I sure wondered what I had gotten myself into nearly three years before when I enlisted. Scared? Yes, on every single mission – but not terrified (there is a difference). We all had our superstitions and mine were to always start out with two freshly sharpened pencils and I never cleaned my 45 caliber service pistol! Other crew members had their own superstitions. Ed Shahinian never washed his flight suit and his twin brother John hummed “Long Ago And Far Away”, a popular love song of our time in his “doghouse” tail gunner's location. George Meranshian read his Bible constantly and Don Pedroni carried his baby shoes upon which he recorded our individual missions. Herb Small carried a Tallit (prayer shawl) and Teffilin (small leather boxes containing scriptures). These are items carried by those of the Hebrew faith while traveling. Also in that same O.D. bag was an Army issue prayer book. We did not want to deviate from the routines of past missions. I had never worn a cap on these flights until I received a package from my folks with my old baseball cap enclosed and wore it on our 22nd mission, the only flight we aborted as will be told later in this account. The enlisted men on our crew confiscated and burned that cap – no objection on my part! Memory of that cap escapes me – I just don't remember anything about it – but our enlisted men sure remembered and I trust their memories.

So that is what happened on our way back to Saipan on our first mission. Before I go on with what happened en route to Japan on that first mission, I need to add some more background information.

While we were still in the process of crew training on B-29s prior to combat assignments, we became acquainted with many others slated to become replacement crews for those lost in combat. We became quite close with one particular crew. I was best buddies with the bombardier and, paired off by crew position, the rest of our crew did the same. When our overseas assignments came, this crew preceded us to Saipan by about a week. When we arrived they had already flown one high altitude bombing mission and gleefully lorded it over us “rookies”. They were the first replacement crew in our squadron and we were the second. Despite the good natured ribbing, they passed along valuable information about weather conditions, airplane performance, Japanese resistance, bombing results, etc. etc. etc. Now back to our first mission.

At that time we were required to fly in fuel-inefficient formations all the way to the target area – presumably for maximum protection against enemy fighter aircraft located mainly on the island of Iwo Jima. Even though those were loose formations until we neared the Japanese mainland, it was crucial that we maintain awareness of all B-29s around us. It was my job in particular to observe all planes above, below, left, and right for 270 degrees of vision in front of our airplane – since the nose of the airplane was my location and afforded the best view of air traffic over a wide range of the sky. All other crew members who were not otherwise busy with calculations and other preparations were also responsible for air traffic observations. Believe me I developed great neck muscles resulting from head swiveling. About two hours into our flight at an altitude of 5000 feet I was horrified to observe the most ghastly sight imaginable – two B-29s colliding and slowly falling out of the sky into the Pacific Ocean and no parachutes in sight. Our crew always wondered what it must have been like for those crews in the last moments of their young lives. Upon landing and going to the debriefing room after this long first mission we were devastated to learn (you guessed it) that in one of those

doomed bombers were our close buddies (on their second mission). Not a pleasant task to pack up and send personal belongings to their families.

Our high altitude (upwards of 30,000 feet) bombing missions with 500 lb to 1000 lb bombs, and airplanes flying in formations for maximum protection against Japanese fighter planes (Zeroes mainly), were mostly ineffective due to the phenomenon known as the Jet Stream. Up to that time little (read nothing) was known of its existence or disastrous effect on our bombing runs. The results varied from poor to downright lousy. If we flew with the current our ground speed was too high for the Norden bombsights to compensate. If we flew into it we were sitting ducks for Japanese fighters. If we crabbed (yawed) at any reasonable angle, the resulting yaw angles effectively destroyed the hoped-for bomb trajectories. It was this set of circumstances that convinced Curtis E. LeMay (our 20th AF Commanding General) that we were wasting valuable resources and endangering many lives in a futile effort – simply put it just wasn't working. General LeMay conceived the tactic of **low level** (8000 feet and lower) bombing runs using incendiary bombs carried by individual airplanes flying at night under the cover of darkness. While conventional bombs were bulky, individual incendiary bombs were small and had to be bundled together in clusters thus adapting to the existing bomb release system.

We flew a number of these firebomb mission with little Japanese resistance – too dark for their fighters and too low for effective anti-aircraft guns. Then came the mission when our bombs did not release cleanly. There are two bomb bays on the B-29 (forward and aft). The bombs from the aft bomb bay released just fine but the lowest ones in the forward bomb bay jammed, effectively damming up the ones above and causing a huge log jam of incendiary bombs whose little arming propellers had spun off thus making a live ammunition dump of the entire airplane!!! **WE HAD TO GET RID OF THEM!** Or else - well you can imagine what else. Fortunately Boeing had equipped these planes with fire axes. While our co-pilot flew the airplane on a steady and bump-free course, our airplane commander and I crawled into the forward bomb bay and proceeded to chop away at the thin cables binding the bombs until miraculously the log jam broke and the bombs tumbled out on their way to a burning Tokyo below. Relief beyond any possible description!!! Ed Shahinian also remembers being involved in chopping out those bombs.

But this was not accomplished without some difficulty. There is limited space in the open bomb bay of a B-29 and there was no way we could go in there with parachutes. It never occurred to us to be frightened of the altitude and exposure to all kinds of peril. We were concentrating on getting rid of those damned bombs then getting the hell out of there to return to Saipan. One minor bonus - we had a spectacular view of 25 percent of Tokyo being destroyed.

While on this mission I became eligible to vote. Sometime during the release of those bombs it became April second, my 21st birthday.

If you are wondering why it was necessary to burn out residential areas of Japan's cities, it was due to the nature of their manufacturing process. While our factories were centralized with parts making and assemblies done under one roof, Japan's were divided into parts making in individual homes and assemblies done in large plants. Every home would have a little lathe or milling machine or drill press in the kitchen. Parts made in these homes would then be taken to assembly plants where they became integrated into minor/major assemblies to finish the manufacturing process. So we were **not** targeting homes to kill innocent civilians – we were destroying their war making capability. Besides they were forewarned. Prior to these raids the cities were blanketed with leaflets describing the destruction and possible loss of life to follow,

In late February and early March 1945 many Marine and Army infantry battalions were stationed on Saipan which became a huge staging area prior to the invasion of Iwo Jima, a strategic Pacific island located about halfway between Saipan and Japan. These troops would sit at the end of our runways watching B-29s take off much as spectators watch the Indianapolis 500 car races, anticipating disasters. Remember we had only 200 feet of “wobble room” to gain climbing speed. They did see a few tragic splashdowns (very few thankfully). I talked with some of these men who agreed unanimously that they would never fly in combat. We airmen, of course, had zero interest in ground fighting. One of the soldiers was John Chapman, not the famous “Johnny Appleseed”, from my hometown of Broadalbin, NY. We had a couple nice visits involving beer drinking before his outfit left for Iwo Jima.

Possession of Iwo was important for three main reasons:

1. Iwo provided us with an emergency landing field midway between Saipan and the Japanese mainland. Countless lives were saved when crews did not have to ditch because of low fuel or battle damage.
2. Eliminated the threat of Japanese fighter airplanes attacking our formations while on the way to the target areas.
3. Allowed us to build our own base for P-51 fighter escort planes which now had sufficient range to protect our formations from enemy fighters and then return safely to Iwo.

The fighting for Iwo was fierce and deadly. Japanese defense forces did not surrender easily and many lives were lost on both sides. You may remember the famous photograph of four U.S. Marines raising the American Flag over Mt, Suribachi. For this tremendous sacrifice we B-29ers will be eternally indebted.

With this background in mind here’s the “rest of the story” – with apologies to Lowell Thomas. After we had dropped our bombs on one of our raids and were on the return flight to Saipan our formation was attacked by a number of Japanese Kamikazi craft – essentially manned flying bombs. At this stage of the war Japanese fighter numbers were reduced to near zero and Japan’s ability to produce more was destroyed, ergo the Kamikazis. One of these suicidal maniacs came zooming into our formation and **narrowly, very narrowly** (by a couple of feet) missing our airplane but glancing off the right inboard engine of another airplane in our formation and shearing off the top half of its vertical stabilizer before plummeting into the northern Pacific Ocean. The bent propellers started a violent structural vibration which was stopped by the quick action of that airplane’s flight engineer in shutting off power to the battered engine. Our airplane commander determined immediately that we would escort this crippled airplane to our new found haven of Iwo Jima. This was an agonizingly slow process because with only 75 percent of the available power airspeed was consequently greatly reduced. Also because normal speeds would have caused further structural damage. To Boeing’s credit this airplane held together and handled sufficiently well to limp on into Iwo. We landed safely, both crews overjoyed to be on solid ground. This was another crew we had become close to and their bombardier wasted no time in kissing the ground (literally) once he got out of that damaged machine. Later their co-pilot would become an employee of mine at Boeing’s facility in Wichita,KS, and we see two other of this crew’s members at our annual reunions. Randy Sloan, senior host of the 2003 Charlotte reunion is one of those two. Our own plane was refueled and we were on our way back to Saipan within an hour of landing at Iwo in the first place. No time wasted there!!

While all other adventures were somewhat life threatening, this next one nearly cost us our lives. It happened after we had completed a mission and were landing. That’s when the trouble began. The speed of the left two engines could not be regulated downward enough for normal taxi speed (after

touching down) due to the throttle linkage locking up in a high speed position. No matter how hard the pilot, co-pilot, and flight engineer pulled back on their throttles, the locked up linkage prevented engine speed reduction so crucial to safe landing. The three sets of throttles were linked together mechanically so that all worked in unison. Thus the pilot and co-pilot could help each other on take offs and landings and the Flight Engineer had the control he needed for engine runup prior to takeoff. The result of this asymmetric high engine speed was a violent yawing action as the left two engines propelled the plane in a forward turning motion while the pilot and co-pilot were riding the brakes as hard as possible in a desperate attempt to keep the airplane going straight down the runway and on the ground. I was sitting in my crew position in the nose as the plane went through the wildest gyrations imaginable with first one wing dipping dangerously close to the ground and then the other and repeating this cycle several times for what seemed like a eternity. We came within inches of ground looping almost guaranteeing destruction. Not many airplanes or crews survived B-29 ground loops. Miraculously the airplane came to a stop near the end of the runway off to one side. We left it right there and everyone scrambled to solid ground.

I was the last one out because of my position in the airplane. As I passed by the pilot's station I glanced over at the throttle levers and discovered – to my amazement – the cause of the problem. As was his habit the pilot had placed his gooseneck GI flashlight on the window sill and it had wedged behind the left two levers on the throttle pedestal. I removed the flashlight, stuck it in my flight suit pocket, and pulled the throttle levers back to the fully retracted position. After I got out of the airplane I took our pilot aside and surreptitiously handed him his flashlight. His face lost all color as he realized what had happened. I think Boeing is still trying to find the cause of that problem, but this was just payback for the malfunctioning bomb release system. No one beside the pilot and myself knew of this incident until many years after his death. Remember the little subtleties that can cause major disasters? What a perfect example, and it didn't happen on the water or in the air, but on friendly dry land!!! The good news – we did survive what could have been a needless tragedy.

I didn't particularly want to sit in my bombardier's seat on takeoffs and landings but it became mandatory especially on takeoffs where I could salvo the bombs to reduce weight in an emergency to gain takeoff speed. Fortunately, this never happened.

Shortly after the capture of Iwo Jima, we were on a high altitude bombing mission when a flight of fighters approached our formation from a direction and at an angle that marked them as enemies. Not wanting them to get too close to us I opened up with all six 50-caliber machine guns under my control at the time. So did our left side gunner with his fire power. Being the lead crew in our squadron, all other crews started firing on our cue. **BIG** mistake! They were our P-51 fighter escort planes sent from Iwo to protect us! Fortunately when they saw our tracer bullets coming toward them they were so far out of range that no harm was done and they quickly moved away. I should have known they weren't the aggressive Japanese. Well, they didn't act like friendlies coming at us from that position, and it is difficult (read impossible) to distinguish one fighter from another at those distances. Regardless, upon landing after this mission, the first question asked in the debriefing room was, "who the hell shot at our P-51s today?". I was sunk and had to admit it – and spent two weeks at aircraft identification school as "a disciplinary measure". Ed Shahinian also got a refresher course in aircraft identification for this seemingly innocent action. Though we were both wrong, the P-51 flight commander and I, it was only fitting that I bear the consequences of that action. I never again shot at P-51s!!

The durability and reliability of B-29s during this phase of the war was amazing. The B-29 was rushed into production before any prototype was ever built and many problems were discovered on early training flights and even combat conditions in the China-Burma-India theater. The Wright Cyclone

engines were especially troublesome early on as the long flying times caused overheating and took their toll. In the latter stages of the war reliability of both airframe and power plant increased dramatically. General LeMay introduced another innovation – centralized engine service and repair, where single engines in need of replacement (or service) were removed, taken to the central maintenance area, and repaired ones installed at the individual airplane locations, thus reducing the replacement time from several days to a few hours. And the skills to do this were concentrated in one place rather than scattered throughout the individual wings. Our airplane had to abort its assigned mission just once due to an overheated engine – not bad once in 35 missions. We got a one hour flight time credit for that but no combat time. The salvoed bombs made a big splash in the wide, blue Pacific, killing a few fish but reducing the airplane weight enough to preclude having to dump valuable aviation fuel. My baseball cap had done its eerie job! Not much drama there, just another bump on the road to winning the war.

On one noteworthy mission (our 30th) we did a radar surveillance and mapping of Hiroshima just prior to the Enola Gay's famous flight and in support of that flight. We carried an extra crew member, a Major (or Lt. Col.) who was a radar specialist. The purpose was to coordinate radar images with visual and photographic observations of the Hiroshima area. Thus weather, if overcast as was the usual case, would not be a hindrance to the actual bomb drop. This specialist kept asking for "just one more pass" numerous times, raising our crew's anxiety level hugely as we were ready to head back to Saipan asap, and there was heavier than usual antiaircraft fire that day. Finally he did have enough material, much to our crew's relief. We got a citation from our Group Commander, Col. Arnold T. Johnson, stating that we had "scooped the entire 20th Air Force". There were others on similar missions that day for backup and redundancy, but we were the first to return with the results. During this mission we dropped many thousands of leaflets (in Japanese) warning the residents of Hiroshima to leave before the indescribable devastation – I remember the leaflets depicting twisted steel structures still smoking from damage and people in agony from the bomb effects. Unfortunately these warnings were not taken seriously by many of Hiroshima's residents.

One of our crew members, John Shahinian, probably deserved a Purple Heart citation for this following incident. On his way back to the aft cabin from his tail gunner's position, John's oxygen mask got detached from its oxygen bottle and about halfway back he passed out. His twin bother, Ed, knew there was something wrong when John didn't show up on schedule on this routine trip from the tail to the aft cabin and proceeded toward the back where he applied his own oxygen supply to John's mask. John revived but Ed passed out and had to be rescued by Herb Small, our radar observer who then also dragged John into the main cabin. During this activity John suffered a sizable gash to his leg but never reported this which would have earned him the Purple Heart medal (for injury during combat). In retrospect Ed now realizes that all he had to do was reconnect John's own oxygen supply and the problem would be solved. But such are our reactions during times of high anxiety and stress. The six crew members in the forward cabin were totally unaware of this incident, and when we checked on the crew status in the aft cabin as we did regularly, George Meranshian stated that "everything's under control", earning him the nickname "Everything's Under Control George".

When we were not flying missions or attending briefings we spent a lot of time swimming in the warm ocean, playing "blood and guts" volleyball (a game so intense and competitive that we came close to fistfights nearly every time), pitching horseshoes, softball, and playing a lot of cards. Sanford (Sandy) Simmons, son of the mattress company founder and a B-29 co-pilot, and I always managed to be on the same volleyball team. Sadly I learned at our reunion in Charlotte that Sandy had passed way during the past year. I was a failure at poker (too emotional about losing) but got pretty good at bridge, and held my own shooting craps. During our entire stay on Saipan my gambling netted me exactly \$100. Most of the evenings were spent relaxing, playing cards, or at the Officers' Club

drinking beer and Salty Dogs (a potent gin and grapefruit juice combination). The gin was always a bit cloudy, not like the clear gin we had stateside and everyone complained about it (**but drank it**). I decided to play a little joke on our pilot one night. I filled an empty gin bottle with clear water, resealed the bottle carefully, and showed him the “exceptional” bottle of clear gin that I proclaimed had made it to Saipan with all the cloudy ones. Then I presented it to him as a measure of respect for his Captain’s rank (I was a rank below him at First Lieutenant). Well that night at the officers’ club he proceeded to drink a number of salty dogs made with clear water and became very boisterous (as was his habit) and drunk. Needless to say, no one who knew of this little practical joke ever had the nerve – **or inclination** – to reveal the true nature of that “special” gin. Mysteriously, no clear gin ever found its way to our area again.

The war ended soon after we had completed our 34th combat mission. Our 35th was a mercy mission where we carried food, clothing and medical supplies to prisoner of war camps located on the main Japanese island of Honshu. These camps were clearly marked with huge red crosses making the task of finding them very easy. Flying over the countryside at 500 feet altitude gave us a close look at the incredible beauty of Japan’s rice paddies and other crop fields – all arranged in precise geometric patterns. People on the ground waved at us wildly after they realized we were not there to harm them. Our U.S. prisoners looked overjoyed at our presence and scooted out of the way when we dropped those supplies which were packed in steel canisters made from oil barrels welded together and with parachutes attached to soften their landing. The Japanese had a cruel way of stealing or otherwise diverting Red Cross supplies meant for our captured airmen, and those that survived the brutal treatment in those camps appeared emaciated and weak. We would have liked to stick around and see the damage inflicted on Tokyo but our mission was complete and we headed back to Saipan for one final safe landing on Isley Field.

I said I never wanted to fly in an airplane again. So when given a choice of flying double crew on a B-29 back to the States (two days with an overnight stay in Hawaii) or taking a troop ship (two weeks) I chose the ship. Aboard that ship were a few of us airmen and a lot of returning soldiers. I became friends with Lt. Dale Gordon, a P-51 pilot from Coalgate, Oklahoma, and we became bridge partners for those fourteen days, making a little spending money playing against other returning airmen. He was a bit of a practical joker too. We observed the soldiers having great difficulty with seasickness, mostly facilitated by the greasy food prepared by the ship’s cooks. After one particularly greasy meal of pork chops he decided we should have a little “fun” with those soldiers so immediately after that meal we rushed to the nearest rail and pretended to be seasick (neither of us **ever got airsick or seasick**). At this point at least half of those returning soldiers, who needed very little suggestion of nausea, also found their way to the railings. We thought it hilarious at the time but realized it was a cruel prank indeed and if those soldiers had even the slightest inkling this was staged we would have been in BIG trouble.

When that ship docked (berthed?) at San Pedro, California we were taken to the reassignment area for processing to travel to Fort Dix, New Jersey where we would receive our discharges from the Army Air Corps. No choice this time as my orders stated that transportation to Fort Dix would be by American Airlines DC-3. So much for my no flying resolution. After six stops along the way and flying through some rough and scary thunderstorms we arrived at Ft. Dix. Here again I was given a choice – enlist in the Army Air Corps Reserve and be discharged in two days or wait several weeks for a regular discharge. Anxious to get home as soon as possible, I chose the Reserve, reasoning that there would not be another war for some time to come. Well of course the Korean War did happen and I sweat out every set of orders from the Reserve until early 1953 when they told me “if we don’t hear from you in two weeks you will be dropped from the Reserve ranks”. I proceeded to throw this communication into my waste basket and that was the end of my U.S. Army Air Corps career.

