



THE FUNNY THINGS - PART I

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION: This issue is a roundup of some of the funny things that happened to us. They are accounts of events that occurred from the Galapagos Islands and Guatemala City to Tinian and Iwo. "What is funny?" Some experiences are so near tragic that they can only be laughed at once those involved have survived the incident. Other experiences seemed funny at the time, but can appear unfunny today. Conversely, an event that was far from funny at the time, when looked back upon from the perspective of 40+ years, can seem hilarious. Some experiences derive their humor in the telling and turn out dry and unfunny when they become words on paper. In getting this issue of MEMORIES underway, it became apparent that one issue on this subject is not enough if we are to include just the stories already on hand. At least one other issue on "The Funny Things" will be needed. This will be published in early 1990.

Date of event: August - September 1945

Written by: Eino E. Jenstrom

Subject: 800 Cases of Beer

Paul Bremen's account of the building of the skeet range in issue #26 of MEMORIES reminded me of this story. I had walked out to the range to try my hand at skeet. Never was any good at it. Anyway, walking back to the newly built Quonsets, I took a detour through the ten-acre sugar cane between the newly cut road to the skeet range and the paved road servicing the route from our area to West Field.

In the middle of the head-high sugar cane, I came upon a tarpaulin-covered pile of something. I turned back a corner of the tarp, and it was beer! Cases and cases of the stuff! I picked up two and put them on my shoulders and ambled back to the hut. When I entered, those assembled asked if the beer truck was in. I told them there was a big pile of cases of beer out in the sugar cane. Within the next few minutes, there was a steady stream of troops. Out to the pile. Two cases shouldered. Back to camp. Some people tried carrying four at a time, but they were the greedy ones. I think we left the tarp. Or was that what we used as a roof on the porch we added to our Quonset?

Date of event: May - June 1944 (approximately)

Written by: Father Bartholomew Adler

Subject: Poker Playing Padre

This famous incident took place at Chakulia one night when Col. (Leonard) Harmon (Group CO) was looking for a poker player. I don't know anything about poker, but anyway I joined in and--much to my amazement--I got an inside club flush which Harmon couldn't believe. I became kind of notorious because a good friend of mine wrote the thing up and gave a copy to Woody (Capt. Forrest G. Wood, intelligence officer). Woody made copies of it. Out of that incident I became known as "Poker Playing Padre."

Date of event: Summer 1944
Written by: Bill Rooney
Subject: Air Raid Complete with Prayer

On the night of the first Japanese raid on A-1, I awoke to great commotion in the courtyard of our hostel. I sleepily got up and went to the door to ask what was going on and was told it was a "three ball" alert. I got dressed and barely got out the hostel door when the first bombs fell on the runway, which was maybe a mile, or just less, away. I was scared spitless! I had been in only one other raid, and that was in Naples harbor on our troopship heading for India. After the Jap planes bombed the runway, one of them came up the road strafing the roadway. This was less than twenty-five yards from us, and it is possible, that in the moonlight, the Japs saw someone running down the road. We had slit trenches, but there was no time to get to them. There was a drainage ditch around the edge of the hostel, and I dove for it. Side by side with me was our hostel boy. In our mutual desire to get to the very bottom of the ditch, he had his arm around my shoulder, and I had my arm around his. My face was burrowing in the dirt. I had been raised a good Catholic, and I knew in cases where death was imminent, the thing to do was to say an Act of Contrition. If ever there was a time for such a prayer, this was it. Accordingly, I launched my prayer starting with "Oh my God, I am heartily sorry..." etc. I was praying as fervently as that prayer ever was said. Meanwhile, in chorus with my prayer, our Chinese hostel boy was saying over and over, with all the fervor he could pack into his English, "God damn! Sonorabitch! God damn! Sonorabitch!"

Date of event: Summer 1944
Written by: James J. O'Keefe
Subject: Man's Best Friend

Bob Glenn from South Carolina was the flight engineer on Captain Skousen's crew when we came to India. I don't know why we gave him the name, "Coondog." Had he actually trained baying hounds through the hills of South Carolina? I do know that he loved dogs, and soon after we had settled in the Old Area, Bob decided to acquire a pet.

He appeared one evening with a puppy in his arms and told us it was a special breed of Indian dog, one that would attack leopards or chase elephants or do something equally heroic. He knew this because the Indian who had sold him the puppy had told him so. It was to our eyes a peculiar-looking dog with outsize ears and a long, sharp muzzle. But we knew nothing about Asian dog breeds and assumed that its features were the adaptations needed for fighting leopards or whatever.

During the day it hid away in dark corners and made no noise. But at night it came to life and yipped and howled for hours on end. One night the barracks was ringed with yips and howls that woke all of us. The noise-makers sounded like the puppy, but there was to their yips and howls a more mature ring. We used our flashlights to spot them, and someone knowledgeable about zoology exclaimed, "Why those are jackals!" Surely then these were concerned relatives of Coondog's puppy.

A committee was formed, and Coondog was presented with two options:

- (1) he could keep the puppy, but the two of them would have to move out into the bush, or
- (2) he could give the puppy to a deserving Indian youngster, preferably one who was passing through on his way to his home in Bombay a few hundred miles away.

Date of event: Sometime 1943
Written by: Donald G. Starkey
Subject: Not Exactly a Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony

Nell Wemple and I went to the movie in Guatemala City (without squadron commander Ira Cornett's permission) and returned to Ira's office that night where he was still working. We had just seen Bing Crosby in "Waikiki Wedding" in which Crosby clipped a fellow's tie off with a pair of scissors. Nell proceeded to demonstrate to Ira just how it was done and cut Cornett's tie off just below the knot. Needless to say, Ira became quite perturbed. The next day, Neil gave Ira a new tie, took the old one to the laundry, had it sewed back together and wore it around the base as if to advertise what he had done.

Date of event: 2 September 1945
Written by: Sam Lipnick
Subject: But the Cockroaches were Still at War

Like everyone else on Tinian, we geared up to fly the cover over the signing of the surrender. I was CFC gunner on Joe Curry's plane. We started off uneventfully and were halfway to Japan when we lost an engine. Joe Curry wisely decided to abort and land on Iwo Jima. There, we learned we would have to spend a week while the engine was replaced.

So, we settled down in our transient quarters, a big 20-man tent with cots, mosquito nets, etc. I was given a bug bomb to spray for mosquitos which I decided to do before we all bedded down. This was one of the original bug bombs. You screwed the cap down to puncture the seal, then backed it off until it started spraying. I backed it off too far. The cap blew out of my hand, and there I was with an erupting DDT bomb. Rather than waste it, I proceeded to march up and down the tent to really debug the place.

Everybody was in their cots, under the nets, when we heard this whirr-plop, whirr-plop, whirr-plop, whirr-plop. I took out my flashlight and shined it over the tent. There at the top of the tent, all over the ridge pole, was this mass of two-inch flying cockroaches, all hit by the DDT, and all doing their death dive--whirr-plop, whirr-plop. Needless to say, I was not very popular that night. But at least--no mosquitos!

Date of event: Spring 1943
Written by: Frederick Sampsel
Subject: Two Tales from Days on "The Rock"

One night some idiot radar operator was getting returns from some big clouds, and an alert was called because some other brainless wonder thought it was the Japs invading. I was in the bomb bay of our B-24, loading a 2,000-pound bomb. Some person ran the bomb racks through after we had the bomb hooked. The bomb dropped, pulling the arming wire all the way off with the bomb resting on the very tips of my toes without crushing them. I had to stand in that position until the Ordnance man came and rearmed the bomb. We then cranked the bomb back in position again. If that bomb had blown, I would have passed to the Celestial Kingdom.

There was a small sandy beach on our island (Baltra) just across from the big island (Santa Cruz). We were allowed to go swimming there out as far as the fresh water barge. George Bissey and I went out swimming there one day, and we were in the water up to our armpits. We were standing 10 to 12 feet apart. We looked out to sea, and there was this big shark coming up slowly between us. The shark was eight feet long or longer. It was literally impossible to swim back to shore so we just stood there real still. The shark swam slowly between us and circled around back of me and headed back out to sea. I said to George, "Did you see what I saw?" George said, "I sure as hell did." We clawed sand to get back to shore. That was my last time swimming there.

Date of event: May 24-25, 1945

Written by: John R. Mikulich

Subject: Air Raid with, Er, Two All Clears

On this occasion we were sent up to Iwo to fly navigation missions for P-51's stationed there. I was radar operator on "Bob" Braley's crew. You could say things started off wrong. As we approached Iwo, a low hanging stratus layer of clouds was floating over the island. The landing strip was not too discernible. Almost parallel and in close to the main landing strip was another strip under construction. We landed on the partially completed strip. Our plane, fortunately, even though traveling over a great deal of crushed stone, survived the situation. The ground personnel who greeted us naturally assumed we were returning from a mission, and they asked, "How was it?" Cool was to only way to play this so we said, "Not too bad."

We checked into our assigned tent quarters and decided to attend the movie. When we got to the theater, every seat was occupied so we stood just behind the last row of seats. At about 10:00 p.m., a siren blared forth with a great deal of intensity. All of the occupied seats emptied in a matter of seconds.

We stood in stunned silence for a moment. Then one of the crew said, "It must be an air raid." With that, we took off in the direction of our tent quarters. That took what seemed to be forever, what with slogging through the volcanic ash. We reached our area and, in no time, collected our meager belongings and headed for a rather generous foxhole near our tent.

Total darkness prevailed, and the night turned deathly still. After what seemed to be an eternity, all of the guns on the island went into action. Tracers lit up the area. Shortly, one bomber, a Betty, was plunging into the Pacific. Another came down in the center of the island.

After a short while, there was complete silence again with the darkness. Our wait in the hole seemed long, and the suggestion that we return to our tent was agreed upon. "Yes, it must be all over," brought no disagreement.

We lay fully clothed on our cots. With the volcanic ash radiating considerable heat, the suggestion that we get out of our clothes was met with acceptance. No sooner had we done this than the sirens blared unmercifully again. Wearing just what we had on, we made another mad dash for the foxhole. As we headed for the hole, the entire area lit up. Needless to say, we were not aware that this blast of the siren was the "all clear" signal. Naturally we were all embarrassed, but we did spend some time laughing at ourselves.

Date of event: 12 April 1944
Written by: John J. Velie
Subject: Hot Meal over the Atlantic? Well, No

We were at Gander Bay, Newfoundland, headed for Marrakech, Africa. I was aboard with Maj. Roberts' crew as a bombardier-navigator although I had not yet been assigned to any crew. Before takeoff I was assigned the job of seeing that a large container containing our meals for the flight over the Atlantic was properly placed aboard and connected to the heating system. The unit had several pull-out trays containing individual servings which could be heated up when wanted. Over the Atlantic, we had a tremendous tailwind--200 knots--so Maj. Roberts headed for Marrakech. We had been flying for many hours since leaving Newfoundland with little to eat except a cold sandwich and some candy bars. Maj. Roberts directed me to heat up our meals. In about an hour the light on the food container indicated that the meals were hot and ready for eating. I pulled out one tray, then two, then all twelve. All were empty. The unit had been delivered and loaded onto our plane, but without food in the trays. It was not my fault, of course, but still the guys were a bit upset with me. I wasn't too happy either knowing it would be several more hours before we would have a meal at Marrakech.

Editor's Postscripts: Please send us your memories--any story you believe worth telling. Send to: William A. Rooney, 517½ Ridge Road, Wilmette, IL 60091.

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517½ Ridge Road, Wilmette, IL 60091