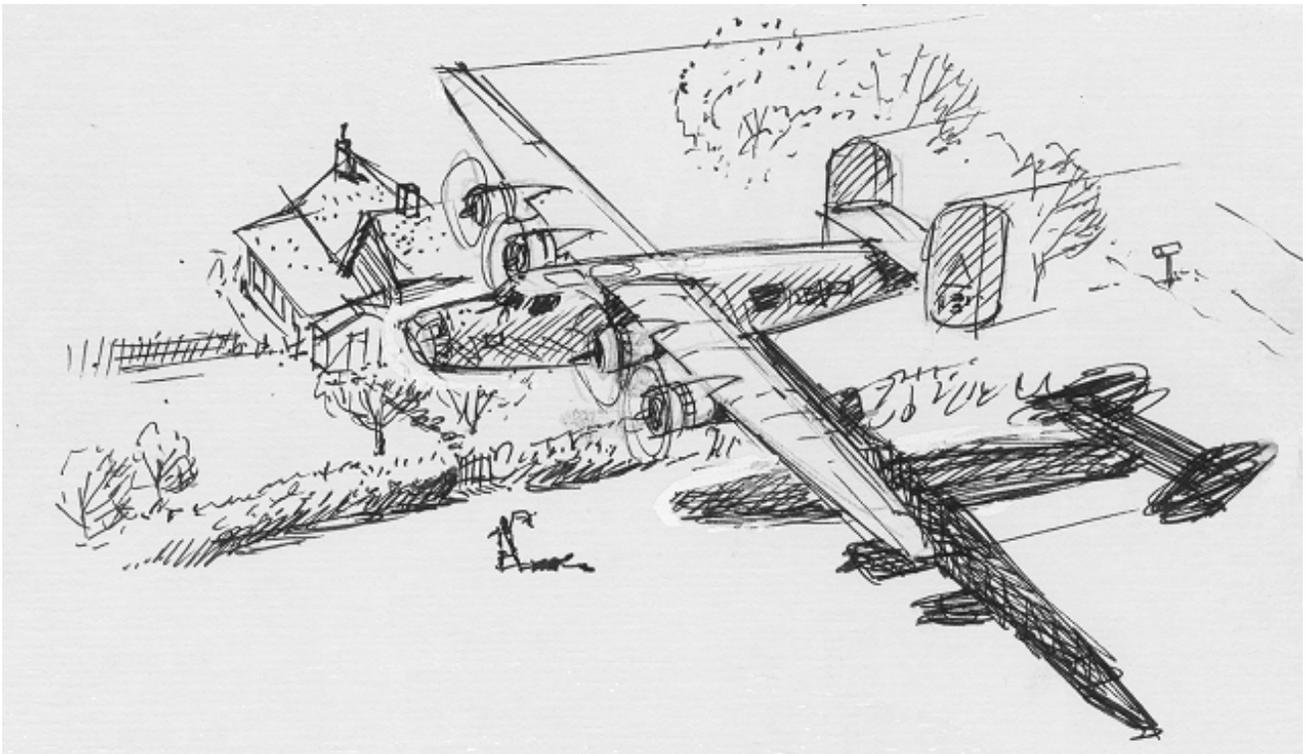


A BRIEF VISIT HOME, 1944

One bright summer morning in 1944 there came an opportunity to make an unauthorized visit home in a B-24 Liberator bomber. As the pilot-in-command I gave my “passengers” a sales pitch and they agreed to keep their mouths shut in exchange for a little adventure.

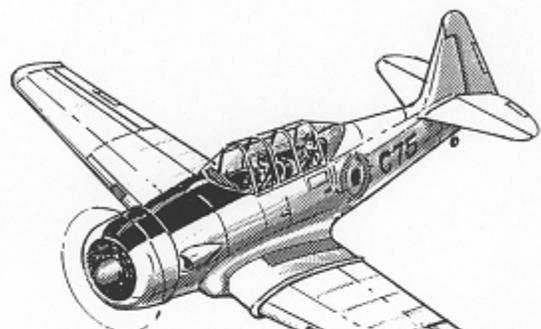


Aircraft referred to in this story



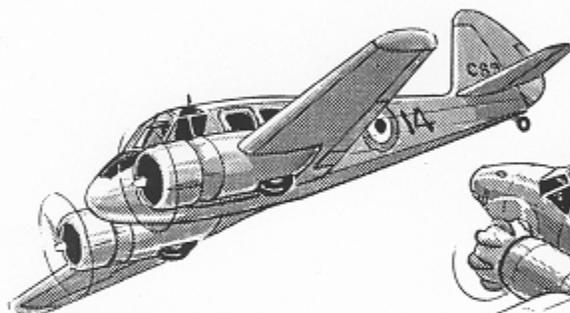
Tiger Moth

Wingspan: 29' 4" (8.9 m)
Engine: Gypsy Major, 130 h.p.
G. Wt.: 1,770 lbs (804.5 k)



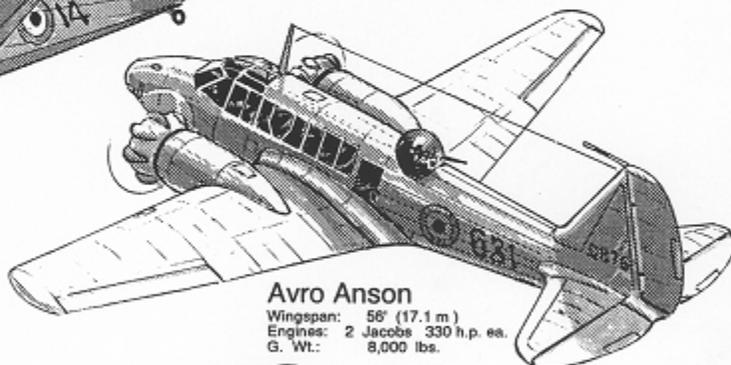
Harvard (Canadian name)
At-6 Texan (U.S. Army)

Wingspan: 42' (12.8 m)
Engine: Wasp Radial, 600 h.p.
G. Wt.: 5,300 lbs (2409.1 k)



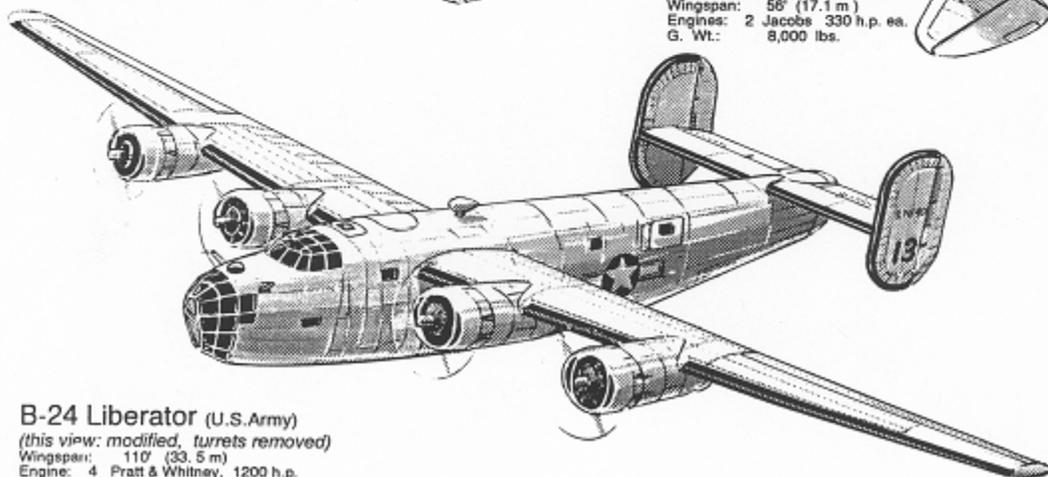
"Bobcat" (Cessna)

UC-78 (U.S. Army)
Wingspan: 41' 11" (12.8 m)
Engine: 2 Jacob, 245 h.p.
G. Wt.: 5,300 lbs. (3636.4 k)



Avro Anson

Wingspan: 56' (17.1 m)
Engines: 2 Jacobs 330 h.p. ea.
G. Wt.: 8,000 lbs.



B-24 Liberator (U.S. Army)

(this view: modified, turrets removed)
Wingspan: 110' (33.5 m)
Engine: 4 Pratt & Whitney, 1200 h.p.
G. Wt.: 65,000 lbs (29545.5 k)

At the sound of a distant rumble, Lena paused washing dishes to listen. She recognized the familiar sound of an airplane, but it was somewhat different this time. During the past four years she had become accustomed to the sounds of single and twin engine 'visiting' military aircraft from Canada. This time it was unlike any engine sound she had heard before--different even from the sound of a formation of aircraft. It had to be some kind of airplane she hadn't seen. A sudden thought came to her mind--by some motherly instinct, she knew her son was coming home for a visit in that B-24 bomber he had written home about. She flung the dishrag splashing into the dishpan, grabbed a towel, and ran outdoors. She hurried down the flagstone path through the lilacs, then stood in the driveway where she could get a view of the sky in all directions. Lena's hopes were dashed. The sound seemed to be coming from the north--Canada. She felt a surge of disappointment because this is the opposite direction from Lowry Field, Denver, where her son in the Army Air Corps is stationed. Nevertheless, since she was now outside she waited to see whatever the strange aircraft might be.

1940

*In great haste, following the Battle of Britain, the RAP, as well as the RCAF, began building training fields for aircrew training in Canada. Many of these fields were within seventy-five miles of our farm. As early as 1940 we began to receive aerial visits by 'crazy' Canadian pilots flying DeHavilland Tiger Moth biplane trainers. This was to be expected. The easily recognized Turtle Mountains, the highway crossing the border with its Canadian customs office made it an identifiable turnpoint for navigation training. Also, to the young lads from England, it was something to write home about... **"Dear Mum: Today I flew across the American border and paid some Yank farmer a surprise visit..."** Since our farm was only a short distance from the customs office, one of those farms frequently visited was ours.*

The first time a Tiger Moth came to our farm I had been in the blacksmith shop and heard it roar over. I ran outside in time to see it pulling up in a gentle climb as the pilot rocked his wings "hello." To a seventeen-year-old farm boy, the sight of that agile yellow biplane buzzing our farm made my heart yearn to be a pilot. As a show-off gesture he made a beautiful slow-roll¹. Then, wings flashing sunlight, the little plane banked into a turn. Then I noticed Mom standing beside me. She too had come outside to see the show. Again the plane came toward its appreciative audience of two. This time the pilot made a slow pass giving us a "so-long" friendly wave and swung again to the north from whence he had come.

What before had been but a yearning, the visit fanned the already smoldering embers of my passion to become a pilot into a raging fire. As the little plane disappeared into the blue void of the northern sky, an important decision became clear to me. I would

just have to overcome my scholastic deficiencies and perhaps someday--miracle of miracles--I could play in the sky as well.

Considering the lack of family wealth, my only option to escape the farm and become a flier was the military. Then again, An older town-guy had said the only use the U.S. Army had for a dumb farm boy was for service in the mud-slogging infantry. The thought of being a private in the infantry made me shudder.

The biggest problem was that my mother, concerned about the inevitable involvement of the United States in the coming war, was paranoid about my going into the service. Even a Boy Scout uniform seemed ominous to her.

From the time Hitler had taken over control of Germany in 1934, Lena knew from the ranting speeches of "Der Fuhrer" that another terrible war was coming. In her mind, her son would be of just the right age when it came. The thought frightened her that I would be in it and get killed in some muddy trench. She expressed these concerns at the end of every newscast of things happening in Europe. In her raging heart she knew Hitler and Mussolini had to be stopped. She dreaded the oncoming war and what it would mean. All the older folks remembered the Great War of 1914-1918 and the losses it brought in men killed or crippled. My uncle Monte Woods, married to Aunt Ann, had been there in the worst of it, as an officer in the trenches. He knew best of all.

In my mind, my mother was probably right about the coming war and America soon being in it. I had mixed emotions. On one hand, being a mud-soaked soldier dying from mustard gas or hanging bullet-ridden on a barbed wire entanglement didn't appeal to me. On the other hand, the military, whether Navy or Army, was my only hope of learning to fly--to hell with the risk of being shot down in flames. There was one big catch. That was the requirement to qualify for acceptance into the Air Corps or Naval Aviation for pilot training--two years of college--minimum. The junior college in Bottineau, The North Dakota School of Forestry, could provide those minimum requirements. This time I didn't argue about going to school. In September I began college.

Even the School of Forestry wasn't immune to the buzz-job visits by Canadian pilots. The act of flying low and showing off over a small town or your girlfriend's house was an act subject to court martial or other punishment as much in Canada as with U.S. pilots. This apparently was no deterrent. The type of person willing to risk his neck in learning to fly would be very likely willing to bend the rules and risk dealing with a mere gravel-gripping officer authority later.

The aerial visits lasted only a moment. Most of the time I would be stuck in the classroom and miss the excitement. Once in a while I would be lucky enough to be outside when the buzz-job occurred. The planes weren't just slow moving Moth biplanes anymore. Now came Avro Anson twin engine bomber trainers, single engine Harvard

advanced trainers, (*The familiar American AT-6, in Canadian colors*), and on one occasion, a plane very much resembling the twin-engine American built Cessna Bobcat, (*Air Corps designation-UC-78*). This plane came roaring overhead, at grain elevator altitude, at balls-out throttle. Then, just as he passed the high school, he pulled up into a gentle climb executing the traditional slow roll. A verrry slooww roll. Very impressive and superb job of flying--also very risky. This type of plane wasn't rigged for the stresses of aerobatics. By now, I knew enough about military aircraft to know that the Bobcat was not designed for inverted flight. Only the Harvard was stressed for aerobatic maneuvers, but these pilots were already risking punishment in what they were doing--so adding a little more risk to the list--what the hell. As they came over town, all these planes would make only one quick pass in the hope that no zealous citizen or official would have time to take the aircraft's number and turn it in to the authorities. We couldn't fairly say that it was just crazy Canadians that performed these entertaining antics. Some of the lads were just as likely to be from England.

America Declares War!

One would have to be an alien from another planet not to know about Dec. 7, 1941 and Pearl Harbor. I was home on the farm for the weekend when the news came over the radio. America was suddenly officially at war. Lena was furious at the sneak attack. My dad didn't say anything, but I could see that he was deeply disturbed. In her loyalty to the U.S. Mom was torn between teaching those sneaky 'Japs' and evil German war mongers a lesson, and her fears about my being in the war and getting killed. Lena was a very upset woman. As for me, I wondered if the Army Air Corps or Navy might be desperate enough for volunteers to accept a farm boy for flight training.

Perhaps not just myself, but several young men in our county had been inspired by the aerobatic displays by our Canadian friends. A great number of them soon chose to enlist in the Air Corps. However, I had another year of college to go to be eligible.

As for the activity of our fliers across the border, the buzzing visits came to a gradual halt in the summer of 1942. The daring aviators had discovered a new thing to do with their planes--"forced landings." It started with a genuine forced landing at the Bottineau airport. Engine trouble had caused the aviators to land their Avro Anson at the small airfield north of town. The field was too small and some minor damage was incurred.

The Canadian repair crew came and in a few days had fixed 'the problem.' In the meantime, the dashing aviators had met some local girls. Awed by the uniforms, elan, and charm of the handsome young men--what girl could resist? The aircrew must have had a very fine time. Word across the border had spread through the ranks. There followed some more "forced landings" in the vicinity. This too, soon came to an end. The RCAF would pick up the crew immediately after the incident and return them to

Canada. This spoiled their fun. There was one last “forced landing” at Bottineau. Perhaps this particular one also helped put an end to their adventuring.

A few other Forestry students and I had a job for the summer. This, our first government desk job, was calculating farm acreage from aerial photographs and on-field-measured maps for the AAA government office in Bottineau. Farmers were not allowed to exceed the allotted acres for planting or lose their Agricultural Adjustment payment. Rarely did we find that a farmer had exceeded his allotted acreage, but they seemed always to be within a frog’s hair of penalty.

One day a fellow worker, Raymond Hanson, who had been calculating the acreage on my father’s farm, jokingly yelled at me to say that my father had been farming three acres in Canada! It was not a deliberate misdeed on my dad’s part. The Canadian border wasn’t all that clearly defined and the north side of Jake’s field bowed into Canada. The ‘stolen’ acres belonged to Harry Morrison, our Canadian neighbor. Raymond said that from the kindness of his heart he wouldn’t turn my father in to the authorities. He added that all things considered, he couldn’t count farming in foreign countries anyway.

Across the street from our office was a blacksmith’s shop. The normal sound of the smith beating a plowshare into forged sharpness sounded like the lead-in to the Anvil Chorus by Giuseppe Verdi. However, one afternoon there came the unmistakable sound of an Avro Anson. We looked out the window of our second-story office and saw the twin engine plane making a slow pass as if it was intending to land. Strangely enough, either the pilot didn’t see the airport or chose to ignore it. We all voiced an opinion, “Why doesn’t he head for the airport?”

For whatever reason, his landing site turned out to be very badly chosen. We could see that in his final approach he had lined up for a landing in some field south of town. The landing gear remained retracted. This looked like real trouble. We couldn’t see the actual landing because of trees and buildings blocking our view. This was too much for me to miss. Responsibility to my job ignored, I left my desk and headed outside to discover what had happened to the plane. It would be a long run to the location of the landing. Running on the way to the site I overtook a student nurse that I knew. She had just happened to be at that end of town visiting someone. Since she was very pretty I stopped running to walk with her. By the time we got to the crash scene, the crew had already been picked up.

No one apparently had been seriously hurt but the crash site was amusing in a disgusting sort of way. It had been a day of intermittent rain showers. The barley field that the pilot had selected for his landing was wet and the knee-high barley had been slippery as snow. The aircraft, wheels up, had slid like a toboggan across the field, through a barbed wire fence, across a small pasture and into the foul-smelling Oak Creek settling pond of Bottineau’s sewage system. There, plunk in the middle of the reeking foul pond, sat the Avro Anson--about four feet deep in sewage. Through the ample side

windows of the plane could be seen, hanging neatly on hangers behind the cockpit, dress uniforms appropriate to dazzle local damsels. The bottom part of the uniforms was soaking up all that 'stuff,' to put it politely.

There were no more 'forced landings' after that. Mentally I made a note that if I were ever to become a pilot, I would be very careful in selecting a field for a forced landing if the need should ever arise.

As the only son of a farmer, I knew that I probably could avoid the draft. I would also miss my only chance of joining that most esteemed awesome, wonderful legion of professionals--a pilot. So when I finished my required two years of college, I enlisted in the Army Aviation Cadet program. My mother's dismay was very apparent.

Supposedly these stories are about life in the Turtle Mountains, not my military career. However, a little background is necessary to understand how I could make an unauthorized visit home which will involve the local folk's back home. Admittedly the event was a stupid thing to do. However, as you already know, maturity, and responsibility develops late in some people.

Because so many men had enlisted, I wasn't called up right away so I continued college by going to the University of North Dakota, Grand Forks. There I waited for the orders to begin my service. The orders came in Feb. 1943.

Nearly every hopeful young man wanted to be a pilot. Only a few would choose to be a navigator, bombardier, or another aircrew skill. There had been too many volunteers, so the weeding process began early. Anyone weeded out had to go into the infantry. This was a depressing blow to the man who had hoped to become a pilot or other aircrew flyer. Even so, accepted cadets first had to go through the whole miserable torture of basic infantry training.

After completing basic infantry training I expected to start pilot training. It turned out that so many men had volunteered for the aviation cadet corps there was an overload waiting to start flight training. So believe it or not, despite the fact that I had already finished my two years, the Army sent me back to college again. Another six months down the tube in special college training for cadets in St. Louis, MO. This was to be followed by another three-month delay at ground school at Brown Field, San Antonio. Finally, Pilot Training.

Because of the many applicants, only a few would make it all the way through to becoming a pilot. Due to the surplus of applicants, we were told that the odds would be rough at the very beginning. The prospect was even worse than we were told. In general, here is a rough accounting of the washout rate on the way to receiving pilot wings. Of a sample thousand volunteers, the cadets in Class 44C, that went through the same various schools and training fields I did, only about sixty-five would have the silver wings pinned on their lieutenant's blouse. A 6.5% chance of success is damn poor odds.

Despite a very close call of washing out due to airsickness, by some miracle I made it through Primary (80% washout rate) and Basic flight training. (20% washout rate) The next step would be Advanced, (10% washout rate)

Aerobatics was my strong suit, so after Primary and Basic training I was given a choice of becoming a fighter pilot or bomber pilot. Considering my getting this far despite the odds, I felt my incredible luck might just continue to hold and that I might even survive the war. The decision was difficult. Flying a nimble fighter appealed strongly to me. However, being raised by parents determined that I become a responsible wage, earning citizen and Lutheran had made a strong impression on me. After all, I had to consider the future. That is, if I had a future. Flying a fighter would perhaps be considered frivolous. Being a multi-engine pilot would give me a big advantage in getting a job flying a commercial airliner after the war was over. Responsibility being more important than frivolity, I therefore asked for bomber pilot training in Advanced and got it. The aircraft I would train in was the UC78--the same kind of plane I had seen doing a slow-roll over my hometown!

After successfully completing Advanced I was converted from being a mere cadet to the status of "Officer and a Gentleman." Big deal. The biggest achievement of my life happened when the coveted silver wings were pinned on my newly purchased uniform blouse. To me, the lieutenant's bars were ho-hum and incidental.

Winning one's wings was not the end of flight training. The next step was transition to heavy bombers. B-29's were almost secret aircraft and no fresh lieutenant would be training in those, so I opted for B-24 training, only because it was bigger than the B-17. My choice was honored. To B-24's I would go. The B-24 was a four-engine bomber weighing about 60,000 lbs. It had long slender wings, a huge double rudder and had a very boxy looking fuselage. All pilots assumed that it would be a clumsy clunk of a plane to fly and it was at first. Yet, when a pilot had a great number of hours in this bird and overcame inhibitions about being gentle as with normal aircraft, it could be a real tiger.

B-24 Transition and an Unusual Instructor

At Liberal, Kansas, A fellow student pilot, O'Brien and I were assigned to a maverick, aeronautically gifted, flight instructor, one of the best pilots I have ever encountered. (*Damn! I wish I could remember his name.*) He taught us to do things in a B-24 that can't be done in a heavy four engine, lumbering B-24. Somehow he could get that big sucker 5000' feet higher than its supposed maximum ceiling of 28,000'. He taught us how to hold altitude with three engines out. On takeoff he would pull three throttles off. With only one engine churning, we swept miles of Kansas grain fields at about fifty feet of altitude. Aerodynamically, we were flying in ground cushion effects.

In formation flying he demanded we would get so close and hold steady, that the lead pilot would be having sweaty white knuckles on the control column. We did landings more befitting an aerobatic airplane than an otherwise clumsy brute of a bomber. We did forward slip, sideslip, short field landings, including a hair-raising maneuver he called the power off, overshoot, short field landing. Before he demonstrated this frightening approach and landing he had said, "Suppose just as you get back to your airfield and your last engine quits, there are clouds at pattern altitude, you spot the end of the runway through a hole in the clouds...you have no chance of a normal approach...what will you do? I'll show you."

Our instructor called the tower and told them he was going to make a high approach landing and entered the traffic pattern at normal altitude. He put the landing gear down and ten degrees of flaps. On the base leg he did not begin a let down but maintained altitude. Then he turned on what should have been a normal final approach to landing. In my mind it was impossible to land anywhere on the airport runway from our present altitude. The nose of our fuselage hid the sight of the end of the runway. At that point he cut the throttles of the engine back to idle and dumped the flaps to full down. Perhaps a single-engine fighter could have spiraled down. We weren't in an agile aircraft. What followed next seemed totally insane.

With the four windmilling propellers now acting as powerful air brakes what does he do but pull the nose up to a full stall position! The plane stalls and the nose plunges down. It will require at least 600' to recover and it appears to me that we are going to plow directly into the ground short of the runway. At just the right moment, having regained flying speed, he flares out in a graceful pullout just in time to make a feather-light touchdown on the end of the runway. We haven't used but a quarter of the runway and turn off at the first taxi strip. He says that tomorrow he will teach us how do this landing. My student buddy and I noted that the other guys didn't have to do these wild stunts.

In addition to strange emergency landings, he demonstrated every other kind of emergency that could happen and how to deal with it. He taught something else. He said that there were a lot of things he couldn't demonstrate in the air, but we could imagine. For example, he said, "Imagine that Number 3 engine has just been blown off your wing by anti-aircraft. Imagine the steps you would do to save the ship. Your brain will file such information for use later. You won't really ever forget it. When the time comes, if such trouble should occur, instead of being immobilized by panic you will do the right things to save 'er'." *Later his words proved to be correct, but that's another story that doesn't belong here.*

One day, as we were nearing the end of our training, he took my buddy pilot and me aside to where no one else could hear his confidential and cautioning words. Words, which are particularly, appropriate to the rest of my story.

“Misters, (ahem), ‘gentlemen’...as you know, having been told many times, buzzing your girl friend’s house or beating up your home town is not only frowned upon, but strictly forbidden.”

“Yes – sir!”

“Such an offense, if you were caught, would lead to severe punishment – perhaps even court martial and loss of rank. What’s more important, there is the risk of aircraft loss, the unwarranted frightening of civilians and disturbing the general peace. Furthermore – in addition to what I have just said about the official consequences, it is my opinion that no rational, sane, responsible pilot would ever do such a thing in the first place. Since none of you two brainless idiots fit that category, I feel it is my responsibility – in order to prevent future costly aircraft loss, that I must give you verbal instructions about how to do low-level flying in the safest possible manner.”

We hung on his every word. We knew he was an expert on the subject. Didn’t he, on our first indoctrination ride in the B-24, fly down the length of the Grand Canyon at about two hundred feet above the turbid water of the Colorado? Didn’t he say that he knew where to make those violent banking turns because he, as a young man, was still one of those few men to have gone down that turbulent river in a boat? We nodded at each other in appreciation of his expertise. He went on revealing the details of a forbidden buzz job.

“Never buzz on a sudden impulse. The flight must be planned like any other mission. First check your aeronautical chart and note the heights of any local obstacles – radio antennas, lookout towers or local peaks. Expect the unexpected. A new tower may have been erected since the printing of the chart. Use your f...ing Goddam eyes! One of the dumb things stupid pilots do is to back off on the throttles to have more time to view the scene below. The airspeed drops and the moron stalls-in with no chance to recover.”

My fellow student and I were spellbound at his wealth of logical information. Low flying was obviously an art filled with potholes of potential disaster. As for subconsciously reducing throttle, he explained that this is a psychological response to be aware of. “At high altitude the ground appears to be moving slowly. At low altitude the ground appears to be moving swiftly and the idiot pilot unconsciously reduces airspeed.” To prevent this, he said to lock your throttles at cruise velocity. For the B-24, he recommended 165 MPH. Set flaps at ten degrees for max. aileron response...etc.

He covered all the fine points of buzzing which may never had occurred to O’Brien or me. When he had finished, these are the instructions he gave in closing, “Just remember what I told you – never, I repeat, buzz your girlfriend’s house. Her father might just be smart enough to copy a number to identify your plane.”

1944 Lowry Field, Denver

For some reason that I never found out, I was one of four people from the Liberal,

Kansas group of pilots finishing transition not to be sent overseas. Instead, I was sent to Lowry Field, Denver, to be an instructor pilot. As it turned out, I was more often an odd-jobs pilot. One day I would be flying an indoctrination flight for a bunch of disgruntled ex-fighter pilots. Next would be flying a cargo version of the B-24 (C-87) converted to B-29 flight engineer training. (*Installed in this aircraft was six complete B29 flight-engineer control panels.*) Once, I even picked up a load of beer in Texas for the officers club in Liberal, **dry**-Kansas. Some of these flights would be boring. For example, the six-hour milk run to Rapid City, South Dakota then Billings, Montana and return. "Deac" Evans, a buddy fellow pilot, sometimes had to fly the same dull run. I don't know who thought of it, but we discovered we could spice that trip up by a low fly-by of Mt. Rushmore. Whoever we had on board always seemed to enjoy the quick fly-by of the granite faces of Washington, Jefferson, T. Roosevelt, and Lincoln. They always promised to keep mum in appreciation of our tour. Certainly we had to devise careful schemes to avoid getting caught by wary eyes and binoculars on the part of some ranger. To avoid being heard until it was too late, we had to come in with minimum noise. From considerable altitude we would glide in, engines idling with cowl flaps closed to keep the engines warm. At the right moment we'd open the throttles and roar by at low altitude. It was good training for my trip home to the Turtle Mountains.

Most of the B-24's at Lowry field had seen service overseas or somewhere else. They had been returned for modification, which meant that gun-turrets had been removed and the holes neatly faired over with aluminum skin. Bombsights, spare radio gear, etc.--any equipment not required for combat was taken out. As a result, the aircraft was tons lighter and flew faster. The lighter plane with four 1200 hp. Pratt and Whitney engines could climb like a P-47 Thunderbolt. A hopped-up ship was a condition we frequently took advantage of. Often we would rendezvous and fly in very close formation just for the fun of it.

Visit Opportunity Taken, Exact Date Forgotten

Arriving at flight operations one early morning I picked up my flight assignment. It was to be the milk run to Billings with a mixed bunch of men, mostly combat veterans back for reassignment. The only person I had flown with before was "Packrat," my favorite crew chief. He had a useful habit of collecting small spare parts, which he had scrounged and always carried with him in his tool kit. Somehow this was comforting, though I admit I was a little hard pressed as to how he planned to repair a plane in mid flight. When asked, his standard answer was, "Well, you never know, we might have to land at some dumb field in Nebraska or sum'pin."

My copilot was an ex-fighter pilot who was mad as hell that he had been relegated to flying in an ugly boxcar of a plane. He made no bones about saying that he would be

ashamed to have any of his flying fighter buddies see him in it. It was my job to indoctrinate him. That I would. His attitude burned me. In reality, the copilot's duties were simple and could be performed very well by Packrat, the crew chief.

Two of the men were navigators who were just going up to earn their four hours flight time to collect flight pay. There was also a bombardier, a radio operator and a couple gunners, all getting their indoctrination flights. Why they need indoctrination flights I didn't know. A B-24 wasn't all that functionally different from a B-17. Another reason for the flight, a new engine had recently been installed and needed a checkout. With this mixed and motley crew the situation was ripe for my planned change of mission. One I would wait to explain when we were out at the plane.

Following the advice of my instructor at Liberal, I had planned ahead. I had rehearsed my speech several times before I presented it.

"Gentlemen – today, as you know, we are scheduled to go on the milk run to Billings. "Plan A." We can do this and it will be very boring. However, if you would like to have a more enjoyable and exciting trip, including a visit to Mt. Rushmore, I can deviate from the official plan. If you would like the deviation that I will propose – I want your word that what we do on this flight will be kept confidential." Not too surprising, they approved "Plan B."

"Navigators, I suspect that you already have in your flight cases the well-worn route to Billings. As an exercise to hone your navigation skills, you may keep track of where I've taken you today. If you are correct I'll give you top grades on the course of where we supposedly went on the way to Billings. Here are two charts you probably don't have in your flight case. (The Minot sectionals) The first leg to Rapid City, South Dakota, remains the same."

According to the milk run, the first leg to Rapid City was a 313-mile flight on a true course of 16.1 degrees. The second leg to Billings a 283-mile flight. Course 296.4 degrees. My proposed change: the second leg to Bottineau would be 82 miles further. 365 miles at 17.3 degrees. By pushing the throttle a nudge. I could make up the time difference and arrive back at Denver precisely on schedule. The flight would take 6.8 hours.

At 11,500 feet mean sea level we were approaching the first scenic tour flight, the Mt. Rushmore fly-by. I eased the throttles back and closed the cowl flaps to keep the engines warm at idle. The silent gliding approach began. The little mountain and its faces became visible in the down distance. On the flight deck, the waist opening and in the windowed nose of the navigator/bombardier deck everyone watched the approaching sculpture. My ship's numbers were painted on the sides of the fuselage and rudder. By going directly over the ranger station, it would be unlikely that a ranger could get my number. If I came in silently he wouldn't even have time to focus his binoculars if he had them. I kept the nose pointed down in the direction of the tourist center and ranger

station. Airspeed 180. At just the right time, I eased the throttles forward again to full power and roared by the faces at the altitude of Washington's chin. The sight was appreciated by my passengers. Cowl flaps reopened, engines at climb power we climbed back to altitude and set the new course for Bottineau and my farm home on the Canadian border.

On the way to Bottineau I had a new idea--a dumb one. Completely forgetting the importance of remaining anonymous I thought it would be nice to drop a friendly note to Leonard Berg, the editor of the BOTTINEAU COURANT. In my School Of Forestry years, as a friendly gesture he had kindly loaned me his Speed Graphic press camera a few times to take home to the farm on weekends.

I called Packrat to the flight deck. I told him I wanted to drop a message that I would write to a friend. What I needed was something that would be more visible than a mere sheet of paper that would flutter away in the wind. He went to his scrounge kit and returned with a red mechanic's rag. This too, I thought might be too light and drift away unseen. He came back with a big 5/8" steel nut for a weight. I wrote the note and wrapped it around the nut, but I needed something to secure it. Again back to his trusty tool kit and he came with a short piece of wire. That wrapped around the folded cloth in the corner of the rag secured the note.

There would be no need to sneak up on Bottineau since there would be no National Rangers with notebook in hand. Halfway beyond Minot, N.D., I began the standard letdown, maintaining a 190-MPH airspeed. As Liberal instructor had advised to do on a forbidden buzz job, five miles from my hometown we leveled off at about 300' above the ground and reduced the speed to 165, put down 10 degrees flaps and locked the throttles. The town came into sight. It looked better from the air than I expected. It appeared as a pretty, very orderly, small town. White painted homes, clean business buildings, and colorful grain elevators sparkled in the sunlight near the foothills of the Turtle Mountains. Soon the town slipped below us. We roared overhead, rocking the wings as a "hello" gesture and continued in a gentle climb to clear the forests of the hills rising ahead. We didn't drop the note on that pass. First, I revisited the irregular goofy shaped lake of my youth, Metigoshe. Then a sweeping turn into Canada to pay back earlier visits from the Canadian pilots and now, on to the farm. Three minutes to home.

To my left, familiar scenes flashed by below. Still over Canadian soil I headed for Lloyd Stewart's farm, my folk's neighbor immediately north of our farm. Following my flight plan, just before his place, I would turn for my home. Hoping that my folks would be home I dropped lower--to about a hundred feet, less than the wingspan of a B-24. Our farm was just ten seconds ahead. The trees of the windbreak, the white house, red-painted outbuildings, and barn rushed toward me. There, in the driveway by the lilacs was my mother. She was wearing a blue and white patterned housedress. I had expected to see her in overalls and that white cotton jacket she liked to wear. But where

was Dad? Where was Carl? As I thundered by overhead, Mom waved her towel.

No slow-roll was prudent in this big bird so I pulled up, made a tight circle over our pasture of startled cows. Then I began another pass from the opposite direction. Again Lena waved wildly, almost dancing. Even in a steep bank at low altitude, my turn carried me across the border again over Harry Morrison's farm. Then I headed for Arnold's, my brother-in-law's place, less than a minute away.

Wunderlich's farm was at the end of a ravine going into the hills of the Turtle Mountains. When we got there, Arnold was standing in the farmyard as I headed up the tree filled narrow ravine. I could see his upturned astonished face as we sped overhead. Some crewmember, looking backward through the waist window, yelled over the intercom that I had scared the hell out of a bunch of flapping chickens. The down wash from the plane had kicked up a maelstrom of dust, straw, and Leghorns around Arnold. I hadn't seen my sister Eva. Damn! I hoped she hadn't missed my visit. (To my disappointment, I learned later that she had.)

After swooping up out of the ravine, I made a gentle turn over the hills to head for another run at Bottineau, I cracked open the bomb bay doors about a foot in preparation for the message drop in my return pass over my hometown. In the meantime the intercom was busy with guys talking. They were spotting frightened deer running in the open glades of the forest.

"This must be great huntin' country!"

"Jeeze...lookit all the little lakes... How's fishin' up here about's?" I didn't have time to answer just then.

Three minutes to Bottineau. Following the north hill road which lines up with Mainstreet, I motioned to Packrat to come closer to where I could tell him to get ready to drop. He wasn't wearing a headset. Standing slightly behind my seat, he leaned closer to hear as I shouted instructions. Unlike stupid Hollywood movies where aircrews have almost normal communication, World War II aircraft interiors were as noisy as boiler factories filled with demented workmen swinging sledgehammers.

"Stand in the flight deck well and throw the rag out when I turn and yell **now!**" With my hands busy on the controls, I couldn't just signal with a wave of the arm. Despite the engine noise he may hear me. At least he could see my mouth open. It was my hope that someone in town would see the dropping rag, find it, and deliver it to Mr. Berg. Considering our speed, using the verbal signal and response, I felt we would be damn lucky to get the message down within a half mile of the intended target--the newspaper office.

Packrat opened the flightdeck hatch and was already in place and poised ready to throw the message through the slightly open bomb bay doors. I lined up on Main Street for the final run. It would be five seconds to drop-time after passing the grandstand at the county fairgrounds. This time I brought the plane down to a level, which would be

slightly below, but easily bypass the top of the highest obstacle, the town water tower. We were a mile away from the drop. My 'fighter-pilot' copilot looked very nervous. Good! He had complained that he had been missing excitement. This was good for his soul.

The fairgrounds slipped by. The street, directly below, was obscured by the long nose of the plane. By counting seconds without looking at my watch the moment to drop would still be a guess – 5-4-3 – I turned my head and yelled “**NOW!**”

Packrat dropped the message. I unlocked the throttles, opened them to max climb RPM, changed pitch and boosted the boosters. At the same time I flicked the switch to close the bomb bay doors and rocked my wings from side to side as a farewell greeting. Then we made a steep climbing circle over town before departing on our return to Denver. To give our navigators a chance to exercise their skills I had requested our return course. Once on the proper compass heading I gave my cocky copilot the controls for the whole distance back. Occasional turbulence kept it from being too boring. There were times he had to battle the controls, as I yelled at him to “Godammit stay on course.” Control forces on the B-24s were not light and it took considerable effort to maintain a precise heading in rough weather. He soon learned not to be timid with the control column and rudder pedals for the big double barndoor rudders.

By flying a straight-line return, we got back to Lowry Field at the proper time equaling a flight to Billings. As usual, a number of B-24s were also returning from their flights. The landing sequence was supposed to be established by the control tower but when too many aircraft returned at once, the tower tended to just give up and let the airborne pilots sort it out by playing “chicken” and with sneaky maneuvering. This time was no exception. Gear down and 30° flaps set, I turned onto the base leg of the traffic pattern. Then I saw an extra B-24 who was dragging in on a long approach. That SOB would cut out my final and I'd have to go around again...unless? ... Yeah, there was a way to land behind the interloper. Better yet, here was an excellent opportunity for my copilot to experience a power-off, over-shoot, short-field landing. I informed my crew and passengers by intercom to strap-down and hang-on for an unusual but safe landing.

First we had to slow down to allow enough time for the plane on final to get ahead of us, so I throttled back. By maintaining altitude at reduced power the airspeed would drop off; however we would also be too high for a normal approach. As we turned onto final I turned to my fighter pilot in the right hand seat and loudly told him not to panic or try to take over the controls at any time. He looked quizzical, but pretended to be nonchalant. The other plane had cleared the end of the runway. Good time for special handling, an intentional stall on final approach to get rid of a lot of altitude in a hurry--back the throttles to idle, dump full flaps and pull the nose up. The propellers of the idling engines quickly become four big windmilling airbrakes. We can feel the forward surge in our seats as we rapidly lose our speed. It doesn't take but a few seconds

to full stall, then the nose plunges downward, pointing at the trash dump at the edge of the airfield. What my colleague in the right hand seat yells as we plunge vertically is not fit for print. We are plummeting like a sash weight, his hands grip his seat, a real case of 'white knuckles.' Timing is critical. Airspeed regained, I ease the control column back to flare out. We are still a hundred feet high, perfect--the intended height-cushion for safety. Now a hard forward slip to quickly get rid of excess altitude and simultaneously slow down. It takes a lot of leg force on the rudder pedals to slip a '24. The boxcar fuselage sides create a hell of a lot of drag, the airspeed quickly approaches stall just as we clear the edge of the runway with five feet height to spare. The big bird responds beautifully as I kick her into alignment on the yellow line. Luckily, the touchdown can hardly be felt, a grease-job. We easily turn off on the first taxiway and have our ship parked before the B-24 who had been ahead of us has been able to return to the parking ramp.

Walking back from the parked airplane, everybody said they had had a good time but admitted to being a little shaky from the 'interesting' landing. One of the men told me he was going to write home and tell his folks that he had 'visited' Canada. This made me recall that first visit by a Canadian Tiger Moth. Wondering what my hotshot copilot was thinking I glanced his way. His cockiness somewhat restored, he actually had a smile on his face. Referring to our modified B-24, he said, "that fat ugly turkey ain't too bad a bird at that."

A week later I got a letter from Mom. I learned that my dad, Jake, had been in his car on the way to town and had missed the flight. So had Carl. As for anyone getting my number and turning me in, I need not have bothered using all that cautious flying technique to prevent identification while buzzing as prescribed by my instructor in Liberal. **Not when I was stupid enough to drop a signed letter** . In the next issue, the message to editor Berg was boldly printed in the paper for all the world to see. Luckily, it being a small town paper, it never reached the eyes of any Air Corps officer who could raise hell with my flying career. Luck of idiots!

That was not all of my dumb luck. In the local article the editor praised the ability of the U.S. Air Corps for its "remarkable bombing accuracy." The message had landed on a shed in the alley immediately behind the COURANT office! Fifty feet east and it would have landed at the front door. He actually believed we had come this close as the result of skill at precision bombing.

- 1. A slow-roll is a seemingly simple but technically difficult maneuver in which the wings of the aircraft rotate relatively slowly about the axis of its straight-line flight path. Inverted, to coordinate the controls, the rudder must move in the opposite direction as compared when the plane is right side up. It is beautiful to watch when expertly done. At low altitude, it is also dangerous. One slip, goodbye.*