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beamed down on the blonde hair of my still beautiful wife, and created little haloes on the back lighted heads of my small grandchildren; a dozen of them flitting around as aimless as summer gnats.

We stood on the apron of the Boeing Field flight line inspecting the last flyable B-24. It was owned by the Confederate Air Force that was showing a display of World War II aircraft. My sons and their wives clucked politely as they wondered aloud how Dad could possibly have survived World War II "in that little thing. " A couple of other relics of that era, like me, were waving their arms, pointing here and there, gesticulating with wild stories about how it was back then. Their progeny, like mine, listened in amused confusion as we each spun our tales of bygone days in the wild blue yonder.

I exchanged a few courteous exaggerations with my contemporaries, gaining a depth of comradeship in a few moments that these kids of mine would probably never know. As we chatted, I heard the sounds, and smelled the powder, and saw the ghosts of my friends who slept while we lived the nearly five decades between 1944, and this moment. My memory conjured up familiar voices that screamed "There's a fire in the bomb bay!" And "Here they come at two o'clock low! They got two out of Baker flight!" And worst of all "Watts is blown to bits!" I heard the bursts of flack as the fragments pierced the skin of our fragile bird and sang past my head and body. I felt the shudder as our plane was hit again and again from the cannon fire of the Messerschmitt and Focke-Wulf fighters. I sweat again the agony of watching my comrades burn as their B-24s came apart and plunged to the earth in pieces. I feel these moments again as I write this.

"Grandpa, where did you sit?" My fifteen year old grandson asked as he peered in through the Plexiglass nose, now all weathered, cracked, and yellow.

"Right there----in the navigator's compartment." I showed him. Looking through that old plastic nose panel brought more memories as I remembered both the ecstatic, and the frenzied times I spent looking through the other side. I recalled the breathtaking starry nights as I shot the stars at high altitude on celestial training missions. I spent many hours laboring away in the small navigator's dome, just in front of the pilots' seats. My memories took me back to the air base at Pocatello, Idaho, where we took most of our combat crew training. We called the place PQ after the call letters of the control tower. Our training schedule called for us to fly six hours, sleep and eat eight hours, ground school four hours, and fly six hours. We flew twelve hours out of every twenty-four, and never once were we grounded for weather; rain, shine, or blinding blizzard. Every sixth day we had no schedule for twenty-four hours. Once we took off at night when we couldn't see our own wing tip lights. The tower couldn't see us either, but we flew nevertheless. We landed under the same conditions of course, and that was with very primitive vacuum operated flight instruments. We did three engine take offs, and were denied permission to land because we only lost one engine. That policy cost Uncle Sam some airplanes and crews, in the wild mountains of Idaho, Utah, and Wyoming. It was war time we were told, and war time is always accompanied by arbitrary, and foolhardy policies. Pocatello was where I met that gorgeous blond beauty on her twentieth birthday at a little supper club called Fred and Kelly's. I was totally smitten by her at first sight, and have remained so captivated even now as she stands beside me this day, the still beautiful, and stately matriarch of all these kids. The

few times we had together, and the happiness we shared sustained me through the hundreds of hours over enemy territory. Even as I frantically pondered over my maps and charts, trying to keep track of our position or find a target, her face crowded all my thoughts. I still see her in my mind's eye during the working day, forty-six years, and all these kids later. I mention her because she is inseparably connected with my memories of the B-24 days.

I know these scenes have played in at least a dozen movies and plays, but they are as real to me now as the days in which they happened. I was there, and maybe I'm just a little bit proud of the fact, as our numbers have dwindled to a small percentage of that elite corps who survived until the end.

The B-24 Liberator bomber was the unheralded giant of the striking force that destroyed the production of machines and oil that sustained the enemy. It remains unknown for the most part, except for the men who flew her, and the survivors of her terrible wrath. This magnificent bird flew calmly on as her sister, the Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress got most of the credit.

I don't suppose anyone cares anymore, and certainly the Boeing employees of Seattle wouldn't believe it, but there were nearly nineteen thousand B-24s built as to a little over thirteen thousand B-17's. We used to pass up the B-17 groups on our way to the targets over Europe, drop our bombs, engage enemy fighters, run through miles of flack and on the way home, meet the B17s still trudging along looking for the same target. We flew higher, faster, carried more bombs, but still the press and general public never caught on. More B-24s were built than any other World War II airplane, however, they had a reputation of being easily shot down. We got shot at, shot up, shot full of holes, (147 on one flight) crash landed, but we never got shot down.

"How did you get through that little door, Grandpa?" I remembered very clearly the first time I wormed my way into the navigator's compartment as I explained it all to them. My first flight was at night, and I'd never even been close to a B-24. The bombardier and navigator were required to stand on the flight deck behind the pilots to maintain proper balance during take off. As soon as we were airborne, we scurried into the bomb bay, then forward to the nose compartment, through a narrow passageway along side of the spinning nose wheel. A small cut in the nose wheel bulkhead allowed us to worm our way inside to the more spacious nose compartment. It housed the nose gunner in his turret, the navigator with his map table facing aft, and the bombardier in a prone position facing forward. I used to slither through that passageway like a greased eel, but then I was twenty years old, and one hundred pounds lighter. It was still a very cumbersome tight fit, dressed in heavy flying boots, sheepskin jacket and pants, electric suit, and a parachute harness. We didn't think much about it except for that first time. It was terrifying, to climb around the spinning nose wheel in the dark trying not to fall out through the open nose wheel well, and to avoid the nose wheel retraction mechanism that always seemed to close in on me just as I was trying to crawl around it. The darkness was terrifying as the wheel rubbed against my body, nearly pulling me into the open void, without my chest parachute attached. The open nose wheel doors created a deafening roar with a wind of cyclone proportions. The noise, darkness, and a possibility of falling out without my chute attached was a frightening experience that first time. The familiar green glow of my navigation instruments soon calmed my fears, and it never bothered me again.

"Oh it was easy to crawl in there." I lied. "Piece of cake."