

Chapter 18

Return to Duty

When I returned to the United States, the plane landed at Washington, D.C., and my orders were to report to intelligence at the Pentagon. I was taken to their nearby location in Virginia, where I was to present my story to a group of officers, some of them experienced personnel, some in an intelligence training program. As I walked in, they were hearing final comments from Kenneth Shaver. He immediately acknowledged me as the man who traveled with him from near Maastricht into Spain. After hearing my story, they asked us both to return to their unit after we had had our days of leave at home. We would assist them in briefing combat air crews going to the European theater of operations. Ken and I both agreed to their request and immediately left for our respective homes: Ken to see his wife in North Carolina and I to see my folks in Kansas.

It was more than a month later when Ken and I met back in Washington, D.C., for our temporary assignment with intelligence. As we faced the hot muggy weather of summer without air conditioning, we had plenty of time to review our past experiences and talk about what had happened on our return home. Ken told what it was like to go home to a wife who had lived for months thinking he had been killed. That is what she had been told after Ken's escape from the Germans in November. She was not told differently until after his positive identification in England, so she had only waited about two weeks for his return.

While at home Ken read the communications his wife, Birdie, had received when he was missing in action and the one saying he was dead. I believe his biggest shock was a visit to the cemetery where he saw a stone erected in his

memory at an empty grave. We hope that grave remains empty for many years to come.

I have always found physical activity to help me in making adjustments, so it was fortunate I returned home when there was alfalfa hay to be cut and put in the barn. With so many men in the service, labor was scarce, and neighbors worked together to harvest crops. I was able to pitch right in and be a renewed part of my family and the neighborhood for a few days before reporting back to duty.

Talking about an unusual situation can also help one adjust, but we could not use that approach with most of our friends because our experiences were classified “Secret.” Therefore, I am thankful for the opportunity Ken and I had to share our experiences with some of the aircrews before they left for England and Europe. It was done in cooperation with intelligence and had their approval. I believe it helped me adjust to what we had been through, and it gave the crews insight into one of the potential aspects of combat.

When my temporary assignment with the intelligence unit was complete, it was back to the cockpit for me. First I trained to instruct other pilots to fly the B-17. Then I transferred to the Ferry Command, where I checked out in several other types of planes, including fighters. When the war ended in Europe, and later when it ended in the Pacific, I was flying new airplanes which were the best United States had built up to that time. I flew them from the factories where they were made to various locations in the States where they were pickled for storage. Some of them would never fly again and be scrapped, while many of the P-51’s in particular would survive and be sent to Korea years later.

Finally, after the war with Japan was over, the day came when my total duty points meant I had a decision to make. I chose to be separated from active service and restart my life as a civilian where my bride, “Scotty,” and I could be

together. We had been married 11 February 1945. I accepted my reserve commission and continued to make myself available for recall for more than 20 years. I retired from the reserves as a lieutenant colonel.

My long walk to freedom during those few trying months was laced with danger for me and those who risked their lives to help me. It was an important part of my life and an experience I hope I never have to repeat for any amount of money. However, if my freedom is threatened I will find a way to do something about it because I am convinced that if the day comes when we are unwilling to fight for our freedom, then that will be the day when we begin to lose our freedom!