

William R. Bussey

This paper is the story of my military experience during WWII. This account is prepared for the file of John Hackney.

I, William R. Bussey, entered the military service in the summer of 1943 shortly after graduating from Furman University. In 1942, I volunteered for military service, but the Army Air Corps didn't call me to active duty until a year later.

My experience in the Army Air Corps was at times luxurious and at times very poor. I was assigned to Boca Raton, Florida for my first experience in military life. I lived in the fabulous retreat for the extremely wealthy Boca Raton Hotel. This was the place of my basic training. Then I was sent to Yale University as a cadet in the Army Air Force training program to be a communications officer in the Army airways communication system. At Yale I lived in the magnificent and historic Vanderbilt Hall. Near my room was the room for the Vanderbilt children who would attend Yale. The room for the Vanderbilt children was ornate with gold wallpaper and Victorian decorations. As a cadet, I ate in the massive Yale dining room. During meal time, an orchestra played. It was a famous orchestra that had been drafted into military service. I think the orchestra was a part of the then famous Glenn Miller Orchestra.

After graduating from the cadet school at Yale, I was sent to Midland, Texas. This town was in the heart of the oil fields of Texas. I had never seen such wealth. Cadillacs were everywhere. Growing up in Florence, S.C., I don't think I saw a locally owned Cadillac. Before Midland, I had never heard of or seen a filet mignon. But in Midland, filet mignons were as common as hamburgers in Florence, S.C. People, including me, ordered filet mignon for breakfast. The price for a big, delicious filet mignon was \$1.00.

Then I was sent to San Francisco to be shipped to the South Pacific. There was more luxury to come on my trip to New Guinea. The troop ship was a converted luxury liner. The ship owners kept their civilian crew to operate the ship. In the officers' dining room we had the ship's dining room crew to serve us. They were dressed in their regular ship's uniforms, tuxedos as I recall. This was the first time in my life that I saw silver finger bowls. Imagine going to war with finger bowls as part of the experience.

This was the end of a luxury that I had never known before. From that point on in my military experience was the opposite of luxury – a sparse, make do with what you have, life.

Our ship landed somewhere and I was sent by plane to Hollandia, New Guinea. When I got off my plane, the first person I saw was General Douglas MacArthur. I wrote my mother about seeing the general. She wrote back and said it was so nice of General MacArthur to meet me.

I was sent to Port Moresby at the southern tip of New Guinea, close to Australia. General MacArthur's headquarters were at Brisbane, Australia.

New Guinea was still in the Stone Age. People used seashells for currency. The women wore grass skirts, and nothing above the waist. The men wore colorful wrap-arounds, a cloth wrapped around the waist. The men painted their upper bodies, put flowers in their hair and walked ten steps ahead of the women who were drab in dress and appearances. Many of the natives were Christians. Some English missionaries came to New Guinea in the 1700s and taught many of the natives the English language and Christianity.

I was associated with Australian troops in New Guinea. They were impressive, gung ho, happy people. When 10 Australian troops went into the jungle to locate the Japanese, two Australians were assigned to fix the tea and scones. I loved Port Moseley. The natural beauty of this small, port village was amazing. I can see why Eryll Flynn, the famous movie actor of the 1930s, made Port Moseley a favorite home base.

Next, I was assigned to Palawan, that long, slender island in the China Sea. We set up a base on Palalawan for the purpose of bombing Saigon, Vietnam. I had never heard of Saigon. It was strategically important for the Japanese oil supply from Indo-China.

My task was to operate the control tower at the air strip. The control tower was a flimsy platform on top of 4 long poles. We had a long ladder to climb to the platform. From there we conducted traffic. As I recall, we had about 200 planes taking off and landing each day. Our tower had a ladder to climb to reach the platform, but we had pipe to slide down in case of enemy attack. We didn't have time to climb down the ladder.

We built a nice radio station in Palawan. The building housed the radio operator, the weathermen, and the people who coded and decoded

messages, the cryptographers. We built this facility in a beautiful, open field. As we were building our base, the natives would shake their heads and say, "No." We Americans were smarter than those Filipinos. But, we were in the dry season. We built in a dry rice field. When the rains came, we had to move our base because everything was under water.

I loved the beauty of this colorful island in the China Sea. The ocean was enjoyable and I went swimming often. Especially, I enjoyed the Filipino people. They suffered horribly under the Japanese occupation. At mess time, the Filipino children would stand outside of our dining hall tent with their buckets. All our leftover food on our trays we gave to the children instead of the trash cans. We put the leftover food from our trays in their tin buckets. They took the food to their hungry, starving families in the jungle where they had been hiding from the Japanese.

Next to Davao, Mindinao. The Filipinos were appreciative, lovely, impressive people. On Mindinao were the Moros. They were fierce, sullen, dangerous people. They were Muslims. Two of our soldiers followed two Moros in the jungle in search of souvenirs. The Moros took their sharp machetes and cut their heads off. We were warned about not trusting the Moros.

On my trip to Leyte I was on a troop transport ship. There were many ships. It was an impressive sight seeing all the Navy ships. As I was looking at that beautiful ship, a torpedo hit it. It was a huge explosion. As I looked a second torpedo hit it. There were considerably huge explosions. I have often wondered about the sailors killed and injured.

On to Manila, the third most destroyed city of WWII after Berlin and Warsaw. When MacArthur retreated from the city in 1942, he declared Manila an open city. This meant that he was not going to defend the city. This would protect the beautiful city from war damage. In 1945, when the Japanese retreated from the city, they dynamited the city. Manila was a beautiful city. The government buildings were built of granite. The U.S. government was preparing the Philippines Island for independence and they helped them build a beautiful capital city. The Japanese destroyed the city. Building after building was dynamited as the Japanese withdrew. This total destruction of a city had nothing to do with military strategy. It was evil. The Filipino people suffered so much under the Japanese cruelty. I have never been able emotionally to buy a Japanese-made car.

When the Emperor of Japan sued for peace and wanted to surrender, he sent the message to our radio station in Manilla. There was no radio station powerful enough to send the message from Tokyo to Washington. Thus the surrender message was sent to our radio station in Manilla, and then transmitted to Washington.

In the spring of 1946, I was ordered to come home. My mother had cancer and was facing surgery. My parents, through the Red Cross, arranged for my departure from the South Pacific. No plane at that time could fly non-stop from Manila to the U.S. Thus, on my return trip I stopped at Guam and then Honolulu. At Guam I was having dinner in the officers' dining room. I was enjoying the first fresh meat that I had had in the 21 months in the Pacific. I was very excited to have fresh meat. As I was eating, I commented to someone how wonderful it was the have meat. He said, "Do you know what it is?" I said, "No." He said, "It is goat. It is one of these sorry looking goats you see on the island." When he said that, I could smell goat and lost my appetite; back to dry food.

I stopped in Honolulu and while there I spent a day with my brother and his family who were living on the base. My brother was in the Army Air Corps and stationed in the South Pacific all the time that I was there. We never saw each other until the war was over. Our meeting in Honolulu was our first meeting in three years.

My brother, Col. Carver Thaxton Bussey was a pilot in the 13<sup>th</sup> Air Force. He was ordered to fly his squadron over Hiroshima. He and his squadron of bombers flew over Hiroshima and returned to the base. He thought this was strange to fly over an enemy city and drop no bombs and return. Three days after his flight over Hiroshima the atomic bomb was dropped. Then he understood. He surmised that the Army Air Corps wanted to know how much resistance they would encounter over Hiroshima. As I recall, my brother and his squadron met no resistance.

My brother lived to be 93 years old and was buried in Arlington Cemetery in December of 2009. In the last few months of his life, he endured health problems. When people asked him how he was doing, he always said, "I made roll call today." At his funeral the congregation sang, "When the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there." I was confident that he made the ultimate roll call. I am

now in my 90<sup>th</sup> year and I hope when the roll is called up yonder, I'll make roll call.

Some observations I wish to make in closing:

1. My years in the military were some of the most exciting, challenging, and enjoyable of my life.
2. I met some incredible people as to integrity and joy to be around.
3. The people I served with made me agree with Tom Brokaw that this was the Greatest Generation



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Merchant Marine Distinguished Service Medal



Treasury Life Saving Medal (Silver)



Medal of Honor (Navy)



Purple Heart



Brevet Medal (Marine Corps)



Distinguished Flying Cross



Distinguished Service Cross



Distinguished Service Medal



Soldier's Medal



Navy Cross



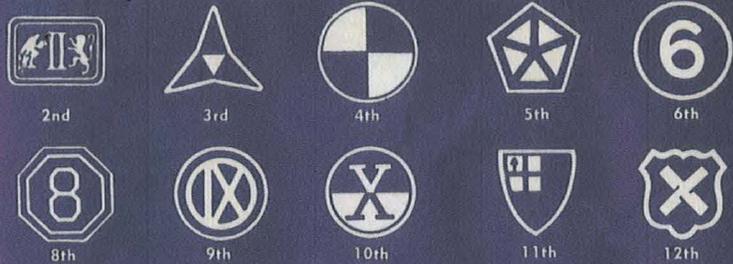
Silver Star

# MILEAGE CHART of the UNITED STATES

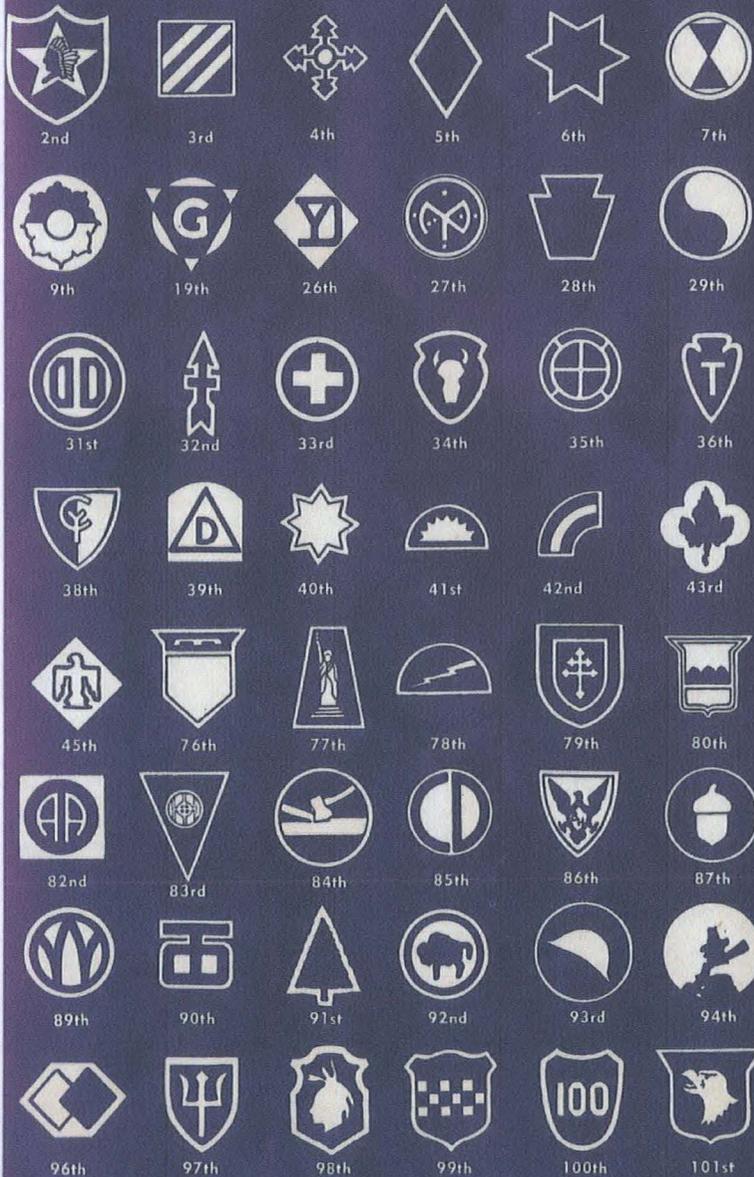
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**MILEAGE CHART EXPLANATION**—Houston, Texas is 1601 miles from Salt Lake City, Utah. In finding the distance between Houston and Salt Lake City, read down the column of figures from Houston until you come to the numbers opposite Salt Lake City. This example applies to any other two towns in the chart.

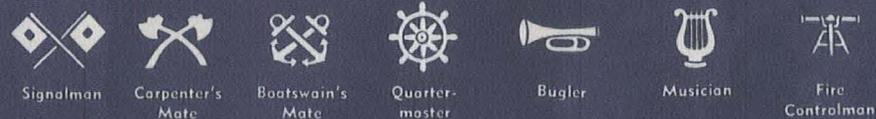
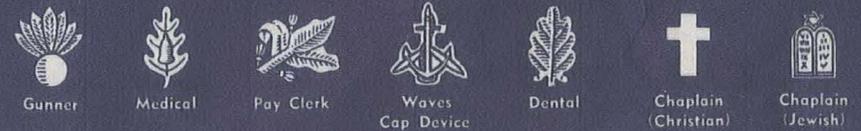
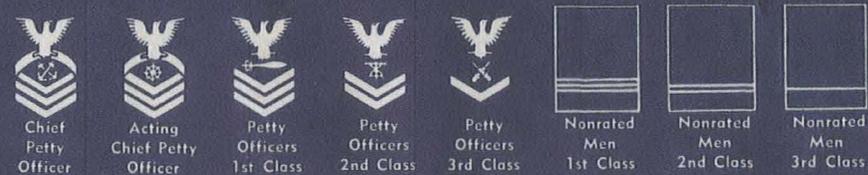
## ARMY CORPS AND THEIR INSIGNIA



## ARMY DIVISIONS AND THEIR INSIGNIA



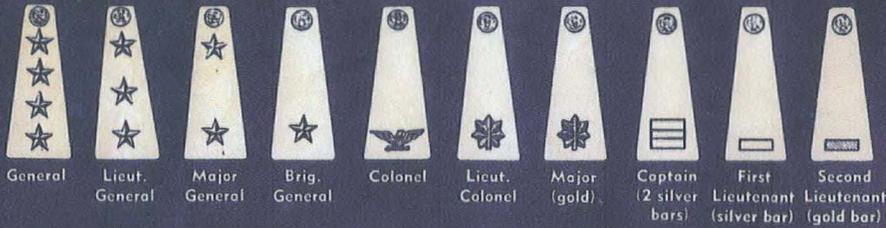
## ★ U. S. NAVY • INSIGNIA OF RANK





# ★ U. S. ARMY

## COMMISSIONED OFFICER'S INSIGNIA



## NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICER'S INSIGNIA



## BRANCH AND BUREAU INSIGNIA



## GENERAL HEADQUARTERS



## ARMIES



## ARMORED CORPS



## CAVALRY DIVISIONS



## SERVICE COMMANDS



## OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

