

Corps had modification centers. "They had to put rocket rails on some of the wings and different things to different airplanes."

Eventually the 413th went on to Ie Shima. "The 318th went about two weeks before we did and they had all the fun. All The kamikazes were just demolishing the ships in the harbor and all around and they (318th pilots) shot down quite a few airplanes. By the time we got there about two weeks later most of that was over and our missions were kind of quiet."

The pilots lived in one area, four to a tent. "Kind of crowded and not a lot of fun." No bathrooms. Wing tank supported by 2x4s with a pull handle served as a shower. "There was a sign on it that said '21st Officers Only' for the shower". I asked if the sign was abided by. Bill laughed and said; "Not really. Nobody minded anyway. It's amazing how well people got along because in such close quarters... Tent's were touching each other almost." The only entertainment Bill remembers was playing cards. "There was really nothing to do."

"Missions were long", every third day a pilot would fly. As a double strength squadron with two pilots for each plane, it allowed for the planes to go up more often than the pilots. "I don't know how they picked the second Lt.s who got airplanes but I happened to be one of them. "[Maybe it was] that I was the wingman of flight leader George Jones. Anyway I was allowed to pick my own airplane."

"We could choose the letter used on the plane for identification. I was too late to get 'S' as the squadron I.D. was 'B' for the 21st. Instead of my initials I had 'BX'."

"Missions were long." "[You were] taught to keep your neck on a swivel, and you're trying to stay alert, look around and fly a decent formation also and stay in position where you're supposed to be. And quite a few missions were six to eight hours."

Bill remembered his first dive bombing mission. "The P-47 is not a dive bomber so we had to figure out how to do it ourselves. They had this one bridge in Kyushu that they wanted taken out. The 21st was given the job. Each [plane] had two 500 lb. bombs. We all took a shot at it. There were 16 of us... not one bomb hit the bridge." "We did improve," Bill noted.

"They'd try new stuff like that which hadn't been done before and you just had to learn as you went."

Flight Leader Jones, Bill and two others were sent out to find a PBV "Dumbo" flying boat which picked up shot down pilots. It had picked up a couple pilots the night before and lost an engine on take off. The four pilots escorted the Dumbo as it taxied on the water back to Ie Shima.

"We did quite a few mapping [missions] escorting B-24 photo plans. Also strafing and dive bombing [missions] as the Japanese couldn't put planes up in the air any longer."

Bill flew three or four napalm missions. "Amazing. 12 or 16 planes abreast. Fly above 1500 feet and not too fast. Upon command all would drop it. Completely burn up a little town. "That wasn't too pleasant because you knew there weren't that many soldiers down there. I don't know how else to put it. Civilians. To me it wasn't too pleasant."

"We lost more planes on take off than any other way. One pilot, two days in succession, he crashed and burned the plane up and got out without a scratch both times." After that the pilot was sent for assignment elsewhere.

"[We] were limited to the length of the runway because the island was so small. It was crushed coral and if it was damp, and there'd been a little rain the night before it would be a little soft and that slowed you down a little bit. It was a problem.

Col. Thyng called a meeting with all the pilots to discuss how you got the fully loaded [plane] up in the air. [We] didn't come to any conclusion so it was up to the individual pilot what he did.

Some liked to use little flaps. I didn't like to use flaps on take off. I had an air speed in my mind. 150mph. I would never try to fly the airplane off until I saw 150 on the airspeed indicator. And I knew at that speed it would fly.

The airplane was about 14,000 lbs. and they were loaded sometimes up to 20 and 21,000 lbs. and the answer was not to load them that heavy. [laughter]. They never considered that because number one you had to have so much fuel to get to Japan and back... and then how much ordnance can you carry. The powers that be that scheduled the missions, they looked at it I think in a different way. 'How many points on this airplane can we hang something?'. They were just overloaded. Period."

"I remember I was flying an airplane once and I did a roll and I was on my back, and the controls just locked up, the stick, I couldn't move it. And I skidded around with the rudders and finally got the airplane right side up and shook the stick and all at once it broke loose. Well there was a stone, a rock and nobody knows how it got in there. And they found it later because the same thing happened to another pilot. He was lucky enough to get out of it too. The bottom of the control stick was in a 'V' and where the cable was attached and it ran back and forth as you moved the stick. The stone, when you rolled the airplane on its back... just gravity... it fell up a little bit, which was down if you were upside down and it would wedge the stick into this 'V'."

"I used to say it had a lot of two by sixes in it."

"[The] day before the war ended, I was on a mission, in fact it lasted eight hours, [Colonel] Thyng was leading it and I was one of the pilots and he took the whole group, 48 airplanes. Thyng told us that 'They think the war is going to be over.' [We] flew to Kyushu, flew around, turned around and landed."

Of Col. Thyng "He was quite a guy. His bark was worse than his bite. Most missions were led by one of the senior officers of the Fighter Group, flying with different squadrons on different missions. I flew his wing on a couple of missions."

It was six months before he was shipped home after the war. After the war they flew at least four hours a month to get flight pay. "You could fly if you wanted to."

When he enlisted, Bill had to have his parents sign when he went into the cadets. He doesn't remember why since he could have been drafted.

Bill's mother didn't like airplanes. She told him, "I don't want to sign this because I'm afraid that when the war is over you'll still want to fly." "So I didn't fly for a couple years." Eventually Bill told his mother that he was going to fly again. He joined the Air Force Reserve and started flying.

Bill Stack made a career of flying, starting with Eastern Airlines flying DC-3s. The last plane he flew, in 1982, was an A300 Airbus.

