

Land of the Yellow Sea

In February of 1952, at the age of 19, Herb was assigned to Korea. He and his fellow airmen set sail aboard the USS POPE from San Francisco and traveled up the West Coast to Seattle, Washington to pick up more troops. One serviceman stationed at that base had been apprehended for automobile theft and would accompany them. “They decided instead of discharging him or anything like that, they’d ship him overseas,” Herb says.

“That waterway between San Francisco and Seattle was rough. A lot of people got real sick on that choppy water. I got a little sick myself. But pretty soon, I got sea legs and learned to stay up topside, and not down in the hole with the rest of them.”

Herb had packed his Kodak Brownie camera and took a picture of the ocean en route to Korea. “The ocean was really in turmoil, so I took a picture of it,” he says.

The voyage to Korea lasted two weeks. Herb’s commander was once again Jack Lewis, who assigned Herb to the administrative office of mail clerk. Herb quickly put his carpentry skills to work in his new position. “I built the mailroom and little cubicles to put the mail in—pigeonholes, we called them. Everybody in the whole squadron had their own little pigeonholes. It was nice having that job—being a mailman.

“Once our mail didn’t come in, so I boarded a C-54 plane to Japan to pick it up. On the way back, as I was looking out the window, one of the props quit. I thought about us coming in on a wing and a prayer like the song, but I really wasn’t scared the plane was going to fall. I figured the pilot weren’t worried, so why should I worry? We managed to come on in okay with just the one prop,” he laughs.



View of the ocean from USS POPE.

“I had a good job with the mailroom, but the guy who worked in the order room, I guess he was sort of jealous. He thought he had more authority than I did, and he wanted my job. So I left there and I took over a more important job than he got, because I was hired to work with classified information. I could wear civilian clothes there if I wanted to, so I did.”

While in Korea, Herb also helped to construct new sidewalks.

During his time off, Herb liked to work with the chaplain. “Occasionally we’d go out to deliver clothes and food to the different orphanages and refugee camps,” he says. “It was nice to be able to get off base and see the countryside. There were a lot of hills, and a lot of flat country, in Korea.”

Herb also visited some of the neighboring villages, such as Kunsan, where straw hats were made.

Routine training missions occasionally took Herb’s squadron on hikes up the mountainside to abandoned enemy pillboxes²⁴ where they would



Herb standing in front of the Labor Office at the Main Gate.

The famous American patriotic song, “Comin’ in on a Wing and a Prayer,” ranked number 7 in the Top 10 songs of 1943.

Comin’ in on a wing and a prayer
 What a show, what a fight
 Boys, we really hit our target for tonight
 How we sing as we limp through the air
 Look below, there’s our field over there
 Though there’s one motor gone
 We can still carry on
 Comin’ in on a wing and a prayer.

*Performed by The Song Spinners
 Written by Harold Adamson and Jimmy
 McHugh*



Herb hard at work in the mailroom. “The first sergeant wanted to kid me, so he said, ‘Okay, get in there and I’ll take your picture.’ It made me look like I was in jail.”

²⁴ According to *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, Eleventh Edition, a pillbox is “a small low concrete emplacement for machine guns and antitank weapons.”



Herb takes a break from his work to smile for the camera.



Herb leaving headquarters after working all day on classified information for Colonel Jack W. Lewis, Commander.



Herb at his desk in civilian clothes.



Herb building a sidewalk.

practice overtaking them. "About once a month they'd take us out on bivouac and we'd walk around here and there," he says.

Going out on bivouac also meant lots of hiking. "One day we hiked way back over a dam—a reservoir—where we got our water," Herb recalls. "And the Koreans were washing their clothes and taking baths in it," he laughs. "But we purified the water. We had potable water containers sitting around base and our showers had barrels of water on top.

"We had hot weather, and then we had our cold weather. Sometimes it would snow and then up would come a dust storm, and blow dust over the snow. We called it "snirt"—snow and dirt mixed in," he laughs.

Inside the Barracks

The barracks, a Quonset hut, would normally hold about 30 people. It was one long, open room on the inside, with no partitions. About 15 people slept on each end of the room, with open space between. “We celebrated Christmas there with a Christmas tree [in the middle of the room],” he says.

“I made friends with some of the natives. One Korean boy worked with me and ruined my radio. Overseas, a transformer converts your electricity from 220 volts to 110 volts. Well, he turned the transformer on to his power and blew up my radio. It really smelled up the place,” he laughs.

Inside the barracks, fuel stoves provided heat. “Instead of burning coal in them, it used kerosene,” Herb says. “This guy that was working with us, I think his name was Su Kim, turned it up too high and set our building on fire. We got it contained; we didn’t lose anything. But you had to watch those things. There were a lot of laughs over there.”



Herb, holding his canteen, takes a break from building a gravel sidewalk beside the Quonset hut in background.



One of the refugee camps that Herb visited. “There were a lot of people in there, I’ll tell you,” he says. “One time when we were there in the winter, a guy hid rocks inside balls of snow, and he threw them at us. They didn’t care if they hurt us.”



Korean children play in the street while a man makes a hat in his workshop.

Entertainment

“The King – Eight Service Club was where we went for entertainment,” Herb says. “They showed movies there, and they brought a magician who made you sound like a duck or something, and some people that could put you to sleep, hypnotists.”

Herb also enjoyed taking photos of himself and his surroundings with his Brownie camera and sending them back home to his mother and Evelyn.



Herb prepares to enter the pillbox.



Herb sent this photo home to Evelyn with the words “Ideal Husband” written on the back.



Despite the hard work, Herb smiles as he piles sandbags on top of each other. “This was when we were making our foxholes,” he explains.



“I’ve got you covered,” Herb says as he completes his training drills.