

I was up on the work stand helping a crew replace a damaged engine cylinder when out of the blue I heard "Attention" and I looked around for the reason only to see an officer below telling the crew "At ease" and he started to climb up the work stand. I signaled to one of the crew to get under him in case he slipped and fell. This officer knew what he was doing because he climbed all the way up.

I found myself looking into a pair of very mischievous eyes while I am still at attention and saluting. Climbing over the safety rail he said, "Be at ease Sgt." and I could see he was a general. He then said, "May I ask what are you doing?" I said, "Yes sir, I am hoping to replace this damaged cylinder and whatever else is bad." I was ready to pull the cylinder up and off the stroke bolts. He then asked if I needed a hand and already had a hand on the cylinder; together we were able to get that cylinder off with only a little effort. I could see that the piston was also damaged and pushed out the pin to release the piston. I handed down the two items to the crew chief and told him "Hope you're lucky" and off he went.

The general then asked me my name and told me his name which didn't mean a thing to me, and asked "What is your position on this plane?" I said "Sir, I have no position on this plane. I am the flight engineer on Captain Rousek's crew." That brought a new idea to the general and he asked, "Are we so short of men to work on these planes?" I said "There is a shortage of qualified men to do what I just did," and he asked, "What makes you qualified?" "Sir, I was fortunate to go to the 19th Wing Tact School at Rio Hata in Panama. I did very well and have a 747 rating." The crew chief was back with a new piston and pin but no cylinder telling me that we would have to order one.

9/4/1942 After returning from another recon mission, this one to Milne Bay, I did not even get to take my flight coveralls off when Sgt. James came up to me and said, "I have a problem that I wish you would give some thought to." After giving the crew chief of that plane we just landed in my thoughts, I walked away with Sgt. James to a plane sitting in the first hardstand. A step ladder was set up under engine number 3 and James was telling me, "I have never seen anything like this." Just overhead of the ladder I could see that the ball joint in that exhaust was missing and the wing showed a good amount of heat damage. I knew right away what was wrong, and asked James where the ball joint was. He pointed at it setting on a tool box further back beyond the engine and I ducked under the wing to look at it, already knowing what had happened.

James following close behind asked what was wrong and why it fell to the ground when the plane first touched the runway. I said, "The springs have had too much heat and they do not have the strength to hold the ball joint in place." James said, "I never ever looked at that thing. What does it do?" I picked the ball joint and showed him the three sets of springs and what they did. He looked rather like a sheepdog then and said "Nobody has ever told me anything about the exhaust." "I won't tell anyone either," I said.

"We need a handful of these springs. There has to be the need for them on other planes." He said "OK" and I looked up just in time to catch a truck heading back to the camp. I did not forget what I just learned and while having a sandwich and canteen of milk I was thinking, "Is there any such thing as springs in the parts shop or not?" I bumped into my captain and told him what I had just found out. I had used bed springs from well used army cots in the storage room at Albrook Field, but we had canvas wood frame cots in our tent, and I told the captain what was on my mind. The captain said, "Maybe I can help you; how many do you need?" I said, "Sir, what I learned makes me think too many may be not enough." "I'll see what I can do for you Sgt." and I thanked him.

After returning from a practice bombing flight the next day 9/5/42, the captain before getting in the car said to me, "I left a handful of bed springs with the First Sgt." I just said "Thank you, sir," saluted and finished checking that everything was OK with the plane. I was able to take the truck back to camp, a wash-up and lunch, then a walk to the First Sgt's office where he was waiting for me. The handful of springs was more than I thought I would get and I thanked the First Sgt., and walked back down to the flight line and to the plane that needed the springs "now." I told the crew chief what we had to do before we could even think of reinstalling the ball joints. I was telling the crew chief that we would need something to hold the springs so we could saw the two hooks off. I could see that he did not know what I was talking about, so I showed him.

That's when Gen. Walker arrived and putting the crew at ease with "As you are," walked to where I was talking to the crew chief and just listened. When the CC went off to get what I asked for, Gen. Walker said, "I was

wondering how you were going to use those bed springs, I am just in time. How are you Sgt.? You were flying this morning, weren't you?" I said yes, it was only a practice flight. The CC was back with the tools that we would need and I pointed out where we could mount the vise which he did and handed me a hacksaw which I took and showed him what I wanted him to do. He was a quick learner and had one spring cut the way I told him. I had one of the ball joints with me and slipped the spring on the support rod and waited for another spring which the CC had finished and handed to me. I slid that spring on the same rod and saw that one more spring would do the trick. That's when Gen. Walker spoke up and said, "I see what you are doing but how does that solve the problem?" I said, "Sir, the springs are pushing the two end pieces of the ball joint apart to hold them in place," and he said "Why did the original springs fail?" I said "They failed because they get hot enough to lose their spring tension."

While watching the men cut and place the springs in their right place the general said to me, "I talked for about an hour to Captain Rousek and he told me some very interesting things about you, like why did you give up your chance of going to flying school?" Captain offered me a chance to fly and learn to become a flight engineer on the B-17 long before I learned that I had passed those exams. I learned something that I like and I was getting very good flying pay and seeing a lot of the world that I thought I would never see. He said, "When did you learn about what is happening now?" And I answered, "On Pearl Harbor day just as everyone else did. My Dad told me about Hitler and he thought Hitler wanted to rule the world and I knew what the Japanese were doing over in China. I had a cousin who was in the US Navy and was wounded while on a ship that the Japanese bombed." He then asked me how I liked being in a war zone, and I said my Dad was in WWI and was very patriotic and I will do what I am told. That's when his car came and he offered me his hand in a handshake and said, "I will see you again."

We went on our first our night mission to Rabaul on the evening of 9/23/42. After landing back at Mareeba at 1420 and after a good night's sleep, I went down to the flight line to find Sgt. James. He was glad to see me and we walked to a plane that he told me had a bad cylinder. The ground crew had removed the cowlings and the damage could be seen from the ground. The regular crew chief was in the hospital and his assistant had not worked on engines. I took him up on the work stand with me and we had just started to remove the bolts when we had Gen. Walker on the stand with us. I said good morning and he said "Do you need help Sgt.?" I said that the man with us on the stand had never worked on plane engines and I am showing him a little bit of the engine that he says he has never seen before. By then the cylinder was ready to be pulled free of the engine. I said to Gen. Walker that I had to walk to another plane to remove a cylinder, the present hangar queen. He wanted to know how many planes there were now being stripped of parts to keep our present planes flying and I told him that I did not know, only Sgt James would know that. He said "I will have to find him" and I told him the Sgt. may still be at that plane in the next hard stand. He thanked me and went down off the work stand. You should have seen my helper, he looked like he could not speak. I said come on we have work to finish today. On our walk to the hangar queen plane he asked me one question after another, with "I cannot believe a general was up on that work stand with us!" I said he is our boss and he wants to know everything about the planes that he is sending his men in on combat missions. I told him, "Remember your letters are being censored."

That job went well and I was able to go to another plane that had received quite a few gunshot holes. Only one man was hurt with a splinter of metal in his forearm. We cut tops and bottoms out of some cans and used them to cover the holes. Then it was time to get a bit to eat, so I caught a truck ride back to the camp across the road.

In a group conversation your Father was just one of the boys. At that time, I did not know his age. Reading the book by Martha Byrd I now know he was just 44 when we would have the many talks. My Dad was born 1893 and I think that is the answer to why we got on so well.

Your Father was a very special man in my life. I say that because he made things right for the enlisted men in Mareeba and Port Moresby in many ways. Food got better, plane parts became a lot easier to order and more enlisted men better trained started arriving. That in itself was the end of me working on the planes.

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