



Bob Blackwood, (USS Locator AGR-6)

In 1957, about sixty days before I got off USS Locator and was discharged at Treasure Island, I took all my leave time, which was 30 days, and came home to Durham to see my family and take care of the business of enrolling at Elon College where I had been accepted. I knew money would be short and I wanted to save all I could on travel expenses, so I decided to try to catch a military hop back to California. Everyone told me the best place to catch a direct flight would be Washington, DC. I allowed myself an extra week of travel time and my mother drove me about 30 miles north of my home in Durham and put me out on the road to hitchhike early one morning. I hitchhiked to Quantico, Virginia where I went down to the air base and immediately caught a plane to Washington, to what is today Reagan Airport.

I got off the plane and started to walk across the tarmac to Base Operations. Everyone I saw was a General, Admiral, or some other kind of high-ranking officer, so I snapped to and saluted everybody. As this was happening I heard a voice behind me say, "Hey, Sailor, where you going?" I turned around and snapped to and saluted. There in front of me was General Curtis LeMay, complete with his famous little cigar and more ribbons than I have ever seen on any man. I told him, "Base Operations, Sir." He said, "Sailor, that's not what I want to know. What I want to know is where in the Hell in the WORLD are you going?" "Oh, California, Sir," I replied as my knees trembled. He said, "Well, Son, you see that Super Constellation sitting over yonder with her engines running and the gangplank down? If you'll get on that thing, you'll be there late tonight." I replied, "Well, I have to go to Base Operations to give my name and information, Sir." "Naw, Son, do what I told you and get the Hell on the airplane," he said. "You can give your information to my aide." His aide was a Colonel. So I did what he said and ran and boarded the plane just as they were about to pull the gangplank, as he called it.

The crew of six was a really nice group of young Air Force men. There was a pilot, a co-pilot, a flight engineer, and three stewards. We immediately got underway and as we flew along, they took me around and introduced me to everyone and we immediately hit it off well together.

They told me the plane I boarded was Columbine I, which had been President Eisenhower's first Air Force I. After he got his second Air Force I, he took the old plane and gave it to General LeMay who was Commander of Strategic Air Command and the commander of all radar picket ships that we were on at that time. So I got to meet the Commander.

We flew along west until late in the afternoon. We were over St. Louis. Looking out the windows we saw three tornadoes. The pilot decided it was time to take it into Scott Air Force Base and put it in a hanger. After we had secured everything, one of the pilots said he had an old girlfriend out there he would like to look up and in a little while, this beautiful girl with three of her friends just as good looking, showed up to meet us. A little later, they had found two more just as good looking and real nice girls. So they decided to take us over and show us St. Louis. The weather had gotten bad so we stayed for three days. Each night, they brought us back to the base where they put us in a nice barracks all alone. One night while we were asleep in the barracks, a tornado came by and destroyed a service station just behind us outside the fence and never touched our building. After the three best days in my military career, we got back on Columbine I and flew to Travis Air Force Base. There, after helping them unload the plane for their return trip to DC, I went back to the USS Locator and was discharged about thirty days later.