

The Life and Times of Thomas Robert (Bob) Vaucher

June 2010

Chapter 1 – Boyhood in the Texas Rio Grande Valley

1. What is your full name? Why did your parents select this name for you? Did you have a nickname?

My full name is Thomas Robert Vaucher. Thomas was my mother's brother's name and Robert was my father's favorite brother's name. I was 20 years old before I knew that Thomas was my first name. My mother called me Rob and my father called me Robert. It was my understanding that my father's favorite brother was Robert. He had been killed as a teenager when he jumped from a freight train while hitching a ride back to his home in Neuchatel, Switzerland.

2. When and where were you born?

I was born December 3, 1918 at home at Six Mile Taylor Road in Sharyland, 9 miles from Mission, Texas in the Rio Grande valley. My mother said I was born at 5am and that she cooked supper that evening for the family. She was from a Midwest pioneer family, so was of a strong stock.

3. How did your family come to live there?

My father was a horticulturalist in charge of propagation at Garfield Park in Chicago, Illinois. This was one of the largest nurseries in the world and furnished all the plants for the Chicago parks. He became very interested in citrus culture. He read that the lower Rio Grande valley of Texas had the right soil and climate to become a leading citrus production area, and that it would exceed California and Florida citrus production. The area was principally ranch country and undeveloped in citrus. In pursuit of his dream, he moved his family to the area and became one of the pioneers in the Texas citrus industry. He imported from California five varieties of citrus and started a nursery from which he planted a forty acre plot and furnished citrus stock to future orchardists for miles around. He developed the ruby red grapefruit which exists to this day.

4. Were there other family members in the area? Who?

We had no other family members in the area. Only Indians lived in the Lower Rio Grande Valley at that time.

5. What was the house (apartment, farm, etc.) like? How many rooms? Bathrooms? Did it have electricity? Indoor plumbing? Telephones?

The ranch house that I was born in was two bedrooms, kitchen and dining/living room with L-screened porch covering the south and west sides. There was no indoor plumbing, no electricity, and no telephone. When I was seven, we got the telephone. Electricity came via President Roosevelt's rural electrification program in the thirties. We had an outdoor toilet. A shower stall under the elevated water tank that was filled by a windmill. As you might expect, we did not take a shower very often in the winter. The most important thing was the pot bellied

stove used for heating from December through February. Mother cooked on a kerosene-fired stove and oven. We had no mail delivery until 1922, so once every two weeks we went into town to pick up the mail.

6. Were there any special items in the house that you remember?

The house was furnished with only the essentials – we had no extra “stuff”. We did have curtains on the windows. We had a fuel powered tractor, in addition to mule drawn plows and farm equipment. We didn’t have a car until I was three years old and, before that time, we traveled the 9 miles to town in a horse drawn wagon.

7. What is your earliest childhood memory?

I can remember swimming in the irrigation canal before I started going to school at the age of five. There was a bridge over the canal with a diving board off the bridge. I had refused to swim in the deep waters of the canal. Other family members went in swimming and I would only wade in a little and then swim to the shore. One day my father grabbed me, took me up to the diving board and threw me into the middle of the canal. And I swam to the shore and from that day on I swam like a fish. I was very proud that from then on I could swim across the canal.

8. Describe the personalities of your family members.

My father was a ladies man; he charmed the women. He was politically conservative with strong convictions. He was very anti Hitler, anti-socialist, anti-Roosevelt. He was socially liberal, for example he didn’t believe in prohibition. He was very sociable and made friends easily, quickly and broadly.

In some respects my mother was the opposite. She was very reserved, puritanical and straight laced. My mother was the only woman I knew who had graduated from college. She had earned her teaching degree from Iowa State and had wonderful stories to tell about her teaching career in one room schools where she taught all grades.

My father graduated from a technical school in Switzerland. Both parents were well read. They subscribed to the Saturday Evening Post, which was their bible. They received the Mission Times, Houston Chronicle and San Antonio Express. We were one of the few families that had complete set of encyclopedias that was the source of all knowledge and was used by the family to lend facts to family discussions.

My oldest sister Evelyn was very sociable, taking after her father. She always had a boyfriend. She caused my mother considerable concern in her choice of boyfriends. Her boyfriend in high school was one of the leading aviators in the area. He was older than she and his nickname was “Slats”.

Evelyn was bitten by a rattlesnake when she was a child and my father saved her life by slitting the bite with a razor and sucking the venom out. As a result, she suffered a slight deformity in that leg and walked with a slight limp.

My sister Elaine was a year younger than Evelyn and eight years older than I. She was very intelligent, always at the top of the class and very studious and articulate. Elaine contracted polio as a child and was treated in Chicago. As a result of the polio, one leg was not as developed and she had a slight limp. She was very attractive – and mother used to lecture her to not be so sensitive about her limp.

Both sisters were very artistic. They boarded at catholic school through the eighth grade. Both went to college. Elaine graduated from University of Texas with a liberal arts degree. Evelyn graduated with degree in nursing from Santa Rosa College in San Antonio.

9. What kind of games did you play growing up?

As children, we played a variety of action games. We'd throw a ball over the roof of the house with the goal of trying to keep the opponent from catching the ball. Before throwing we called Annie over, Annie over – come over, come over.

At about the age of 10, we started hunting – quail, deer, and coyotes.

When I was a small boy, I had a male white donkey named Peggy. Peggy took a lot of abuse from me. Peggy was my main source of transportation until I got older and learned to ride a bike.

With a bike we could get around so much faster. The nearest neighbor kid was ½ mile away. Alfred Schoneing was my best friend and he lived 1 mile away. Margaret Sloan, my high school sweetheart lived six miles from me. Lloyd Bentsen, who later became US Secretary of the Treasury, lived 6 miles away. Keith Rumble, my best man at my wedding, lived four miles away.

10. What was your favorite thing to do for fun (movies, beach, etc.)?

Swimming was favorite thing to do for fun. We loved eating watermelons in the summer.

11. Did you have family chores? What were they? Which was your least favorite?

On a farm, we all had chores that we had to do every day. Feed and milk the cows twice daily. Feed the chickens and gather the eggs. No one had to remind us. Mom was responsible for three meals a day and took care of the household. Work was farm work –till the soil, plant the field, irrigate and prune and spray the trees. No time for fooling around.

12. Did you receive an allowance? How much? Did you save your money or spend it?

We had very little cash. We raised all our food and bartered for what we needed. For example, the neighbor would grind our corn and we would pay him in corn.

13. What was school like for you as a child? What were your best and worst subjects? Where did you attend grade school? High school? College?

I loved school. I enjoyed all my school years right through high school graduation. School was one of the best parts of my life, because it was intellectual compared to farm life. I also enjoyed riding the school bus. I played in all sports. Baseball, track, football and basketball. My best subject was science and I remember fondly my high school science teacher, Robert Rumble.

High school graduation was a big happening. I didn't know until the day of graduation that I was going to be honored as the most outstanding graduate. That night I received a medal as the most outstanding student. I received academic scholarships to three collages

After high school, I didn't go to college for a year. I traveled to the west coast and worked in a sawmill in Oregon. After seeing hard labor, I decided that getting an education was the thing to do. I went to a local collage, Pan American University. I played on the tennis team. Theater was a big part of my college life and I became president of the drama club.

After two years, I was accepted into the Army Air Corp.

14. Do you remember any fads from your youth? Popular hairstyles? Clothes?

All the boys put Vaseline on our hair and parted it down the middle. Our clothes were very ordinary. In high school we had a great bunch of kids, we enjoyed dating the girls. The boys would go to the bars to a house of prostitution in Mexico. I went with my friends, but was so fearful of getting a disease, I never bought a hooker. The Spanish girls were very beautiful and sexual. One night in Mexico we backed into a guy wire, pulling a telephone pole down. The police officer arrested us and took us to the police station and fined us a large amount. We didn't have enough money to pay the fine and we called a friend and he came over to bail us out of jail.

15. Who were your childhood heroes?

Charles Lindberg was my childhood hero and the reason I got into flying. My sister's boyfriend was an aviator, and I admired him, as well. Lindberg was all everyone ever talked. I was nine years old when he flew across the Atlantic. There were pictures of him in all the papers and he traveled the whole country and was paraded as a hero. He was my hero until 1940 when he sided with Hitler and then he became a bum to me.

16. What were your favorite songs and music?

I loved anything that came out of Hollywood. Whatever was current in the movies, such as Big Crosby.

17. Did you have any pets? If so, what kind and what were their names?

I had a dog named Spots who was killed by a car and I almost died with him. I had an unusual white donkey – Peggy and I were inseparable. One Christmas eve, Santa came with our presents. Dad said "Santa may have left something out on the porch." My sisters went out on the porch and couldn't find anything. I went out and opened the wood box and a little white goat peered out. I can remember my sister screaming, this was one of my earliest childhood memories.

18. What was your religion growing up? What church, if any, did you attend?

Mother was a strong Roman Catholic and father was a Calvinist. There were no Calvinist churches in our part of Texas. There was a continuous intellectual argument between my parents regarding the Catholic church. He kidded Mom about the church rituals. As kids we would peek under the tent of the evangelical tent revivals, as amusement. The Methodists had a Sunday night youth group, with music, dancing and homemade refreshments. It was the place to go. One time the priest of the Catholic church confronted mother about me attending the Methodist church events. She told him off. I was proud of her for confronting him.

19. Were you ever mentioned in a newspaper?

When I graduated as most outstanding graduate of my class, there was a story in the paper. During the war, the service released news to my home town paper and my sister kept a book of clippings.

20. Who were your friends when you were growing up?

All my friends were my schoolmates. My closest friends were neighbor kids.

21. What world events had the most impact on you while you were growing up? Did any of them personally affect your family?

The most impactful world events were WWI, Lindberg's first transatlantic flight, the Depression, the Russian revolution, and Hitler. I was born because of WWI. All men had a conscription number and my father was 32 years old and they were calling men of his age and number up. So they decided to have another child. I was conceived during the war but was born 15 days after the war ended, November 11, 1918.

Topic A as a kid was WWI. Topic B was the Russian revolution. Then came along the Depression which lasted into WWII. I was 14 yrs old when Hitler came into power. The main world news source was the weekly newsreel that preceded the movies. Hitler liked publicity and so he was the subject of many newsreels. I remember the Polish invasion in particular, because of the dive bombers.

The Depression affected us in a big way. My parents sold a piece of property in 1929 and they invested the proceeds in Texas Power and Light preferred stock. When the crash came, TP&L was part of a national scandal and the stock value dropped to almost nothing. I inherited the stock 50 years later, and it had finally regained the original value.

22. Describe a typical family dinner. Did you all eat together as a family? Who did the cooking? What were your favorite foods?

We ate dinner when Mom said it was ready and we all sat and ate together. The chores were done and the day was done towards sunset, about 6pm. Mom did the cooking. My favorite food was whatever was put on the table. Morning was pancakes and bacon and eggs. We ate potatoes in every way possible. We ate a lot of home canned goods - beans, corn, peas, even beef. We had outdoor canning days, with family and neighbors. Dad would build a big outdoors fire and put three tubs of water to boil. We dipped the glass canning jars in the hot water to sterilize them. Fresh food was what we raised and traded for. A favorite food was steak.

23. How were holidays (birthdays, Christmas, etc.) celebrated in your family? Did your family have special traditions?

Thanksgiving was a big holiday. We didn't do any farm work on holidays. Fourth of July and Christmas were the other big holidays. We also never worked on Sunday. Saturday was a catch up day when we did non-routine chores, such as fixing the well or going to town for shopping. Going to town on Saturday was a social event.

24. How is the world today different from what it was like when you were a child?

We were so remote that San Antonio, 240 miles away was a destination. We would go in a caravan of six or eight cars every two years or so. It would take us two days to get there. We would camp out on the side of the road along the way. Roads were mostly unpaved. We would bring extra tires, because tire blow outs were the norm. These trips were the greatest fun as a kid. On the second day, I can remember going over a rise and could see the city on the horizon. We had a game to see who could be the first to see San Antonio.

25. Who was the oldest relative you remember as a child? What do you remember about them?

The oldest relative that I remember as a child is my grandmother, Kate Wolf. I remember her being very strict. My mother faithfully traveled by train to Lost Nation near Davenport Iowa to

visit her for a month each summer. As a young child, I went along. Grandmother had a flock of geese and would have the goose chase me if I misbehaved. Uncle Tom lived with her. His wife had died at childbirth and he never remarried.

26. What do you know about your family surname?

Great-grandfather Wolf was an English barrister who was assigned to Ireland by the British government. Wolf married an Irish girl and they were shunned by both the Irish and the British. So he and his bride came to America.

Vaucher's were French-Huguenots. The Catholics chased them out of France into Switzerland. The full name was Vaucher-de-la-Croix; of the cross. My dad dropped the last of the name.

Both sides of the family were well educated. My grandmother Vaucher was a French language tutor to Kaiser Wilhelm's family and she spent one summer tutoring the Romanoff's of Russia. My father graduated from a technical school in Switzerland and my mother graduated from Iowa State with a teaching certificate. We had a senator, judge, two priests and two nuns in the Wolfe family. My father's family was watchmakers and Vaucher is still one of the finest watch movements in the world.

Our coat of arms is .



27. Is there a naming tradition in your family, such as always giving the firstborn son the name of his paternal grandfather?

28. What stories have come down to you about your parents? Grandparents? More distant ancestors?

The Wolf family was on the boat coming from Europe and there was a disease epidemic and children were thrown overboard who were weak and unlikely to live. My great grandmother pleaded for her child and she was spared and became the matriarch of the Wolf family, Grandmother Kate.

My dad's great-grandparents ...

29. Are there any stories about famous or infamous relatives in your family?

One of my mother's cousins owned a commercial laundry in Chicago with a lot of delivery trucks. The union wanted to unionize the drivers and he fought it for several years. One morning when they arrived at the laundry, all the windows were shot out by a mobbed machine gun, as a warning. They claimed that the man behind it was Jimmy Hoffa.

Dad used to claim that the Kaiser Wilhelm family sent them a trunk of goodies every Christmas.

30. Have any recipes been passed down to you from family members?

31. Are there any physical characteristics that run in your family?

We are all averaged size. I am 5'10 and the average was 5'9". My dad was 5'7". Vaucher men have full heads of hair and bushy eyebrows. Hair on head turns snow white and eyebrows stay black.

32. Are there any special heirlooms, photos, bibles or other memorabilia that have been passed down in your family?

I have Wolfe family photos that my mother still recognized when she was quite frail and approaching 100 yrs.

Chapter 2 – The Young Air Cadet

17 years after I was born, Franklin Roosevelt in his 1935 inaugural address said:
“To some generations much is given. To other generations much is expected, THIS GENERATION of Americans has a rendezvous with destiny.”

Those words were cast on the backdrop of Winds of War that had reached gale force.

- Japan was flexing its power in Asia,
- Stalin was solidifying the revolution with persecution,
- Hitler had taken complete control of Germany,
- Mussolini had taken over Italy
- Franco was stoking the Spanish Revolution,
- And most of the rest of the world was in economic turmoil.
- The national budget in 1936 was less than 10 billion dollars.
- The military services were budgeted to keep skeleton organizations.
- The National consciousness was isolationism.

However, there were a few visionaries preparing MY generation for that rendezvous with destiny: Arnold, Nimitz, Billy Mitchell, MacArthur, Marshall were visionaries in building America's military foundation.

About 1933, General Hap Arnold instituted the Flying Club of America. The idea was to create a pool of youth with some aviation technology and enthusiasm. I joined in the 8th grade. We got a pair of wings, built model airplanes and a newsletter now and then. Arnold wrote a book in 1935, “This Flying Game” and that became the bible for many of us.

Two years later, General Marshall created the Citizens Military Training Camp – CMTC – to build a pool of youth with some military training. Since my father was very patriotic and supported the defense of our country, he encouraged me to join. I went to summer camp for one month when I was a junior in high school. That was in the HOT, HOT month of August 1936 at Camp Bullis near San Antonio, Texas. It was boot camp training. The culmination folded us into a regular army unit which was on summer maneuvers. All recruits started out in the infantry. You could opt out to other branches in your 2nd year.

One hot dusty day we were moving up a one lane dirt road to a new field position when we were ordered to move over to allow an artillery unit to pass through. It was the 1st year that the artillery had changed from horse drawn caissons to truck drawn. Well we stood by and ATE their dust and I vowed right then and there the next year I was going to ride, not walk.

You had to pass an exam that was laced with a bit of math & which seemed to be the stumbling block of qualifying for artillery. But I passed and the next year I went on maneuvers as an artillery man. They were more than ever an elitist group because they didn't have to shovel manure any more.

Well, that second year they also introduced AIRPLANES to summer maneuvers and the MOCK WARFARE rules were that if they dropped a bag of flour on or near your battery you had to take cover and couldn't move until there were no airplanes overhead circling the target area. Well that went on from about 11am to 3pm and we were pinned down in poison oak up

to our waists. We also missed our lunch as the kitchen was side tracked. Besides, we might not even get supper. I thought about the aircrews and realized they were going back to their base in San Antonio, shower, have dinner in the dining hall & take their girlfriends to the movies.

RIGHT THEN & THERE I decided to become a pilot.

BUT, you had to have a college degree to get into pilot school.

So I enrolled in what is now Pan American University, an off campus of Texas University. Two years later, General Marshall started the Civilian Military Training Corp. Since my father was very patriotic and supported the defense of our country, he encouraged me to join. So I did and when I was a junior in high school, I went to summer camp at Camp Bullis, Texas. The camp was attached to a regular military unit. We all started in the infantry the first year. We were on maneuvers and artillery came along in the trucks, created all the dust and I said to my self "I'm going to get into the artillery next year."

I had to take a math-oriented test to get into the artillery. I passed the test and the next summer I'm in the artillery, which was more elite than the infantry. That summer we were out on maneuvers on another hot summer day. They used airplanes for the first time in the maneuver, and we had to take cover. We were pinned down all day in poison oak and missed our chow wagon. And I thought, "Those guys in the airplanes are going back to base and dinner and movies with girls." "So, I'm going to get in the Air Corp."

The next year, I went to college and could take flying as a course. In the course were four of us, three boys and one girl, Vivian Peterson, who became my girlfriend. We passed the course and became pilots. By this time Hitler had invaded Poland in 1939. The military offered a deal where one could get in the air force or navy with two years of college. So I joined the Army Aircorp. I went to primary pilot training in Oxnard, California, at Cal Tech, then went on to basic pilot training at Randolph Field Texas, and then to advanced training at Brooks Field, San Antonio, Texas. I received my wings and became a commissioned officer (second lieutenant) of the Army Air Corps with a pilot rating, class 41C on April 25, 1941. I was making \$225 /month. With my first paycheck, I bought a four door, Ford sedan.

33. What was the full name of your spouse?

Eleanor Carson Hooey. Nicknamed Hoo.

34. When and how did you meet your spouse? What did you do on dates?

One of my best friends in flying school was John Rush. He was so different than me. His father was athletic director of Princeton University. I revered his gentrified upbringing and he valued my down to earth upbringing. Langley Field, Virginia was our first assignment after we were commissioned as officers. One day we were told that we were being assigned to Westover Field, Mass. He said we were going to have a great time at Westover Field, which was near two girl's schools. He said, "Bob, I have just the girl for you."

He was a ladies man with a smart-looking convertible. The second day after arriving at Westover Field, he said, "I've arranged a picnic with a group of girls from Smith College." When we got to Smith, I was assigned to go into a dormitory to pick up a couple of girls. As I was walking out to the car, I saw Eleanor Carson Hooey sitting in the car. I fell in love with her

the minute I saw her. And this was the girl that John had in mind for me. She later confided in me that she was disappointed that he wasn't her date and I ended up with her.

35. What was it like when you proposed? Where and when did it happen? How did you feel?

Eleanor and I started dating. When she graduated from Smith in June of 1941, she returned home to Somerville NJ. She would often come to Westover and we would enjoy summer outings at the so-called New England beaches. We didn't care if they were rocky, because we were in love.

Cross-country flying in the PT trainer was encouraged as part of our training, so I would fly to Newark NJ airport on weekends to see her. I learned about Solberg airport near Somerville and that Thor Solberg was training Norwegian pilots there. I introduced myself to Thor and he said he would welcome military use of the airport. From then on I would fly to Solberg on courting missions ---to court my girl in Somerville. So I could say that I flew the first war bird into Solberg and I have a photo to prove it.

Trips to NJ always included visiting with Eleanor's mother, cousins and friends, including Fred and Lois Schmelz. Lois was one of Eleanor's closest friends. We also spent time at the beautiful NJ beaches and mother Hooey at times chaperoned.

I spontaneously proposed to Eleanor one afternoon when we were romancing at Paradise Pond on the Smith campus. It was a beautiful late summer Saturday afternoon in 1941. It was one of the most delightful responses I ever heard when she said she would marry me. At the time, I was a little surprised that she had no reservations -- or didn't defer until she asked her mother. We later went to NYC to a well known Fifth Avenue jeweler to buy her engagement ring.

Chapter Three – The War Years

Military Career: Bob had a very intense and distinguished military career in the Army Air Corp from 1940 thru 1945. He attended Command & Staff School for key personnel and subsequently held the positions of Group Operations Officer, Lead Crew Commander, Aircraft Commander, and Pilot. Bob's assignments included:

34th Bomb Group at Langley Field, Norfolk Virginia (mother group of 8th Air Force),
6th Bomb Group & 6th Air Force Headquarters in Panama,
40th Bomb Group in Pratt, Kansas,
462 Bomb Group in Hayes, Kansas; Piardoba, India; Chengtu, China; Tinian Island; McDill, Florida.

He had Air, Wing, Group & Squadron Commander Combat Lead Crew duties. His last duty was as Director of Operations 462nd Bomber Group with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Bob served overseas for 36 months. He participated in numerous aviation firsts and checked out in B-17, 18, 19, 23, 24, 25, 26, 29, LB-30 and numerous other tactical, service and training planes.

World War II Missions: Bob's first combat mission was December 9, 1941 (two days after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor) and his last was September 2, 1945 (where he led a 525 plane Show of Force flyover the Japanese surrender ceremony on the battleship Missouri in the Bay of Tokyo).

Bob flew a total of eighty-seven combat patrol missions and thirty combat bombing, mining, and photography missions.

He made twenty-six Hump Crossings from India to China. He flew on the first and last B-29 combat missions over Japan. His combat missions were in Panama, Guatemala, Ecuador, Peru, Galapagos, India, China, Tinian & US. His targets included Atlantic & Pacific Sea Frontier, Sumatra, Malaysia, Burma, Thailand, Indochina, Manchuria, Korea, China, Formosa, Japan, and Philippines.

Bob's awards include two Distinguished Flying Crosses, five Air Medals, and thirteen War Time Commendations & Citations.

Bob commanded and participated in many aviation firsts while serving in the Army Air Corp:

- Flew as observer pilot on **first dusk to dawn flight** on September 1941 where he departed Westover Field, Massachusetts in a B-17B and “bombed” Pittsburgh, Pa., Savannah Ga., NY City and returned to Westover at dawn. Event covered by national news service.
- Introduced the **first radar equipped U.S. bombers (LB-30)** into combat.
- Participated in the transfer ceremony at Boeing Wichita plant of the **first B-29 the Air Corps accepted from Boeing** and delivered it to Pratt, Kansas.
- Commended by General H. Arnold for the **first successful test flight bomb run at 38,000 feet in a B-29** (in 1944, that was outer space!)
- Participated in the **first and last B-29 combat missions to Japan** as aircraft commander on mission #2 on June 15, 1944 targeting Yawata steel mills and Air Force commander on mission #332 on September 2, 1945 for a 525 plane Show of Force over battleship Missouri surrender ceremony in Bay of Tokyo.
- Participated in the **first mine laying mission #5 by B-29s targeting Palembang, Sumatra.**

- Participated in the **longest non-stop combat mission of WWII** from Ceylon, India to Mosie River, and Sumatra with a roundtrip of 4030 miles in 18 hours, 50 minutes.
- Served as air commander on mission #186 Yokohama that was the **largest single in trail assembly of B-29s (454)** over a single target and was **the most destructive of any single mission** (8.9 sq. miles destroyed with 2590 tons of bombs).
- **Advanced the theory of “ground effect”** which was later proved by NASA. **Advanced a theory of cruise control and bomb loading** of the B-29 that substantially increased the bomb load on most missions.

36. Where and when did you get married?

Everyone knows December 7, 1941, when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, but few know that 6 days later, on Saturday December 13th I was engaged to be married. On December 7th, I was at Westover Field as 2nd Lieutenant pilot trainee either riding as an observer or co-pilot in B-17's. I had a year or more of training still remaining. On December 8th, the next day, I was one of General Arnolds 1,100 full fledged combat-ready pilots that could fly anything in the Air Corp. inventory whether I had ever seen or heard of the plane. On December 9th, 1941, two days after Pearl Harbor, I was co-pilot on a top secret mission in a B-23 experimental bomber which neither I nor the pilot had ever heard of. On Thursday of that week, I had realized I would not be back for the wedding and sent a telegram to my best man, who was a student at MIT and to Eleanor, my fiancée. Later I found out that, while my best man received the telegram, Eleanor did not.

When we arrived back at home base around 11pm on Sunday evening, I was told to call the commanding officer immediately. He said, *“Your future mother-in-law has been driving us crazy trying to find out where you were! And, she didn’t believe that WE didn’t even know where you were!”* He told me that I could have 36 hours off, but had to be on base for roll call Tuesday 8am. Before getting underway for Somerville, I called my fiancée. Her mother answered and said that Eleanor would not talk with me. When I explained at some length to Mrs. Hooey where I had been the past week without revealing the mission, she replied, *“Bob, I’ll take care of Eleanor. You come on down here and we’ll have the wedding arranged by time you arrive.”*

So I was off to Somerville, arriving 4am on Monday morning. Eleanor was relieved to see me and we were married in St. John’s Episcopal Church at 11am. What about the honeymoon? Eleanor and I drove back to Springfield where we spent our wedding night. I made the 8am Tuesday roll call. At 8:30, I was co-piloting a B-18 bomber and searching the Atlantic for the still anticipated German Navy.

37. What memory stands out the most from your wedding day?

The most memorable event of my wedding ceremony was when Eleanor’s train caught on fire. After the ceremony we went into the sacristy with the priest to sign the papers. The maid of honor and best man were witnesses. There was an open flame gas heater and the train of her gown swept by the heater and burst into flames. Everyone was alarmed. I stomped it out with my feet. She was dismayed “how can I walk down the aisle with this train?” The maid of honor

took a scissors and cut off the burned end of the train. And we walked out of the church as man and wife without anyone the wiser.

38. How would you describe your spouse? What did you admire most about her?

Eleanor was very deliberate, unpretentious, quite, calm. She never showed her emotions. She was very proper of language and attire. She was very feminine but had a tomboy streak. She was captain of her lacrosse team in school. She was an excellent rifle marksman. When we got married, she did not know how to cook since she grew up with a cook and maid in the house. She went to a number of ethnic cooking schools and became a wonderful gourmet cook. She was not interested at all in community politics and civic affairs. She chooses her friends carefully and was socially reserved. She was stubborn at times.

39. What do you believe is the key to a successful marriage?

We both understood what our individual priorities and accepted them – gave each other the freedom to follow your individual interests. I decided my marriage was more important than my air force career or other jobs during my career that would have required us to relocate. When I took a job in Buffalo, she didn't move for two years and we were there for two years before moving back to NJ.

40. How did you find out your were going to be a parent for the first time?

I was in Panama and got a letter from Eleanor telling me she was pregnant. I was awed that I was so young and going to be a father in the beginning of a multi-year war. My commanding officer was named Mooney. I got another letter that said she had a miscarriage in her last trimester. He sent me on a mission back to the states – and gave me a few days to go and see Eleanor. He's buried in the Somerville cemetery – baby Vaucher.

I was in India and got a letter from Eleanor telling me she was pregnant. I remember when Yvonne was born. The Red Cross notified me. We were on R&R in Calcutta India staying at the top hotel in Calcutta. Three of us were going to see the cremation – burning gats. We were approaching the hotel entrance and someone yelled that the Red Cross had a telegram. Hey Vaucher, you're a father." That night, all the drinks were on me. We had a big celebration of my fatherhood.

My Introduction to the B-29

Now comes my affair with the B-29. After flying search missions in the North Atlantic, Caribbean and Near Pacific, I had accumulated about 1000 hours in 4 engine bombers. At that time only a handful of pilots world-wide had that much time in 4 engine bombers.

While I was stationed in Panama, suddenly I was sent back to the US to a fast track command and staff school which was pretty heady stuff for a 1st Lieutenant. What I didn't know was that General Arnold was beginning to put together the organization to run the B-29 program; thus had ordered the worldwide return of experienced people to form the command.

About two months later I ended up at Pratt Kansas in a large hanger being briefed and inspecting the largest production plane in the world. The B-29 was a quantum leap over any

previous production bomber. It was big – 141 ft wingspan (½ length of football field). It was heavy -- weighing 80,000 lbs empty and could carry 40,000 lbs of payload. We actually overloaded them; carrying 58,000 lbs. It was powered by 4 Wright #3350 engines with combined horsepower of 8800. It held 8500 gallons of fuel.

We were told that it flew like nothing we had ever flown, but had some similarities to the B-26 twin engine Martin attack bomber, so off to Del Rio Texas to the B-26 training center. And after ten or so landings I was now ready to take on the B-29. Well, to my surprise, a Boeing test pilot checked me out after two hours and fifteen minutes and I was off to the Wichita Boeing plant to pick up the first production B-29 officially delivered to the Air Corp. There was also another pilot on the assignment. I was designated first pilot as I had fifteen more minutes flying time even though he outranked me as captain. Well, after a ceremony with a few hundred Boeing workers gathered around and a bottle of champagne broken on the nose wheel, I took off for Pratt Kansas and an odyssey that lasted another two and ½ years.

There is no way I can relate to you the drama of the B-29 saga except in very general terms and a few episodes. When we started testing in Kansas we didn't have a clue that so many problems would be encountered. Some were really big and critical. Almost every aspect of the B-29 was at a new level or first time application. This was the first plane to go into full scale production without undergoing to two five years of testing before final specifications were released for production. Several thousand problems had to be solved. There were over 2000 engineering changes on the engines alone.

To illustrate, let me read a passage from the book entitled Point of No Return, by Wilbur Morrison.

“When Vaucher took the airplane up from Walker, it was just another flight to him because he didn't realize how crucial this test was to Arnold. At 38,000 feet, he made a bomb run and the engines maintained their cylinder-head temperature and the new doors snapped open properly, and the bombardier made a good run. Later, in Operations, he reported they had made a successful flight. Then, much to his surprise, he was told that General Arnold was on the phone and wanted to talk to him. *“I've just heard about your successful flight at 38,000 feet. Were you able to hold your airspeed on the run?”* The General's voice was well modulated and pleasant as Vaucher listened; assuring Arnold that he had been able to do so. *“Did the cabin pressurization hold?”* Arnold asked. *“Yes sir,”* Vaucher said. *“There was no problem whatsoever.”*

After thanking him, and asking Vaucher to convey his congratulations to the crew, Arnold hung up. Only then did it sink in that he had actually talked to the head of the army air forces, and he was amazed that such a busy man would take time to talk to him personally.”

38,000 ft. was outer space at that time. Only a few people had gone to that height. So from July 1943 to April 1944 when we departed for India we were in a state of discovery while trying to learn how to use the plane.

My B-29 Experience in the Pacific Theater

I subsequently flew twenty-six Hump Crossings from India to China. My targets included Sumatra, Malaysia, Burma, Thailand, Indochina, Manchuria, Korea, China, Formosa, Japan, and Philippines.

By the summer of 1945, Allied forces had retaken most of the areas earlier conquered by the Japanese and were closing in on the Japanese homeland, which had already been effectively isolated by Allied airpower. By August 1st, virtually all of the Japanese cities of economic significance suffered 25-90% destruction. We had placed over 12,000 mines in the harbors and waterways, and shipping was at a standstill. In essence, the strength of the B-29 attacks literally brought Japan to her knees.

August 6, 1945 completely changed our lives when the B-29” Enola Gay” dropped the first atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. All of us who had been through fourteen months of hell in China and the Pacific were awed when the damage reports came in. Three days later a second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. Japanese military leaders still hesitated to surrender, but the Japanese Emperor Hirohito prevailed upon them, and Japanese authorities surrendered on to the Allies unconditionally on August 14. On August 14th, my unit, the 462nd bomb group, made the last bombing mission over Japan, completely destroying the Hi Ka Ri Arsenal. Three hours later the word was flashed to all B-29s to return. The war was over.

Formal surrender ceremonies presided over by Gen. Douglas MacArthur, were held aboard the battleship USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay on September 2, 1945. The signing ceremony aboard the deck of the *Missouri* lasted twenty-three minutes and was broadcast throughout the world. The instrument was first signed by the Japanese foreign minister then the Chief of the Army General Staff, at 09:04. Afterwards, U.S. General Douglas MacArthur, Commander in the Southwest Pacific and Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, also signed.

I happened to be in the right place at the right time and General Ramey gave me the honor of leading the show of force of 525 B-29's flying over the Missouri at the exact time that MacArthur signed the treaty, 9:17AM. General Ramey's last words to me were,” Vaucher, that's one target time that you better not miss!” And I didn't. Here's a photo of the event taken from my plane and which now hangs in the Nimitz museum.

Link to Japanese Surrender Ceremony Newsreel on YouTube

<http://enka2.netorage.com:9711/harddisk/user/lyk36/mumess/376-macarthurjap.htm>

Chapter Three – The War Years

INDIA –CHINA

Roosevelt had promised that the B-29 would be in action by March 1944 retarding the Japanese advance into China. So our destination was the CBI (China-Burma-India). All operations out of China to Japan were on a HIT AND RUN basis. We could not have the B29's as sitting ducks in China – subject to Japanese air attacks.

Sustaining the 20th Bomber Command was a LOGISTICS nightmare. All supplies -- food, fuel, bombs ---had to be shipped by sea to Calcutta and trucked one thousand miles to our rear bases in Assam Valley India. Then they had to be air transported from India over the HUMP. The Himalayas were the highest mountains and the worst weather in the world. There was no weather forecast or landing field for the twelve hundred mile trip. In the beginning, we airlifted our supplies to China in our combat B-29's. We lost twenty-three B-29's over the Hump and some 450 aircraft went down along the "Aluminum Trail."

The scenario of a typical mission went like this: In the morning the 20th Bomber Command teletyped a mission alert and everyone on the base in India got in motion to ready for the mission. About 3am the following morning crews were up for breakfast and started departing at first light in order to cross the Hump and arrive at the China base about noon. There would be an early evening departure and hitting the target around midnight. We would land in China early in the morning and go to a debriefing while the planes were refueled --and get back to India around noon. If by that time (after 33 hours) you had not passed out, you went to the Club that evening and did so.

Every crew had their own unique experiences: engine fires, engine failures, prop ran away, pressurization failed, fuel transfer pump failed, ran low on gas, lost radio contact, and the list goes on and on.

MISS LACE – HIMALYAS

My first plane in CBI was named Miss Lace by the crew. Miss Lace was the heroine in the Terry and the Pirates comics. They wrote Milton Caniff, the cartoonist and asked for a drawing of Miss Lace, which he sent to us and then was painted on the plane by one of the unit's artists. After flying Miss Lace for a few months, we were appointed lead crew and assigned to fly King Size. Here I am with my eleven man crew and King Size.

I flew twenty-six Hump Crossings from India to China. My targets included Sumatra, Malaysia, Burma, Thailand, Indochina, Manchuria, Korea, China, Formosa, Japan, and Philippines. Along the way our C.O. Colonel Carmichael was shot down and later our Operations Officer, Colonel Roushe along with many others. I was selected to take Colonel Roushe's place and promoted to Lt. Colonel.

While in India, I received a letter from Eleanor telling me she was pregnant. I have a vivid memory of hearing about the birth of Yvonne. We were on R&R in Calcutta India. As we were approaching the hotel from a day of sight seeing, someone yelled "Hey Vaucher, there's a telegram from the Red Cross. You're a father." That night, all the drinks were on me.

TINIAN

In April 1945, the 20th Bomb Command was transferred to Tinian Island and reactivated as the 58th Bomb Wing under General Ramey. The BLITZ on Japan started in May and was ratcheted up to daily missions with 1000 B-29's. The Empire Program, as it was called, was awesome. In India-China, I had led several squadron and Group missions. But now we were in the Big League and I was Air Commander for Wings and Combined Wings. One was the May 29, 1945 Yokahama mission which was the longest in trail of 454 B-29s'. We destroyed the target with nearly three thousand tons of bombs.

My most dramatic mission was on June 5, 1945. It was a faulted plan. My deputy and second in command were both shot down over the target. I managed to get back to Iwo Jima on a "Wing and a Prayer." We counted 400 holes in the aircraft & quit counting. The plane was sent to the junk pile. I know for sure that I'm here today because of Iwo, as there was no way we could have made the next 800 miles to Tinian. Over 70 B-29's were rescued that day by Iwo Jima. Eleven B-29's were lost and 176 damaged.

End of the War

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MISSOURI

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CHAPTER 4 – FAMILY

EARLY FAMILY

Going home was a shock after being in combat for over three years. 12 million GIs came home with no jobs. I went home to Somerville to begin life with Eleanor, baby Yvonne, who was now 11 months old and Eleanor's pet terrier, Peter.

I turned down an opportunity to stay in the Air force and be the field operations officer for the Bikini atomic bomb test. I also turned down a job with KLM in Singapore and a job as co-pilot

with American Airlines. I landed a job in sales for the Palmer Marine Engine company and outsold everyone, becoming sales manager in 6 months.

After not seeing my family in Texas for five years, I traveled often to see them over the next years.

In 1948, we bought our home on Foothill Road and took up life in the country – in Bridgewater. Suzanne was born in 1953 and our third child, David was born in 1957.

FAMILY LIFE

Since Eleanor had summered at the NJ shore her entire childhood, she and the children loved the shore. By 1955, we thought the shore was getting crowded, so we decided to build our swimming pool.

The pool quickly became the center of life for our family and an attraction for the town. The Red Cross, Y, and Girl Scouts all taught swimming classes in the Vaucher pool. In the winter the pool became an ice skating rink. The ice was lovingly maintained by Dad and Eleanor designed and sewed the children's skating outfits.

Our children enjoyed life in the country on Foothill Road. They learned to horseback ride. Suzanne had a horse, named Rob Roy who lived in the barn – and they rode him in the field behind the house

When Yvonne was a junior at Smith College, she fell in love and married Alfred Butterfield, a junior at Harvard. Suzanne was enamored with Al's best man, Buzz.

CHAPTER 4 – COMMUNITY AND CAREER

COMMUNITY

After returning from war, I got involved in civic affairs, joining the Somerville Lincoln Hose volunteer fire company. General Bowers, who headed the vestry at St. Johns took me under his wing I and I became active in the church. I was elected to the vestry and chaired the 1956 capital campaign to enlarge the parish hall. Our social life revolved around St Johns – from pancake suppers to men's club and bowling leagues.

When we moved to Bridgewater, I quickly got involved in local government and school affairs.

In 1960, Millicent Fenwick recruited me to be the Northern NJ regional manager of Nixon's campaign for president. I still say that Kennedy stole the election.

As of 2010, Bob's still involved in local community affairs. Here's YouTube video of him speaking at Tea Party Rally on the Flemington NJ courthouse steps on April 15, 2010, at the age of 91.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xyV2j-wmNxY>

CAREER

As for my career, I went from Palmer to Niagara Machine and Tool. In two years, I became the leading salesman. I then was recruited to be VP of Precision Manufacturing. My goal was to develop a line of household items that used metal manufacturing capabilities. My first invention

was an adjustable height ironing table. Some friends are still using one of my ironing tables. Niagara recruited me back as General Sales Manager in 1957.

In 1960 I left Niagara to start my own business with an idea I had for a machine tool product line. The Egan brothers, Ed and Larry, asked me to join them to develop the product. The product line was a success and Egan formed the metalworking division which I headed up as General Manager until the division was sold in 1983. I left Egan and became an independent consultant until retiring from the working world in 1990.