

THE P-38 AND I

By Glenn van de Sandt

At the onset of World War II, I was 17 and a high school student. I had a friend who was a B-18 bomber pilot in the Army Air Corps Reserves. I also built flying models from scratch, one being a Pan Am Clipper flying boat. This model helped me get a job as a model builder at the nearby shipyards, where I was to go to work when the model shop was completed. In the interim I was to work on the railroad gang. When the structure was completed I was called, but my supervisor on the railroad gang would not release me, so I quit, with the result of my later being drafted into the service. At the reception center I was offered the chance of going through the Aviation Cadet program, and my flying career began.

After completing the training I graduated at Williams Field, Arizona, and took [additional] training there in the RP-322, with photo recon training at Coffeyville, Kansas, in the B-25 and the F-5, the photo version of the P-38. Then on to the Pacific, where I joined the 36th Photo Recon Squadron, which itself was new to the Pacific Theater of Operations, on the island of Biak in January 1945, moving on to Clark Field in the Philippines, then on to Okinawa. We had not seen much action, for the lack of aircraft, until we reached Clark, from where we flew photo missions to northern Luzon and long missions over a lot of water to Formosa, now Taiwan. After Clark we loaded onto an LST (Landing Ship, Tank) for our trip to Okinawa.

Our compound on Okinawa was next to the other photo recon squadrons of the 6th Reconnaissance Group, i.e. the 26th PRS and the 8th PRS, and we were there when the A-bomb was dropped. While there, we were treated to the loss of our housing (tents) due to "The Late Divine Wind," a typhoon that swept across the island only to circle and return a week later and do it again. Two F-5s from one of the three photo squadrons were on missions over Japan when the A-bomb was dropped. They took photos of the mushroom cloud.

Close to the end of the war, while based on Okinawa, thirteen pilots from the 36th PRS and the 26th PRS were sent to the depot on Biak to ferry P-38/F-5s from there to Clark Field. Nine of us got off on the initial try, with four going in at Morotai with problems. Five of us made it to Clark, with an overnight stop at Zamboanga and extreme severe weather on the second leg. All five planes were redlined for one reason or another. Mine was for a minor problem with the small fixed trim tab on the rudder. Those planes are probably in the photos of the junk piles after the end of WWII.

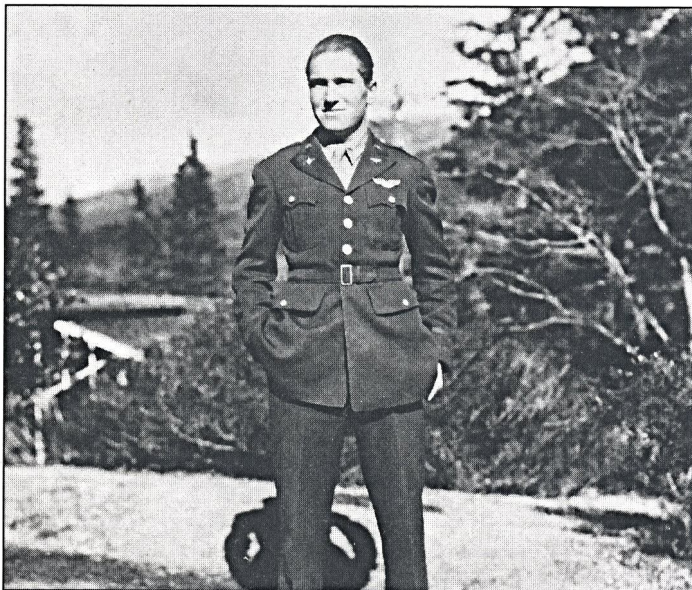
The 36th PRS was originally called the 28th Observation Squadron and in July 1942 was activated at Goodman Field, Kentucky. It was deactivated in February 1946 and in September 1990 was redesignated as the 36th Tactical Intelligence Squadron at Langley Air Force Base, Virginia, which as far as I have been able to determine is still active.

The personnel of the 36th PRS became members of the 8th PRS on 19 September 1945, by order of Lt. Col. [Joseph] Davis [Jr], Commander of the 6th Reconnaissance Group, and my memories are mostly of the short time after the move to Japan, since the war was then over.

The 8th PRS headed for Fuchu, Japan, via another LST and

another typhoon. In tow were small rescue craft attached with long cables to the fleet of LSTs, and during the typhoon the boats disappeared behind the waves only to rise again. It seems like we circled in the center of that storm for days. We all felt sorry for the poor crewmen on those boats.

In Japan, we were billeted at the Fuchu Petroleum Laboratory complex and flew from the Chofu air strip, which was a very short runway ending at one end in a very muddy field and at the other in a concrete drainage ditch. (I hated the [F-5] G



Lt. Glenn van de Sandt, photographed while on R&R at the Fugia Hotel near Mount Fuji, Japan, just before he returned to the U.S.

model. At Chofu you could not see the runway in front of you [due to its huge nose].) We flew missions over Japan from the northern tip to the southern tip. I remember two missions of mine, one photo mapping Tokyo and the other photo mapping Hiroshima at altitude, with a low altitude look for my own information.

By January 1946 I had gained enough points to return to the Zone of the Interior and to finish a 24-year military career in the USAAF/USAF and an additional 20-year career in the Federal Civil Service. I was probably the youngest combat pilot in the 8th PRS at the time, being just 22 when I returned home. During the Korean "Police Action," I returned to the same buildings that the 8th PRS used at Fuchu as the Supply Officer of the 5th AACS Installation and Maintenance Squadron.