

Using Days Off: Tokyo Rose, Richard's Comic Strip, Bourbon From the Flight Surgeon

RK: We flew a mission every day, but each pilot only had to fly every other day. You had one day off. One day off, and then you flew a combat mission. One day off, then flew a combat mission. On your days off it was very important to have something to do. Because we were living in a jungle, in a tent, and mosquitoes, and bugs, and snakes, and you name it. New Guinea was one giant jungle infested with every kind of thing that you could imagine.

And so, living was tough. But the thing that was important to us is it - strangely enough - in the evenings we would pipe in music from the armed forces radio station. And our favorite music came from Tokyo with Tokyo Rose. I don't know if you've ever heard of her. Well Tokyo Rose was - we listened to her every night. [Laughs]. She was something. Of course, she also would tell her little story every night, about, "well, the red-nosed butcher shot down some of our boys, but we're gonna get even with them, and we're gonna bur--," blah, blah, blah, blah. And then she'd go and play some music.

DS: She was playing American jazz and stuff, right? All American top hits?

RK: Oh yeah, she had all of the best hits. She had the latest music. I dunno where she got it, but she had it. And she was broadcasting from Tokyo. It was a thing. But anyway, you gotta have something to do, and that was very important. And so, I took my sketchbook and I sketched and I painted, and many of these paintings and sketches and stuff - I've got stacks of them inside, there - I did during the war. Lots of unseen things. That was my - what I did to keep doing. And that was important.

Those of us who found something to do, did well. And I also did a comic strip that I put up every other day - I'd put up one installment of the comic strip. And it was about a hot-rod - or a really, really super fighter pilot - I don't know if you've ever heard of Errol Flynn. Probably not. You have? Okay. Well, he was a hot-shot-type of guy. So I created a guy named Speed Flynn, instead of Errol Flynn. Speed Flynn, he was a hot dog fighter pilot, he shot people down. But he ran into a super female Japanese pilot. and she was just almost as good as he was. This is a comic strip now, mind you. Not really, not really. But she would shoot him down and then he'd shoot her down. And then they'd meet somewhere, and blah blah blah blah. So anyway, it was a comic strip and the guys just loved it. And I had it - I did one every other day, and if I didn't have that thing ready on my day off I didn't get into mess hall. So [laughs] I had to get the next installment of Speed Flynn.

DS: So the pilots, and the mechanics, and everybody on the base loved it, right?

RK: Oh yeah, they'd all come over and I'd put it on the bulletin board, and everybody'd go over and see it, and see what the next installation was. If I didn't have the next installation, I was in trouble. But they loved it. We did different things to keep our mind off things. And we have a great flight surgeon, who, I don't know

where he got it, but he managed to get booze. And we would come home off a bad mission - a long mission - strapped into a tiny cockpit...the P38 was a great airplane but a tiny little cockpit, and boy you were beat after six or eight hours in one of those tiny little cockpits. But he would always meet us when we came in. And he'd walk down the row of the guys as you pulled in. You're in order, you know. And you pulled in and stopped and shut her down, and then the next guy would go by you and pull in and stop. And he'd be here with the first airplane up and give you a big shot of bourbon in the canteen cup. And I gotta tell you, boy, that was great. [Laughs]. Then he'd go to the next guy as he rolled up and gave him a shot of bourbon. So that was his contribution, and it helped a lot.