



*Charles Kemper in the Cockpit*

S/Sgt Charles Kemper  
21<sup>st</sup> Squadron  
Crew Chief

Charles was born in Westport, CT on April 29, 1919.

Before the war, Charles was "working in gas stations and garages. At that time jobs were really hard to get".

The draft was in effect before the war, and Charles was drafted in September 1941 for what he expected to be one year of service. He reported to Fort Devens and received equipment that was from 1917, and then was sent to Jefferson Barracks for basic training. "I was scheduled to go into armor and I didn't think I'd like it, so I enlisted for three years in the air force".

Once in the air force, Charles "went to mechanic school at Chennault Field in Chicago" and then on to Goldsboro, NC where he was stationed for two years until he joined the 413<sup>th</sup> at Blumenthal.

At Goldsboro he was an engine instructor for basic aircraft engines. When he went to Blumenthal he encountered the P-47 for the first time. "I thought it was great. It was a rugged ship."

Generally the pilots were young, many from small towns. "Some of these guys didn't know how to drive a car because we had to teach them how to drive a jeep".

Charles recalls traveling by train from North Carolina to Seattle. "A troop train wasn't the greatest way to travel. All our meals were prepared for us in the baggage car. We walked the

length of the train to get our food and on the way back the train swayed. We spilt a lot of food on the way back."

On the Kota Inten, "the Indian crew had Hindus and another religion. They were divided. They would fight each other with poles. It was entertainment. We cheered them on."

"I remember showering with salt water, drinking water was rationed, standing up to eat. The crews sold us some Indian beer. I think it was a dollar a bottle". I asked how much beer did the crew have? "I don't know. Whenever we asked for it they went down and got it", was Charles' response.

"I came back [to the US after the war] on a Navy troop carrier. On that they had dining areas and good food."

In the 413<sup>th</sup>, Staff Sergeant Kemper was a crew chief, "assigned to one airplane to keep it flying."

He was taken off the Kota Inten in Saipan because the aircraft were there. For training the planes strafed the Truk Islands and, while on Saipan Charles got aquantined with the pilots. There was no enemy fire from Truk, because no supplies ever got there. Occaisionally, planes would come back with damage because the pilots went to low and their own fire came up to hit their own plane.

Saipan and Tinian, the Northern Mariana Islands, are very close to one another and Tinian served as a base for B-29s. "When the B-29s came back to Tinian, you didn't think they would end there were so many."

When their work was finished on Saipan, Charles flew to Ie Shima on a C-46.

The crew chief, "worked, more or less, with the pilot." While the specialists, such as armorers and mechanics, actually prepared the planes, Charles' job was to make sure that everything, as appropriate for the mission, was properly in place and ready to go. In addition, "if the pilot came back and told me of a problem, I made sure it was fixed." "Once the plane was off in the morning we'd get ready for the next flight".

If a small repair was required, the mechanics or armorers would take care of it in the parking area. For "big jobs", like an engine replacement, the planes went to a special engineering area.

"It's hard to see over the nose so we'd sit on a wing and direct him [the pilot] to parking".

There were two pilots that flew the plane in his care and each pilot had their name on one side of the aircraft. One pilot was Ennis.

"When I left for discharge, my plane was still there. It always came back".

On Ie Shima, "the food wasn't the greatest. The water wasn't the greatest either, it hung in rubber or canvas bags". While he doesn't remember the monsoon season, Charles remembers seeing water spouts, "but none came ashore". Each night, at about 2 a.m., two Japanese planes would come over and bomb the runways.

"Most of our living quarters were around the outside of the island. The runways in the center." "There wasn't much to do when we were off duty. The swimming wasn't great". Some of the men would put homemade "booze in orange & grapefruit juice", but Charles "never drank anything that someone else didn't first."

When the end of the war was announced, there was a big fireworks display on Okinawa. "I heard a few guys got killed."

Because he had been drafted before the war, Charles had enough points to be one of the first men to go home.

Charles recalls William Terrell from Long Island who kept in touch after the war.

After the war, Charles "worked some in the garages". He eventually got a job with Sikorsky where he worked for 33 years, getting helicopters ready for flight and ready for delivery. A couple times he went on a delivery as a crew member. "Pilots used to let me take the controls". Coincidentally, Charles remembered that when he was on Saipan, he went over to Tinian where he saw his first Sikorsky helicopter.

I asked Charles if he left a girl behind when he went into the army. "Just one", he answered, "eventually she became my wife. We got married in 1947".