



Plain Brown Rapper

Christmas Edition

A CHRISTMAS TO REMEMBER

Submitted by Charles Brown

Fifty years ago, Christmas Season 1948, I had a Christmas experience I won't forget. I was stationed in Tsingtao, China (Quinqdao since the communist Chinese Government took over in 1949) completing two years of service with the 1st Marine Division. On December 16th we were ordered to pack our gear and be ready to leave by December 20th. We were to pack what we could take with us and disable or destroy what we couldn't. Some of us departed in C-46 aircraft with equipment stacked in the center of the cabin. Chinese War-brides and their children on bucket seats on one side of the cabin, marines on the other. We were the last U.S. Personnel to leave because Mao Tse Tung and his Communist Army had moved out of Manchuria, overran Peking and Tientsen, moving south to eventually take over mainland China.

After 48 hours of flying with refueling stops at Okinawa, Kivajelain, and Johnson Island, we finally arrived in Pearl Harbor on December 23. After 2 days of processing at Headquarters, some of us boarded a flying boat and headed for San Francisco. I landed at Alameda Naval Air Station the day after Christmas, 1948 and went to Treasure Island for my next Assignment and 30 days leave. While I was in San Francisco, Dick, who was stationed north of there, and I got together for a couple of days. We tooled around the city and saw all kinds of strange things while there. I left San Francisco about December 29th, went by train to Camp Pendleton, South of Los Angeles to sign in at Headquarters there. Then I started my 30 day leave. Made airplane reservations to fly out of Los Angeles for Denver, but couldn't fly until January 3rd, so I went to Santa Ana and stayed with our second cousins, Rita and Frank Kahanic. I especially remember this because it was the first time I had seen television. They had just purchased one about the size of a floor type radio we had at home in Cheyenne, but the picture tube was about the size of today's 13 inch TV. We watched the Rose Bowl

Game, January 1, 1949. The Kahanic's took me to LA International for my United Air Lines flight to Denver on the 3rd of January and that's when the fun began.

The flight left about 1 p.m. and shortly after takeoff we ran into a bad storm over the San Bernardino Mountains. The plane began to jerk and shake, then hit a downdraft and people and luggage went everywhere. An 80 year old lady sitting in front of me hit the bulkhead and was knocked out for a while, but revived after the stewardess gave her oxygen. The weather got worse as we headed East so the pilot decided to land at Grand Junction, Colorado. We found out later the storm had closed the Denver airport. United loaded the passengers on a train in Grand Junction at 8 o'clock that night and we headed for Denver arriving there at 2 a.m. the next morning. When we arrived, I went to the ticket counter to catch the first train to Cheyenne but was informed the storm had drifted snow across so badly they couldn't get trains out to Cheyenne. No one knew how long it would be until they could open the line, so I spent the rest of the night on a depot bench, along with hundreds of other people. No luck getting out the next day so I got a room at the old Oxford Hotel and stayed there for five more days while the storm raged on. Finally, on about January 10th they announced, anyone wanting to go to Cheyenne that night could take a chance on the first train at 8 p.m. The train had plows, three engines and some passenger cars. They would try to break through the snowdrifts and open the tracks to Cheyenne. After 8 hours of slow going, hitting snow banks, backing up and hitting them again, we arrived at the station in Cheyenne. When I got off the train I could see what the storm was like in Cheyenne. Couldn't get a cab at 4 a.m., the streets were blocked anyway and nothing was moving so I decided if I was going to get to the house I had better start my walk. I threw my seabag over my shoulder and headed down 16th street to Holliday Park and finally reached the house at about 5 a.m. I knocked on the door since no one knew I coming home and I remember mom and the 44 special under the mattress of her bed. I didn't want to startle her by walking in unannounced. She got up and let me in.

It was the most emotional time I can ever remember, seeing her there in her nightgown with her long hair down and both of us crying.

After we said our hellos and settled down to talk, we went to the kitchen where she made breakfast. I'll always remember the Christmas tree was still up in the Dining Room and my gifts were around it because I was planning to be home about the First of January. Things didn't work out that way.

After a couple of weeks in Cheyenne, I flew to Casper (the highways were still closed) to see Anna and Norman. I remember the storm raged on all the time I was there. Norman was the County Agent and he had Army Air Force Cargo planes flying hay to stranded cattle. I recall having to remove snow drifts in front of their garage using a buck saw to cut out chunks of snow. Shovels wouldn't touch the snow, it was like concrete.

I went back home where I spent a few days, then left by train for Los Angeles and finally to Camp Del Mar at Oceanside, California to serve the last three months of my enlistment in the Marine Corps.

Editors note: The blizzard of '49 was amazing. We didn't return to school from Christmas break until late January. There were weeks when we couldn't go to the store. Mother had a room in the basement, we called it the "Fruit Room" and I remember it had been a ham radio room for someone and an owl and call letters were painted on the door. In the fruit room she had cases of food, most of which she had canned. Peaches, pears, cherries, beans, peas, pickled beets, canned milk, laundry soap and etc and etc. It was quite a cache. We existed very well during that period of time.

Nicki Schumacher said she remembered Charles coming to Casper and trying to open the garage using the big saws to cut the snow drifts.

Roy was laughing about the "44 Special" that mother kept under the mattress. He said one of their favorite things to do was to slide down the coal chute in the basement. It was however, extremely slick and you could not go back up no matter how hard you tried. Roy said they would make endless attempts, but you could only slide down. One time some poor soul decided to get into the house using the coal chute and mother heard him. She got out the 44 Special and went to the basement where she proceeded to let him get a peek at it. He was so scared, he went right back up that coal chute and away from there as fast as he could travel.

AN EXCERPT FROM A LETTER BY OUR COUSIN, LEWIS DAVIS

" everyone has been remembering fifty years ago during 1994, one of the war years-- I am writing this letter on Christmas Eve-- fifty years ago to this day I was stationed at the Air Force Base at Pampa, TX-- it was my first Christmas away from home, and I was lonely --looking at the bulletin board in the flight shack on Christmas Eve I saw a notice that a flight instructor was taking a B-25 to Cheyenne for Christmas --interested passengers were invited to go along --

--I signed, was accepted, and went to pack a quick duffle bag --I didn't have time to do any advance planning or notifying, but I knew the Brown's would be home --when we arrived at Cheyenne I phoned you folks and spent a wonderful Christmas, lengthened by a snow storm that delayed our return flight a couple of days --also on the plane was a the crew chief who took chance on visiting an uncle, I think, near Cheyenne-- when he returned the day after Christmas and our flight was delayed, the Browns took him into your home --

--it was my first winter out of the South, so the snow scene was a fantasy for me --some of the things we did during that Christmas stand out in my memory...sledding down the hill beside the house...ice skating on the pond across the street...tobogganing out in the hills...attending Christmas Eve services...going to see the Harlem Globetrotters basketball game--

--but the most memorable experience was being with ALL of the Browns at one time--we had seen the Browns two-by-two as you made the train trip to visit the Georgia Browns year after year--but it was a real treat to see you all together and find out what it was like to be around so much family in one place at the same time--I still remember eating in shifts, and I never did figure out where everyone slept--but we did, including the crew chief--and I even got a Christmas gift, a bottle of shaving lotion --it was a great time, 50 years ago this Christmas --"

Both Nancy and June suggested the memory from a letter written to Nancy from Lewis Davis, Jr., our cousin from Georgia. Lewis is the son of Dad's sister Bessie and he wrote the letter on December 24th, 1994 with Christmas, 1944 on his mind. Thanks ladies!!!

Leah remembers the Christmases because Dad liked to decorate the house. He always put lots of lights across the porch and wrapped them around the pillars. One year he put them all over the big chimney on the North side of the house. She said he loved to try to convince the little kids that Santa was coming. He and mother would send everyone into the little bedroom and they would all lay on the floor to try to see Santa from under the door. Dad would get some bells and walk up the hall in his boots with the bells jingling. One year he even got out on the roof and jingled the bells. Leah said, for weeks before Christmas mother was sewing up a storm making pajamas and etc for Santa to give us, but no one breathed a word because it would have meant that you didn't believe. You know what? I still believe.

This is the end of the Christmas memories. Next year we'll do it again.

Congratulations are in order for Orpha. She chaired the Assistance League of East Valley fashion show, "*HOLIDAY ELEGANCE*." She spent a year preparing for this major philanthropic event and it was a huge success, raising thousands of dollars for their four main charities. I'm sure none of you are surprised at the success of her event, everything Orpha does is done with perfection. Good job, wish we all could have been there.

On the following page is an article from the newspaper sent to me by Roy. He must be very proud of his grandson, Matt and we all want to know where to pick up a CD.

Bob and I want to wish all of you the best holiday ever. We feel like we have been given the best of all gifts, a busy and productive life. Our prayers are for you to have a wonderful 1999 and keep your cards and letters coming!!! My arm is healing fast and I'll be out of the cast by the New Year!!!

MY BROKEN ARM

There is a Guardian Angel, she watches over me!
Oh pooh, you say, if she was there no broken arm you'd see.
But there is more to this you know and smile as I say,
"next spring, the golf course opens and when I'm there to play
my swing will slice and hook, the ball will wander off the tee,
the bunkers and the sand traps will always welcome me.
But, now when all this happens, I can say with lots of glee --
My bad shots are because, I broke my arm you see!!!"