

Whatever the obstacles, the Army makes sure its troops eat traditional fare on Thanksgiving, but quirks of time and distance in a vast ocean left this aviation engineer feeling stuffed.

The Turkey That Ate The Pacific

By Ivan E. Prall

In the spring of 1944, our 375th Army Air Base Headquarters and Air Base Squadron stationed at Nadi, Fiji, was split into three segments called Detachments A, B and C. Detachment A, of which I was a part, remained at Nadi. Detachment B moved to garrison the base on Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides, and C moved to Guadalcanal.

During October, plans were drawn up in Washington for Iwo Jima. Surplus men with specific skills were gathered quickly from various bases in the South Pacific and flown to Hickam Field, Oahu, in preparation for this coming struggle. I was with a small contingent of these men, who were to fly from Nadi and join a group from New Caledonia and thence fly to Hickam. Our departure date from Nadi was the day before Thanksgiving, 1944.

Since it was customary even under the worst conditions of World War II for the Army to attempt to feed its men turkey at Thanksgiving and Christmas, our conscientious base mess sergeant, fearing we would miss ours, served us a turkey breakfast before our departure at 8 A.M.

Our C-47 flew the 700 miles of ocean to

deposit us at Espiritu Santo by 11 A.M. their time. Here, long-separated friends from Detachment B warmly greeted us. Fearing we would miss our Thanksgiving meal, they served turkey for lunch.

Departing Espiritu, we continued west for 600 more miles of lonely Pacific to arrive on Guadalcanal and rendezvous with our old friends of Detachment C and our new technicians from New Caledonia. Detachment C, not wishing us to miss our Thanksgiving turkey, packed box lunches for us to eat as we flew northeast across the Pacific Thanksgiving Day.

Our C-54 landed at the Air Transport Command (ATC) Base on captured Tarawa about 2 P.M. While the plane refueled, we were trucked to the mess hall. Anyone who ever ate at an ATC mess hall during World War II will know that a traditional meal there so far outstripped a regular Army menu that a newcomer naturally thought he had died and gone to heaven. This was the case with the Thanksgiving dinner we consumed there that day.

Boarding our plane, we continued our trek northeast across the Pacific. Darkness de-

scended, and somewhere during this flight, we crossed the international date line placing us back a day to Thanksgiving morning. At 5 A.M., we landed at the naval base on Johnston Island. While the plane refueled again, we were hauled to the mess hall. Huge pans of golden brown turkey were being brought out of the ovens and readied for the Thanksgiving feast. We were served an early breakfast of turkey.

Resuming our flight, we arrived at Hickam Field a little after 8 A.M. We formed into the First Provisional Station Complement Squadron whose assignment was to make operational the first airfield to be captured on Iwo Jima. Our immediate task, however, was to conquer another Thanksgiving dinner at the Hickam ATC mess hall.

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