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The last pages in my Southeast Asia journal list 19 plane changes and 14 different hotels in 27 days. Final departure took 30 hours of flying and layovers from Papua, New Guinea to Los Angeles.

Only one plane a week connects Indonesia and Papua. Overbooking and backloading baggage is the format. Missionaries brought up boxes of books and one lady checked in a spear six feet long wrapped in tape. Hopes faded for a smooth trip when the boxes looking like egg cartons turned out to be butterflies to be exported.

No one knew who buys butterflies. As tough as the livestock markets have been in Texas, I decided maybe business had changed while I was away, and butterfly ranching or fattening caterpillars was going to be a new sideline, like fancy billy goats or short-winged birds.

In the boarding procedure, a huge native woman, lugging a kid, bumped her bag and caused a chicken to cackle inside. The chicken was more air-worthy than the lady. During taxiing and taking off, she held her child up so he could watch the plane leave the ground.

The captain came over the speaker to apologize for leaving our luggage. From the window, I watched my army duffel disappear on a wet dock. But, at least the lady's spear hadn't stabbed a hole through my shaving kit, or the jet-born chicken hadn't been able to roost over the straps.

New Guinea customs agents, at the last stop, dug through the carry-on gear, sniffed my water flask and stamped my visa in the same stroke we tattoo cattle's ears. They hate the Indonesians and figure travelers going to Indonesia are spies.

At reentry at Jayapura, Indonesian officials muttered the universal English cliché of "no problem." By then I was so nervous from hearing chickens cackle in suitcases and seeing long spears coming on board an airplane, this "no problem" business was insulting. If that nosy, over-paid baggage snoop thought no problems existed, he ought to travel across the borders of the world and have every six-bit nephew of an immigration chief go meddling through his personal gear.

Domestic service ended on the island of Biak, an old World War II field maintained for refueling international flights. I had hours to wait for the plane to Los Angeles.

The hot terminal offered a six-stool lunchroom run by a Chinese guy for diversion. The cook and owner specialized in selling chicken soup and exchanging money. No banks were open, so the exchange rates were lopsided in the house's favor and the soup was undergoing a rollover like lakes change from top to bottom.

I ordered four bowls before the meat surfaced. I drank the other three bowls to elevate my body fluids back to between subdehydration and mummification.

All Indonesian soups must be strained through the front teeth to catch the hot peppers and bone slivers. However, after a few practice sessions, one masters a style similar to a baleen whale seining plankton from the sea.

No newsstands existed at the air terminal. The government had shut down the two largest newspapers in Indonesia. The more I move around, the more I believe a big multilingual field manual exists for the world's rulers, containing instructions in the back pages on how to open Swiss bank accounts and close up palaces for a fast getaway.

The worthies all put out the same hogwash. For example, in Papua, a report in the pidgin English paper from the capital in Port Moresby proclaimed a big drop in unemployment rates. Ninety percent of the population of P.N.G. live in villages in straw huts. Job qualifications range from being retired headhunters to experienced betel nut chewers. Tribal warfare and killing each other after soccer games occupies part of the forces, but those two are more like hobbies than vocations.

At nightfall, Garuda Air opened the international section. Twenty or so Caucasians appeared. International companies seemed to be transferring employees back to the States. We milled around without so much as a stool to sit upon. Three little girls matched a contest killing mosquitoes. The more vigorous of the lot screeched, "I've killed 25!"

After an hour of sitting on the floors in stifling heat, double doors opened to a modern air-conditioned waiting room. Crisp-uniformed pilots and lovely groomed stewardesses filed through, leading a big crowd of urban-dressed passengers.

Porters unlocked the restrooms. I shaved in hot water and used the foam to dissolve the thick film of insect repellent and sunscreen. I stuffed my hat and red bandanna into a bag and put in my shirttail in front and back. I drained the rusty iodine water from the flask and discarded the torn-up walking shoes in the trash can. A guy in a navy blue blazer, rinsing off his hands, tried to keep from staring at me in the mirror, but failed.

Passage droned into a groggy delight of naps, cold food and chilled water. I had vanilla ice cream for breakfast in Los Angeles. The guy at the newsstand missed a chance of selling an *L.A. Times* for \$5.00.