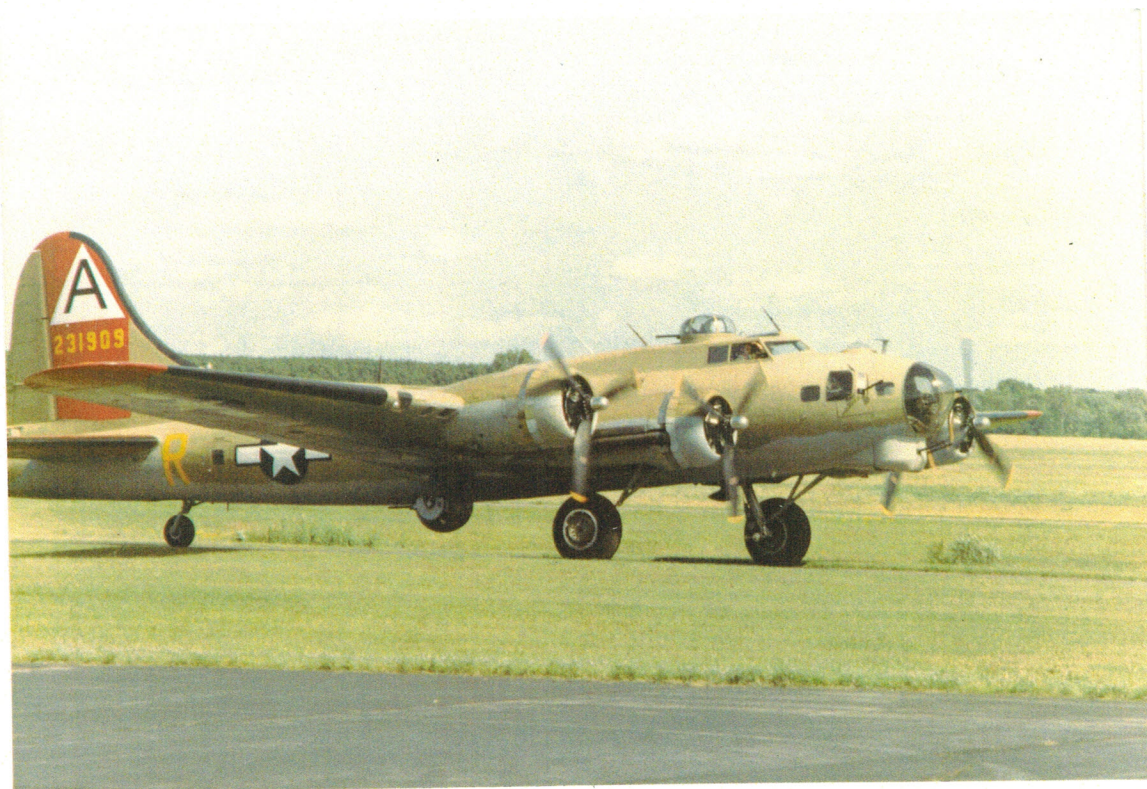


# LIVING A DREAM



MEL ABRAHAM

To: My Family

The following capsule recap of my life is intended solely for the purpose of answering questions we all forget to ask.

In my personal life, I failed to ask my parents especially, also siblings, many questions that surface today. There is no paperwork to refer to and all have passed on to their Heavenly homes.

Trust the following history may avoid this from happening for those interested in some highlights I have enjoyed.

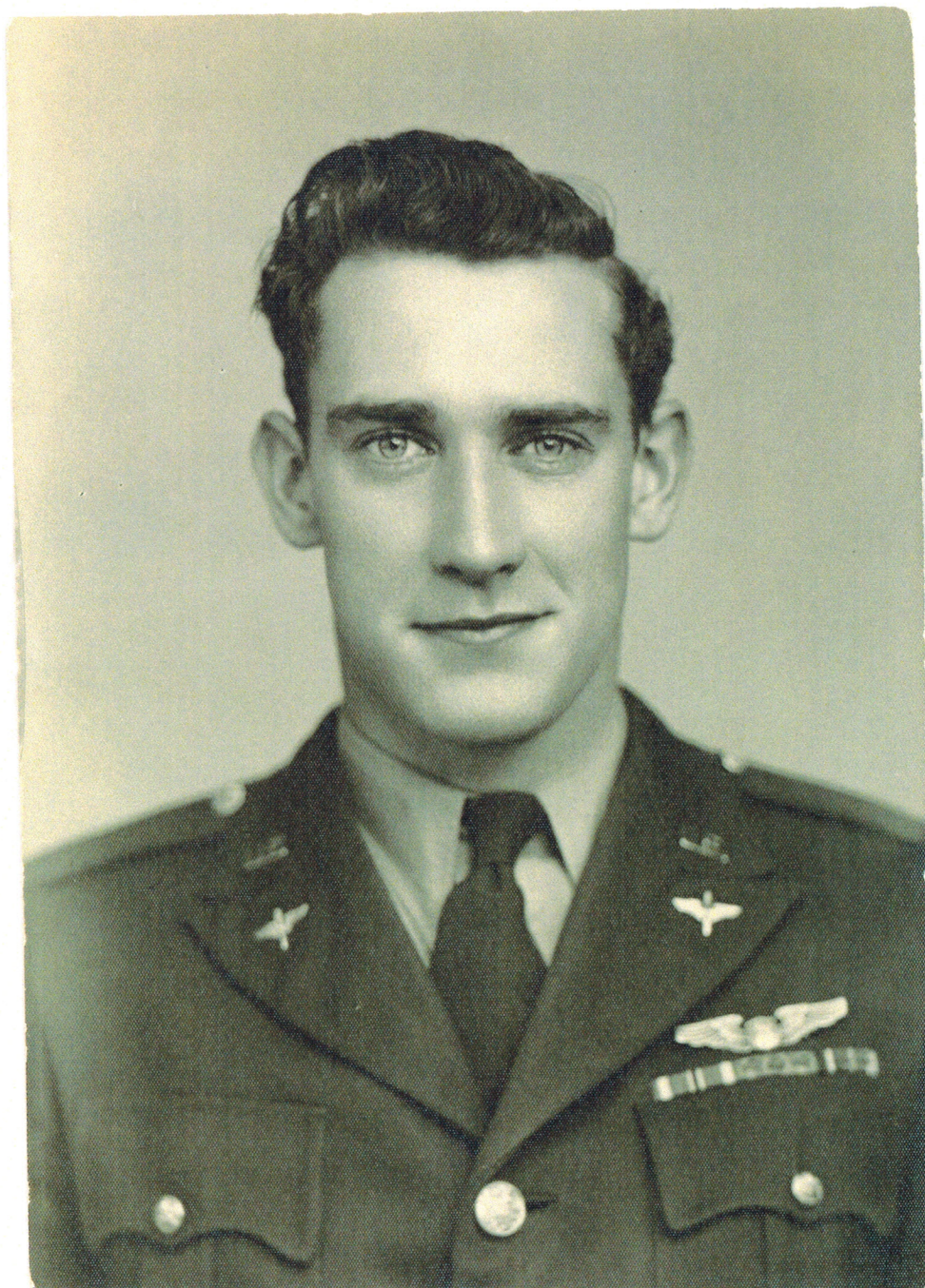
My notes are heavy regarding my 31/2 years in the military, reason-Flying was my dream. This dream was satisfied along with a life very fulfilling for me. My dream continues to develop, thanks to my loving Family, especially my wife, Marcia, of 65 years of married life.

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A B17 bomber, known as the  
"Flying Fortress". I was the pilot  
of this plane for 33 combat  
missions over the skies of Europe.

1944





-----1945-----

As a First Lt. In the Air Corps, having  
just returned from England after finishing  
my combat tour over Europe.



## Living a Dream

I grew up on a farm. One of my favorite pastimes involved lying in a small patch of grass near the farmstead gazing skyward watching the billowy clouds form and slowly fade away. My dream was to be up there jumping from one mass to another. My real hope was to see a small plane, any small plane cross between these clouds enjoying what God had created. Flying!!!!How could I make this come true. How could I get up there and enjoy these beautiful clouds.

Just a bit of background----I enjoyed the pleasure of growing up with an older brother, Arnold 17 years older than I, and three older sisters , all attempting to play the roll of a Mother. With careful maneuvering this worked to my advantage in most cases. My Father and Mother were in their early forties when I was born, a late arrival to the clan, with Gertrude the youngest of my sisters nine years older than I. Viola was the oldest sister, then Esther. As you may be surmise ,yes I was catered to and lead a very good life. I should mention , my family experienced two serious problems prior to my arrival, namely the death of two sons. Ralph died in infancy from whooping cough and Raymond from getting an arm caught in a gas engine that was pumping water at the age of 12 and was killed instantly. As has been stated many times , nothing is harder on a parent than losing a child to some disaster.

Fast forward- how did my Dream of flying progress?

On December 7<sup>th</sup> 1941 Japan attacked our naval base located in the South Pacific at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. It was a beautiful Sunday afternoon in Mn. and I was out hunting muskrats with my neighbor Arnie Sylwester. I was a senior in high school and knew immediately that I was going to be a part of the military to defend our country as soon as I could manage this goal. Fate played a role to make this happen. Immediately upon my graduation from high school my brother Arnold received a draft notice to report for active duty in the military. The draft board was just waiting for this move telling my Dad he only needed one helper on the farm. I realized I was not cut out to be a farmer, my heart was not in this field. We had a family round table discussion , with my volunteering to enter the service in Arnold's place and he stay home to farm and support the family. Remember Arnold was 35 years old at this point and certainly not a good candidate for the military. This was my opportunity to pursue my dreams even if it meant entering an active war. My Dad spoke to the draft board and presented this proposal and I would volunteer and enlist in the Air Force. The answer was NO ,this would not count toward the draft numbers they were required to meet and Arnold would still be subject to the draft. Big Problem!!! End result, yes, I was drafted and entered the Army, not too happy about this move. On July 20<sup>th</sup> I was on my way, little time was wasted, wars require urgency. As you can tell this was a "win" "win" situation, Arnold remained on the farm doing what he loved, I was able to leave pursuing a new challenge and a chance at an exciting career yet to be determined.

### Grade and High School years

I was fortunate enough to attend a parochial school my first eight years, that being in Gaylord , Immanual Lutheran. Our school may have been unique in that we only had two teachers, one for the first four grades and one for the top four grades in two separate class rooms. What we lacked in some personal attention we truly gained with the emphasis on religion instruction, part of our



daily routine.

Our recess periods will remain a highlight in my life, as we had the poorest softball diamond in town but some of the best ball players around. The competition was always the Farmers against the Town team. I was fortunate enough to play first base as I moved along in years. First base had a raised sidewalk just ahead of the base itself and you can imagine what may have happened to hard hit balls in that area. All told it worked and many of us moved on to Varsity play at High School later in life. Why the sidewalk? It led to the outdoor biffy! Yes, we were in town but lacked indoor plumbing probably up to 1936. It was cold for a little tike six years of age to trot out there at -20 degrees on many a day. We had a one room country school about a mile from our farm, fortunately my folks decided it was best for me to attend the city school. Of interest, transportation to and from was a problem. My aunt Clara had a boarding house in Gaylord and this is where I stayed in winter from Sunday evening to Friday afternoon when I skied home across lake Titloe. As I advanced in grade and age, in summer I rode my bike to school, a hand me down from Arnold's youth. What mattered was it wasn't the newest bike in town but it worked. On poor weather days somehow I did get a ride to school and usually begged a ride home from our neighbors, Arnie and Waldemar Sylwester, riding in back of their model T ford.

Of interest, when I was "upstairs" my sister Gertrude had finished Bethany College and earned her teaching certificate and was hired to become the lower grade teacher. This arrangement resulted in Gertrude and Otto Weissenborn, the upstairs "professor", becoming romantically involved and ended up getting married. That summer they decided to quit teaching, moved to New Ulm and pursued another direction in life.

ON to High School. Up to this point Gertrude and I were the only ones to continue our education beyond 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Obviously I was very thankful for this opportunity. Again transportation became a challenge. Thank God for a Mother who really cared. With the "egg money" she earned she bought me a 1929 ford model "A" coupe for \$50.00 dollars. I was only 14 years of age, with a driving permit somehow arranged by my Dad and the only Kid in school owning their own car. It served me well for four years, Marcia well remembers our dating in it in my later Senior year when we became a "couple". When I entered the service after High School my Mother reclaimed the car and sold it for \$50.00 to a teacher in town who taught in the country school afore mentioned. What a blessing this model A was , great for hunting gophers along the roadside and a plus on the farm . I had a rumble seat so you can imagine the Kids in the back seat and fun.

Later in life , after retirement we moved to Florida for 12 years. Of interest we attended Faith Lutheran Church in Tavares. We had a very successful parochial school with about 145 students. A new teacher arrived! Chatting with her we found out she came from the Gaylord school!!!The next question did you have any little Abraham's in your class? Yes, Jerry and John. What a small world we live in. Her name was Deb Heilman, started as a teacher, now serving as Youth Minister.

To wander just a bit----

The home on the farm that I grew up in was truly a palace to me. I was born in 1923, this new home was built in 1923, so I never knew anything but luxury that dates way back. Our home had



five bedrooms, central heat, electricity, unheard of in those years. We had a koehler generator in the basement supplying electricity to the entire farm. Complete indoor plumbing, this included the same water supply for the entire farm yard. I was spoiled from day one. Later in high school, my junior and senior years my primary summer assignment was, one year I painted the entire house, year two the entire large barn. These were two major projects. I suffer from a fear of heights.

, so you can imagine my hanging on scaffolds walking a bouncing plank 20 ft. up in the air between two ladders. For relaxation evenings I drove out to the city dump to shoot rats. I must have killed hundreds and never made a dent on the amount around. My last months in school in summer I quit shooting rats and changed to chasing Marcia around, found this much more enjoyable. We were really becoming very close friends.

One note of interest- my Father was a progressive man. He was involved in the community, member of the school board all the years I was growing up, county assessor all these years, chair of the Red Cross org. and on and on. He was a chance taker- in about 1937 he purchased an air electric windmill to harness the wind to supply electricity to our farm. He was years ahead of the community, now this is the way to go. Actually he was too far ahead, the generator on top of the 60 ft. tower caused considerable trouble burning out brushes. It was Arnold's job to mount that tower in good weather and foul weather to repair same. He was the only one with the guts to do it. My Father also would have done it, he had no fear of anything. I was the piker, I could not have done it. The air electric was dismantled when the REA moved into the rural areas in the early 40's.

This raises a big question in my life— what was life like after I left for the service in July of 1942? The major change occurred in the summer of '44 when my Father died very unexpectedly from a blood clot following gall bladder surgery. At the time I was in England flying a B17 bomber assigned to the Eight Air Force, my dream in action, except it took a war to get me there. My family made the decision not to notify me of my Fathers death to avoid what problems it could have caused to dismantling an air crew. A difficult but very wise decision. I received a letter from Gertrude about a week after my Father had been buried. It was a very difficult piece of information to accept under the conditions at the time. Gertrude was a beautiful writer and presented this information in a beautiful Christian manner to soften the blow. My thoughts immediately turned to the welfare of my Mother and that being- I was living from day to day with death staring me in the face on every mission. At the time our combat losses were running very high about a 29% survival rate of air crews. My concern was how could she handle another death in the family within months of each other. God took care of that problem.

To continue my question- I came home on leave from England in October of '44. Yes, things had changed. Arnold was in charge of the farm and plans had just been completed that Arnold was getting married and this happened while I was at home for two weeks. Arnold married Florence, someone he had been dating for some years and I guess never felt it was right to marry her and bring her into an active family. It was now his show. My Mother and Viola, the oldest sister, having great problems with a very serious case of asthma decided to remain on the farm and move upstairs. This is where I lost track of what was happening. Obviously, this did not work out. I don't recall the timing, but I was home on leave and my Mother stated she and Viola were



moving out and looking for a place to live in Minneapolis. We took the family car drove to the city , found a realtor, and Mother purchased a home that day. I returned to duty and the family move was made. It was a good move. My Mother and Viola lived in that home for years .The decision to move to Mpl's. was not taken lightly, our local Dr. encouraged Viola to get off of the farm , he felt it would help her asthma condition. It may have helped to some degree, but she died very young, I believe about 40 years of age. My Mother was a very strong person and this move was very challenging as you can imagine, from farm life to the big city in one sweep. Now this is where the new generation of Abraham family members fit in to the picture and I have lost contact. When I was dis-charged from the military in October of '45 , I moved in with my Mother in Minneapolis. I did go out to the farm on a few occasions to go pheasant hunting but that soon was dropped. The whole family was out there when Bill was born and he was baptized. That is about the last time I spent time on the farm, a new life for all concerned.

The farm changed greatly. I remember the dairy phase of farming was expanded greatly, new barn was constructed and a big time milking operation was developed. This is were I lost contact.

#### Back to High School-

I truly enjoyed my years in high School. I was very active in athletics, played four years on the basketball team , four years of high school track, fortunate enough to be named the captain of the track team in my senior year. My specialty was the 880 yard run and throwing the discus. I was unable to go out for football as I was needed on the farm for fall chores in the fields. Corn was one big crop and it required a lot of hard work shocking. One major mistake academically that I made was , not taking enough math. When entering High School I was poorly advised as to the importance of this subject and I suffered later in life for that mistake. My background from parochial school was very weak in math and this also may have encouraged me to shy away . One interesting facet in my senior year, I was accepted for the lead roll in the senior class play. This caused a conflict with going out for track, which I was not about to give up .Mr. Sandholm my History teacher and coach found an answer. He persuaded our principal, Mrs. Linee to allow me to take my afternoon study hour and head for the city park and participate in track by myself. This worked out except for the fact that I lost contact with the team and fun of working out with team members. The class play was a plus and I'm glad I was allowed this opportunity.

Again, I must emphasize the final highlight of my senior year was becoming friends with this Junior girl by the name of Marcia.. This happened towards the end of the year so we actually only enjoyed a few months of dating before I left for the military. We continued a very close relationship writing very faithfully over the next three and one half years. This high school friendship ended in marriage in 1946 ,eight months after I was discharged and I'm writing these notes in 2011 , yes this marriage lasted and was truly blessed by God, 65 years later!!!!

#### Camp Swift, Bastrop, Texas July 1942

Life in the military- As a draftee, explained earlier, a bus load of us left the courthouse early one July morning. Our destination was Fort Snelling. Here a battery of tests were taken to determine what was to happen to each of us as to future assignments. Fortunately having just graduated from school



I tested very well for which I was always very thankful, it opened many doors. We soon left this post and were shipped , by train, down to Camp Swift, a brand new Division , located at Bastrop, Texas out in the wilderness. Actually we were about 25 miles from Austin, Texas the state capitol. It turned out to be the 95<sup>th</sup>. Infantry Division a newly formed unit. Again, I was fortunate and assigned to the 320<sup>th</sup> medical battalion. I was spared the tough life of infantry training. I should correct that statement, yes we did go thru basic training, including the calisthenics, marching galore ,hikes out in to the country for 20 plus miles at one time. All this in Texas heat in July in the 100 range daily and no air conditioning in the barracks. This took a little getting used to and allowing some question in my mind as to my sanity volunteering???Actually the calisthenics by the hour were wonderful. I put on 15 pounds in three months, and I can assure you all muscle. At this point in traveling I had become very friendly with another Gaylord lad by the name of George Donlin. George was assigned to an infantry unit about 10 city blocks down the road from where I was housed. Our training schedules were totally different. I spent most of the day in classrooms learning first aid and medical associated duties, where George spent life training hand to hand combat living with a rifle out in the wilderness. I would visit him many evenings and he was always busy cleaning his rifle, where I had not even seen a rifle. George will be mentioned later in life and a very important phase of my life.

Now you can see my problem developing and my drive to get out of this medical unit and to accomplish my long sought goal- how do I get into the Army Air Corps from here????? I mentioned scoring well in my entrance exams, well this became my ticket out. After about four months when evaluations started I was informed I qualified for Officers training. . My question was, how can I transfer out of the army into the fast growing Army Air Corps? Fortunately. all of the Officers in my unit were Medical Doctors and people with great compassion. They listened to my plight every chance I was able to make some contact with one and finally agreed to allow me some time off to take the bus to San Antonio, Texas and arranged for me to take the tests to enter the Aviation Cadet program. I was one excited young Kid!!!! The company clerk. also my bunk mate from Duluth typed up the orders and I hopped a bus and was on my way.

Back track just a few weeks to a month.

Yes, I had permission to pursue my wish but this required some work on my part. I needed to be accepted as a candidate for the Aviation cadet program! I needed three personal references to be included in my request. I quickly sent letters to my Pastor, Rev. Winters- to my High School Principal Hilda Linee - to my track/basketball coach and History teacher Mr. Sandholm and to our county judge Mr. Rogstad. All followed thru and sent letters of recommendation promptly. My next problem was a fast math class. I was one who was poorly advised in high school and did not take any advanced math, a very serious mistake. I should have realized the importance of this but did not. Fortunately, one fellow soldier in my barracks was a Northwestern College grad and had majored in math. I was earning \$21.00 a month, made a deal with this guy for him to teach all the math he could in what little time we had before I hoped to be called to take the entrance exam. Hi fee \$10.00 for this, no problem let's go. I was very broke for this period , but it didn't matter, all of my free time was spent in the base library studying more math. My major treat at that point of my life was a pint of ice cream in the evening, which was put on hold.

Of interest- While this was happening in my life, surprisingly I was promoted to private first



class! Now this was not my career path but I was pleased to be recognized early on in my own unit. To this day I still give credit to my bunk mate from Duluth submitting my name for promotion, as company secretary he carried some weight in the front office.

At San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center

Upon arrival I checked in with high hopes to achieve my goal- one step closer to flying. About early afternoon we finished testing, and were assigned times to meet with decision makers. I passed all exams, now the next step will I pass the physical exam? This was not as great a concern as I was not aware of a problem. Surprise!!!! I was called back for another chest x ray due to a black spot on my one lung. My heart sank in view of the fact my sister Viola had a very severe case of asthma, now my mind took over telling me I too was about to have a problem. The second test with more close up views indicated the scar had healed over and was not a factor. I can't begin to describe how relieved I was. By the way this same scar haunted me the remainder of my days in the service, many re-x rays taken, all negative. At some point I was on my way back to my home base with a letter informing my C.O. I was accepted in the Cadet program and would be called in the very near future.

One morning at a special formation we were informed the entire 95 th Infantry Battalion was on alert and we would be packing our gear and moving as a Battalion to Fort Sam Houston located in San Antonio , Texas. We had only been at this base for five months. This is typical in the military, all part of training. Ft. Sam was a very old established base. The housing consisted of old three story stone barracks, slightly worn but still very interesting. Upon arrival , traveling by truck, we were assigned a building and told to find our bunks wherever we wanted. I ran to the third floor and found a neat bunk out on a porch overlooking a huge area of park. It was a very beautiful spot. I was stationed here just one month and my orders came thru requesting I report to the San Antonio Aviation Center about six miles down the road. The commanding officer arranged for a jeep driver to deliver me to the gate of this center. May I tell you what a helpless feeling came over my body? I just left an organization where I felt very comfortable and now tossed out into a new world. To add to this feeling, the officer in charge came over and ripped my PFC stripe off of my blouse!!!! He very loudly announced your no longer a private first class , you are an Aviation Cadet and have no rank!!! My rank was nothing but I was proud of the darn little stripe. He assured me there was nothing lower in life than a cadet.

A new life is about to begin! Once processed and assigned I was taken to a barracks along with about 240 more students. Most were just entering the service , so I had that experience as a plus. We were very quickly made aware that we were the lower class men and there was nothing lower in the world, we were officially class 43J, standing for a graduation date of November 1943 should we live so long and that became a question in our lives very fast. Nine months of grueling work ahead of us. Calisthenics, marching, class work from morning to late at night. This is where I realized what stupid mistake I made in High School taking the easy classes and ignoring math. I suffered for this. Many night after lights out along with a number of others I would sit in the latrine where we had lights and study well beyond sack time. Our routine was based on West Point ,constant harassing , standing in a brace, nothing but "Yes Sir" and "No Sir" how did I get myself into this mess!!!We ate square meals ,but they were excellent meals. After four weeks we moved up-stairs and officially became upper class men, wow!!!!At this point we had lost a number of cadets for various reasons, just the beginning of a heavy wash out rate. As



upper class men life improved greatly, classes became harder but we were beginning to gain this necessary confidence and believed in ourselves. The one huge goal was just four weeks away FLY!!!! One thing as a cadet my pay jumped to \$90.00 a month, a good improvement over the \$21.00 I was earning in the Army. Finally graduation day arrived!!! I was very proud to have made it, worked my tail off but one step closer to the goal I so desperately wanted to achieve. We were all summoned to a hall and handed orders for various flight schools in Texas.

At this time all primary flight schools were contracted out to civilian schools, the military didn't have the people to operate these schools. My orders read to report to Coleman Flying School in Coleman, Texas. This turned out to be a small town in western Texas, as I recall possibly a population of 2000. half the size of Gaylord.

Coleman Flying School-----May 1,1943 to June 29,1943

I can't come up with any words to describe our feeling upon arrival at this base, seeing a line up of possibly 30 beautiful blue and white primary trainers knowing they were ours for the next 9 weeks! They were PT 19's , built by Fairchild with 225 HP engines, low wing planes. They turned out to be excellent training planes very easy to handle. We were assigned instructors, five students to an instructor. The instructors were civilians , most about 40 years of age , all just past the age of military service. I was assigned to Witt Yeatman, about 50 years of age, an oilman by trade. He owned a number of oil wells and I'm sure was doing to this just to give his part to the war effort. He was a gentleman!!! This doesn't mean he couldn't cuss me out with zeal when I screwed up a slow roll or missed my point rolling out of a loop. Anyway after eight hours of dual instruction, this was the average everybody needed to solo at, we were at the far end of the grass field and he asked me to pull over to the side and he jumped out and said "It's all yours" ! Again, this is one moment in life that one just never forgets-truly a dream coming to fruition!!!! Imagine this farm boy , never even in my wildest expectation realizing a dream about to become a living reality. I well remember taxing out checking the landing approach of other cadets sweating their landings, and taking off!!!All was uneventful due to great instruction, the solo flight went well, landed and picked up my instructor and completed the days routine of flight. All this happened on April 9,1943.

The 40 hours of flight instruction moved along very rapidly. During this nine week period we lost probably 20 % of our fellow cadets, they washed out (eliminated) due to lack of coordination in most cases. These were always very sad moments when a fellow cadet was placed on the bus and disappeared. When a cadet was struggling , the instructor would have the cadet fly with one of the Air Force pilots for a check ride. This usually ended in the career of the student. The cadet was usually sent to one of three schools, gunnery ,bombardier, or navigator training. As a gunner he would end up an enlisted man and in the other two schools he would end up as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. upon graduation. Some choose to quit flying entirely and went to mechanics school. All were necessary slots to complete a flight crew not one more important than the other , we needed this total team to survive our missions.

After 40 hours of flight training , finishing the ground school phase we were ready for transfer to our next step in training, namely basic flight training. We were now questioned as to our future preference-single engine (fighters) or multi engine (bombers). Stating out choice was not an



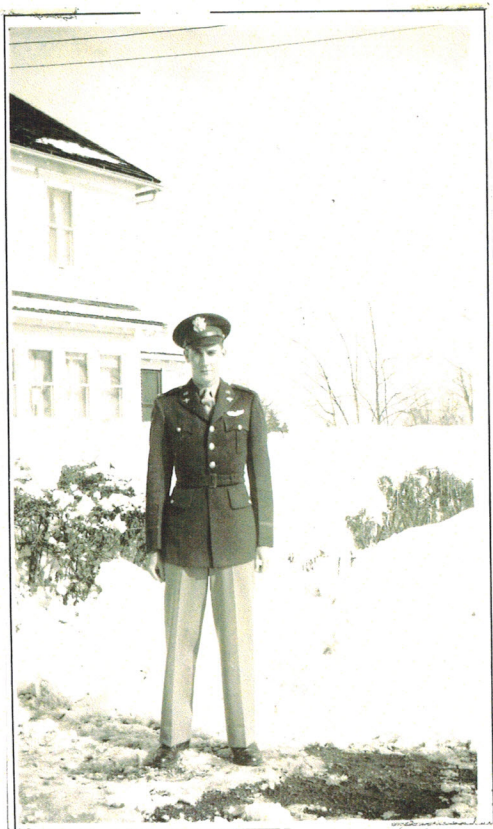
assurance that this would happen. The top echelon made the final decision. I choose multi engine. One reason, my height. I was concerned sitting in a small cockpit for hours at a time , however I later discovered this was not a problem, room was adequate in most fighter planes.

I must relate two happenings while at Coleman Flight School. The owner of the school was a very wealthy rancher. As a special treat for the cadets, he brought in a full first class circus and had them set up their tents on the airfield and held a performance for the cadets only. We were in shock! Nobody had even really cared we were in the community.

Another happening of interest. Our last week at the school, we were now pretty well set as to who was graduating, wash outs were kind of behind us, it was Sunday afternoon and our instructor for the five of us said he was coming out to pick us up for a little trip. He arrived in a nice station wagon loaded us, and to our surprise we found a case of beer. He announced, enjoy relax you have earned this treat. He then proceeded to drive us out to his oil well. One big unit spewing oil what a sight to behold. He explained the workings of this huge structure and we loved it. His goal, to say thanks to his students , all five of his graduated, and to relax us for our next phase of flight. This was pretty special I for one never forgot this kindness and thoughtfulness. When I completed my missions I sent him a nice letter thanking him for teaching me how to fly and to fly well.

One week later we are on our way to basic flight training.

c



November 1943 home on leave.  
Graduated from Flight School  
Brooks Field, San Antonio, TX.



Perrin Field, TX. 1943  
BT 13 -basic trainer.



Orders were issued and our class moved on. I was sent to Perrin Field at Sherman, Texas.

Perrin Field-- Sherman, Texas June 30,1943 to August 27,1943.

This school was all military no more civilians. It was located on the Oklahoma border, way up north Texas. We were greeted with a flight line of BT13's, a low wing trainer, 450 horsepower engines, known as the Vultee Vibrator. The reason for this special name we soon discovered was due to the excessive vibration in the fuselage when practicing tail spins.

Again we were assigned, five students to an instructor. I drew a tough Lt. very hard to work with and this made my life very miserable from day one. I did solo in about 8 hours but then problems developed. He felt I was not progressing as a student and recommended me for a check ride , otherwise known as the dreaded elimination ride. You may remember from primary school, this ride usually meant you were finished-washed out. Unless you have experienced this phase words can't describe the horrible feeling of getting tossed out of cadets. I was one lucky Kid. My check pilot felt the instructor was wrong and I had all the skills necessary to become a military pilot and what I needed was a different instructor to work with. I was assigned to Lt. Utter, a very easy going soft spoken Lt. and a joy to work with. At this point cadets again became a pleasure, my flying skills developed with no further problems. Of interest, about 15 years later in business this salesman called on me with the name of Utter and he looked so familiar. I asked if he had ever been a military man, Yes he had. You guessed it, he was my former instructor, the man who saved my career. Anyway, at this point I cancelled some appointments and we took off and had a long lunch and I picked up this tab with pleasure. What a small world. He was from Chicago.

Our flying assignments were now becoming more intense, more complicated, more aerobatic concentration. We spent many an hour working on slow rolls, loops and the nasty tail spins. We did learn to fly. Also at this point we were introduced to night flying. Night navigational flights were big. Navigation in general became a big part of the program toward the end basic training. The BT13 was a much more challenging plane than the primary trainer we had just left behind,450 horsepower makes a big difference. Also the fact we now had only military pilots instructing us was a huge difference.

Of interest, on this field I ran into a friend from my High School. Leo Kelbs was two years ahead of me in Gaylord High School however we played basketball together on the same team. Leo was an exceptional player, played guard a very good ball handler. His brother James was in my class and also ended up in cadets but unfortunately washed out. Jim was lucky, he was sent to navigational school, graduated as a Lt. and served his tour. Leo was a mechanic working on the BT13's in the hanger next to the flight line. I would have a chance on breaks to stop over and chat with him. We, on occasion contemplated sneaking him into the back seat for a flight. Our problem was, how would we check out a parachute? Consequently it never happened.

After the usual eight weeks of this phase of training was completed and 220 of us breathed a great sigh of relief, yes we made it. Don't know how many washed out in basic, a rather large number, but not as bad as primary school. Orders were prepared and on to our next flight school- Advanced Fight school and our last school prior to winning our wings. I was sent to Brooks Field, SanAntonio Texas. A beautiful old school. Upon arriving and checking some history



discovered this is the school Charles Lindberg attended and graduated from in the early 1920's. Training at this phase was not the usual pressure flying. Now we were into more intense navigation , night flying and cross country flights. We were flying AT 17's, a twin engine aircraft with retractable landing gear. Our power consisted of two 450 horsepower engines. The plane carried a nickname , the Bamboo Bomber built by Cessna. On many flights usually three students would go up on flights and we would exchange assignments on board to learn all aspects of the plane. The plane was designed to carry four passengers. Our instructors were all military pilots.

One key phase pilot training at Brooks consisted of making gentlemen out of us. We spent many an hour in class learning the finer points of becoming an officer and how to act when this happens. The social graces were truly stressed.

About two weeks prior to graduation we were issued a \$250.00 stipend for buying officers clothing. Truly a thrill to go downtown to a tailor and get measured and end up with some truly beautiful perfect fitting uniforms, both summer and winter. Obviously, we all purchased both the smart greens and the classy pinks, we were pretty hot stuff we thought. We all purchased beautiful leather gloves, jodpur flight boots and of course the white scarf. Words would not describe the feeling we kids had when this happened, we honestly did earn this benefit, we struggled to get to this point.

Finally November 3<sup>rd</sup>.1943-- GRADUATION DAY!!!!!! An assembly on the parade ground, the base commander, a Colonel, pinned on our silver wings and bars and we were suddenly Air Force Pilots !!! This culminated in a fly -over by a flight of AT17's flown by the new upper classmen!

I had made reservations to catch a commercial airliner that afternoon to fly to Mpl's. Arriving about 12 midnight. My sister Gertrude and her husband Otto were at the airport to meet me. This was my first commercial flight, flying was just not an everyday occurrence at this point in the world. I had not been home since the day I entered the service way back in July of 1942. To say the least, it was an exciting moment to come home.

Spent the night in comfort and had a date the next morning to pick up Marcia and drive out to Gaylord. Marcia was living with her Aunt Della and Uncle Jim and attending Hamlin college. Now remember I had not seen this girl since I left Gaylord and she was a Junior in High School, this was 16 months ago! I walked into the house to pick her up and what did I see— a beautiful young lady , words cannot describe that feeling. This was the girl I had been writing to for the last 16 months , the girl I truly enjoyed being with my last months while in school. Now this lovely young lady and I truly fell in love this time, and here we are 65 years later and still enjoying each other and life in total. How I cherished those letters, little realizing the end result would be this wonderful.

All the great pleasures of life come to an end, It was time to pack up my B4 bag and head to my next assignment which was Salt Lake City , Utah. Marcia and I had spent considerable time together during the week, she needed to return to Minneapolis and back to school at Hamlin U. I



spent time with my family and some friends who were home on leave. Must say this amounted to a very few friends, as we were all scattered every part of the world, It came to say Good-by and off to new adventures.



Daughter Lee, Mel, and Marcia. Florida-2009.

This was a none flying base. It was designed for the purpose of forming combat crews. Gathered here were all members that make up one flight crew. How they were selected for a particular crew I don't know, but I do know it was done very carefully. Thinking about the crew I ended being a part of as a co-pilot, it was evident as we progressed in our training this crew was carefully chosen. The three fellow officers were all older, 26 and 27 years of age. I was the young one at 20 years old. I realized very quickly after flying and getting to know these three it was evident they were achievers and very good at what they were about to do what they had been training for. Later I realized we were destined to train for the lead crew position. After about a four day stay here we were given orders for our next duty assignment, which was Ardmore, Oklahoma a phase training school which meant learn to fly as a crew, learn each others and weaknesses, in my case learn how to fly the B17 bomber. Hatheway our pilot, had finished 3 months of training in a B17, both the navigator and bombardier had finished their schooling in their fields of the team. I was the lone inexperienced crew member on board. Hatheway soon corrected that problem by teaching me how to fly the big bird. Our time here was scheduled for three months, a period that was to be enough for all crew members to learn to work as a well greased machine. As we got to know our enlisted members of the crew we soon realized we had a very sharp talented group of people. There was not one mis-fit in the entire lot of six men, we were fortunate, this gang would be responsible for our lives in short order.

Our training at Ardmore amounted to extensive high altitude formation flying. For the gunners we had tow planes flying with socks for them to fire at. The bombardier was trained for further



work with the Norden bomb sight. One very sad incident that happened involved a mid air crash of two planes. We were flying at 20,000 ft. when one pilot lost control of his plane and started slipping towards another B17. Due to inexperience he over-corrected , bringing his wing up too fast and too sharply that his wing sliced thru the fuselage of the bomber he was trying to avoid. End result, all nine men aboard were killed. The sheared off tail section floated down to earth like a kite and the tail gunner stepped out alive! To witness this crash really put all of us on alert for extreme care in our flying.

At this point I was fully checked out in the B17 and felt comfortable making landings and take-offs. We were all functioning well as a crew ready for our next assignment. This order read for us to hop a train and report to Grand Isle, Nebraska for an overseas assignment. We were here but a few days, orientation in preparation for a flight across the Atlantic for combat duty and getting our personal lives in order which amounted to preparing a will. Imagine this at 20 years of age? All mine amounted to who would receive the \$10,000. Life insurance policy I had, one offered by the government at a very low cost.

Today our orders came thru. Yes we were going to the European Theater of operations for our combat assignment. We were taken out to a brand new B17 possibly with 6 hours of flying time on it, just enough to be ferried from the Boeing plant in Seattle WA. Probably by a WASP pilot. We were all issued a 45 automatic side arms, four pairs of good binoculars and told to fly to a fighter base in New Hampshire, which was a 7:00 hour flight. We accomplished with this with no problem. We arrived arranged for re-fueling and overnight quarters for the crew. The next morning we were socked in so decided to stay another day.



A model of the plane I completed my first  
Solo flight in. Coleman Field, Texas .  
May 9<sup>th</sup>. 1943



Day two ----- We awoke, the weather was great, we were ready for our next leg , destination Goose Bay, Labrador, Newfoundland. This is when our test started, are we trained as a crew??? Our total trust now shifted to our Navigator, Eugene Petrocine, will he get us across this remote area of the world? It was a 5:45 hour flight, really the start of what would amount to 29:45 hours of flight time to reach our destination in England. Every one was a bit apprehensive I'm sure, this feeling was well subdued, we were a crew! We found our base in good order. The snow was so high we could not see a thing once on the runway ,could only follow directions from the control tower. That evening we arranged for refueling, housing for the night and spent some time reviewing our next leg of the journey. To sleep we had to draw the shades , this is the land of the midnight sun, something new to all of us. We awakened early , found to have good weather, checked out and were on our way to Iceland. I can assure you, the excitement was building by the hour. This leg would really test our navigator, not much room for error, lots of Atlantic Ocean below us. Remember seeing Greenland on our left, felt we were on our correct heading. Arrived in Iceland, terribly cold, believe someone said it was 30degrees below zero. We headed directly to our assigned sleeping quarters and called it a day. At 2:00 0'clock the next morning we were awakened for our next leg , that being Prestwick, Scotland. We all wondered, would our engines start in this cold weather? The crew chiefs were totally prepared for the cold, they had the four engines warming up when we arrived on the flight line.

We were beginning to feel like veterans, having found two of our destinations and still alive. Gene calculated our flight time to be about 8 hours depending how much of a tail wind we might encounter. We carried enough gas to remain in the air about 10 hours. All was going well, we were holding our compass heading as I recall just over the overcast at about 12,000 feet. I must add It was a very different feeling knowing that you were over the Atlantic Ocean with no place to set this bird down in case of engin failure. Gene was constantly taking celestial readings to back up our navigating in the cockpit. His readings suddenly didn't make sense. I joined him and took a celestial reading , coming up with his coordinates. He re-calculated, informing us that we were heading off course. How can this be?? After some discussion we decided we were being sucked into a false beam. We also realized we were now entering a combat zone and anything can happen and it did. We figured it out, the Germans probably located in Belgium, were extending a very powerful beam out to sucker us into their zone of combat to send fighters up to knock us out. Thanks again to a smart navigator , we followed his direction and trusted we were heading for the British Isles.

We were now flying in the soup and approaching our time to look for our base, Prestwick , Scotland. Our radio had been completely disabled by the Germans, so we were unable to extend any calls for help or direction. Decision was made for our radio operator to send May Day calls on his teletype . No answer!!!! Zimmer kept at it ,repeating the call over and over. In the meantime we in the cockpit were getting concerned over gas supply, we were almost at 8 hours in the air. We discussed our options, none were good. Our main problem was we didn't know what our terrain was below us, nor did we know how high the ceiling was if we broke out of the cloud cover. Regarding the terrain, our question was- are we in a mountain landscape? Also, are we a 100% sure we are over the continent and not over the North Sea. Hatheway and I mulled these concerns it was our decision that would be the guide to our crew. We were just about to tell the crew it would be their choice- bail out and take your chances, or we hadn't decided for a



final answer but Hatheway and I were planning on riding the plane down. We weren't the big heroes, but felt we had a good chance of making it. Just like that our answer appeared on our right wing!!!! A beautiful Beaufighter , an RAF plane!!! With his addis lamp he signaled our radio operator who he was and to follow him down. You can't imagine the excitement in our plane. Prayers answered????

We followed this RAF plane down thru the overcast, broke out in the clear with a fair ceiling and very level terrain. He lead us the fighter base where he was based, just a very short grass strip. Could we land this big bird on this short field and get off in the morning? Our choices were limited, yes we will land. All worked well, had enough runway to safely settle in. We were greeted with open arms. This was a base to care for wounded pilots in the RAF, fighting in the Battle of Britian. We joined them for dinner, and we all were housed in a beautiful castle with white cloth dinner service and servants running around everywhere. When we went to bed that evening we were told to leave our shoes out by the door and anything we needed pressing or washing. Our shoes were shined to perfection in the morning, what pampered service!! In the meantime ,we had to ask for a volunteer to sleep on board the plane, we carried a highly secretive Norden bomb sight and could not risk anything happening to it or our plane. Bob Brown volunteered, a good man for the duty, we felt comfortable with Bob handling this job.

Morning. Good weather out, we briefed ourselves to find our original destination, namely Prestwick Air Base in Scotland. We took on just enough fuel to reach Prestwick, we needed to stay as light as possible to get airborne on this short strip of grass. With a full fuel supply and bombs on board we usually required about 5 to 6 thousand feet. We made it with very few feet of grass to spare and a big sigh of relief. We found Prestwick, checked in , explained our late arrival and found housing awaiting next order. They were thankful for a new plane still intact!

Our orders were ready the next morning and we were placed on a train and sent to a staging area , a none flying base, to learn all about English culture , monies, aircraft identification , some gunnery practice for the enlisted men. We were here about one week and then new orders arrived for our transfer to our new home, the 95<sup>th</sup> bomb group at Horham.

Upon arriving we were all assigned quarters. We were very fortunate to be assigned two small private rooms sparing us the huge housing in large quonset huts. Hatheway and Carlson , the bombardier, decided to bunk together, leaving Gene Petrocine, the Navigator, and myself for the other room. This all turned out well. Gene was 27 years of age so we had little in common which really didn't matter, our duty from now on would be to fly missions. Gene was a NYU graduate, living in Brooklyn, N.Y. .A very intelligent young man. Again, a good reason why we had trained for a lead crew assignment.

We flew a number of practice missions, working hard to improve our formation flying. We had to learn our radar system , no fly zones, and numerous other new things, Finally, our first mission. We had an experienced pilot fly with Hatheway on the first mission and I had to stay behind. Then on April 19<sup>th</sup>. I flew my first mission to Werl, Germany bombing an air base. I won't discuss every mission, these have all been documented over and over by many authors writing excellent books on the subject, much better than I could describe the mission. I will take



just some liberty to describe what a mission amounted to. Usually we were awakened by a runner who hit all of the crews flying that day, and this would be about 3:00 A.M. . A truck would be waiting for us in the area and take us to the mess hall for breakfast. These breakfasts were very somber, we never knew who would be missing for the next call, so friends were not made. After breakfast we headed for the briefing room. The Officers in one room and the enlisted crew members in another room for their briefing. In the front of the room was a huge map of Europe with a sheet over it. to keep our mission secret. At the appropriate time the Colonel , the base commander, would come in , pull the curtain aside , and we would see our target for today. If it was a nasty run many grunts would be uttered by all in attendance. Knowing this would be a bloody run with the chance of heavy casualties.

At this briefing we would be informed as to fighter cover and when they would meet us, our bomb load, our gas load, where in the formation we would be flying, the altitude we would fly at, weather conditions both at base and over target. Then we would all head for the locker area to put on our flying gear, such as heated suits, heavy sheepskin jackets and pants, our helmets and oxygen masks, boots. Our personnel items would be placed in a bag and sealed until we returned from the mission in a lock up area.

Now we would board trucks and be taken out to the hardstand where our assigned plane was tied down. The pilot and co-pilot would now visually inspect the plane, talk to the crew chief for questions we may have , tell the rest of the crew where we headed for and our target, altitude, fighter opposition expected and then did we have enough ammunition on board? If not the armorer would somehow obtain more, we had to feed 13 fifty caliber machine guns on every mission. The navigator and bombardier would be settling in getting maps ready.

Finally, we would receive the signal to start engines. The pilot and co-pilot each had their duties to do this properly and be sure the engines were performing at the their finest. Successfully completing this we waited for our turn to taxi out to the runway area waiting our turn to take-off. We entered the runway area and a plane was airborne every 30 seconds. Usually we had an overcast and were on instruments in very short order, usually climbing thru 6000 to 10,000 ft. of cloud cover. Our lead ship would be up there firing flares for identification and we would form into a group of 18 planes and in our assigned slots. The groups would then form into a combat wing, usually three groups in a combat wing and wait for all the other groups from the various fields to do the same and then head out for the North Sea or the English Channel to our target for the day.

Suffice this to give you an idea what a morning amounted to. We would usually climb to 22,000 ft. crossing into enemy territory, sometimes up to 28,000. ft. depending on cloud cover and anticipated flak, anti aircraft fire. Most missions were in the 7 to 8 hour range. Now remember we had nothing to eat or drink until we were back on the ground and finished with de-briefing, probably around 6:00 P.M. These were long days. We lived on oxygen from about 10,000 ft. and stayed on oxygen until descending 8 hours later. The temperature at altitude was usually -50 degrees from 25,000 ft. on up.

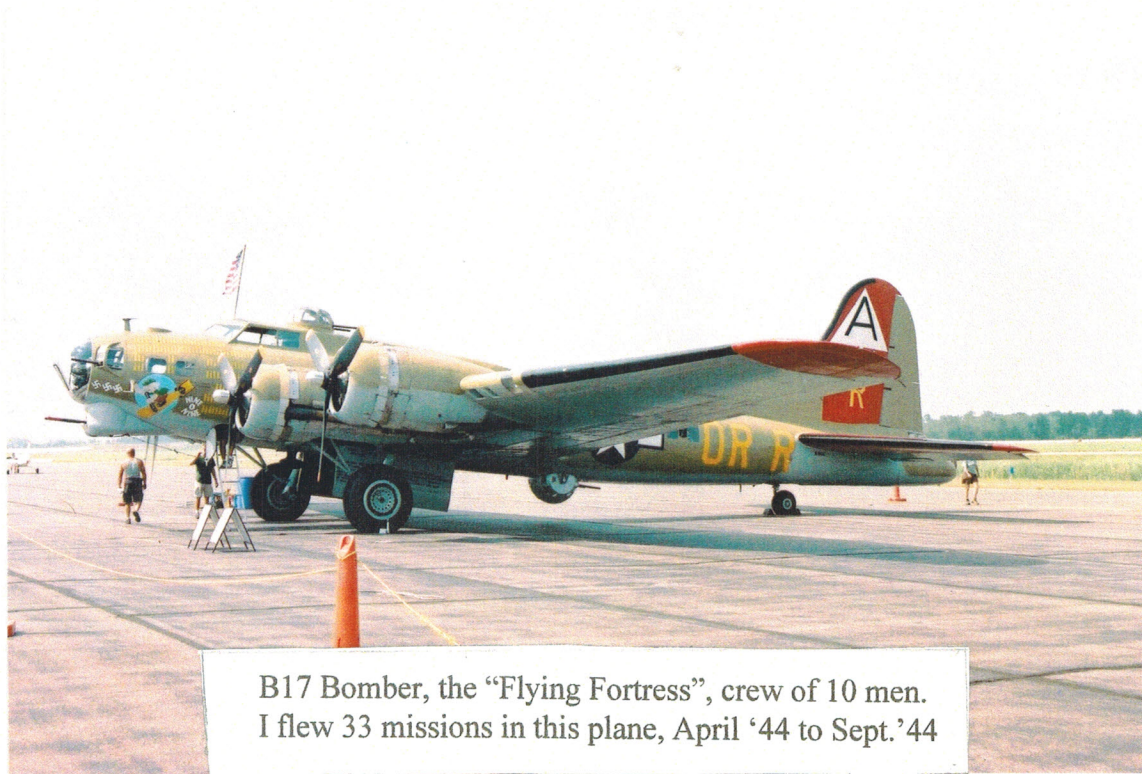
I started my tour as a co-pilot and flew 17 missions in that capacity. I was fortunate to have a



very good first pilot to teach me, so I ended up being promoted to first pilot at this time . I hated to leave a great crew but time had come. I ended up flying 16 missions as a first pilot with numerous crews who had lost their pilot usually to being wounded or killed.. I never really knew another crew due to constant changes, this I really missed. I ended up flying a total of 33 missions, based on a formula, lead crews flew 30 missions due to the danger of that position, the balance flew 35 at this point in the war. Having flown a good number of missions as part of a lead crew I was given credit for two missions, accounting for the 33.

After I left my original crew they were sent to school to learn the newest , bombing by radar. They moved out of this squadron and were based in another area. This left me alone with two rooms by myself. In a way this turned out to be a blessing. My former roommate , Gene Petrocine , the navigator, was killed on a flight by a direct hit in the head by flak. I didn't have to witness this tragedy for which I have always been thankful. My old crew finished their missions some weeks after I did. When finished I stayed on base about two weeks to help train some new crews and then accepted the opportunity to go home to the States.

1. I don't recall the exact date, but I received a letter from my sister Gertrude, beautifully written informing me my Father had passed away. He had been in the hospital for a gall bladder operation , developed a blood clot and passed away. The family handled this very well concerning me. They felt trying to get me home in time for the funeral, it would be better to allow me to stay with my crew allowing me a better chance of surviving the war, and how correct this decision was. It was a shock to receive this letter , but I mentioned beautifully written, and this was a true gift of Gertrude's. Receiving this letter I became even more determined to end this war alive, my mother didn't need another death at this point of life. God handled this His own way and I came home early in October 1944 for a two week leave. After 6 months in England it was a welcome retreat to return to a country not at war, at war yes, but not a shooting war. No concerns about some buzz bomb landing in your backyard.



B17 Bomber, the "Flying Fortress", crew of 10 men.  
I flew 33 missions in this plane, April '44 to Sept. '44



I flew 33 missions. Two that will always remain as very special in my heart were —on June 6<sup>th</sup>. It was announced at briefing that today was the long expected invasion of the European Continent, referred to as “D-DAY”. Words cannot describe this armada of ships and planes heading across the English Channel. I always remarked , one could have walked from one ship to another never touching the water.

A sight I will recall forever, involved our parachute fighting teams. They were being dropped into the combat area by C47 transport planes in their massive gliders. France is well known as a county side of hedgerows and small country roads. These gliders could not be controlled with any accuracy once released from the tow plane. The gliders would hit these hedge rows flip end over end and just break in two, a horrible sight to watch from about 12,000. ft in the air. They were one brave combat team , trained to accept what the war effort had to offer.

The magnitude of this invasion will never occur again! The amount of planes and water craft assembled for this huge invasion in Britian is hard to imagine. Probably 1000 B17 and B24 bombers, 600 B26 and B25 medium size bombers ,also hundreds of RAF bombers, probably 800 fighter planes, consisting of P51s, P47s.,P38s, Spitfires’s and Hurricanes. The Germans chose not to defend this invasion from the air. We encountered no problems other than flak batteries. We actually were briefed on exact traffic patterns to fly in case we needed to abort and turn around to avoid air collisions. The weather was marginal, broken cloud cover, fortunately when our group was bombing we had pretty good visual observation. It would have been a shame to miss seeing this huge power of air and sea massed for the attack.

Another mission to remember was flown July 14<sup>th</sup>, actually my first mission with my own crew flying as the command pilot. This was to deep Southern France flying supplies to the Marquis, the freedom fighters , secretly sabotaging everything on the ground that could slow the war effort. We were so deep in France, the Pyrenees mountains were just off to our right. Our target was a small open land area totally surrounded my a huge wooded area. The freedom fighters were hidden in the trees and we needed to drop down to about 300 ft. just unheard of in a huge bomber and in formation of about 18 planes. We were very exposed to enemy fighters just ready for a kill. Fortunately this was a very secret mission and we were lucky to come out of it intact. As we were climbing for altitude after our drop, the Marquis were like ants coming out of the woods to quickly gather up our drop and get back under cover of the woods. I still can’t imagine how we found this small clearing , the Marquis did a wonderful job of marking it along with our lead navigator who was really on the ball. We dropped containers filled with guns, ammunition, grenades, dynamite, and food.. Our flight home was also not challenged by the German air force, we were very fortunate.

One last mission to mention– I was still flying as a co-pilot and it was a long, deep mission into Germany. Our escort had turned around to head back home due to low fuel. The German fighters were just waiting for this time and immediately attacked. in a huge swarm. Fortunately, they hit the group ahead of us. I am still shaken thinking about this sight. In minutes there were seven B17's on there way down, burning, exploding , engines on fire and I counted 66 parachutes floating down. All these airmen destined for a POW camp providing the German populace didn’t



get a hold of them first. The civilians were nasty, they killed our airmen in many instances. We need to remember we were killing many civilians and they were not happy people.

Upon the completion of my tour in the 95<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, I received orders to report to Southampton, England, on the coast, a seaport. Spent about a week here waiting for assignment to a ship to sail back to the United States.

I was assigned to the Aquatania, a large passenger liner owned by the British. It was very large, 980 ft. in length, many decks, truly a first class ship. Due to the fact of the speed this ship could travel at we headed out to the Atlantic for a solo crossing. Most ships traveled with heavy destroyer or submarine escort. We were fast enough to outrun any enemy submarines should we encounter one. Yes we did! We had to detour way north to escape the trap set for us and then outrun the enemy subs, obviously we did our I would not be writing this story.

One exciting happening aboard the Aquatania. With my last name beginning with an A, assignments were made for our help on board and my call came the first day. I was named "Officer of the Day", which meant in the morning I had to read the news recap over a loud speaker to all aboard. Then I had to tour the entire ship from one deck to another, reporting on any problems, again I had aids helping and guiding me. The next highlight was reporting to the captain up on the bridge, the control center of this ship. I was then invited to have lunch with the Captain. A beautiful set-up, white table cloth service, imagine this in wartime?? I felt very, very fortunate after having just toured the ship and seeing what poor quarters the troops in the lower decks were living in. Crowded, dirty, many sea sick passengers just a terrible sight to see. Now this crossing to New York lasted for 6 days, so imagine these quarters after six days!

My personal quarters were just excellent. Four of us were housed in a beautiful first class stateroom on the top deck. This would have been one of the most expensive rooms on board in a peace time sailing. We had windows in all directions, just beautiful.

Arrived in New York harbor, what a beautiful sight to see the Statue of Liberty! We disembarked and were bussed to Fort Kilmer, New Jersey for processing to allow us to head home for a two week furlough. Four of us became good friends, we were housed together due to our final destination which was Minneapolis, MN. Phil Brain was from MPL's, Bill Bagus was from Hankinson, ND and Bob Binger was from New Ulm, MN. Bill and I became very close friends and remained in contact until Bill was killed in a plane crash flying a freighter for a commercial airline in 1957. Phil Brain was killed a plane crash about two weeks after returning to duty following this vacation. He was an instructor pilot and his student made a bad mistake on a simulated take-off problem and all were killed in a B24. I never again heard from Binger. Bill Bagus and I had made arrangements to meet at the train station in MPL's. when our leaves had expired for our orders read to report to a hotel on Miami Beach, FL. for two more weeks of R and R. This was just one sweet assignment, beautiful Miami Beach in November.

Back tracking just for one insert— A problem had developed upon returning to MN. Marcia was living in Washington, DC working for the Veteran's Administration. How would I see her??? I felt I had to go home to see my Mother after all she had experienced, so my going to DC was not



an option. Final decision, Marcia boarded a train and came back to Gaylord.. We had a wonderful short time together, I really knew this was the girl I was going to marry but didn't know when this would happen. The timing was not right, I had little money, obviously didn't know where I would be stationed next, had no idea what my new assignment would be. She then boarded a train and returned to DC and I proceeded with orders to Miami Beach, Fl.

Just a brief recap of the information mentioned covering the 95<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group and my small part played in it===

The 95<sup>th</sup>. Flew 320 missions in total, of which I participated in 33 missions over a 6 month period.

The 95<sup>th</sup> lost, shot down, 206 B17 bombers.

In these losses 938 airmen were killed and about an equal amount bailed out over Europe and were taken prisoners or killed by civilians as they landed in their parachutes.

Our chances of survival were usually estimated to be about 33%, one out of three airmen.

I shall never forget the devastating loss of life when the bomber next to you was hit by flak or fighters and would blow up. Or to watch a bomber have two engines shot out and forced to leave the formation over enemy territory knowing the German fighter pilots were just waiting for this to happen. In minutes they would pounce on the airplane in trouble and shoot it down, all we could do was hope we would see 10 parachutes leave the stricken bomber. A most difficult thing to watch was seeing a bomber go down in a tailspin, you knew the pilot and co-pilot in most cases had just been killed and lost total control. In most cases the entire crew would perish due to the extreme pressure in the plane freezing one into position and unable to bail out. These memories remained fresh forever. I had mentioned earlier very few friendships were created for this very reason. It was difficult to watch a friend go down in flames. Actually I did not have a close friend other than my original crew members the entire six months in England.

I also had mentioned that the lead ship was usually the first target for the enemy fighters. Reason being as you can see, this would really disrupt the formation, for now the deputy lead had to take over, all this is very tough on a formation. This was the reason lead crews flew 5 fewer missions than anyone else, and justly so. I had the honor of being in that lead crew as a co-pilot for 17 missions.

For my tour of duty I ended up earning the following medals==

Distinguished flying cross-- DFC

Air medal with three clusters.

European theater ribbon for flying over 6 months in this area..

Normandy Invasion, June 6<sup>th</sup> medal.

A special ribbon for participating in the air war over the continent.

Entered the service 7/21/42  
1942 to 1942 PFC in the Army  
Jan. 1943 to Nov. 1943 Cadet in the Air Force  
Nov 1943 to June 1944 Flight Officer  
June 1944 promoted to 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt.  
June 1944 to June 21 promoted to 1<sup>st</sup>. Lt.  
Discharged 12/10/1945  
Reserves for 21 years  
promoted to captain Aug 1950  
" To Major May 1957



## Miami Beach forward

The stay at Miami Beach was a true delight. We were catered to in every way possible, wonderful meals, deep sea fishing junkets, tours of the area and lots of rest. Forgot to mention, Bill Bagus from No, Dakota had remained in contract with me while on leave, with the plan of meeting at the train station in Mpl's. For this trip to Miami. He was there waiting for me the day of our departure.

Arriving In Miami we were subjected to many tests as to where we were mentally after the time in combat, our hours in the air , type of planes we flew, generally just what should our next assignment be. I had requested to be removed from flying four engined aircraft primarily because I could not handle any more high altitude flying due to the many times I suffered from the bends. This bodily problem exists both at high altitude and diving very deep in water for an extended length of time., it is very painful particularly in the area of the knees.

My orders came trough and I was to report to a base in Hobbs, New Mexico, a B29 base. I was not real happy. First off the B29 was still in it's infancy of development and the bugs , problems were still to be resolved. The ship was equipped with very poor engines, known for catching on fire in flight. Upon reporting at Hobbs I immediately pursued my transfer to another base for flying B25's. In about a month this request was honored, many thanks to a cooperative Air Command, and I was given orders to report to a B25 instructor training school in San Antonio, Texas. The school was at Brooks Field, San Antonio, Texas , the school I graduated from in November of '43 , cadet school!!!!I was delighted with this assignment.

Arriving In San Antonio I was quickly assigned to a class that would run for 2 months, preparing one for being a cadet instructor. It was a pleasure to fly this well known plane. It was the plane General Doolittle chose for the now famous raid over Tokyo taking off from a carrier. I enjoyed every minute of this training. It was a very easy plane to fly, in view of the fact I now had about 700 hours of flying time under my belt, and lots of this time under extreme conditions.

For some reason this class was transferred to Waco, Texas. At this base my training was completed and I was assigned Douglas Air Force Base located at Douglas, Arizona, 15 miles from the Mexican border. We were all assigned a class of Chinese cadets, briefed to start, when the war was winding down and no more pilots were needed to be trained. This time line was Spring of 1945. Now what to do with all of us very qualified pilots?

The squadron commander gathered for a meeting, informed us of about 10 openings for pilots across the USA. Who would be assigned where? A big surprise to all of us, about 25 of us, he informed us this would be done by the cut of a card, high card first choice and so on down.I drew, and drew an ace!!!! This meant first choice. I selected an opening at Westover air base located at Westover, Ma. This base was to receive a fleet of A26 attack bombers, at the time the newest and the best. Top speed 375 miles per hour versus our B25's at 165 MPH. Also, when trained we would report to the South Pacific for duty, this pleased me to no end, this as my ultimate wish.



Three of us ended up with this assignment, Gene Lewis, Chick Chiccini and myself. We ended up the very best of friends and remained friends until Chick passed away at the age of 93 and Gene is alive today and correspond regularly, primarily by E-mail, to this day. Well to make a long story short, when we arrived there, no A26's on the flight line, only a small fleet of B24's. We checked this out , were told they are on the way, you can fly the B24's at will , all the hours you want to stay proficient. I was checked out in the B24, it amounted to a couple of take- offs and landings and that was all that was needed, a flew just like a B17 except that had a three wheel landing gear versus the old 17 with a three point landing. This was no great challenge after the hours in the air. We waited patiently for our new planes, nothing happened. We had a true summer of vacation. Swimming almost daily in the local lakes, really nothing to do. Gene owned a big 16 cylinder lincoln so we had transportation, seemed we had plenty of gas stamps and lived like Kings.

One day towards fall to our great surprise two A26's arrived!!!! We were one happy bunch of pilots. Now the problem of spreading flying time to about 20 anxious pilots. I ended up with tree flights , amounting to 6 hours of flying time. This a beauty to fly, top speed of 375 Miles per hour, this after B25' at 165 mph this was fun. Our hope and goal was to finish our training and get assigned to the South Pacific Theater for duty. What happened??? The war was over!!! Obviously great news, but suddenly we were all in limbo,, what next??

In the meantime I had purchased a 1935 ford from one pilot who was being transferred overseas I paid 325 dollars for this vehicle and drove it until 1950, five years. The best move I made and it served me well as you will hear later on.

Now what the war is over!!! Do we have a job ? What will our next move be? Conversation was rampant, discharges were ready ,based on time and this converted to point giving us a number as to a possible discharge date. Almost all of four engine pilots had visited the local FAA and taken the test for a commercial pilot rating, so we all had this for a possible move as a civilian. I still have mine today, they never expire just need a physical to fly.

Decisions! .Decisions!!!! What to do??? Do I take my discharge and head for home? Do I gamble on a career in the service? My concern was about three fold. 1. I was making about \$400.00 dollars a month and that was very good money for a 21 year old Kid with only a high school education. 2. With only this high school education where am I going in the military? Many fellow pilot had college degrees as this was required initially until they relaxed the rules to get more cadets. I made the decision—I will take my discharge and head for MPL's stay with my Mother, and attend the U of M heading for a degree in business, We were given four years of free tuition, a wonderful opportunity to better ourselves, truly a huge thank you.

I hopped in my 1935 Ford and headed home, this was in October. I wasted little time in taking the entrance exam for the University , fortunately I passed, was given credit for one year of schooling thanks to my cadet training, so I was accepted as a 2<sup>nd</sup> year student. In the meantime I immediately searched for a part time job while I would be in school. Uncle Sam was very generous and gave all of us a \$90. Stipend a month ,plus paying for all school expenses, truly a huge and generous thank you.



I was born August 23, 1923. Celebrated  
My 88<sup>th</sup>. Birthday this past summer. God willing,  
I may be fortunate enough to enjoy many more  
and continue to Live a Dream.

This brief autobiography was  
written in 2011.



B24 "The Liberator" Bomber. A plane I flew the  
summer of 1945—Westover Field, Ma.



B25 "Mitchell" bomber. The plane I flew  
while a cadet instructor-Douglas, Arizona.