

December 15, 1992

## BIOGRAPHY AND A LITTLE HISTORY ABOUT FLOYD W. HENDERSON

Born May 28, 1918 in Loup City Nebraska. I stayed in Loup City until I was 19 years old.

I've had lots of memorable moments, but the one that comes to mind first was my second bombing mission over in France from England. One piece of flak took a piece of my parachute and cut a groove in the seat I was sitting on. Another piece of flak went through my fuel selector valve. I had to land at an airfield on the coast of England and repair the valve before I could continue to my home base at Wethersfield, England. My two gunners and I counted 33 holes in that plane from flak. One piece of flak about 1 ½ inches square was imbedded in the emergency radio in the gunners compartment. Had the radio not been there, it would have hit my gunner. There were several prayers of thanksgiving for God's protection on that mission. I had a few other close calls, but that is the only one I can recall.

I had five brothers and four sisters and I was about in the center of that group in age. The nearest brother in age to me was about a year younger than I am. This brother died when he was about 6 years old. I can still remember the day of the funeral. My parents wanted me to go to the funeral and I refused to go and accept the fact that Dayton was gone.

My Mother and Father were good parents. I don't see how my Mother kept control of her composure as well as she did. Mom had a special harness for me to keep me from exploring the neighborhood when I was about 5 years old. She would put a leash on this harness and attach it to the clothesline and toys to keep me occupied so she could run the household and not

worry about me disappearing. My two older sisters told me about this arrangement.

My Dad had a store and sold sacks of feed to the farmers in the area. He also bought cream and eggs from them and shipped this produce to Omaha. Drouth and depression hit us hard in the 1930's so dad added groceries to his store to try and add to his income. We eked out a bare living but Dad finally had to give up and move to Oregon around 1940. All of us were required to work in this store as we were growing up and it was part of my education. My Father had only a fourth grade education so he gave my sister and I the responsibility of keeping the books for the business. He had me writing business checks when I was in high school.

I spent most of my time in the store as I went from fourth or fifth grade through high school. I was allowed plenty of time to do things kids love to do. I did a lot of swimming, hunting, fishing, and trapping. High school sports were a big part of my life. I received letters in track, football and basketball in my junior and senior years. We played baseball, but it was not a school sport. When we first began hunting pheasants, there was no bag limit. There was no game wasted because these pheasants were hunted for food. We did shoot jackrabbits for sport because they were pests and also good moving target practice. Those were good years. We all had plenty to eat, but no one had money to spend foolishly.

Our graduating class had 36 students. There was a pretty good variety of farm students and town students in my class. I wanted to go on to higher learning after high school so my courses in high school were college preparatory. We had to take Latin and a choice of French or German for foreign languages. I enjoyed these language courses, but always thought they were a waste of time. The math courses I took were algebra, plane geometry and trigonometry. Two years of typing, some business accounting, American history and English made up the balance along with physics and biology.

The good classes were there if you wanted an education. My grades in high school were pretty good and I enjoyed school.

After graduating from high school, there was nothing for me to do in Loup City. I wanted to go on to college and get a degree in electrical engineering but there was no money to get me started. My oldest sister Helen had gone on to Business College and after graduating, got a job in the county courthouse working for the government. She insisted on getting me enough money to enroll in a school in Illinois. I went for a semester thinking I could find a job and pay my own way. There wasn't even a bus boy job or anything I could find to end my asking Helen for more help so I returned to Loup City. My sister was really provoked with me for giving up. She would have financed my education if necessary.

My Dad's store was going down hill slowly by this time due to drouth and depression, about this time the government decided to create some work for this area. A dam and irrigation system was started in our area and I worked on this for about a year until it was completed. I had younger brothers and sisters and Dad needed financial help so part of my salary went to help the family. After that job, I heard from two of my friends who had gone to California and found work so I hitchhiked out there and tried to find work. My job searching did no good. I returned to Nebraska and got a job in Omaha working at a cold storage plant. It was a good steady job, but the pay at the start was .35 an hour. In about six months, they increased my salary to .86 ½ an hour. The fringe benefit with this job was that this is where I met my wife to be. She worked in the same building. This brings us up to about the summer of 1940. A friend of mine introduced me to this cute blue eyed gal and we were constant companions in our free time. About the first question I asked her was where do you live? She answered that she lived in North Omaha and I answered that I lived in South Omaha, but would soon be moving to North Omaha. About a week later I was living

about three doors down from where she lived. We dated for about ten months before we started arrangements for a wedding. I was classified 1A in the draft and things were looking bad in Europe because of Hitler's activities. I went to my draft board to try and get an idea of when I'd be drafted. This was in November of 1941 and they said I wouldn't be drafted for at least six months. We then went out to Cedar Rapids, Nebraska to get Ann's mother two days before the wedding. Just before we arrived back in Omaha, it came over my radio that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. About a month later I received my greetings to report for induction into the army. That one month we were married went pretty fast.

I was drafted into the infantry and sent to Camp Roberts near Paso Robles, California. Ann came to be with me while I was in boot camp. She got a job and lived in Paso Robles so we got to be together most weekends for about six to eight weeks. Shortly after completing basic infantry training, I took physical and aptitude tests to get into aviation cadet training. On July of 1943 I graduated from flying school in Yarma. Ann and I did get to have occasional visits during my training. She was working and living in the Los Angeles area. There were two more steps of two and a half months each before I went overseas. One stop was Mather field near Sacramento and the last was Florence, South Carolina. We lived off the base for those two periods. I received my orders to get on the Queen Mary ocean liner and go to England in February of 1944. That was the last we saw of each other for a bit over thirteen months, but we wrote each other almost daily. Six months after going overseas, I received a cablegram that I was the father of a six pound boy we named Clarke.

Just a little about my service. I flew my first mission in March of 1944 and my 65<sup>th</sup> and last mission is April of 1945. Our group did ground support for D-day, Battle of the Bulge and Remagen Bridge, to name a few. When my 65<sup>th</sup> mission was done, I was given a choice to stay in Europe, be promoted

from first lieutenant to major or go home. I chose the latter for some unknown reason. I had visions of my wife and son and that was where I wanted to be.

We bought a home in Omaha and a daughter Jackie was added to the family. We moved to Fort Bragg, California in 1947 and six children were added to the family there in fourteen years. We moved to Grants Pass, Oregon in 1961 and added one more son, John who is now 26 years old.

Now for some of the questions you asked.

My good high school friends are all dead.

Would I have made any changes if I could do it over? I can't bring to mind any way my life could have been more full.

My most important role model. The pleasure of family life kept me motivated.

The worst job I ever had was feeding chickens in a poultry fattening plant and cleaning the cages. The hardest job I ever had was shocking grain and pitching bundles into a thresher. 12 hour day 1.50.

Historical events in my life. World War 1 and World War II, Pearl Harbor, man on the moon, space exploration, nuclear energy, atomic bombs. All the advancements in electronics like TV sets.

The most important change in medical fields was the development of a vaccine for Polio.

There was one event that happened in my life that played a big part in the following pattern of my life. When I returned from overseas and reported to an air force command post in Miami, I was given three choices concerning the air force. One was to stay in the service, take a fifteen day furlough then report for active duty. One was to take a fifteen day furlough and sign for reserve air force duty when and where the air force might need me. The last choice was to be honorably discharged and out of the air force. I chose to stay in the reserves with periods of active duty at Hamilton Field in northern California. We were living in Fort Bragg, California

at this time and had one active duty period that covered preflight instructions on jet aircraft piloting. My next active period would have been to fly a T-33 or P-80 single engine fighter plane. About two weeks before this scheduled date, I had a steel fragment pierce my eye. When I reported this to the air force, they promoted me to Captain and gave me an honorable discharge. Events that followed this time shortly were the Korean War and Vietnam War. This loss of my eye might have been a blessing in disguise because I probably would have been involved in one or both of them.

My diet is basically the same now as fifty years ago except now we eat less meat.

Family life is much different now then when I was growing up. TV has made quite a change in family life. We used to make our own entertainment and recreation.

My hobbies are swimming, golfing, horseshoes, reading and TV.

My favorite President was Roosevelt. We had just gone through a stock market crash, drouth and depression and he did get things going again. W.P.A. or Works Progress Administration and some other projects got people working again. I think the benefits outweighed the abuses these projects were responsible for.

Natural disasters were and still are common. How would you like to have been a farmer with a nice crop ready to harvest only to have hail stones beat it to a pulp. I have seen some of that and the destruction a tornado can cause.

My major challenge was to feed and clothe our family and have our children become good and happy citizens.

My occupations; clerk in Dad's store, some farm chores, shipping and receiving, pilot, auto parts clerk, some machinist work, and mechanic. Most of my work in auto mechanics involved, brakes, suspension and wheel alignment.

Grandchildren number seven and I guess that will be all. No great grandchildren yet.

Foreign countries I have seen are; England, France, Scotland and Ireland.

I do enjoy Mexican, Italian and Chinese food.

Would we like to move? We are fairly well pleased right where we are. We do like to travel and see other places in the U.S.A..

Are the police more strict now then they were? There are more people now so we need more police. In my home town of 1500 people there was only one policeman and he also took care of the city water system.

We had a telephone when I was young, but every call was operator assisted.

I think the ten years following World War II are my favorite years. Everyone seemed willing to pitch in and help our nation back on a peace time schedule.

It has been a great life and I'm very thankful for the experience and for the sons and daughters in order of their birth; Clarke, Jackie, Loren, Gayle, Maura, Robert, Mary, Tommy and John. We lost Tommy four years ago in a motorcycle accident.