

FROM CIVILIAN TO PRIVATE TO AVIATION CADET TO 1ST LIEUTENANT TO CIVILIAN

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May 1, 1942, I had just completed my first year of engineering at the University of Illinois. An Air Corp team told us that if we passed the written and physical tests we could stay in school until we graduated. Nine months later they were drafting married men so we were called up. I boarded a train in Chicago, traveled for a number of days and ended up in Sheppard Field, TX. A corporal with a big, big voice was in charge and he did a great job with the young civilians. As we walked into the facility in our civilian clothes (Government Issued) GIs yelled "you'll be sorry!" The next day those who came in with me yelled "you'll be sorry!" at those in civilian clothes. After we were issued our clothes a 2nd lieutenant read the Articles of War. No one could understand one word because he read so fast. Later as we were walking to our barracks the Air Corp song came out over the loud speakers my thoughts "bull shit," now I find the song thrilling. Most of the GIs had throat infections so I was on KP (kitchen police) every other day for two weeks. One night another GI and I cracked eggs for at least three hours. One egg had a girl's name and town written on it. While serving breakfast that morning a GI said, "dried eggs again." I set him straight in very certain terms. One night the chef served steak with too much seasoning. We fell out every morning at GAM wearing all of the issued clothes. We fell out after lunch in shorts. I played baseball instead of PT. The manager asked me if I wanted to spend the rest of the war playing baseball. No thanks!

Oklahoma City University - Spring 1942

College training detachment - We were given courses which I had completed in my first year of college.

San Antonio, TX - Summer 1943

Classification. We were given mental and physical tests to determine pilot qualifications. Lots of classes including Morse code. We were placed in barracks according to height. I was 6' 2" max was 6' 4" We wore jodhpurs cut off above the knees. As we marched to class cadets whistled from the side, cute knees, I guess.

Meals were served family style with six cadets on each side of the table and one at each end. The cadet in the end center seat raised his hand when more food was needed. Our first classification choice was pilot and last choice was gunner. Naturally the cadet in the end seat was called "gunner." I spent two days in the hospital with stomach problems. It was and still is my Achilles' heel.

PT-19 in El Reno, OK - October 1943

The first airplane that I flew was the PT-19. The PT-19 engine was started from the ground by a cadet who rotated a crank counter clockwise. After engine start the cadet then held up two fingers, not for victory, but to remind the cadet pilot to switch to two magnetos instead of only the left or right mag. The PT-19 had no batteries. I was the last to solo in my class but I wasn't thrown in the swimming pool and was reminded that I should have been.

Another cadet and I thought it was better to wear high cut shoes in case you had to bail out. He crashed and the sergeant who went to recover the body told me that the only article recognizable were his shoes. I volunteered to go home with the body. But didn't, I guess, because it was close to the end of the class.

BT-13 and AT-17, Garden City, KS - December 1943

It was bleak, cold, windy and flat as a pancake. Dried sage bush had to be brushed from the mess hall door.

The BT-13 scared out some cadets. We then flew the twin engine AT-17 with either an instructor or cadet in the copilot seat. It was called the bamboo bomber because it had a wooden fuselage.

That Christmas I took a bus to Wichita, KS and spent the first night on the floor of a hotel. I had two great days with the family that took me to their house. Cessna Aircraft that built the AT-17. Had a great time with the family that took me even gave me a Christmas present. A popular song was "I met a witch in Wichita."

B-25 in San Antonio, TX – Spring 1944

The weather in San Antonio had cloudy days and clear nights. On those days a note on the board said, "even the birds aren't flying!" My first flight as a pilot was at night. It was the first tricycle airplane instead of airplanes with a tail wheel which required the pilot to turn down the taxi strip for visibility. The instructor sat there until I figured out to let the airplane first roll forward for a short distance before turning with the engine and brakes. My best B-25 landing was when we knew that we were on the ground because we ran over a runway expansion strip. I won't tell about some of my poorer landings.

After graduation we walked along a table to get our wings, 2nd lieutenant bars, money for clothes, etc. A sergeant at the end of the line told me that the first thing every one did was put their instrument card in their wallet. We really prized that card.

On D Day June 6, 1944 I was in Columbia, SC after 30 days at home where my mother had a big party for me. and a trip to Champaign to visit Mickie. All travel was by train. It was reported that a sardine once said that they were packed in like people.

Florence, SC Summer 1944

The A-20 is a twin engine single cockpit airplane. Before my first flight I was given a blind fold test in which I had to touch each instrument or cockpit control after about one hour of self orientation. Florence Air Base had no crew chiefs. I sometimes had difficulty figuring out what was done for the squawks which I wrote up after flights.

On a strafing skip bombing practice the right engine quit so I had a single engine flight back to base. The next day, on the same practice mission first the right engine then the left engine quit so I made an emergency landing in a small clearing after knocking down a part of a tree. People living in that area came running up. I asked one of the spectators to call the base. The crew came out in three or four hours. A major came over to hug me saying, "I'm glad to see that you're alive!" My thoughts "Amen!!!"

After the crash I jumped out through a broken window and grabbed the propeller for support because I had not released the overhead canopy. I initially thought that the A-20 was burning but it was just dust. When I looked back at the airplane there were two dogs lying in the shade of the wing. The next day a board of inquiry, captains and majors, asked me how I knew which engine to feather. I went through the procedure and told them that I had a single engine the previous day. My next flight was at night. After takeoff I saw that the engine exhaust flame was orange but turned blue when I reduced the mixture control. I had not done that before and didn't ever do it again.

Two weeks later we boarded a train which took us to the ship, New Amsterdam. On the train to the POE I started playing poker until they went from nickel and dimes to dollars. We were issued pounds on board the ship. Each pound was worth \$4.00. The poker game continued with pounds.

On board the New Amsterdam I enjoyed RHIP (rank has its privileges) for the first time. The officers, mostly 2nd lieutenants and some flight officers were serviced by waiters who wore formal dress, had white towels on their arms with white clothes on the tables. The food was good. My two gunners were fed below deck. Our

stateroom was very small as were the spring bunk beds. Turning over in bed required coordination with the other two officers.

Liverpool, England

After disembarking we were given a mutton meal. Not too good. We took a train to Stoke on Trent and two weeks later we were motored to an airfield for a C-47 flight to the 416th Bomb Group. On my first trip to town we were driving between two hedgerows in the middle of the two lane road. I thought that we had it when the driver moved the small truck to the left. Before the flight we relieved ourselves in a brick room where there were lots of "honey buckets." Yes, there was a British guy emptying the buckets. Ted, who flew in B-24s in the Pacific thought that "honey buckets" were just in the Pacific. There was much commonality in service. When I told Virg, who was also in B-24s in the Pacific. About the greetings "you'll be sorry!" when first going into service, he smiled and said yes he remembered.

A-26 Invader in France

When I joined the 416th Bomb Group in Melun, FR, ten miles outside of Paris, they were changing from the A-20 to the A-26. Douglas technicians explained operation of the systems. I had completed two and 1/2 years of engineering at the U of IL That background helped me understand those systems. I flew all my 4s missions in the A-26. The A-26 was initially designed for use with a 75 MM in the nose. Therefore that configuration eliminated space for a co-pilot. I read that twin engine bomber low level flights in the ETO were disastrous.

I was checked out in the A-26 by sitting in the jump seat for a takeoff and landing by Capt Miller. That procedure was repeated with Miller in the jump seat. I had five more hours of flying before my first mission which was just after Christmas, 1944. I had previously flown twin engine B-25s and A-20s so wasn't surprised that the A-26 handled much differently with bombs. I flew my first mission in the number six position. I was wringing wet when I returned from my first mission. That happened just once. I eventually flew from the number two position. The lead ship, which had a bombardier-navigator, was #1 #2 and #3 were right and left of #1. #4 was below #1 and #5 and #6 were right and left of #4. During pre flight briefing we were told the time between the release of each bomb. We opened the bomb bay doors and dropped the bombs when the #1 did. My right engine quit while I was on a cross country training mission. I landed at 3:30 PM. After midnight the crew chief came to my tent to tell me that it the problem was the right engine induction system and that it was now ready to go. This was far different than when I was in Florence, S. Carolina where there were no crew chiefs.

During a cross country training mission I saw an animal tethered to a stake for feeding resulting in a big symmetrical circle where the animal had eaten.

After a bomb drop I had my gunner verify that the bombs had dropped. On one mission there was a 300 pound bomb hung up on the bomb shackles. The gunner removed the fuze after I closed the bomb bay doors. While descending through rough air, the bomb broke loose and rolled around on the bomb bay doors. Before landing, the tower told me not to open the bomb bay doors. I asked Fred Stemmler, my crew chief, at one of the reunions how he got ride of the bomb, ordnance told him to "open the bomb bay doors."

We transferred fuel before reaching the target to tanks low on fuel to minimize chances of an explosion in case of a flak hit. A pilot who had completed a B-17 tour, said that he was out of fuel while returning from a mission. I had fuel for four or more hours at that time. He and his gunner died. Fuel guages are used by the pilot to determine when to stop transferring fuel.

Before advancing, the army bombed the enemy from the ground. Late in the war one of our missions was to do that type of bombing. While I was flying missions a Martin B-26 Group lost 16 out of 36 aircraft to bandits, enemy fighters, on such a mission. Obviously they didn't have fighter coverage before crossing the bomb line. We rendezvous with fighters before crossing the bomb line. We were in France you know.

I went out one night to the two holer (latrine). It was cold, there was snow on the ground. The man pn the other

hole said that he was a bush pilot in Alaska and that his wife agreed to go to Alaska with him if he would pre-heat the seat. So he did.

After a mission I was debriefed and went to my tent to rest. On two occasions I flew a second mission, when one is 23 years old the adrenaline flows and you are ready the second briefing.

One afternoon we had a late, long mission. After the drop we reduced our manifold pressure and engine RPM to conserve fuel. It was dark when we arrived back our base. All 36 of us were low on fuel. One pilot received permission to land first. That pilot then called his flight leader to thank him. Another pilot said "Don't thank him, thank God!" Amen!

On another mission it was very cold and foggy. The tower repeated eight seconds between take offs. my thought were that I'm the pilot and need more time. While waiting for takeoff I felt my flak suit pressed against my chest. While accelerating during takeoff I had to use my directional gyro because I couldn't see the sides of the one airplane wide runway. During that takeoff there was a strange noise which I later thought was ice from the propellers. The fog was about 200 feet thick. The mission was uneventful after takeoff. It was one of the few mission that we later discussed. Two airplanes exploded on takeoff and eleven were killed. The Commanding Officer, Ted Aylsworth, later explained that Air Corp Headquarters would not believe that visibility was that bad. I later learned that some pilots refused to take off under those conditions. The other pilots and I decided not to sweat out missions, we had a philosophy that when your number was up, that was it! On my 35th mission I was to fly in the number two slot. A tractor caused me to get stuck off of the taxi strip. When I finally got off of the ground, the Group had completed their 360 degree turn and were heading for the target. One flight had only five airplanes so I joined it. I flew in the number 5 slot, just below the number 2 position where I was scheduled to fly. Over the target the airplane in the number 2 slot took a flak hit. Pieces of that airplane hit me. I later thought "that was supposed to be me." I guess it wasn't to be, but I did sweat out my next missions more then usual. I would sometimes sit in the cockpit for over five hours and never had to urinate. A friend told me that adrenal was the reason you emptied your bladder before the mission. As I recall, the urinals were always busy before missions. Before a mission the crew chief pulled the wheel chocks, saluted so the pilot could taxi out. One one mission my crew chief, Fred Stemmler, waived me off after saluting. Then he climbed up and tapped me on the flak helmet several times. Fred told me later that he had never lost an airplane when he did that.

Glenn Miller

We had a mission against a German airfield and were told the fuzes couldn't be removed and that if we didn't drop on the target we were to drop the bombs in an English channel bomb disposal area. We did drop on the target. Glenn Miller was very popular in England and on an anniversary of his disappearance, a gunner checked his notes which said that while dropping bombs, a small airplane was under them. I recently heard that the pilot, a hot shot Charley, was probably drunk.

We received scotch and gin occasionally. Ralph Allen, one of my tent mates was probably an alcoholic. He would frequently get liquored up when he didn't have a mission the next day. When he hit the sack he would usually say, "Wake me early tomorrow, mother, for I shall be queen of the May." Recently, on a WW One TV program, a British fighter pilot said, "Wake me early tomorrow mother for I shall be queen of the May" before a difficult mission. While returning from breakfast at the mess hall Karl Vollmeyer, a Bombadier-Navigator friend had something in his shoe. When he removed the shoe a cock roach fell out.

After starting the left engine I would put three sticks of gum in my mouth while the readouts on the instrument panel were settling out. On the Worms mission, a German railroad area, the briefing officer said "the early bird gets the worms" referring to the early hour takeoff. Each 18 airplanes has a director. When we were over Worms, in very heavy flak, I could taste the flak black powder Our director said, "we're going back to the IP(initial point)" which meant flying back around the target where the enemy was waiting for us. At that time I choked on my gum and now chewing gum gags me when the flavor is gone. Worms was the roughest target that I flew against. We lost four airplanes and one flew back on fire. When I returned from that mission Fred Stemmler said, "what did you do to my A-26?" It took him four days to patch it up.

Late in the war, after dropping on a target, visibility was awful. I had trouble staying in position because of limited visibility and finally decided to leave the formation. I banked right and dropped my nose. I could see that I was losing altitude very fast from the rate-of-climb indicator and the airspeed was at red line, 380 MPH. I pulled back on the stick, nothing happened. I then put both my feet on the instrument panel and pulled back with all my strength I saw green (from ground cover) coming toward me. I blacked out and recovered at 5,000 feet, the bomb bay doors flew open and my gunner, Bob Francis, was yelling at me. I had the gunner come forward after closing the bomb bay doors and gave a short call for a heading and ETA for home. The air was suddenly filled with rockets. I thought that I was in friendly territory so shot the colors of the day with the Very pistol. The sky got worse, more rockets, so I quickly climbed above the clouds. Some time later I saw two twin boom airplanes, probably P-38s. But I hit the deck anyway. Suddenly there was a friendly wave on my right and on my left from the P-38 pilots. I was told the next morning that the airplane was overstressed and had to be scrapped. The extra force of gravity when I pulled out was too much for the A-26.

We occasionally got two days leave. No car passed me while hitch hiking. I got a ride with a British sargent. For three hours the only thing I which i understood was "You do understand English?" I initially asked him to repeat then finally gave up and just smiled and said nothing. A French farmer invited me to eat with him, I understood the French word for eat. He drove down a long lane to his house. He showed me lots of pictures of his family. The French serve a glass of wine with each course. After the second course the maid put the farmer to bed and I resumed hitch hiking.

After VE Day we were stationed near Paris. A friend and I were picked up by a young man I sat in the back seat. It was like an old fashioned movie with trucks and cars zig zagging in front of us. On two occasions he drove up on the sidewalk. When he dropped us off he asked if we wanted to go farther. It would have been great but, we said "no thanks!"

While riding with a man in a car fueled with burning wood. The driver pulled out a lever injecting alcohol to climb small hills.

We got our haircuts in town. After one haircut the barber asked me if I wanted a shave. That was a mistake. The shave was with cold water and a dull razor. A short time later I developed impetigo on my face, my neck and the back of my neck. Alter at a field hospital two doctors soaked the scabs in warm water and peeled them off and put penicelin salve on my sores. I was there for two days, all clothing that touched my face, neck and back of neck was replaced. I was mess for some time.

Thirty years ago at a reunion in Oshkosh, Wl three crew chiefs and three pilots decided to look in the cockpit of an A-26. Access is through retractable stairs on the starboard (right) side. Not one of us were able to climb up the steps. Loss of muscular strength comes with old age.

August 9, 1945

After VE day I flew to Cambrai, FR where there are large, large light colored purple poppies in all of the big bomb craters, we went there for the installation of a bomb bay tank also called Tokyo tanks. My orders were to fly home, get 30 days leave and go to the Pacific theater. Roy Gettle was my crew chief. Our first stop was Marseilles to refuel where we learned that the Japanese had surrendered, and we were on our way home.

That night was spent in Marrakech, Morocco where we were briefed on the weather and emergency landing sites. We left early the next morning for Dakar, French West Africa crossing the Atlas mountains through a V shaped hole at the standard rate of climb 500 feet/minute and flew over an edge of the Sarah Desert. There we saw five lakes, mirages, from 5,000 feet. We missed our check point and the Navigator who was with us wanted to fly another 15 minutes. Instead, I headed for the Atlantic ocean, as we approached the ocean vegetation appeared. We then followed the coast line to Dakar.

After a one day delay due to a bomb bay tank leak, we landed in Fortaleza, Brazil in exactly eight hours. It was

really great to see land in the far distance. During that delay Roy and I went to the ocean to wash some clothes. It was done for us by two large women. I have never seen so much black meat in all of my life. We were told that there would be three ships to be used in case an we had to ditch the airplane but we could contact only one. That night I walked into the latrines bright lights and saw my nearly bald head. I wore my hat the rest of the night. An Operations Officer bought me two rum and Coca Colas, the popular drink at that time. He was looking for sympathy because he was still in Fortaleza with no prospects of returning home soon.

The next stop up the coast of South America was British Guiana where we waited fifteen minutes for a rain cloud to pass through. The cloud build up information was very accurate. The Operations Officer at British Guiana asked me if I wanted to stay there or fly on to Puerto Rico. We flew on to Puerto Rico. In route, at 5,000 feet we saw an undisturbed three masted ship on the bottom and in the distant right saw clouds, which looked like cotton over a

Lesser Antilles Island

After a one day delay due to weather we flew to Hunter Field, Savannah, GA playing in the clouds before my last pilot landing. Roy Gettle and I got a kick out of the radio singing commercials after not hearing one for a long time. I was asked if I wanted a discharge in the Air Corp. I said "is the Pope a catholic?" After Steak and ice cream I took a train to Fort Sheridan, IL where I was mustered out of service about six days after the end of WW II.

After returning home, in Chicago, IL I put on my uniform and took a train to Washington, DC to visit the family of the man I worked for at the University of Illinois in Geological Survey for, at 25cents an hour, the standard rate It was a great two week trip. I spent very little money.

I went back to the University of Illinois and enrolled in the new Aero Space Engineering school. Married Mickie Dorch in June 1946, whom I met at the University before going into service. Graduated in January 1947 with a BS in Aero Space engineering and joined Douglas Aircraft in Santa Monica, CA. Most of my career was with Northrop Aircraft, a great, great company! I volunteer at the Pima Air and Space museum, where four of the six airplanes which I flew are located. A B-24 is the center attraction. Late in the war they had a mile long assembly line and put out 23 airplanes every 24 hours for a total of over 18,000 B-24s. Mickie and I married in June 1946 and received 11 aluminum trays.