

John Parker Hillerman Memories

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Lt. John Parker Hillerman

416th Bombardment Group
670th Bombardment Squadron

Stationed out of England and France 1944

He flew A-20's and A-26's light bombers and received the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal with 12 Oak Leaf Clusters and the European medal with four stars. He was a veteran of 65 combat missions.

The name of his airplane was the Betty Bear.

"POP WHAT DID YOU DO IN THE WAR"

I heard my daughter say the other day after sending
 Her children to school
 Strange how a verbal prod can stir up a contented
 Hibernating 1000 day hunk of my mind
 In thinking back – I had youth as an ally – but more I had:
 Faith in myself
 Patriotism in America
 Love of God
 And with youth's immortality
 I never knew a day of fear



MY FIRST A-20 Wethersfield Airbase England

This was my spear

In thinking back – I was too young to appreciate:
 My gunner crew – their faith and trust in me
 My maintenance crew – their care of my airplane
 My armament crew – their courage loading those bombs

My Most Perilous Bombing Mission

It all happened on a late afternoon mission from Braintree, England 4-3-1944, when our A-20 bomb group, flying at 12000 ft. over France had just dropped our load of eight 500 lb bombs. Anti aircraft flak hit my plane and my gunners screamed our right engine is on fire. If I couldn't get the fire out we would go down. I feathered the prop, dived to extinguish the flames and continued a gradual descent to maintain good airspeed. Leveling off at 1500 ft. I increased the left engine to near full power to maintain 140 mph. If that engine failed to hold up for the 2 hour return flight we would go down. If a Jerry fighter spotted us we would be easily shot down. Bailing out of an A-20 the pilot is apt to be fatally hit by the tail stabilizer. Had we been hit by all the tracer machine gun fire we got from German troops concentrated along the coast waiting for D-day we would have gone down. If our left engine failed crossing the English Channel at night there would be no survival. If I hadn't recalled my morse code training as we were challenged by the English coast batteries we would have been shot down. If my navigation training had been inadequate I never would have found my Braintree air base in blacked-out England. After landing I was told that landing an A-20 on one engine is risky, especially so at night without landing lights. Although I thought I had beat all the odds, actually I owe it all to my co-pilot, God.

MY ARMY BUDDIES

In England we lived in little billet for 6 men. My billet consisted of my closest buddy, Charlie McGlohn. He completed 65 missions and came home to Mississippi. He became an FBI agent but died at an early age due to a melanoma. Big Gus Ostrander, a heavy drinker, was a professional football player. He had to ditch his A-20 in the channel but was recovered by the navy. He got 65 missions and went home to Los Angeles to become a bar owner. He died at age 68 from a stroke. Hugh Monroe (age 19) got 65 missions and stayed in the Air Force flying high cargo airplanes throughout the world. Nordstrom was shot down and we never heard what happened to him. Powell, a bombardier, got 65 missions and went home to Alabama. Betty had communicated with his wife, but we lost track of them. Our tent in France included McGlohn, Ostrander, Monroe, Rooney and Kirk, a bombardier. Rooney was leading a flight on his 65th mission and when returning to his home airbase he collided with another A-26 and went down in flames. Kirk managed to bail out OK.

Betty and I visited with Monroe and Ostrander in their homes in Los Angeles while down there in our motor home in 1989.



Rooney killed on last mission, 6/65

BETTY BEAR

After our 416 Bomb Group was established at Weathersfield, 40 miles NE of London, our A-20 airplanes were soon flown in and each pilot in our squadron was assigned one. I named my plane Betty Bear-- since Betty was home bearing our son. We began flying bombing missions March 3rd. Betty Bear was a work horse; my ground crew always had her ready for the next mission, even for other pilots if I wasn't scheduled to fly. I was one of the first to complete 20 missions. Charlie McGlohn, my closest friend, flew Betty Bear on April 15th and was hit with heavy flak injuring him and knocking out the instrument panel but he managed to follow the group back and landed safely. After spending several weeks in the hospital he was awarded the Silver Star medal. Betty was soon repaired and back flying. On June the 3rd, 3 days before D-Day, I was flying a late afternoon mission deep into France when was hit with flak just as I had released my bombs. With my right engine on fire I shut the engine down, feathered the prop and nosed down sharply blowing out the fire. I leveled off at 5000 ft. but the group was disappearing. I proceeded on my own at a little over half speed consulting my map (as described in another report). I was awarded the DFC (Distinguished Flying Cross). On June 6,7,10 & 13th I flew 4 low level bombing Missions (300 ft). in support of our invading troops into France. On July 15 Rooney was flying Betty Bear on a short mission into France when he was injured from ground fire. He barely managed to fly back over the channel and crash land on a costal farm field, wiping out Betty Bear. Rooney was in the hospital for 2 months. So Betty Bear had carried me through 44 missions and had been flown over 25 times by other pilots, so she got her 65 missions also. I was assigned another A-20 and flew 18 more missions, the last 5 from a ravaged German airfield near Melon, France. In October we were equiped with new A-26 bomber airplanes and I flew 3 more missions into Germany giving me a total of 65 bombing missions -- and a trip home.