

William W. Gullett

U.S. Army Air Corps



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I was born in Springfield, Illinois in 1922 and graduated from Springfield High School in 1940. I attended Springfield Jr. College in 1940 and 1941. In October of 1942, I joined the United States Army Air Corps Aviation Cadet program which would allow me to continue my college education until called to active duty. At the time I was 20 years old and attending the University of Alabama, majoring in chemistry. After a few months, I was notified that I would be called up in April of 1943 and would have to leave school in my senior year without graduating. I left my home in Springfield and went by train to the old C&A railroad to Chicago where I met up with a group of cadets and we were immediately put on another train to Nashville, Tennessee where the Air Corps Classification Center was located. I had hoped to qualify for navigator training because of my scientific training but at the end of the six week classification period I was told that I was to be sent to pilot training, not because I wasn't qualified to be a navigator, but because all those schools were full.

My group of cadets was then sent to the Maxwell Army Airfield for pre-flight training and then to three bases in Arkansas: Camden for basic training in PT-19 Stearman bi-planes, Walnut Ridge for basic training in BT-13 Vultee mono-planes, and finally Blytheville for advanced training in Curtis AT-9 Jeeps. On February 8, 1944, I graduated as a Second

Lieutenant and received my pilot's wings. I was then sent to Drew Army Air Base in Tampa, Florida for training as a B-17 pilot. We formed a crew of ten men who would stay together for almost the duration of the war. We were then sent to Langley Army Airfield in Hampton, Virginia to train radio operators to operate a secret device that could be used to see targets at night and through the clouds. It was called radar!

At the end of August, 1944, we flew a brand new B-17G out of Langley to Presque Isle in Maine and then left the next day with secret orders not to be opened until we were in flight out of the United States. The orders directed us to Goose Bay, Labrador and then to a field called Bluie West One at the southern tip of Greenland. After a night there we took off for Prestwick Field in Glasgow, Scotland. We thought we would be flying this beautiful new B-17 in combat only to find it was taken away from us in Scotland. The plane was equipped with the new radar and was to be used only for the commanders of the formations of planes on bombing missions. After a night in Glasgow, a long train ride brought us to our new home, a large airbase near Ipswich, England, close to the North Sea.

The base which was called locally, Rattlesden, was the location of the 447th Bombardment Wing, part of the 3rd division of the Eight Air Force. It was one of dozens of fields located in that area northeast of London. The 1st and 3rd divisions flew B-17's and the 2nd division flew B-24's. We had four squadrons at our field and could put 40 to 50 bombers in the air on any given day. Our crew flew 35 combat missions over Germany beginning in September of 1944 and ending in March of 1945. We encountered enemy fire on every mission, usually only flak from 88mm guns and later from some really big 155mm guns. Serious enemy fighter plane resistance came on trips to Berlin and to the famous Leuna synthetic oil refinery at Merseberg which was reputed to be protected by more anti-aircraft guns than Berlins because it was their last main source of high octane fuel.

I received several military awards including the American Theater Ribbon, European Theatre Ribbon, the Air Medal with five Oak Leaf Clusters, battle stars for the Battle of France, the Battle of the Bulge, and last but not least, the Good Conduct Medal!

I left England in April of 1945 sailing on a small converted Caribbean cruise ship through 50ft. waves in the North Atlantic. The trip to 21 days in convoy with some enemy action but we made it safely through the Cape Cod canal to Boston Harbor. The death of President Roosevelt took place during the voyage. A quick flight to me to Glenview Naval Air Station near Chicago where I received orders to go home to Springfield and then to Miami, Florida for 30 days rest and recreation or, R&R as it

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was known in those days. I brought a used 1937 Plymouth for \$850, which was a lot of money in those days, and my wife and I drove to Miami. After my second day there, I was called in and told that I would be sent to California to train in B-29's for the Battle of Japan. I was also given a second choice since I had accumulated so many combat points. I could be discharged and return to civilian life! I took the second choice even though it meant losing the rest of the leave time in Miami. We drove to Ft. McPherson, Georgia where I was discharged on June 15, 1945 and returned to Springfield. I did remain in the reserve program and served a total of 30 years in the Air Force retiring as a Major in 1972.

Submitted by:
William W. Gullett
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