

## War Era Story Project 2012

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Age: Not given

**Memories from Edward Hehn, gunner armorer  
493rd Bomb Group, 860th Squadron, Eighth Air Force  
1943- 1945**

Some of my experiences during 31 months in the service were good, some tolerable, and some were really bad. Many men traveled on a troop train while in service and remember how bad it was. But I never really knew what “bad” was until I traveled from the U.S. to England on a ship during war time.

Having been trained and formed into bomber crews, we were ready to leave the U.S. for England and were ready to go! In order for the ground crew chief to go by plane, one gunner had to go by boat. The pilot, Lt. Hauge, said the gunners should draw straws, and the one who drew the short straw would go by boat. He also said that since I was the armorer I wouldn't have to compete in the drawing. I said I would participate in the drawing with the rest of the gunners. Well, that was how I learned never to volunteer for anything; I drew the short straw. So I took a 13-day boat ride that was a nightmare I still remember. It was like a cattle car. Bunks were about four high with a two-foot path to walk through, and there was no place to go anyway. We spent 13 days in the bunks. For breakfast, we got two hard-boiled eggs; there was no lunch and very little for dinner. But that was the good part, because about 9 out of 10 were seasick. I was one of the lucky ones; I didn't get sick, and I didn't ever get airsick either. I must have had a cast-iron stomach.

When we landed in England, we went to a base in the middle of the night. We were all really hungry and the officer in charge said the mess hall was closed and everyone was sleeping. He said if we could get a volunteer to help, we could fix something to eat. Well, this will be another first: there were more volunteers than were needed.

We were reunited with our crews, and flew our first mission on D-Day, June 6, 1944, a day to remember! We flew 34 missions in all, in B-24s and B-17s. Our b-17 was a little worse for the wear, but all 10 of our crew members escaped unharmed. Our last mission was on Christmas Eve, 1944.

I also came home on a ship – a hospital ship that was a big improvement over the one that took us over. For a day or two, U.S. Destroyers were circling the convoy with sirens blowing. That was because of the threat of enemy submarines in the area.

I was recommended for pilot training, but I had flown enough and I was ready to go home. I think about the crew often. After our children were grown, we had reunions with six crew members and their wives, and had good times together for about ten years. There are only two of us left now, out of the ten whose first mission was D-Day.

