

War Era Story Project 2012

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Garl McHenry – WWII Aerial Combat Survivor

The United States entered WWII after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor on Dec 7, 1941. Congress declared war on Japan, Germany and Italy, and the war lasted four years. We had 16 million people in uniform and the people on the home front changed from peace time to war production and rationing. I was drafted in March 1943 and chose to become a radioman in the Army Air Corps. I completed basic training at St. Petersburg, Florida, 26 weeks of radio school at Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and six weeks of aerial gunnery school at Laredo, Texas. I was assigned to the ten-man B-24 bomber crew 2366, and we flew training missions over western U.S. before being assigned to the European Theater of Operations. We flew to Europe over the southern route, including stops in Florida, Trinidad, Brazil, French West Africa, Morocco and Wales.

In England, we were assigned to the 8th Air Force, 2nd Air Division, 445th Bomb Group, 702nd Bomb Squadron, and flew out of Tibenham field near Norwich. At our first orientation, we were informed that by the end of our tour, half of us would be dead, prisoners of war or disabled. As it turned out, we had one dead, one nervous breakdown, one flak injury, two broken legs and three ankle injuries requiring hospitalization.

We flew 31 missions over enemy-occupied Germany and France in the B-24. We bombed railroad marshaling yards, bridges, air fields, submarine pens, oil refineries, manufacturing plants, transformer buildings and residential areas. We were told it was alright to bomb civilians, as they were skilled workers building the munitions used against us. We carried bombs weighing up to 2,000 pounds, including incendiaries and leaflets. We made 12 missions into Germany, including missions to the Ruhr Valley, Berlin and Munich. We flew and bombed in formations of 12 aircraft, and the total aircraft bombing each day approached 1,000. All missions were daylight missions and the British Royal Air Force bombed at night, putting Germany under attack practically 24 hours a day. On the missions, we had fighter protection using P-51s, P-47s, P-38s and P-39s. We flew at altitudes of 15,000 to 25,000 feet on



the missions. We wore flak vests, flotation gear, oxygen masks, goggles, throat mikes, headphones and heated flying suits, since the temperature often approached minus 60 degrees F.

We had several extraordinary missions during our tour. On one occasion, the aircraft hydraulic system was disabled by flak. We had to crank the landing gear down by hand and lost power to the flaps and brakes required for the landing. We stopped the aircraft on the runway with parachutes deployed from the waist windows. On another occasion, we went into an unexplained dive from 22,000 ft. to approximately 2,000 ft. At the beginning of the dive, we were pinned to the ceiling of the aircraft and then became weightless during the dive and pinned to the floor during the pull out. We came out of Europe at a low level to avoid engagement with German fighters.

We also flew a mission in the D-Day invasion at Normandy to drop fragmentation bombs around the large gun emplacements on the beach. Through holes in the clouds, we could see our ships shelling the shore and landing craft headed for the beaches. On the attempt to make our 32nd mission, we lost two engines over the North Sea on the way to the target. We began losing altitude at 300 feet per minute. To lighten the airplane, we threw everything we could get loose out of the aircraft. When we got back to England, we were at 2,000 feet and the ground was covered with fog, so we could not land while losing altitude. To lighten the airplane further, the pilot asked seven crew members to bail out and then he could control the altitude. He flew around to burn off fuel, and part of the fog burned off, allowing him to land the aircraft. I was one of the seven who bailed out and sprained an ankle requiring hospital stay. Two others broke legs and three sprained ankles, causing the crew to disband. I received the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters for my tour of duty.

We had air superiority during the missions. but the anti-aircraft guns and the flak was our greatest obstacle. On one mission, we had approximately 267 anti-aircraft guns firing at us, and we seldom returned without flak holes in the aircraft. The highest number of flak holes received on a mission was 17, and many of the holes were two inches in diameter.

I returned to the U.S. on the French liner *Pasteur* with a load of German prisoners. The trip required eight days to cross the Atlantic because we changed course every 15 minutes to evade German submarines. I was sent to Miami, Florida, for rest and recuperation then assigned to Scott Field, Illinois, expecting to be made a radio instructor. The war ended in Europe and I was sent to Yuma, Arizona, storing aircraft on the desert, and then to San Bernardino, California, where I typed manifests for transport aircraft flying supplies to the South Pacific. After the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan in August 1945, I was discharged from San Bernardino and returned to civilian life.

Using the GI Bill, I attended college and obtained a BS Degree in Radio Engineering. After working for Magnavox, IT&T, GE and NASA, I moved to Dayton, Ohio in 1962, working for Ledex and TRW Globe Motors on military projects. I retired from TRW in 1987. I had two patents pertaining to electronic circuitry in the aircraft and missile field. I married in 1946 and raised two children in the Dayton area. More information and pictures can be obtained by logging on the internet to garlswar.com or obtaining a 57 minute DVD available from the author at garld1945@aol.com.