

War Era Story Project 2012

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My Experiences During World War II

I enlisted in the Army Air Corps at Patterson Field in Dayton, Ohio, on April 13, 1942, at the age of 22. My pay was \$21.00 a month and included meals, clothes and bed. I had to pay for life insurance, laundry and necessities out of my \$21.00 per month. When I enlisted, the first number of my serial number was one. If a soldier was drafted, it was a three. On the entrance exam, I scored a 128. My brother, John Thomas Richey, outscored me with a 136, which was considered excellent. I was assigned to the 1st Transport Group, Army Air Corps. This group became the 36th Troop Carrier Squadron of the 316th Troop Carrier Group. Colonel Jerome McCauley was Group Commander and Lieutenant Ben Garland was Squad Commander.

After a few days at Patterson, Harold Crooks, Pappy Street and I ventured into Hanger 206. A plane landed and Robert Uhrig, in a leather jacket and white scarf, came over to the hanger. Uhrig told us to wipe mud from the bottom of airplanes and landing gear. Then Uhrig asked us if we wanted to take a ride in a plane. Oh boy, Yes! He said to get parachutes and hurry down the line where a plane with engines running was waiting. We ran while trying to put the chutes on, which we soon found was impossible to do. This was a joke on us rookies, along with many other requests they would make. The door was being held open; Colonel McCauley was the pilot. We took off, circled the field, and landed very shortly. There were no runways so we got to wash more mud off the plane upon returning.

We were supposed to have thirty days of basic training, but one or two weeks was about all they provided. We learned regulations, rules, marching, and got our shots. We had not been issued clothing yet, so we marched in the best suit and shoes we owned. When we received our clothes from the Air Corps, we were issued sewing kits. Everything had buttons; the zipper wasn't widely used on service uniforms. My parents came to Dayton to see me once, and I sent the suit home with them.

Planes were scarce, Wright Field had a few, but Patterson Field had fewer. I was there when the first fighters were being turned out, and my favorite was the P-38 twin engine with props rotating in different directions. It was the only fighter ever built like that. I could not be a pilot due to my hay fever, but after two months, we were moved to Bowman Field in Louisville where I started flying as a crew member. At Bowman Field, we had three planes: two C-53s and one C-39. I stayed around them day and night because they were something I was in awe of. After one and a half months, we were moved to Lawson Field at Fort Benning in Georgia. I was assigned to a brand-new C-47 airplane named "*Boomerang*," as flight engineer. As flight engineer, I had the best seat in the aircraft between the pilot and co-pilot. I could always move around. Navigators were not necessary on all flights, so I would sit in their seats as well. After six months of flying, I was awarded my flight engineer wings at Del Valle Air Base in Austin, Texas, in September 1942. While in Austin, Texas, all flight crews were shuttled to

Mobile, Alabama, to ferry fourteen new airplanes to Columbus, Ohio. We flew in formation at 1,500 feet and passed right over my home west of Russellville, Ohio. I saw Mom and Dad come out of the barn and look up. At the time we flew over, they would have been milking. I called home that night and told them I saw them.

I endured a spinal injury at Del Valle. My crew, consisting of Jerome McCauley, group commander; S/Sgt. Elmer Jackson, pilot; S/Sgt. Leonard Arbon, copilot; S/Sgt. Raymond Oullette, radio operator; and Glenn Ridgeway, crew chief; left without me to go overseas. After spending twenty-one days at Camp Swift Hospital, I boarded a train to Newport News, Virginia, for embarkation on December 18, 1942. I was then transported to join my unit aboard the *U.S.S. Mariposa* (this ship had been a cruise ship in Los Angeles and after the war it was used as a cruise ship in Hawaii). The ship's speed was the reason it was sent out as a single ship rather than in a convoy. It was crowded on the ship with 5,000 troops. Bunks were arranged four or five high and you were supposed to sleep head to foot. I was lucky to be on one of the top decks, where we could walk out and look up and see the command post or helm.

On Christmas Eve, each GI on the ship received a pack of cigarettes and another sewing kit from the Red Cross. We sang Christmas carols and hymns. A couple GIs had harmonicas they played, so all of this helped us to make our new world bearable. For chow, we would proceed down three decks where it was hot, and we went through a line with our mess kits. The food was slapped in a mess kit like in the movies, and we ate our meals at stand-up tables where we had to hold on. When the water was rough, it was hard to hold on and keep our mess kits from sliding away from us. The ship would maneuver in a zigzag course to elude torpedoes by the U-boats.

We wound up in the harbor of Rio de Janeiro in South America. The beach at Rio looked fabulous. From the ship's deck, we could look up at the famed Sugar Loaf Mountain and see the statue of Christ the Redeemer. I think we were there for three days. At about dark, we steamed out, really moving, heading southeast. When on deck, we could see flying fish and we were told they were prevalent between South America and Africa. A U-boat got on our tail and we steamed 900 miles into the Indian Ocean. We went north along Madagascar and into the Gulf of Aden. Some of the GIs pitched pennies into the water and watched kids dive in and retrieve them. From there we went on through the Red Sea. It was a long trip due to German submarines and mines in the water.

We debarked at Port Said, Egypt, and boarded a stock train that was sitting out in the open. It was very cold. We arrived at Fayed, Egypt, near Great Bitter Lake, close to the Suez Canal, and ended up at an English army camp late in the evening on February 1, 1943. This base belonged to the English and they had Halifax bombers and Spitfires based here. There was a PX on base where we could get English cigarettes and Egyptian chocolate. The chocolate was only fair once we had to buy Indian cigarettes, which were so strong they made our throats sore. We did not see any alcoholic beverages until Sicily. We had toilets, showers, a mess hall, movie theater, a basketball goal and a baseball diamond on this base. I would play any kind of ball, anytime I could; I still had sports in my blood. I had some bread there baked by German prisoners, but it had worms in it. I didn't eat too much of it, but it was hard to turn down.

The third night at camp, I went to the wash room and somebody hollered, "Richey." Another GI and I answered simultaneously. It was my cousin Carey Richey. We had departed on the same boat from the United States and didn't even know it. We surely must have missed each other by inches or perhaps even bumped into each other. Carey's unit, a B-24 bomb group, was to fly in later. I visited him one night across the field in tents, but that was the last I saw of him. I later learned when my mother wrote to me that Carey had flown the Ploesti Oil Field raids and he was home and out of the service.

After recuperating from my injury in Texas, engineering officer Robert Uhrig released me to fly with my crew again. Uhrig gave me the best advice I was ever to receive. He told me, "It can only be right, not partly right, and keep it that way." He also said to keep all paperwork right too. I always kept the plane the best I knew how. I did not loaf much in the evenings as it seemed the plane took so much time. I wanted to keep things good so I could go home.

My first trip out was in a plane loaded up front with oxygen tanks. However, near the pyramids, we had an engine sputter and the flight got rough. We had to dump the load of oxygen tanks to stay in the air. The tanks landed on a small town and killed a child, an old woman, and a goat. Later in the war, the English settled with the Americans. They paid \$8 for the child, nothing for the old woman, and \$16 for the goat, as the goat was their way of life.

I got to fly with the group commander, Joseph McCauley, who was from Texas. He was a full colonel trying to make general (he never made it), and he would fly to meetings in Cairo, Tobruk, Benghazi, Tripoli, Algiers, Tunis, etc. I would always stay with the plane and service it when he was in his meetings because we were warned Arabs could sabotage the plane. Colonel McCauley always took extra clothes. When he would get out of the pilot's seat, he would ask if his clothes were wrinkled. If so, he would change into a fresh, neatly pressed uniform before going to a meeting. This colonel was the pilot who took me on my first flight when I enlisted at Patterson Field.

In this short period of life in the Army Air Corp, (later known as the Air Force), it was amazing what we had learned about airplanes, but it was more amazing what we didn't know. I guess the old saying, "What you don't know won't hurt you" proved to be true.

After two months, I was assigned to El Adem in Libya to haul water because the Germans had destroyed all water desalination plants. This German army was joined by the Italians. We were eighty kilometers below Cairo with the pyramids in between, which we flew over daily. We bunked in tents here and every time you looked across the desert you could see a mirage. The mirage usually resembled a lake or body of water, but never a girl.

It was here that I received my first mail call. Some mail took as long as four months to reach its destination. I had letters from my mother, most of my aunts, and letters from a girl I had dated, Thelma Roush of Winchester. Thelma had also sent cookies for Christmas, which tasted like salt water. I ate them and got sick. The cookies had been in the hold on the ship for too long. Our mail was censored and there were so many things we were told we couldn't say, it seemed almost useless to write back. I did write quite often, and I think everyone else who was there did also.

We sang hymns at night, and two of the best singers were Kentucky Baptists. Electric was provided by a generator. However, all lights had to be out at dark, or you could be strafed and bombed by the Luftwaffe (German Air Force). Mussolini had sided with Hitler and Italy was also a foe. It was knowledge among the troops that the Italians let themselves be taken prisoner. That may have made it easier to defeat Rommel, a German general.

Two of our pilots died at El Adem. They were both staff sergeant pilots who were married in Austin only a short time before going overseas. They came upon a German gun on wheels and fired it out of curiosity. They jumped in a trench for their safety but the gun rolled back on them and killed them. When we flew, we could see downed aircraft, jeeps, tanks, and war debris all over the desert at the bases. We did a lot of low-level flying and at times only went high enough to get above dust storms. We flew several ten-hour days mostly to Oran and Algiers in Algeria. Oran was a depot and we met up with Americans near there. We flew daily hauling freight, paratroopers, bombs and parts into Italy. War ended in North Africa and the Middle East and we moved to Guercif for training for the invasion of Sicily. One day the brass took all of us to Casablanca in French Morocco. We could look across the narrow part of the Mediterranean and see the Rock of Gibraltar.

When we returned to Guercif, Squadron Commander Ben Garland and 1st Sgt. Roy Johnson (who prior to the war was a booking agent for big bands playing one-night stands across the country) called me in and asked me if I would lead a convoy 1,000 miles to Enfidaville, Africa. I never did understand why I got picked for this, but thought it was best to say "yes." I was in the lead with Lt. Lewis and Capt. Black. (Lewis was killed later and Black became a judge in Hollywood, Florida, after the war. Black co-hosted a reunion we had in Florida years later. They were both very nice to be with and always cooperative.) This was a very long convoy, and the second night we crossed a river on pontoon bridges, courtesy of the army engineers. We were allowed headlights, but had to dim them by "blousing." This was done by covering the headlights with our shirts. Soon after, everyone was across. It was very scary, but we all made it safely. We slept in our trucks and jeeps. When we came through the city of Algiers, we went right through the middle of town with shops on both sides. We saw dried bananas and meat hanging from sidewalk store fronts covered with lots of flies. We figured it was goat meat.

From there, we headed east to Tunisia and Tunis and on to Enfidaville, inland from the Mediterranean. This is where we experienced the hottest day in Africa. It was reported to us 142 degrees, but later learned it was 138 degrees. The doctors had everyone in tents drinking lots of water from garbage cans. It cooled down that night. I received verbal commendations; I don't know why except I was always willing to help and most others were negative. I had a lot of encouragement from Pappy Street and 1st Sgt. Johnson. It was here that I was on guard duty for my only time in the service. There was a rumor that German paratroopers would be dropped on base that night and all flight engineers and tech sergeants were to pull guard duty near their ships with submachine guns (fifty rounds of ammunition), 45's, and God. Before morning, I got very sleepy, but dawn broke without German invasion and it was over.

The worst living conditions I endured were the nine months spent in the desert. The sand fleas took their toll on us, but we had to get used to them. We stayed in tents with mosquito netting when near

the Mediterranean. We shaved every day, but I only remember getting to take one shower while in the desert. A barrel was put up on stilts and a tin can had holes punched in it over the spigot. We lined up and went through the shower pretty quickly. Most of our clothes were washed in aviation gas, 100 octanes from aircraft. They dried quickly in the desert sun. We never wore anything but fatigues. We all had crew haircuts. Once, several of the guys decided to go to the Mediterranean for a swim and get clean. They all got severely sunburned. Their faces cracked open, their eyes swelled shut, and they had to be hospitalized at Algiers.

Twice we were close to an Oasis where a sheik had a harem just like the pictures you see. Water supplies were destroyed by the Germans in most towns and cities. We were at an air strip at El Adem one night and were bombed by Germans, but they missed us completely. Our money was piasters and coins had holes in them. When we could not obtain parts to repair our aircrafts, we used these coins like washers on our engines. The reason for not getting our parts and supplies is the German U-boats were sinking our ships from the U.S. and Britain.

There were more English soldiers and equipment in Africa at that time, so we were assigned to the British 8th Army and were under their command. We flew for them and lived with them. I flew with General Monty Montgomery twice, and in his tam and long coat, he looked more like a woman. We also flew Ernie Pyle and I actually slept in the same tent as him for a couple nights along with about a dozen or so GIs. He went along with us the next day to Tripoli and Oran. When taking off in the desert, wire mesh was laid down for runways. The planes had tires wide enough to maneuver on sand. Takeoffs created a lot of dust.

It was very cold on the desert in February and March and the wind blew the sand with it leaving grit everywhere. We ate in a tent from our mess kits; the meal consisted of something like canned hash or powdered eggs. When finished, we dipped our mess kits in a tub of water and either let them air dry or dried them with toilet paper. This led to many becoming ill with dysentery. We did have two doctors with us always. The toilets were the same as for cats (in the sand) and you could cover it up with either paw! But once we left the desert we were in the most dangerous conditions and had a lot of close calls. One of our greatest fears was land mines.

Five of us went to the town of Ismailia on the Suez Canal, took carriage rides and bought some chocolate. This was the only time I went to town in this area. There were lots of poor people and huts made from grass, stones and sticks. Women carried baskets of laundry on their heads to wash the clothes in the canal. They swam, bathed, washedveggies and used the canal for everything. This lifestyle was so interesting to us we spent time to watch at Cairo, Tunis and Algeria. They would come around the planes when we landed, and we had to watch closely for sabotage. They would chant or sing in Arabic. The English were in control of this whole region, so any money or jobs came from England. We always wondered what a lot of these towns looked like and what lifestyle the people had prior to war. Many of their buildings were just shells and there was a lot of rubble.

A Texan by the name of Henry Heger had been a barber and set up a shop. He charged a quarter for a haircut. The entire time we were in the service, they allowed him to charge and encouraged a tip of a

dime. We later learned he sent home \$10,000, and we also learned some of the officers tipped pretty well. We talked about whether it was fair that he was able to earn extra money because doctors or nobody else got extra money for services.

It was announced that *Boomerang*, ship #9, was going on a mission and needed a crew. That is when the crew of Jackson, Arbon, Richey, and Ouellette volunteered, plus two navigators. We were to fly in fog fifty feet above the Mediterranean to the island of Malta. All the area was in German hands, except Malta, which had been the most-bombed spot in the war. It had been bombed 2,200 times without surrender. We were treated royally and taken to a castle to have lunch with Elliott Roosevelt, the president's son. He was at the end of the table farthest from where we sat, but it was an honor. Roosevelt had an Australian captain take us on a tour of the five-by-ten-mile island of rock and then took us by boat to Valletta, a sister island. Before the war, these islands were known as top tourist spots. Roosevelt was the commander of a P-38 outfit there directing American and British planes.

Raymond Ouellette, who was Catholic, wanted to go to church that night, so I went with him to a cathedral. It was a large cathedral like the ones in England and most of the roof was bombed out. I later went to church with him in Rheims and Paris, France. One night I went with him to the black market in Paris, which was a bit scary. He wanted to buy some perfume for his wife. It helped that he spoke fluent French. He was my favorite radio operator, but I never saw or heard from him again.

Our aircraft was unarmed except for fifty-caliber Thompson machine guns we carried in case we were shot down. We only kept guns on the planes and never carried them if we went to town. We carried small packets that contained German marks and pills. If captured, we could end it with these pills if torture was unbearable. We used colored flares for communications. For instance, when returning from a mission, if we had wounded on board, a red flare denoted this to ground crews. Many planes came back with instruments shot away and some with hydraulic reservoirs gone.

We often flew to Cairo, Ismailia, Tripoli, Enfidaville, Benghazi and Tunis. We flew dignitaries including Monty Montgomery and Ernie Pyle. I kept two five-gallon trinkwassers, which held our water supply, in the rear of the aircraft near the toilet. We never used the toilet on the plane because it had to be taken out to be cleaned. We did haul some nuns once who used the toilet, so I had to clean it.

On the night of the invasion of Sicily, July 9, 1943, I was scratched because of jaundice. Due to lack of nutritious foods, jaundice became common. This was the night I lost my pilot, Elmer Jackson, when his plane, *Texas Tornado*, went down. My replacement, Onstine, and the rest of my crew were on our plane, *Boomerang*, when it was shot down in Tunisia over the Mediterranean. We lost Onstine and a navigator on that flight, the rest survived. We had one plane named *Jiminy Crickett* that had the nose and instruments gone. The pilot sat out in the open and flew from Sicily to Africa by the moon. Another plane lost the entire right side of the cabin and made it back. Eight days later, I was back to flying, on a new ship named *Johnny Zero*, as we took a load of detonators to a B-24 outfit on the east coast of Italy near Foggia (very dangerous mission). Detonators were hauled lying flat on the floor of the plane. Upon our return, we saw a body floating in the water south of Gela, Sicily. It turned out to be Jackson. The B-24 outfit was commanded by Senator George McGovern of South Dakota and had moved down from

England to try to bomb the Ploesti Oil Fields. We flew in daylight unless we were on an invasion or training in a non-combat area.

We named the plane *Johnny Zero* after the song then famous by British and BBC. After everyone had bouts with dysentery, we moved to Capistrano, Sicily, after invasion, and we got tomatoes, eggs and fruit for a change. I got a dozen eggs from a farmer and boiled them in my helmet. I ate all of them and got very sick. We ate olives off of the trees and English walnuts. One jug of their vino would make a whole tent of men groggy!

In Sicily, I sent my laundry out to be washed and ironed. A seven- year-old girl named Osolmio would pick it up at the gate and return it. She did not speak much English so I used a book to converse. The town of Castel Vetrano was off limits, except one time we were allowed to go to a restaurant with a group for spaghetti. One GI slipped away, was beaten, and was delivered to our gate as unrecognizable. We assumed he went after a woman.

We left one night with the 82nd Airborne from Castel Vetrano, Sicily, to cross the Arno and drop on Salerno because the infantry was bogged down. While we were at Castel Vetrano, President Roosevelt visited and presented us with the Presidential Citation. I was flying again and eating fresh foods and fruit. On the mission for invasion of Salerno on the south side of Naples, I hurt my hand. We witnessed the eruption of Mt. Etna on our way home. It was very bright in the sky. This was a long flight and there was very little gas left when we landed. We were all awarded an air medal.

As I woke up one morning in the tent, the guys hollered that I had a scorpion on my hand which was wrapped due to my injury. My hand became infected and doctors had no medicine to heal it. After some time, they flew me to Palermo Hospital where I remained for four months. The hospital was beautiful and the operating room had marble in it. My hand did not improve as there was still no way to get penicillin because the Germans were sinking everything. They told me they may have to remove my hand because they couldn't get it to heal. Dr. Johnson, a famous surgeon from San Francisco, suggested taking me to the medical university, which was close by, for another opinion. Dr. Johnson performed two grafts on my hand. The second graft showed signs of progress. They decided to heal naturally with pure water and clean dressings. My healing progressed as they wrapped my hand with a new bandage every hour around the clock. I was able to walk the halls, which were very crowded with army cots, and help console and talk to some of the other GIs. I watched the staff at the hospital growing maggots to help with all the stinking infection. This was terrible, but I was eating, showering, and wanted to help as the hospital was so full. Captain Cowgill came to award me my first air medal which they pinned on my robe. I stood at my cot with probably fifty wounded GI's in attendance. I earned seven air medals during my time in the service.

When I was released from the hospital, I rode an Italian ship to Ireland and crossed into Scotland. The ship went through the straits of Messina, the roughest I have ever traveled, up the Mediterranean and through the Straits of Gibraltar, which I had previously seen when at Casablanca. Communication was difficult with the Italians. On the ship, we had hammocks for sleeping and ate a lot of pasta. Finally, I was taken by train to join my outfit in England. Our base was at Cottesmore, a former air base where the

English trained German pilots, who later bombed the heck out of the British Isles. Cottesmore was really a nice base with all brick barracks. Flight crews were housed two to a room, and I roomed with Harold Crooks. The reason flight crews were separated was because the Provost Marshall had guards on duty and each outfit had a company quartermaster (CQ) who would go and awaken flight crews usually between 4:00 and 5:00 A.M. We would be flying over the English Channel when the sun would rise. This was fantastically beautiful at times! We made many, many trips over the channel.

In Nottingham, England, which was about thirty miles from our base at Oakum and below Melton Mowbray, I met a nurse. When she left work, we would go to a fish and chip place and get fish wrapped in newspaper. We put vinegar on it and it was really good. She also took me to a restaurant where they served horse meat. It was sweet but I didn't care for it too much. She was from Scotland and lived with her aunt who had a really nice brick home. She had another aunt who lived in the United States who sent goodies from the U.S. I went to a Sunday dinner there and had pickles and others things we could not get in England during the war. After being shot down over the Rhine and not getting back to town for so long, I never saw her again. She was a really nice girl.

We lost many lives in England, mostly over France, but some right in England in the fog. When landing in rain or fog with no instrument landing system, we just relied on tower contact and having all eyes in the plane on alert.

The only whiskey available in England was if you could be in town at 5:00 P.M. on Sunday evenings. When pubs opened, you could have one shot of Scotch whiskey. Big deal - only one. We drank their warm beer, though. We would go by the truckload to town, officers and all. The truck would leave town at 11:00 P.M. sharp to be back on base before 12:00. We usually took one rest stop by a brook on the way back. Blackout was always in existence during war. Sometimes, we went to a movie because you were allowed to smoke in theaters and we had not had much entertainment except nuns on the planes and nurses in the hospital. A few pin-ups adorned the barracks from the states, as Betty Grable, Ginger Rogers and Janet Leigh. One night, we saw Bob Hope, Frances Langford and troupe put on a show near Tripoli. We were in a truck probably about a quarter mile from stage. There was a sea of troops in front of us.

All the time we were overseas we did not see candy, Coke, cake or pie, but we did very well without. Rationing was in effect, so nobody had these luxuries. Candy bars in the states were five cents for a quarter of a pound. There were not many varieties but I remember Power House, Baby Ruth and Clark. When I called home from overseas, I told my parents that if I wrote about smoking a certain brand of cigarettes, they would know I was in that country. Cigarettes were 45 cents a carton.

My CEO, Colonel McCauley, told me about an upcoming invasion and asked if I could fly. He told me I was a little short of 800 combat hours, but if I flew D-Day, I could go home for R & R for thirty days. The night before D-Day, the top brass decided to paint stripes on the wingtips and fuselage. Everyone, including the cooks, was out painting these planes till late at night. This was done after our planes had been shot down by our own navy in a previous invasion. Our navy had been alerted they were German bombers. I think we lost about sixty-five planes, their crews, and paratroopers.

On the late hours of June 5, 1944, my squadron took off carrying troops and supplies to be dropped behind enemy lines in support of the invasion of France on the early morning of June 6th by Allied troops. Some of the infantry divisions that parachuted from our planes were to later be highlighted in the movies "The Longest Day" and "Band of Brothers."

We flew an easy mission even though we witnessed a lot of ack-ack (antiaircraft fire). Those who were told they could go home, myself included, all came back OK and were granted furloughs. I had not gotten a furlough since enlisting two years before. On June 20, 1944, we left South Hampton on the *George Washington* troop ship and sailed for the states.

I immediately volunteered for kitchen duty and got the job of making mashed potatoes. After getting them in the mixer, with a bowl the size of a tub, I told the head guy they were ready. He asked if I had put in any butter. When I told him "no" he said to add two pounds of butter. It really made good mashed potatoes. If you work on a ship it makes the time shorter.

We were seven days to New York. We debarked and I got on a train west. It was good to see bright electric lights, as everything overseas was blacked out. All houses and stores had to be completely dark so German planes could not see and bomb them. We came into the terminal in Cincinnati, now known as the Cincinnati Museum Center. It cost me fourteen dollars for a cab to take me from Cincinnati to my home to Russellville, Ohio. It was so nice to see my family after serving my country for over two years. There were not many to visit at home as so many were away working for the war effort in some capacity.

After being home for thirty days, I went to Atlantic City on the Boardwalk for eighteen days before returning to active duty. While in Atlantic City, I saw Doris Day in a black dress singing "Sentimental Journey" with Les Brown on the Steel Pier. It was very hard to return to England for second tour. Upon returning to England, we went to Leicester when we saw a lady soldier stopped by her jeep. She is now the Queen of England. My brother, John, also stationed in England at the time, came to see me when I returned to England. The streets were piled deep with rubble. Buzz Bombs were small planes the Germans would send to England and when they ran out of gas they would fall and explode. We then became involved in the Holland invasion.

The plane named *Johnny Zero* and flight assistant Willard Friend were shot down in the North Sea. Friend and the crew survived after an air-sea rescue. I resumed flying on a new ship towing gliders on the Holland mission with the 82nd Airborne. Picking up these loaded gliders caused our engines to overheat, but we kept a close watch and could radio if we had to cut them loose before drop zone. I loved flying during early morning above the channel covered with clouds and the sun peeping through. It was something like you would expect heaven to look like. Billowing white clouds looked like unburned, toasted marshmallows you could step out and walk upon.

Our next mission was the Battle of the Bulge. It was Christmas Eve 1944, and we were told we were going to fly that night. So we left Cottesmore Air Base in northeastern England near Nottingham. In southern England, a huge convoy of troops from the states was debarking. Our group had fifty-two planes, but there may have been five hundred planes total picking up battle-ready troops with full armor

and back packs. We flew them across the English Channel into France and northeast to the Belgium-Germany area, where we landed and disbursed them into bitterly cold, snowy weather.

We took off for another trip to get more, but fog had settled in over the English Channel and the English sent up a Beau Fighter aircraft, which had radar, to guide us to a landing in England. Upon landing in England, we were informed we would not fly again that night. Since it was Christmas Eve and the ground was covered with snow, we all decided to walk to the nearest town. However, when we got there, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse. Disappointed, we returned to base and slept on the floor. When we awoke we were fed a meal of mutton and brussel sprouts, which I did not like. We left with another load of troops before noon. It was ten degrees below zero when we landed. We had trouble with the plane that had to be fixed before take-off. All the crew worked to fix the plane, but it turned out to be just a problem with a spark plug. We returned to our base on Christmas Day. There was much sorrow in my heart for all the young lives lost.

Another seven hundred plus hours flying included an invasion over the Rhine River into Germany near Wesel on March 24, 1945. We were shot down after dropping English paratroopers at a drop zone sixteen miles over the Rhine, but no paratroopers were hit. We continued to drop more troops. We pulled in static lines and proceeded to the cockpit as we lost an engine. The pilot said we had to go down. We both started mapping our route and knew we had high tension lines of one hundred feet, so we decided to go under as we could not get enough altitude to go over. We decided not to ditch into the Rhine River because with doors off and gear down, we would go under immediately. The pilot said he would stay in his seat and take whatever. The radio operator, copilot, and I went to the rear door and jumped out at approximately fifty miles per hour, as we were almost certain the plane would explode. We all jumped and the pilot came out the top of the plane, slid down over the wing, and met us as we ran away from it. We were all OK except our co-pilot sprained his ankle. A machine gun was firing and we stayed down. We walked a good piece then watched the plane burn. It did not explode. I guess God was with us as we saw two explode before us with crews we knew. It was sad and still brings tears today. It is all right to cry.

A Harrier plane saved us from snipers after we crash landed. Americans started coming around us soon as we trekked west to meet them. I do not remember being scared. We walked till we met up with General Brereton who told us to go back to where his plane was and he would take us to Brussels that night. The center of Brussels was beautiful and rich, and the square was fantastic. We had some German marks on us that were good for beer. We never took our billfolds on a mission; we just wore a money belt with their money such as piasters, lira, francs and marks depending on where we were. We stayed at the Red Cross until an English airliner agreed to take us to Scotland, where we once again were stranded. Another airliner came along and took us to Cottesmore, England, where our belongings had been turned in. We had been reported MIA. This operation was called Varsity.

I recall getting the word the European War had ended while we were in England. We all went to town and saw lights on in the houses and businesses, people dancing in the streets, and we drank some beer. I can't remember flying again before we left South Hampton for the states in May. We landed in New

York, and went to Camp Kilmer. We took a train to Indianapolis and on to Cincinnati, then to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. At Fort Bragg, they were training troops for all new ships to go to the Pacific Theater.

While in training, the war ended and we started putting on air shows. The first was in Orlando and then Miami, Florida. We were called back to Pope Field at Fort Bragg and we had an open house for everyone. We were told we could go home soon. We flew our last air show that day for a monumental crowd. I took a discharge that day and rode home with Harold Crooks, who had his car there. We left so quickly they didn't even have our records yet. This may have been part of the reason I did not receive some of my medals until I was in my nineties.

After the war, Ben Garland flew into Wright Field where I was working and looked me up one day. I was in a hangar and he said he just wanted to say "hi." He later retired and went into the insurance business in Montgomery, Alabama.

During my time of service, I earned nine campaign medals and seven air medals in the European Theater. I flew in the campaigns of Egypt Libya, Tunisia, Sicily, Naples-Foggia, Rome-Arno, Normandy, Central Europe, Rhineland and Northern France. I also received a campaign medal in America, a Good Conduct medal and a Victory medal. I volunteered for the Malta mission as well. We were notified our records burned in St. Louis after the war. I have been told in recent years I was going to receive a Presidential Citation and another air medal, but have not received them yet.

While serving my country, I do not remember being scared, but once or twice. While at El Adem a plane dropped a flare to light up the area; I ran out in the desert and lay down. I said the Lord's Prayer and I was scared. I probably said the Lord's Prayer many times.

The second trip back overseas was very disheartening but I learned to make the best of it. I know this came from my parents and my upbringing. As you grow older you try to model after the best of your family. I hope my kids do not have to experience war. The service is good because it teaches you so much at an age when you need it. That is my view.

Thirteen of us enlisted on April 13th, 1942, at Patterson and all came home alive. I think it was the will to help others overseas and at home that created success. We banded together to get things done. We all have different versions of what we saw, which is very understandable under all the pressure, but we bowed to each other as a mission well-accomplished. I think (and we all did) that God was with us.

Robert Wendell Richey
Flight Engineer
36th Troop Carrier Squadron
316th Troop Carrier Group
9th Air Force



Robert Wendell Richey



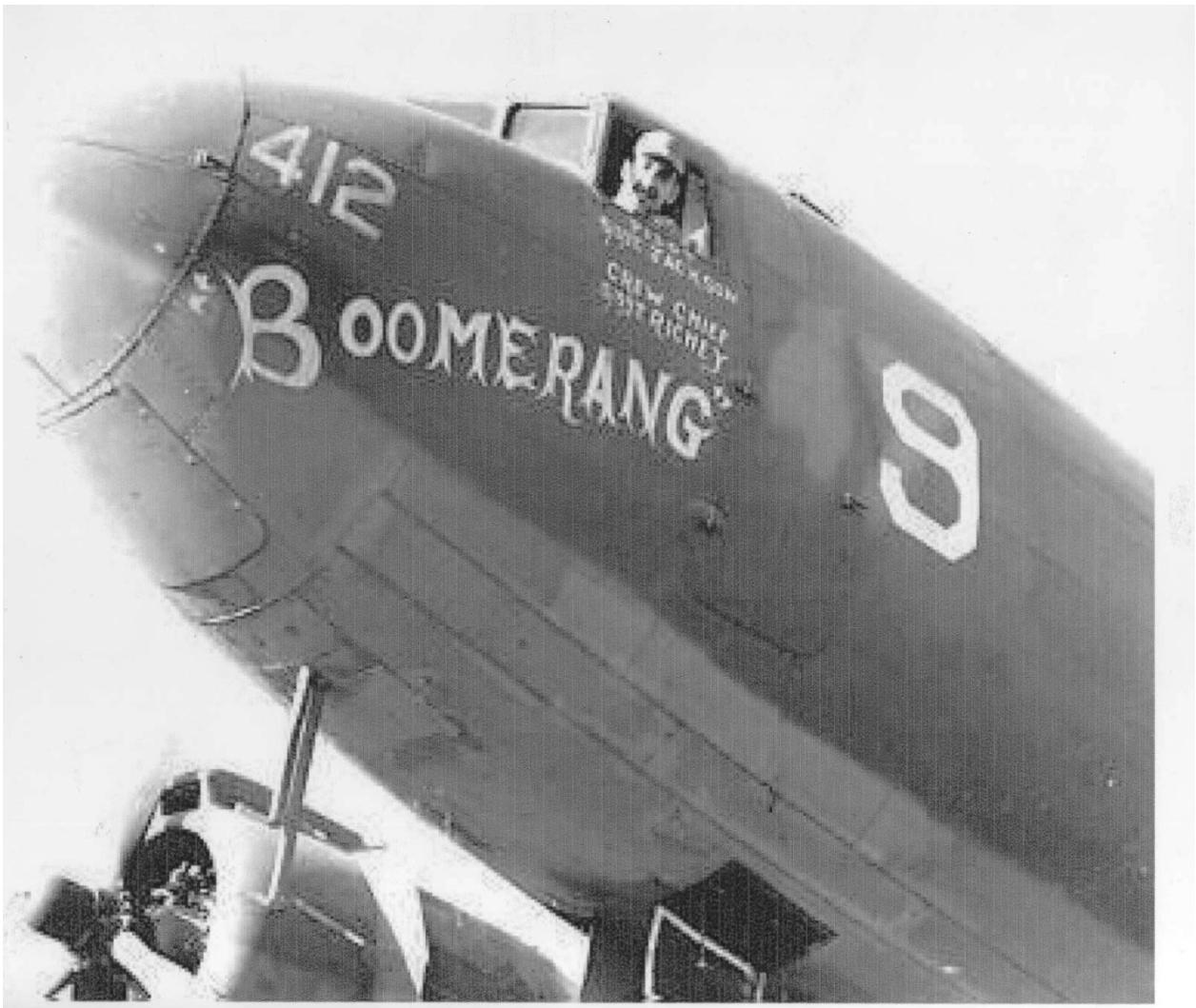
My home at Enfidaville, Africa



Plane shot down over the Rhine River,
Germany (Varsity Mission)



Robert Wendell Richey with "Boomerang"



My favorite plane "Boomerang" pictured with Glenn Ridgeway, Crew Chief

Cousins Meet On Transport



Pictured above are, left to right, Corp. Carey W. Richey, son of Mr. and Mrs. W. Clyde Richey, Ripley, and Tech. Sergeant Robert Wendell Richey, son of Mr. and Mrs. R. L. Richey, Georgetown, Route 3. The men, cousins, met somewhere in the middle east on a troop transport.

A letter telling of this unusual reunion follows:

Somewhere In The Middle East
February 9, 1943

To Whom It May Concern:

Our acquaintances which we are now making, we expect to break in the near future. To our readers, we expect to renew the same, and so we will tell you of one coincidence which happened to us. We were stationed at the same embarkation point and must have crossed each others tracks dozens of times because we lived within throwing distance of each other. We departed on the same boat and surely must have missed each other by inches, or perhaps even bumped into each other. We made the complete journey and debarked without seeing each other. At one time during this process, we could not have been more than three feet apart. We continued to camp by the same conveyance and again had no meeting. Our third day at camp we met while washing our hands at the same faucet. So just plain dirt caused us to meet at this time. But the real reason for our meeting originated from the boat. Two or three cases of measles broke out on the journey, of which neither was us, and we were put in a camp together under

quarantine. Likely as not we could have gone on our way without ever knowing until we met again. Our relationship is that of first cousins.

We spent Christmas aboard ship and received a very nice and useful gift from the Red Cross. Christmas Carols were never more beautifully sung than they were that nite. For a group of soldiers can certainly do just that. Upon arrival we received letters and Christmas cards by bundles. Also among them were many packages. We take this opportunity to thank each and every one who so kindly remembered us. We assure you they were never more appreciated.

Now that we are partially settled once again, we have many new manners, customs and lots of changes to get used to. One of our first, of course, was money. But that was not in the least difficult. The people here have mastered our tongue greatly, and, as is natural, we should like to do likewise. Someday, we hope to make this complete journey over in a world that is ours with freedom everlasting. Thanking everyone once again for your thoughts of us.

Corp. Carey W. Richey
T. Sgt. Robert W. Richey



**ENLISTED RECORD AND REPORT OF SEPARATION
HONORABLE DISCHARGE**

7764 Rec'd Sept 20, 1946
7764 Rec'd Brown Co
7764 Rec'd J. McFarland
7764 Rec'd J. McFarland
7764 Rec'd J. McFarland

1. LAST NAME - FIRST NAME - MIDDLE INITIAL RICHEY ROBERT W		2. ARMY SERIAL NO. 15 110 811	3. GRADE T/SQT	4. ARM OR SERVICE AC	5. COMPONENT AUS
6. ORGANIZATION 36TH TC SQ		7. DATE OF SEPARATION 3 SEP 45	8. PLACE OF SEPARATION SEPARATION CENTER FORT BRAGG NC		
9. PERMANENT ADDRESS FOR MAILING PURPOSES RT 3 GEORGETOWN OHIO		10. DATE OF BIRTH 16 APR 20	11. PLACE OF BIRTH JACKSON TWP OHIO		
12. ADDRESS FROM WHICH EMPLOYMENT WILL BE SOUGHT SEE 9		13. COLOR EYES BLUE	14. COLOR HAIR BROWN	15. HEIGHT 5 10 1/2	16. WEIGHT 140 lbs.
17. NO. DEPEND.	18. RACE X WHITE		19. MARITAL STATUS X SINGLE		20. U.S. CITIZEN X YES
21. CIVILIAN OCCUPATION AND NO. MEAT CUTTER 11 (5-58.100)					

MILITARY HISTORY

22. DATE OF INDUCTION 13 APR 42	23. DATE OF ENLISTMENT 13 APR 42	24. DATE OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE 13 APR 42	25. PLACE OF ENTRY INTO SERVICE PATTERSON FIELD OHIO
SELECTIVE SERVICE DATA X YES	26. REGISTERED X YES	27. LOCAL S.S. BOARD NO. BROWN CO OHIO	28. COUNTY AND STATE SEE 9
30. MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALTY AND NO. AERIAL ENGINEER (2750)		31. MILITARY OCCUPATION AND DATE (I.e., Industry, aviation and marksmanship badges, etc.) AVIATION BADGE	
32. BATTLES AND CAMPAIGNS EGYPT-LIBYA; TUNISIA; SICILY; NAPLES-FOGGIA; ROME-ARNO; NORMANDY; CENTRAL EUROPE; RHINELAND; NORTHERN FRANCE			
33. DECORATIONS AND CITATIONS EAMET CAMPAIGN MEDAL WITH 9 BRONZE SERVICE STARS; AIR MEDAL GO#403 6TH TC SQ 15 OCT 43; DISTINGUISHED UNIT BADGE WITH 1 OAK LEAF CLUSTER GO#212 9TH AF 23AUG44; GOOD CONDUCT MEDAL AR 600-68			
34. WOUNDS RECEIVED IN ACTION NONE			

35. LATEST IMMUNIZATION DATES		36. SERVICE OUTSIDE CONTINENTAL U. S. AND RETURN	
SMALLPOX 6SEP44	TYPHOID 6SEP44	TETANUS 6SEP44	OTHER (specify) Y F 30APR43 TYP 15DEC43
37. TOTAL LENGTH OF SERVICE		DATE OF DEPARTURE	DESTINATION
CONTINENTAL SERVICE	FOREIGN SERVICE		
YEARS MONTHS DAYS	YEARS MONTHS DAYS		
0 11 22	2 4 29	21 DEC 42	EAMET
38. HIGHEST GRADE HELD TECHNICAL		30 JUN 44	USA
39. PRIOR SERVICE NONE		7 SEP 44	EAMET
		15 DEC 44	USA
			1 FEB 43
			12 JUL 44
			15 SEP 44
			23 MAY 45

40. REASON AND AUTHORITY FOR SEPARATION CONVENIENCE OF GOVERNMENT RRI-1 (DEMOBILIZATION) AR 615-365		42. EDUCATION (Years)
41. SERVICE SCHOOLS ATTENDED NONE		Grammar 8 High school 4 College 0

43. LONGEVITY FOR PAY PURPOSES		44. MUSTERING OUT PAY	45. SOLDIER DEPOSIT	46. TRAVEL PAY	47. TOTAL AMOUNT, NAME OF DISBURSING OFFICER
YEARS MONTHS DAYS	TOTAL THIS PAYMENT	NONE	NONE	NONE	1 A CALPESTRI MAJ FD
3 4 21	300 100	INSURANCE NOTICE VOH NO			

48. KIND OF INSURANCE		49. HOW PAID	50. Effective Date of Aliotment Discontinuance	51. Date of Next Premium Due (30 month after 50)	52. PREMIUM DUE EACH MONTH	53. INTENTION OF VETERAN TO
Wat. Serv. U.S. Govt. None	Attachment Direct to V. A.	X	30 SEP 45	31 OCT 45	6.60	Continue Continue Only Discontinue
						5,000

54. FINGERPRINT 	55. REMARKS (This space for completion of above items or entry of other items specified in W. D. Directives) NO TIME LOST UNDER AW 107; LAPEL BUTTON ISSUED ASR SCORE (12 MAY 45) 114 OHIO WORLD WAR II CLAIM COMPENSATION APPLIED FOR No. 581225		56. SIGNATURE OF PERSON BEING SEPARATED <i>Robert W. Richey</i>	57. PERSONNEL OFFICER (Type name, grade and organization - signature) E. M. KOPP 1ST LT AUS <i>E M Kopp</i>
	58. APPLICATION FOR READJUSTMENT ALLOWANCE PUBLIC LAW #346 OHIO 3-8-46			

RESTRICTED.

General Orders
Number 254

HEADQUARTERS NINTH AIR FORCE.

A.P.O. 696, U.S. Army
28 October 1944.

EXTRACT.

Battle Honors

1. Under the provision of Section IV, Circular No. 333, War Department, 1943, the following named units of the Ninth Air Force are cited for outstanding performance of duty in action against the enemy. The citation reads as follows :



"The **316th Troop Carrier Group**. For outstanding performance of duty in action against the enemy from 25 November 1942 to 25 August 1943. Throughout the course of the Egyptian-Libyan, Tunisian and Sicilian Campaigns the **316th Troop Carrier Group** rendered distinguished service in its vital support of the British Eighth Army and the Ninth Air Force. During the Middle East Campaign, during which refueling and rearming problems were greatly aggravated by the attenuated lines of supply through the desert, the unarmed and unarmored aircraft of the **316th Troop Carrier Group** played an outstanding part in the success of both aerial and ground operations by transporting vitally needed supplies and replacements to advanced landing grounds only recently evacuated by the enemy. While the air echelons of the group were engaged in undertaking long and hazardous flights without escort over areas where enemy opposition was both anticipated and encountered, the ground echelons of the group, in addition to their normal duties, supported the air echelons of two heavy bombardment groups throughout important operations in the Western Desert. Living under conditions of great personal hardship and danger in the desert, and operating despite the difficulties of unfavorable climatic and weather conditions, as well as enemy aerial attack, the personnel of the **316th Troop Carrier Group**, through their courage, perseverance and deep devotion to duty, rendered an invaluable contribution to the success of allied operations in the Middle East Theater of Operations."



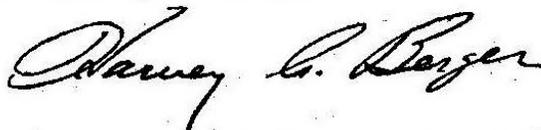
By command of MAJOR GENERAL VANDENBERG —

Official—
/S/ C. M. SEEBACH
/T/ C. M. SEEBACH
Colonel A.G.D.
Adjutant General.

W. W. MILLARD,
Colonel, G.S.C.
Chief of Staff.

HEADQUARTERS 316th TROOP CARRIER GROUP
A.P.O. 133, U.S. Army — 8 January 1945.

I Certify that this is a true extract copy and further that
..... was a member of the
316th Troop Carrier Group during the period covered by this citation.





Honorable Discharge

This is to certify that

ROBERT W RICHEY 15 110 811 TECHNICAL SERGEANT
36TH TROOP CARRIER SQUADRON

Army of the United States

*is hereby Honorably Discharged from the military
service of the United States of America.*

*This certificate is awarded as a testimonial of Honest
and Faithful Service to this country.*

Given at

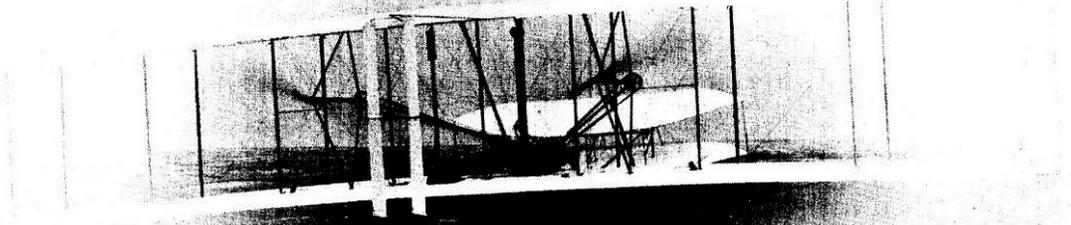
SEPARATION CENTER
FORT BRAGG, NORTH CAROLINA

Date

3 SEPTEMBER 1945

R. B. Martin
R. B. MARTIN
MAJOR AGD

THE NATIONAL AVIATION AND SPACE EXPLORATION WALL OF HONOR



In grateful acknowledgment of your generous contribution in helping to create
The National Aviation and Space Exploration Wall of Honor at the Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center.

316th Troop Carrier Group, USAAF, World War II

Is hereby inducted as an Air and Space **Leader** of the Udvar-Hazy Center.
In recognition of your contribution, your name will be inscribed on the
National Aviation and Space Exploration Wall of Honor
as a permanent testament to your commitment and passion for aviation and space exploration.

Certified this 25th day of August 2000



Smithsonian
National Air and Space Museum
Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center

General J.R. Dailey, USMC (Ret.)
Director, National Air and Space Museum