

# **PERSONAL HISTORY OF THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF ALBERT NEAL MCMAHAN**

I, Albert Neal McMahan was born September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1920 at Ranburne, Cleburne County, Alabama in my maternal Grand Father Major (his name, not military rank) Edmond Gibbs log home and grew up at Old Hopewell, Cleburne County on my family's 200 acre farm. I am the oldest of seven children, five brothers and one sister. My early interests included farming, electrical principles, electronics, and travel. Within the following pages are some of the experiences that have shaped me into the person that I am today.

Thanks to:

My parents for their guidance and support throughout my life, my wife Del for being the love of my life and best friend, my adopted son Hugh for the joy he gave me and last but not least my nephew George Tate, his wife Lisa, and son Joshua for the care they have given me and helping put my life history on paper.

This is the second version of my life. The first was destroyed in a computer and the passage of time has caused me to forget much of the material that was in the first version!

But here goes with what I remember!

## Personal History of Albert Neal McMahan

I, Albert Neal McMahan the oldest of seven children was born September 1, 1920 at Ranburne, Cleburne County, Alabama in my Grandfather Major (his given name) Edmund Gibbs log home. My father, Joseph Arthur McMahan, born December 17, 1885 at Old Hopewell, Cleburne County, was a farmer, sawmill owner/operator, cotton gin owner/operator, school teacher and broiler chicken grower. My mother, Georgie Gibbs McMahan, born January 2, 1898 at Ranburne, Cleburne County, was a home maker. They married January 26, 1919 in Cleburne County, Alabama.



*My Mother and Father*

My siblings, all born at Old Hopewell Alabama are: Harold Eugene - Sept. 13, 1923; Julian Edwin - Sept. 10, 1925; Carolyn Jo - Sept. 9, 1929; Charles Arthur - Aug. 26, 1931; Earl Gibbs - Aug. 6, 1934; Clifton Horace - Nov. 7, 1939. I am the oldest of all seven children. Memories of my early childhood are limited. My earliest occurred when I was about two and half years old. We were living in Hightower, Cleburne County where my father was teaching in a one room school. We lived in a nearby house with a porch about 2 feet above the ground. When I wanted to go outside I did not use the steps, I backed up to the edge of the porch on my belly, dangled my legs over the edge and dropped to the ground landing on my bottom.

My next childhood memory occurred in Atlanta, Georgia when I was about three. A neighbor was visiting one evening and Dad mentioned that I had no fear of the dark. To prove it he told me to go outside and walk around the block. It was a moonlit night. When I came to a shadow on the sidewalk I was frightened and would jump over the shadow or walk into the street or on the lawn until I passed the shadow and then I would get back on the sidewalk. I did this around the block. Unknown to me I was being followed to insure my safety.

My parents told me that when I was two and three years old they read to me, whetting my desire to learn to read the books and encyclopedias that were lying around. I thumbed through the encyclopedia until it was dog-eared!

Fall 1923 - My father had typhoid and could not do physical labor so we moved to Atlanta, Georgia where he worked as a shoe salesman and then to Greenville, South Carolina where he sold silk stockings door to door. His health improved and in late 1924 we moved back to Old Hopewell and he resumed farming.

They had better than average educations for the time and area. Dad had completed the eighth grade at the Methodist Seminary School at Edwardsville, Cleburne County and attended Jacksonville State Teacher's College, Jacksonville, Alabama. My Mother had

completed the eighth grade at Ranburne. She was an above average student and excelled in English, Latin and spelling.

My father, to us children Dad, owned 200 acres of hilly red clay land on which we and several sharecropper families grew cotton, corn, wheat and sorghum cane. Cotton was our cash crop and the corn was used primarily to feed our mules, horses, cattle, hogs, goats and chickens. Some of the corn and wheat was taken to the local grist mill and ground into corn meal for corn bread and the wheat into flour for biscuits. The sorghum cane provided delicious syrup that with Mother's biscuits, ham, eggs and gravy, made a meal fit-for-a-king! We had large year round gardens and grew many kinds of vegetables. Also we had several hives of bees that provided honey. Moneywise we were dirt poor but thanks to our gardens, chickens, pigs, cattle, goats and honey bees, we ate like royalty! My mouth waters when I think of the great food we enjoyed.

When I was 4 years old we had a black maid who primarily cooked and cleaned for my family but also helped to take care of me and my younger brother Harold while my father worked in the fields. I called her Aunt Callie. My mother was not able to do housework due to health problems at that time. She was basically an invalid at the time she married my father. Amazingly, her health seemed to improve with the birth of each child. By the time my youngest brother Clifton was born, her health was much better. Aunt Callie would let me come over to her house and take naps and feed me when I got hungry. I would play with her son Snip whenever possible. We were great friends. I loved Aunt Callie and Snip very much.

No one could have more loving parents. They were devout Southern Baptists who lived and practiced their religion. We attended Sunday School every Sunday and Church every fourth Sunday of the month. Sunday was the Lords day and other than caring for our livestock we did no work. We children were taught and required to practice the values and ethics that hard working Christians lived by. I have tried to live by those principles.



September 1925 - I began school in the one room building at Old Hopewell heated with a wood fired stove in the middle of the building. One teacher taught first through eighth grade. During my fifth grade year I took the State of Alabama test required to advance from sixth to seventh grade, passed and skipped sixth grade. My parents subscribed to a daily Atlanta newspaper that was delivered Monday through Saturday by the US mail.

*My 1<sup>st</sup> grade class. I'm 2<sup>nd</sup> from the left.*

As soon as I could read and was not in school or working in the fields, I impatiently waited for the newspaper to be delivered and read every page.

Dad started me working in the farm fields when I was six. My first task was preparing an area for planting cotton. That required that the soil be broken up to plant seed. My Father had a small plow that I could manage and a mule that knew what had to be done without

me having to guide him. I would work until I got tired and resume the job later in the day. There's a limited amount of work a six year old child can do.

September 1931 and 1932 - Attended Macedonia school for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades.

August 1932 - Joined my parent's Old Hopewell Baptist Church and was baptized in Silas Creek, popularly known as Sally's Creek.

Beginning in the fall of 1933 I attended Ranburne High School about 13 miles away. A school bus picked us up in the morning and brought us home every afternoon. The spring semester of 1934 Ranburne High School was closed because of the Depression. Heflin, the other Cleburne County High School remained open. My Aunt Ila McMahan, who lived near my home taught and drove there each day so I commuted with her and attended school. In the fall of 1934 Ranburne High School reopened and I graduated in 1937 at age 16.

May 1938 - My parents did not have money for me to go to college so I requested to attend Ranburne High School an additional year. My request was granted and I took courses that I had been unable to schedule; chemistry, math and biology. It was an exceptionally enjoyable year.

1939 - Because of the Depression virtually no jobs were available so I lived at home and worked on the family farm.

1930 thru 1942 - The Depression years, were difficult. Hence, we did everything we could to be self sufficient. We grew larger more diverse gardens, grew wheat that was ground for bread, raised chickens for eggs and meat, hogs for meat and lard, and cattle for milk, butter and meat. Cotton, our only cash crop, provided little money. As a result we bought only the clothes and the non-farm produced supplies that we needed. We just tightened our belts and made do with what we had or could make ourselves. We often had surplus vegetables, pork and beef, eggs and foods that made us popular with our friends and city relatives who frequently visited us to restock their larders. We were pleased to help them survive the hard times! Our Christian values mandated it!

The lack of money directly affected how we celebrated Christmas. Gifts for us children were inexpensive, healthy, and readily available. Each of us got an age appropriate toy, such as a top, knife or doll. Everyone got oranges, apples, nuts, peppermint and horehound candy. There was never money for a bicycle!

Reading, whittling and carving were my oldest hobbies. Initially, my projects were simple toys. As my skills improved I whittled and carved more difficult items such as animals and wooden chains. I especially liked carving and painting solid wood model airplanes and cars.

Later, I bought a rubber band, balsa, and tissue paper model airplane. I carefully followed the plans and when finished the plane flew great. I was hooked! After that anytime I could save the money I would order a plane kit and build and fly it. Later, I drew my own plans and bought balsa and tissue paper and built and flew my own designs. It was great fun! I was the only boy in the neighborhood who built and flew model airplanes!

My reading and building rubber band powered airplanes led to radios. I think I was 12 years old and knew that I must learn how radios worked. Without my parent's permission I ordered a correspondence course on radio from Coyne Radio, Chicago.

The first thing I received was a box of items including a battery, galena crystal, resistors, capacitors, insulated wire, headphones and instructions: items that I would use in the experiments to prove how voltage, resistors, and capacitors worked.

When the material arrived my parents were upset! Dad questioned and spanked me and contacted Coyne Radio. I don't remember how it was resolved but I kept what I had and never received any more material or instructions.

Anniston, Alabama, about 20 airline miles away, had a low wattage radio station that I wanted to listen to. I knew that a good antenna would be required. My father had replaced a car generator that contained the copper wire for the antenna. I removed the wire and using his blowtorch heated soldering iron soldered the pieces together until I had enough to go from the peak of our barn to an oak tree in front of our house and a lead-in into my bedroom. When all were installed, checked and double-checked, I adjusted the sensing wire on the galena crystal hoping to hear the Anniston station. I was shocked when I heard XERA Reynosa, Mexico, a 500,000 watt station. I remember listening to WLW Cincinnati, Ohio, WWL New Orleans, WSB Atlanta, plus other 50,000 watt stations!

Building and listening to the crystal radio made me want to build vacuum tube radios. I saw an advertisement in a magazine for a one tube battery powered super-regenerative radio receiver kit not including battery, cost \$4.50. But I had no money! I told my parents about the radio and was very pleased when they said that I could have all unneeded chicken eggs that I would sell at the nearby country store. Also, I occasionally found a Coca Cola and RC bottle and got a few cents for them. I saved every penny for about one year and ordered the kit and battery. The day they were delivered was a memorable occasion.

With great care I wound the tuning coils, assembled and soldered the components and installed the battery. The radio worked perfectly! It took a bit of tinkering to learn how to tune a super-regenerative radio which I soon did and was hooked!

As I learned more about radios I wanted to build others. My Grandmother Gibbs gave me an old inoperative battery powered radio that I disassembled and used the parts to build simple radios. Occasionally I was given an inoperative radio that I would strip of usable parts and use them to build other simple radios.

Spring 1933 - Mr. E. H. Fincher, the Ranburne High School Vocational Agriculture Teacher, proposed a 10 day summer trip to the Chicago World's Fair for the students in his class. His plan was that he would drive a Ranburne School bus and we take the needed food and other supplies provided by those on the trip, prepare our meals, sleep in school gyms or state parks along the way, and visit as many interesting and educational sights as time and conditions permitted. The Cleburne County School Board agreed and the trip was on! Each of us took the food, clothes and sleeping gear we needed. The cost per individual, including World's Fair admission fee, was \$20.00!

We left early Saturday morning so we would get to Nashville, Tennessee in time to attend the Saturday evening 'Grand Old Opry' radio show. Our group stood and was recognized, a fantastic event for a bunch of country boys.

We then drove to Chicago and spent two days at the World's Fair. My most vivid memory of the Fair was the CBS color television demonstration. I was amazed! Remember this was in 1933, years before commercial television! We also visited the Adler Planetarium in Chicago. On the way home we visited Lincoln's birthplace, Fort Knox, Mammoth Cave and other points of interest. This was my first trip of length, an inspiring peek of the world!

Our parents encouraged us children to be independent and aggressively pursue life. I was very active in 4-H Club activities. My projects included growing cotton, corn, raising hogs, and cattle.



*My 4H Club in Washington D.C.*

I judged cattle at the 1938 Alabama State Fair in Birmingham and won first prize judging beef cattle.

I was one of the 4-H Club members, two boys and two girls, chosen to represent the State of Alabama at the 1938 National 4-H Club Encampment in Washington, DC. We visited the White House, Capital, and other sites of interest. Also, that year I was President of the Alabama 4-H Club Council.

In addition to my parents encouragement I must add the encouragement of Mr. E. G. Small, Assistant County Agent for Cleburne County who took a personal interest in me and encouraged and guided me in my choice and conduct of 4-H Club projects. Occasionally he took me to farms in Cleburne and surrounding counties to show me the results of good farming practices some of which I applied on our farm with excellent results.

Mr. Small influenced my life in many ways. One when I was 14 concerned food. After visiting a farm in Calhoun County he said that before he took me home, 15 miles out in the country, we would stop at his home and eat supper. When we, including his wife and children, were seated he passed a bowl of turnip greens for me to serve myself. I didn't like turnip greens so I told him that I didn't like them. He was offended and angrily said "GO TO GRASS" and then in a very quiet, but unmistakably angry tone, stated that he had invited me to his home to eat food prepared by his wife and that my refusal offended him and his wife, and that I should be ashamed of my actions! Of course I apologized and served myself turnip greens. At that moment I silently made a vow that there was no food that I would not eat. To this day if there is a food on the menu that I have not eaten, I order it! Some foods I have not enjoyed but most have been pleasant surprises!

Life on our family farm was very satisfying, being in the midst of nature, planning, planting, cultivating, seeing crops grow, and harvesting them, were pleasures I will never forget. But working in the fields from early to late, with only Sunday off, lack of money and

conveniences such as electricity, gas, and water systems, and distance from medical service, made life difficult.

Based on Mr. Small's advice and my parents encouragement, my success with 4-H activities, and that I didn't want to spend my life farming, my plans were to attend Alabama Polytechnic Institute, now Auburn University, major in Agriculture and become a US Department Of Agriculture County Agent.

September 1938 - Entered Auburn majoring in Agricultural Science, my cousin Buford McMahan also wanted to attend. Neither his nor my parents had much money. To reduce expenses we rented an apartment and took a variety of foods such as ham, eggs, potatoes, canned vegetables, meats, and fruit and prepared our meals. Periodically our parents mailed us replacement foods. Neither of us were experienced cooks, but we had plenty of healthy tasty food. This enabled us to complete our freshman year without causing our families to go into debt!

As I mentioned my family only had funds for my freshman year. That meant that I would have to work and pay for my sophomore and subsequent years. During my freshman year I tried to get a job, any job, but none were available. There were many students with my financial problems. All available jobs were taken by juniors and seniors.

I learned that a company was offering summer jobs selling Bibles and religious materials. I thought that if I could earn enough I could continue my studies. I applied and was accepted. Sales personnel had to attend a sales class in Nashville, Tennessee. Having limited funds I hitch hiked there, had the class and was assigned a territory around Lillington, North Carolina. I hitch hiked there and found a cheap room.

My sales territory was a farming area. Not having a car I walked carrying a heavy bag of sample Bibles and religious material! The farmers were mostly Baptists and Methodists but none had the cash to order anything. After a disappointing week with no sales I quit, hitch hiked to Nashville, turned in my sales kit, and hitch hiked home.

Because of the Depression no jobs were available so I lived at home and worked on our family farm.

Spring 1940 - Then I had a bit of good luck. I collected information for the US Census. I visited the people in the area, all of whom I knew, and collected the required information. As was common in farming areas the houses were scattered and not having a car I walked. It was an interesting job and was paid to do it, but not enough to continue college.

Since college was no longer possible I explored other opportunities. For as long as I could remember I had been interested in electricity and radio. In a magazine I saw a US Army Tank Corps recruiting advertisement touting its communications school. I thought that if I enlisted, attended the communication school, and served three years I would have the skills to work in the radio field after I was discharged.

Early July 1940 – I worked for the US Agricultural Adjustment Administration on a crew surveying farm crop land in the area around Old Hopewell. It was a great learning experience. It taught me how an area could be mapped and the acreage computed and introduced me to the life of a wage earner.

July 12, 1940 - I went to Fort McClellan, Anniston, Alabama to enlist. I told the recruiter that I wanted to join the Army but was enlisted in Army Air Corps as it got all individuals who had attended college. Basic training was easy for me. I was raised on a farm and was adapted to the hot humid summer weather.

August 25 - Assigned to the 91<sup>st</sup> School Squadron as a Mechanics Helper. The 91<sup>st</sup> had bomber and fighter planes. Seeing and working on these planes was a fantastic experience for one who had never been near an airplane.

September 1 - My birthday! I was assigned to the 82<sup>nd</sup> School Squadron as a Mechanics Helper. Before I go further I must explain how US Army airplane pilots were trained. The first step was with very low powered single engine planes, the second step was with higher powered single engine planes and third step was with higher powered and so on. The 82<sup>nd</sup> Squadron was involved in the second step.

October 15 - Assigned a BT-14 airplane (second step) to maintain and awarded a 5<sup>th</sup> Class Specialist rating.

January 4 - April 21, 1941 - Attended Aircraft and Engine Mechanic training at Missouri Aviation Institute, Kansas City, Missouri. After graduation I returned to the 82<sup>nd</sup> and was assigned as crew chief of a BT-14 plane.

June 25 - Transferred to Turner Field, Albany, Georgia. The base was under construction, our living quarters and mess facilities were completed and the runways were in the late stage of completion.

July 1 - Promoted to Private First Class (Pfc) and was a Mechanics Helper.

September 15 - November 15 - Aircraft Instrument Specialist course at Chanute Field, Illinois. On completion I returned to Turner Field. After that when an airplane had an instrument problem I was called for assistance.

November 1 - Promoted to Corporal (Cpl), Aircraft and Engine Mechanic Second Class.

Sunday December 7, 1941 - A day I will never forget. I was in charge of the Squadron Alert Crew responsible for servicing all departing and returning 94<sup>th</sup> Squadron planes. Everything was going smoothly until Captain (Cpt) Joshua Foster, the Squadron Commander, called and told me that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor and that he would drive to the Base and until he arrived I was responsible for securing the squadron by posting guards at all planes and buildings, including squadron supply and orderly room. I immediately contacted the Squadron Charge of Quarters (CQ) and the senior sergeants and told them what Cpt Foster had instructed me to do.

Needless to say some of the higher ranking airmen did not take kindly to a lowly Cpl telling them what to do, When Cpt Foster arrived he informed everyone that I was acting on his orders and they must do as I had directed.

January 15, 1942 - Awarded Aircraft and Engine Mechanic First Class.





Based on my experience with electrical trouble shooting I was assigned Crew Chief of the first Curtiss AT-9 assigned to Turner Field. It was a twin engine, electric controls training plane. Also, I was charged with on-the-job training of other mechanics on the plane.

*AT-9 in flight*

February 15 - Promoted to Sergeant (Sgt).

May 24 - Hospitalized with pneumonia from which I was not expected to recover. My parents were notified and came to and remained in the Turner Field area until I recovered, thanks to the new sulfa drugs. Upon returning to duty I resumed my duties as Flight Chief.

June 1 - Promoted to Staff Sergeant (SSgt) and assigned NCO (Non Commissioned Officer) of the Squadron Aircraft Inspection crew. Aircraft inspections were done at night to have the maximum number of planes available for day flying training. Night duty was welcomed as the temperature was much cooler.

Mid July – There was an item on the Squadron Bulletin Board requesting an Instrument Specialist for the 301<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group. I knew that bomb groups were being shipped overseas so I volunteered. Cap Foster vetoed the idea. I persisted and he relented.

July 29 - Assigned to 301<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group and shipped to Richmond Army Air Base, Richmond, Virginia.

August 7 - Reassigned to the 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, 369<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron, 'Fightin Bitin', as an Instrument Specialist. The 306<sup>th</sup> was equipped with Boeing B-17F Flying Fortresses. Other three squadrons in the Group were 367<sup>th</sup> 'Clay Pigeons', 368<sup>th</sup> 'Eagar Beavers', and 423<sup>rd</sup> 'Grim Reapers'.

August 15 - 306<sup>th</sup> ground personnel moved to Ft. Dix, New Jersey. While waiting for transportation overseas we were administered the required immunizations and qualified with the 1903 Springfield rifle.

August 30 - 306<sup>th</sup> ground personnel departed Ft. Dix and boarded the luxury liner Queen Elizabeth (QE) at the New York Port of Embarkation.

August 31- QE sailed 10:30 am, destination unknown, without escort protection from German submarines. With a speed of 33 knots in the daylight hours and 30 knots in darkness and a random course that changed every 45 seconds.

17,200 troops were on the QE, many times its peacetime civilian passenger capacity. With only 6000 bunks, each rotated between three persons with each shift sleeping six hours, the other 18 hours were spent eating or on deck! Our crossing was uneventful.

September 5, 1942 - QE docked at Gourock, Scotland and spent night onboard.

September 6 - 306<sup>th</sup> personnel boarded an English train to Bedford and ate breakfast, our first meal in England; one piece of coarse toast covered with baked beans with one slice of bacon on top and a cup of coffee.

Our base Thurleigh, near Bedford, was an established Royal Air Force base that had reasonably good accommodations.

September 11, 1942 - 306<sup>th</sup> B-17F planes and flight crews arrived from the US and did intensive training in British flying and radio procedures and began formation flying. We ground personnel maintained the planes and did support activities.

September 30 - Flying crews declared "Ready to Conduct Combat Operations".

October 9, 1942 - 108 bombers, 84 B-17's and 24 B-24's participated in the Eighth Bomber Command's first major mission to Lille, France. The 306<sup>th</sup> provided 18 B-17's, 4 from my 369<sup>th</sup> Squadron. The 367<sup>th</sup> Squadron lost one plane.

My entire life I have tried to take advantage of situations to learn everything I could. When I arrived in England I resolved to learn the English customs. A few days after we settled at Thurleigh we were given evening passes to Bedford and the surrounding area. I visited Bedford a couple of times and really enjoyed the town, people, and their pubs even though I drank very little. Later, when I asked the 369<sup>th</sup> First Sergeant (1stSgt) for a pass to Bedford he said "No". On several occasions I asked for a pass with the same result. I was really irritated as some persons got passes every evening!

That evening I again asked the 1stSgt for a pass and he said "No". I explained to him that I was going to Bedford pass or no pass and that I would be at a certain pub. He came to Bedford, saw me and said nothing. The next day, October 10, I was reduced from SSgt to Pvt! My telling him that I was going to Bedford pass or no pass was a BIG MISTAKE!

November and December 1943 the 306<sup>th</sup> flew 10 missions. I think all were into France. Stiff German fighter and flak resistance resulted in the loss of 8 B-17s.

How combat crews were affected by combat interested me. I wanted to know how they responded to being shot at by German fighters and flak. Were they nervous, smoking, and drinking more than usual? Were they functioning efficiently?

Also I wondered how I would react to what the combat crews were experiencing, could I face the dangers of combat, of being wounded, becoming a POW (Prisoner of War), even being killed? There was only one way to know. GET ON A COMBAT CREW!

When B-17s were shot down or so damaged that they were not repairable, crew members wounded, killed, or shot down, the planes and officers were replaced but there were no replacement enlisted crewmen!

November 20 - I volunteered for combat crew and was sent to the Combat Crew Replacement Center, Bovingdon for 9 days of Aerial Gunner training. It consisted of English and German aircraft identification, theory of aerial gunnery, familiarization with the 50 caliber machine gun and limited firing practice on the ground, but none in the air! The training included how to prevent the guns from freezing and the use and care of oxygen masks.

Two of Lt Robert Riordan's tail gunners had been severely wounded and he needed a replacement. When he asked me to be his third tail gunner I responded with an enthusiastic "YES"!

The tail of the B-17F had two 50 caliber machine guns with 600 rounds of ammunition for each housed in storage bins in the waist above. In firing position the tail gunner sat facing the rear on a low bicycle type seat. A flexible canvas partition fastened to the interior of the tail section and the machine gun barrels blocked the minus 30 to 60 degree Fahrenheit air.

In the early months of the war crew members wore wool underwear, shirts, pants, socks, fleece lined leather sheep skin pants, jackets, flying helmets, silk and fleece lined leather gloves and boots to be as warm as possible. In early 1943 electrically heated suits, gloves and boots were issued. Safety equipment such as flak suits and helmets came into use after I completed my missions.

December 15 - I was promoted to Sgt.

December 20, 1942 - MY FIRST MISSION! Target the airfield at Romilly, France, bombing altitude 20,000 feet, 10 500 pound bombs. The crew was Lt Robert Riordan pilot, Lt Edward Maliszewski copilot, Lt George Spelman navigator, Lt Gerald Rotter bombardier, Sgt Glen Wyly top turret gunner, Technical Sgt (TSgt) Robert Stevenson radio operator-gunner, Staff Sgt (SSgt) Joe Bowles ball turret gunner, Sgt Anthony Santoro right waist gunner, Sgt Charles Davis left waist gunner, and I was the tail gunner.

100 B-17 and B-24 bombers participated in the mission.



*My crew waiting to takeoff on my first mission. I am standing 3<sup>rd</sup> from the right. Pilot Riordan is standing on the left.*

It was a beautiful, cloudless Sunday. Takeoff was 10:10 AM and assembly was perfect. As we flew into France we could see the German fighters overhead. The FW190 and ME109 fighters attacked us all the way to the target and back to the channel. The fighters used a new attack, from 10 to 2 o'clock (directions are by clock position, 12 is ahead, three is off the right wing, six is behind and nine is off the left wing) our 170 mph speed and the fighter's 300 mph resulted in a closing speed of 470 mph. I saw two B-17's shot down before the target with no parachutes from either and one after the target with eight parachutes. We bombed the target at 1238 PM and according to reports this was some of the best bombing that the Eighth had done.

About 10 minutes after bombing the target WAHOO was hit by German fighter 20 mm cannon projectiles.

The INTELLIGENCE TELETYPE REPORT stated the damage as follows: PLANE 25086 STABILIZER SHATTERED, NO 3 ENGINE OUT AND NO. 2 DAMAGED FROM SHELL FIRE, HYDRAULIC SYSTEM KNOCKED OUT, NOSE SHATTERED, ELEVATOR CONTROL INJURED AND BOTH OXYGEN SYSTEMS SHOT OUT.

Because of our damage we slowed and contrary to regulations the other 306<sup>th</sup> planes did also to provide protection.

I knew we were in big trouble, but between this being my first mission and not knowing what had happened to the front of the plane, I was not aware of the seriousness of our situation.

On the way out we flew close to Paris and the Eiffel tower but the fighter attacks prevented me from enjoying the view.

Seeing the Cliffs of Dover gave me a fantastic boost. It meant that we would soon be in friendly territory! We were under enemy attack for the entire one hour fifty-three minutes we were over enemy territory.

After exiting enemy territory Lt Spelman, our navigator, was making a visual check of the condition of each gunner and WAHOO's damage. He had a lighted cigarette. I took it from his hand and took a puff! He said "You don't smoke!" I responded "I just started" and smoked until 1950, seven years!

As children Dad told us that if we did not smoke by 21 he would give the non-smoker 40 acres of land! As a result I had strong feelings about smoking! That is why I responded as I did to Lt Spelman's "You don't smoke!"

About this time Lt Riordan told us to "Standby to Jump" because it appeared that the damaged right stabilizer would rip off. It did not and we proceeded to Thurleigh. We lay on the radio compartment floor while landing because of the loss of hydraulic and brake systems. The damaged stabilizer caused the plane to veer to the right of the runway so we circled the base and the second landing attempt was perfect.

Lt Riordan was slightly wounded by glass and Plexiglas fragments and was awarded the Purple Heart.

This was the third time Lt Riordan had brought back a badly damaged plane with unusual skill and courage. He had the reputation that if a plane would stay in the air he would fly it back to base! When we got on the ground I was exhausted. I thought I was prepared for the mental and physical stress of combat but barely was! The stress of flying at high altitude on oxygen, being shot at by fighters and flak and being severely shaken from the tails vibration caused by the damaged horizontal stabilizer was taxing.

Also I learned that the German fighters had damaged both of WAHOO's oxygen systems, the Plexiglas nose, copilot's windshield and window and copilot's control column.

The 367<sup>th</sup> lost three planes.

According to the mission report Lt Rotter, bombardier, and TSgt Stevenson, radio operator, each claimed downing an FW190. Lt Rotter's claim was denied! Due to an electrical problem SSgt Bowles had to use a screw driver to fire the ball turret guns.

After interrogation and eating I went to a Bedford pub and drank a couple of glasses of ale. That helped me relax.

The tail's vibration caused every muscle in my body to be sore for several days.

This baptism to combat provided the answer to my question "Did I have what it took to endure the strain of combat?" YES! Combat was an exhilarating experience, the most exhilarating experience ever! At the same time I was fearful that I would be wounded as had DeJohn and Langley or that we would be shot down, captured and a prisoner of war, or be killed. I had great faith in the will and ability of Lt Riordan to get the plane home as long as it was flyable. The answer to the question, "Could I take the stress of combat, being shot at by fighters and flak?" was a frightening and stressful experience as I showed by beginning to smoke! BUT I COULD MANAGE THE FEAR AND PERFORM MY DUTIES. Mission # 1

To help us get over our stressful experience we were given a three day pass to London. We had a really enjoyable time seeing the sites. An insignificant item that I remember was Anthony 'Tony' Santoro suggested we go to an Italian restaurant. He ordered spinach ravioli and never having eaten spinach ravioli I ordered it and enjoyed every bite!

January 1, 1943 - I was promoted to Staff Sgt (SSgt). Pay just over 42 English Pounds per month. I think the exchange rate was \$4.80 per Pound, about \$205.00 per month! Not much for the possibility of being killed!

January 13 - Lille, France, altitude 23,200 feet, 5 1000 pound bombs. Only 72 B-17F's flew the mission. I was looking directly at the planes of Cpt James Johnston and Lt Jack Spaulding when they collided and both went down! It upset me! I knew the crews of both planes. I later learned that 11 of the 20 persons on the two crews had survived and were prisoners of war. Moderate flak and fighters attacked the 306<sup>th</sup> but the 305<sup>th</sup> was heavily attacked. Mission #2

January 24 - Lorient, France, altitude 23,600 feet, 5 1000 pound bombs, flak moderate and accurate on lead group but moderate and scattered for the 306<sup>th</sup>. About 25 German fighters were in attack position but escorting Spitfires were successful in keeping them at bay. Mission #3

January 27 - Wilhelmshaven, Germany, 306<sup>th</sup> led the Group, altitude 22,000 feet, 5 1000 pound bombs. I saw only 1 German fighter, intense fairly accurate flak. WAHOO had some flak damage. Mission # 4

February 1 - VIII Bomb Command renamed Eighth Air Force.

Promoted to SSgt, pay just over 43 English Pounds per month. I think the exchange rate was \$4.80 per Pound, about \$205.00 per month – not much for the possibility of getting killed.

February 14 - Bremmen, Germany, altitude 23,000 feet, 5 500 pound general-purpose bombs, only one fighter attack, flak from islands off German coast inaccurate, no damage, bad clouds over Germany, returned to base with full bomb load. Mission #5

February 16 - St. Nazaire, France, 68 B-17's participated, 20 from the 306<sup>th</sup>, altitude 23,000 feet, 5 1000 pound bombs, as usual the flak over St. Nazaire was very intense, 367<sup>th</sup> and 423<sup>rd</sup> each lost a B-17, some flak damage to WAHOO. Mission #6

February 27 - Brest, France, almost complete overcast, altitude 23,000 feet, 5 1000 pound bombs, slight and inaccurate flak, only one fighter attack. Mission #7

March 4 - Hamm, Germany, altitude 20,000 feet, 5 1000 pound bombs, no flak but 368<sup>th</sup> lost one plane to German fighters, weather over target and surrounding area caused return with full bomb load. Normal procedure in Germany was to bomb any targets of opportunity. Procedure for bombing occupied countries was to return to England with bombs. Mission #8

March 6 - Lorient, France, altitude 22,000 feet, 5 1000 pound bombs, 12-15 fighters made feeble attacks. 367<sup>th</sup> lost two B-17s, one by flak and the other by fighters. 306<sup>th</sup> landed at Exeter to refuel, stayed overnight returned to Thurleigh the next day. Mission #9

March 8 – Rennes, France, altitude 22,000 feet, 5 1000 pound bombs, 20-25 fighters engaged on return flight. Weather was good and bombing accuracy was excellent. Light flak. Mission #10

March 12 - Rouen, France, WAHOO led group, altitude 24,000 feet, 6 1000 pound high explosive bombs, 30-40 FW190 and ME109's attacked, light flak. No losses. Mission #11

March 13 - Amiens, France, altitude 23,000 feet, 6 1000 pound bombs, only two or three enemy fighters, good Spitfire support on the way to target, severe but inaccurate flak at Dieppe. Mission #12

March 14 - We flew to Belfast, Ireland. The weather was great. I can't remember why.

March 18 - Vegesac, Germany, altitude 27,900 feet, 5 1000 pound bombs, target submarine building. 40-50 ME110, JU88, and FW190 planes attacked and dropped time bombs on our formation for 40 minutes with only one person suffering a minor wound and one slightly damaged 306<sup>th</sup> aircraft. Mission #13

March 20 - Awarded Air Medal.

March 29 - Combat tour set to 25 missions by the Eighth Air Force. The procedure at the beginning of combat was that crew members flew until they were wounded, emotionally incapable of continued combat, shot down and prisoners of war, or killed. Loss experience showed that few crew members would survive the war! After a few months of combat 306<sup>th</sup> Flight Surgeon, Cpt Thurman Shuller, recommended 20 missions, 25 missions then set for a tour. Then there was a possibility that some of us would complete a 25 mission tour!

March 31- Rotterdam, Holland, altitude 23,500 feet, 6 1000 pound bombs, 10/10 visibility/cloud cover, overcast at target prevented bombing, few German fighters, light flak. Milk run! Mission #14

April 4 - Paris, France, altitude 23,900 feet, 6 1000 pound bombs, flak moderate and inaccurate, 20-25 mostly FW190 German fighters attacked and dropped aerial bombs into our formation until Spitfire cover was reached near Rouen. Mission #15

April 6 - Awarded Oak Leaf Cluster to my Air Medal.

In early April 1943 Maj Henry Terry, 369<sup>th</sup> Commanding Officer (CO) told Cpt Riordan that WAHOO had been selected for a special and critical mission. The engineer, TSgt Anthony Santoro and WAHOO crew chief Master Sgt (MSgt) Forrest Goodwill supervised

adding extra ammunition at each gun position and installing a 410 gallon gas tank in the bomb bay.

The crew was Cpt Riordan pilot, Lt Rogers Littlejohn copilot, Lt George Spelman navigator, Lt Gerald Rotter bombardier, TSgt Anthony Santoro engineer, SSgt Orval Shultz radio operator, SSgt Charles Davis ball turret, SSgt Dwight Diggins right waist gunner, SSgt Ray May left waist gunner, and I was the tail gunner. I was issued a Thompson Sub Machine Gun and many rounds of ammunition.

April 13 - WAHOO took off at 14:30 and flew to Bovingdon where we picked up a number of bulky sealed barracks bags and their custodian, Maj Walz, a US Army Infantry Officer. The bags were stacked on the right side of the bomb bay, in the radio room, on both sides of the top turret and in the nose. Guards surrounded WAHOO until we took off at 16:30. We landed at Portreath and guards surrounded WAHOO with its cargo of secret material. We slept in the plane.

April 14 - We were awakened at 24:00 and departed Portreath at 04:45. The flight plan was to fly at 1,000 feet altitude on a course west of the Scilly Islands and turn southwest. We flew this course until we saw the lights of Brest, France, enemy territory! A cross wind had blown us off course! We turned out to sea to avoid interception by German fighters and then flew to the coast of Spain and Portugal. After passing Portugal we flew towards Gibraltar. A few miles from Gibraltar we got a view of Africa, a couple of mountain peaks. We approached Gibraltar on a northerly heading. When about 3 miles out the Very Pistol was fired with the colors of the day and we were given the green light to land. We made a wide turn inside the Bay on the west side of Gibraltar staying clear of Spanish territory.

On final approach a violent down draft threw belts of ammunition out of its cans and upset the loose articles. We circled around on a second landing try and the down draft was even more violent. I had come out of the tail into the radio compartment. Maj Walz, standing in the open radio compartment hatch was almost out of the plane when someone grabbed one of his legs and held him. Everything in the plane was thrown to the top of the plane and then back to the floor. Cpt Riordan made a perfect landing.

The weather at our destination was bad so we remained at Gibraltar for a couple of days. An American Sgt took us to Gibraltar town and showed us where we could exchange English Pounds for Gibraltar Pounds and other points of interest. We ate fresh citrus fruit for the first time in months and wandered around for a couple of hours sightseeing the area. Almost everything was built for defense.

April 15 – The weather at our destination was still bad so we stayed another day. We fired our 45 caliber pistols and the Tommy gun at the gunnery range and rode in a horse drawn taxi and saw the Barbary apes and met some American sailors from the US ship Housatonic that was in port for engine repairs. They had never seen a B-17 before. We took them to see the outside of WAHOO.

In turn they took us onto their ship and treated us royally. The Housatonic was moved to another part of the harbor where the British battleships Rodney and Nelson were. We ate supper on the ship, saw a movie, returned and slept in WAHOO.

April 16 - The weather at our destination was good so we flew over the Mediterranean to Maison Blanche Airport about 11 miles from Algiers. There were many types of planes on



the airfield including; C-47, P-39, Wellington bomber, Spitfire, Beaufighter, Hurricane, P-40, and a captured Italian Macchi pursuit.

After WAHOO was parked Army trucks with armed guards removed the bags. We later learned that they were leaflets to be dropped over Sicily just prior to the planned invasion of the island. We took advantage of the sunny weather by stripping to our waist as we waited for transportation to the Algiers Red Cross Club.



*Our crew enjoying sun while waiting for transportation in Algiers. I'm 2<sup>nd</sup> from left*

Afterwards we wandered around the city in our flying gear with 45 pistols on our hips. We could only stay at the American Red Cross one night so for the remaining time in Algiers we stayed at the Young Women Christian Association (YMCA) facility. I'm not sure but I think it was the Hotel D'Arago. The nearby harbor was an inviting target for German bombers. The first night the air raid sirens sounded so we went outside to watch. The anti-aircraft guns threw up a curtain of defense but the German bombers dropped their bombs anyway. After about 20 minutes the "All Clear" sounded and we went to bed. It was reported that a number of nuns were killed by the bombs and several German planes were downed. For the next two days we wandered around Algiers seeing the sites. It was divided into two areas: French and Arab. The French part was very modern with clean tree lined streets and trackless trolleys. The Casbah in the Arab section was off limits to uniformed personnel. The Arabs we saw were clothed in rags and looked as though they never washed or bathed. All Arab women we saw, except the very young and very old, wore veils.

April 18 - After nightfall German bombers again raided Algiers. It was reported that anti-aircraft downed two and English Beaufighters downed three and 50 people were killed by the bombs.

April 20 - Went to Maison Blanche to maintain WAHOO and serviced both struts. Got sunburned from working in my shorts, stayed at Hotel D' Arago.

April 21 - Went to the airport, ate lunch and at 15:30 departed for Marrakech, Morocco. The country was green with a few lakes and modern houses and roads. The land became mountainous and grass covered with scrub brush. The country then leveled and became desert like with Arab villages and tents. The area was dotted with Arab villages encircled by walls. We located a road that led us to Marrakech, landed, ate and stayed overnight in the Casino Hotel.

April 22 - Refueled and flew to Gibraltar. It was Good Friday and most businesses were closed so we ate at the Victoria Hotel and slept in WAHOO.

April 23 - Serviced WAHOO and left for England and Thurleigh. On board were four American airmen who had avoided capture after being shot down. They were: Lt John Trost, 367<sup>th</sup> bombardier shot down on December 20 raid on Romilly, Cpt Richard Adams, 306<sup>th</sup> pilot shot down on the January 13 raid on Lille, Lt Howard Kelly, 367<sup>th</sup> copilot downed on February 16 raid on St. Nazaire, and TSgt Jones, 303<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group engineer. We flew to Bovingdon, dropped our passengers who were to be transported to London for interrogation and flew to Thurleigh, the end of a very interesting adventure. We enjoyed Africa's sun, horse steak, eggs, oranges and bananas. Great trip! We learned the 306<sup>th</sup> had lost 10 of 16 planes and crews on the April 17 raid on Bremen Germany, none from our 369<sup>th</sup> squadron!

April 30 - 3 day pass to London.

May 13 - Meaulte, France, altitude 21,600 feet, 10 500 pound bombs, fine weather, excellent fighter support, slight flak, little German fighter opposition, but they dropped some aerial bombs into our formation. Almost a milk run! Charles "Little Bit" Davis our ball turret gunner was in the hospital. I had flown several practice missions in the ball turret so I replaced him. Ray May, our left waist gunner was ill and was replaced by Lt John Stanko, our non-flying 369<sup>th</sup> Squadron Adjutant, who was flying a mission to experience what combat crew members underwent during combat, and SSgt Furr replaced me in the tail. Mission #16.

The ball turret, as the name implies, was an approximately 3 foot diameter ball located on the underside of the plane causing the gunner to be isolated from the other crew members. To enter the turret the airplane had to be in the air with the guns pointed down, open the turret door, get into the turret and close and lock the turret door at his back.

Some gunners were claustrophobic about the ball turret. The gunner was separated from the other crew members. If bailout became necessary the turret had to be pointed down to open the turret door, climb into the waist and get to and hook on his parachute before bailing out. Some were bothered by this but I was confident that I could do whatever was required to bail out!

The ball turret gunner was curled in an almost fetal position. He sat on a 6 inch wide board seat. Beneath the front center of the seat was a twist lock receptacle for his electrically heated suit. The individual rounds of ammunition were connected together by metal links to form a belt that was housed in bins in the waist above. The turret was rotated to the desired position by handles about head level, one on the right and another on the left with a firing button on the end of each that when depressed by either thumb fired both guns. When the guns were fired the empty shell cases and metal links were supposed to be ejected outside the turret via metal chutes. In the early days of the war

shell cases ejected but the links frequently jammed in the link discharge chutes preventing the gun from firing. To remedy that the link discharge chutes were removed and the links dropped into the turret. Then as enemy activity permitted the ball turret gunner would pick them up and one by one put them out of the slot in the side of the turret. A time-consuming process! I was told that after I completed my missions a redesign of the link discharge chutes cured the problem. It was the only place you could lay on your back and fight a war!

May 14 - Kiel, Germany, altitude 24,900 feet, 5 1000 pound bombs, great weather, moderate inaccurate flak, and few German fighters. I flew ball turret. Ray May still ill so Dwiggin covered both waist guns, Sgt Furr flew tail. The 44<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group lost 4 B-24's. The 367<sup>th</sup> lost three planes. Mission #17

May 15 - Helgoland, Germany was the target but weather caused diversion to Wilhelmshaven. WAHOO led the group, altitude 23,600 feet, 10 500 pound bombs. "Little Bit" was still in the hospital so I was in ball turret again, Ray May in the tail and Sgt. Nichols in waist. More than 100 German fighters attacked with cannon, machine guns, aerial bombs and moderate to heavy flak. Mission #18

During the fighter attacks I couldn't get rid of the links fast enough so they built up in the turret and blocked access to my heated suit twist lock plug. At that exact time my electrically heated suit shorted in my right groin. It was really hot so on the intercom I reported over and over that my suit was on fire. After several seconds I let up on the intercom button and Cpt Riordan, in a calm voice, said "Stay off the intercom and keep shooting!"

I finally managed to move the loose links aside and disconnect my suit, a great relief but without the heated suit I was very cold. After we were on the ground I checked my groin. I had a blister that healed in 8-10 days.

Cpt Rotter, bombardier, was wounded by a fragment of an aerial bomb dropped by a German fighter and was awarded the Purple Heart. He was the fourth 306<sup>th</sup> officer to complete a 25 mission tour.

May 17 - Lorient, France, altitude 23,625 feet, 4 1000 pound bombs. "Little Bit" still in hospital so I was in the ball turret. Another try at knocking out enemy submarines. Flak was slight and inaccurate, only a few enemy fighter attacks on the 306<sup>th</sup>. The 305<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group lost four B-17s. Maj Riordan and Cpt Spelman completed their 25<sup>th</sup> mission. Maj Riordan was the sixth 306<sup>th</sup> officer and Cpt Spelman was the seventh. With their completion of 25 missions the crew of WAHOO was history. Mission #19

Before going on I must describe Maj Riordan, pilot of WAHOO. He was a tall, athletic Texan who always looked like he had just stepped out of a band box. He took great pride in our plane and crew. On non-flying days he would often have us cleaning WAHOO and practicing emergency procedures. He believed that WAHOO must be in perfect condition and that we know and execute what must be done in every conceivable emergency! We practiced bailout procedures, engine and oxygen fire procedures, care of wounded, use of oxygen walk around bottles, etc., dozens of times. He had an unshakable determination that if WAHOO would fly he would bring it and the crew home! He did a great job training copilots to be pilots, we had several during my tour.

We crew members who had not completed a 25 mission tour then flew with a crew that was short a member, often in positions other than our usual one. We especially disliked flying with a crew with limited experience as they were lost more frequently than experienced crews.

May 19 - Kiel, Germany, altitude 25,000 feet, 10 500 pound incendiary bombs, tail gunner on Lt Charles Schoolfield's crew, target ship building yards. 40-50 enemy fighters but few attacks on the 306<sup>th</sup>, heavy inaccurate flak on 306<sup>th</sup>, but appeared intense and accurate on following groups. #20

May 21 - Wilhelmshaven, Germany, tail gunner on Lt Schoolfield's crew, aborted, #3 engine overheated and was shut down, propeller feathered, and returned to base. Check of engine oil cooler air intake found it stuffed with rags. Sabotage!!!! Mission # 21

May 24 - Awarded Oak Leaf Cluster to Air Medal.

May 29 - St. Nazaire, France, altitude 24,000 feet, 2 2000 pound bombs, tail gunner with Lt Carroll Briscoe. This was the eighth raid on St Nazaire, opposition was slight, flak was heavy and accurate, and one aerial bomb attack. TSgt Anthony Santoro, Wahoo engineer gunner, completed his 25<sup>th</sup> mission with another crew. He was the eleventh 306<sup>th</sup> enlisted crew member to complete a tour. Mission #22

June 1 - I was promoted to TSgt.

June 11 - Wilhelmshaven, Germany, altitude 26,000 feet, 10 500 general purpose bombs, submarine yards were the primary target but due to heavy clouds alternate target Wilhelmshaven was bombed. 75-80 mainly FW 190s were seen but the 306<sup>th</sup> had only 2-3 determined attacks. I was the tail gunner on Lt Briscoe's crew. Mission #23

June 13 - Bremen, Germany, target submarine buildings, altitude 27,400 feet, 10 500 high explosive bombs. Flak was very intense and accurate over the target. Only 5-6 German fighters were seen. I was tail gunner on Lt Briscoe's crew. Mission #24

June 22 - Huls, Germany - synthetic rubber plant, pilot Lt Eugene Hanes, I was tail gunner, altitude 24,000 feet, 10 500 general purpose bombs. We took off at 06:40, flew to Skegness, assembled at March at 12,000 feet and gained altitude to the Dutch coast at Vlieland, Holland. The formation was only fair and when the lead crew aborted the formation broke up. Then at 24,000 feet in cumulus clouds #4 engine failed and the prop ran away. It was feathered and the bombs were jettisoned. We stayed in formation until engine #3 quit and was feathered. About this time I counted nine enemy fighters at 3 o'clock. Lt Hanes gave the "Prepare to Bail" command. TSgt Robert Moore and I told him to try to get home on two engines. I said "I don't want to spend the rest of the war in a POW camp eating sauerkraut and wieners" (the POW food would not have been that good) and that we should say a prayer and try to get home. After the crew voted to try to go home Lt Hanes said "You asked for it" and we descended. Mission #25

We were attacked by a lone ME109 at about 18,000 feet, SSgt Mike Komo the left waist gunner gave it a long burst. The ME109 shuddered but kept on. I picked it up at less than 100 yards and gave it a long burst. The top turret gunner TSgt Frank Latta gave it a long burst. Violent evasive action took it out of sight I was sure my shots raked the fuselage.

However no one saw the ME109 go down so no one got credit! With two engines out we were a perfect target but no enemy aircraft attacked.

When we got down on the deck we had to run the flak gauntlet between the islands of Vlieland and Terschelling, and the flak boats in the channel between the islands and mainland. The flak bursts were all around us. Due to the lack of power on one side and our low airspeed we could only take weak evasive action. The concussion from a close flak burst blew out our right life raft which knocked a large dent in the right horizontal stabilizer. During our passage between Vlieland and Terschelling we got in several good bursts at three flak boats. One of them looked like it was sinking. I shot up another small boat that we flew over. Our airspeed was dropping and we were losing precious altitude. We threw out all of our ammunition but kept the guns. I don't remember why we didn't throw them overboard too.

Beginning about 10:10 our radio operator sent continuous SOS calls but received no answer. Even though we had only two operating engines our speed and altitude slowly improved because of the decreasing fuel weight. We had enough altitude to fly to our base and landed at 11:57 and learned that we had been reported lost. This was my 25<sup>th</sup> mission.



After being debriefed and turning in my gear I was treated to the 369<sup>th</sup>'s customary routine for crew members completing their combat tour. I was stripped to my shorts and a large yellow 25 trimmed in green oil based house paint was painted on my back with a similarly painted 369 underneath. It was one of the happiest days of my life.

When we were reported lost someone called Pop Fuller, an English taxi driver who only served the 369<sup>th</sup> personnel, and told him that I had gone down. When I landed I called him and told him that I had returned and was not injured. He was waiting in his taxi when I finished cleaning up and getting dressed. He took me to a phone and I called home with the good news.

Pop then took me to his home, sat me at his table with a glass of whiskey and said "Drink", it almost made me drunk. He took me back to base. According to Cpt. Thurman Shuler, 306<sup>th</sup> Flight Surgeon's diary, I was the 18<sup>th</sup> 306<sup>th</sup> enlisted crewman to complete a combat tour. It was a truly significant event, one that I had doubted that I would live to see.

Having completed my combat tour I could answer the question "Did I have what it took to fly combat"! The simple answer was "Yes"! But all must understand that I had experienced periods of terror. Encountering German fighters with their 20 mm cannons and 7.9 mm machine guns blazing away was very scary! I often remembered my first mission when we had been badly damaged by German fighters and during my combat tour had seen many planes severely damaged and frequently downed! But on those occasions even though I was very concerned I could shoot back and doing so gave me a sense of security.

Flak was different. Every time I saw flak bursts I knew that nothing could defend the plane or crew. I felt vulnerable and helpless. Flak made me perspire profusely and moisten my undergarments. It was always cold in the tail and ball turret but when your skin and clothes were moist, no matter how little, it got awfully cold! For sure, combat was character building!

My 369<sup>th</sup> Squadron "Fightin Bitin" set an early record of 42 missions without losing a plane and only one crewman being killed while the three other squadrons of the 306<sup>th</sup> were losing many B-17s. It began on the January 23 mission on Lorient, my third mission, and ended after I had completed my tour. I was very fortunate to fly 23 of my missions during that period.

### Mission Log

<u>#</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Target</u>	<u>Pos</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Pilot</u>
1	Dec. 20, '42	Romilly, France	Tail	5:15	Riordan
2	Jan. 13, '43	Lille, France	Tail	3:50	Riordan
3	Jan. 24	Lorient, France	Tail	6:20	Riordan
4	Jan. 27	Wilhemhaven, Germany	Tail	6:45	Riordan
5	Feb. 14	Bremen, Germany	Tail	5:10	Riordan
6	Feb. 16	St. Nazaire, France	Tail	6:30	Riordan
7	Feb. 27	Brest, France	Tail	5 15	Riordan
9	Mar. 6	Lorient, France	Tail	8:30	Riordan
10	Mar. 8	Rennes, France	Tail	5:00	Riordan
11	Mar. 12	Rouen, France	Tail	5:00	Riordan
12	Mar. 13	Amiens, France	Tail	4:55	Riordan
13	Mar. 18	Vagesac, Germany	Tail	6:15	Riordan
14	Mar. 31	Rotterdam, Holland	Tail	5:25	Riordan
15	Apr. 4	Paris, France	Tail	5:15	Riordan
	Apr. 13-24	Africa – Algiers & Marrakech			Riordan
16	May 13	Meaulte, France	Ball	5:00	Riordan
17	May 14	Kiel, Germany	Ball	7:20	Riordan
18	May 15	Helgoland, Germany	Ball	6:20	Riordan
19	May 17	Lorient, France	Ball	5:20	Riordan
20	May 19	Kiel, Germany	Tail	6:20	Schoolfield
21	May 21	Wilhelmshaven, Germany	Tail	5:30	Schoolfield
22	May 29	St. Nazaire, France	Tail	4:55	Briscoe
23	June 11	Wilmshaven, Germany	Tail	5:30	Briscoe
24	June 13	Bremen, Germany	Tail	6:35	Briscoe
25	June 22	Huls, Germany	Tail	<u>5:15</u>	Hanes

Total Combat Time **141:10**

### Notes

My 18<sup>th</sup> Mission - Bombardier Rotter's 25 mission

My 19<sup>th</sup> Mission - Pilot Riordan's, Navigator Spelman's 25<sup>th</sup> mission

My 22<sup>nd</sup> Mission - Engineer Anthony Santoro's 25<sup>th</sup> mission

My 25<sup>th</sup> Mission - Thank God! Going home to US

June 23 - From observing what happened to combat crew members who had completed their missions I knew that they soon returned to the US. That posed a problem. I still had the Thompson 45 Sub Machine Gun and ammunition that I was issued for our April flight

to Algiers and Marrakech. I could turn it in or take it with me! I had heard that neither crew members nor their baggage were checked. So I packed the "Tommy gun" and ammunition in my bags of clothing and other items.

June 24 - Transferred to the 12<sup>th</sup> Replacement Crew Detachment, Chorley, England for shipment to the US. While awaiting shipment Chorley personnel organized games: blind folded 50 caliber machine gun assemble/disassemble competitions, cribbage tournaments, and other activities to keep us returnees occupied.

I have always had good mechanical aptitude. Because of that, plus my combat acquired skill, I won the blindfolded assemble/disassemble 50 caliber machine gun contest. There was no prize just the personal satisfaction that I could assemble and disassemble a 50 caliber machine gun faster than any gunner in the camp!

July 4 - I was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC).

July 11 - We sailed on the QE the ship on which I came to England in September 1942. Conditions were very different, and better, from the trip coming over, the food and accommodations were much better. Returnees were assigned some duty to perform, mine was submarine and iceberg watch. I helped man and fire a 4 inch gun at an iceberg! Our crossing was uneventful.

July 15 - Docked at Halifax, Nova Scotia.

After docking I was concerned about the Thompson Sub Machine Gun and ammunition. I knew that I was not supposed to have it and the simple solution was to throw it and most of the ammunition overboard, which I did! Neither we returnees nor our baggage was searched!

We entrained at Halifax and traveled through Dartmouth, Truro, Amherst, and Moncton, Canada into the United States at Houlton, Maine to Camp Miles Standish, Taunton, Massachusetts.

My overseas tour was 10 months 16 days, August 31, 1942 to July 15, 1943. My combat tour was 6 months 2 days, December 20, 1942 to June 22, 1943.

July 16 - Received furlough orders to Old Hopewell, Alabama, my home, and to report to Salt Lake City, Utah August 15. I departed Camp Miles Standish to Atlanta via train.

Being home with my parents, brothers and sister and in familiar surroundings gave me a fantastic feeling of security!

Soon after I got home I was told that Mother knew every time I was on a mission and when I was back safe on the ground. According to family statements during those times she would do all of her normal activities but would not talk or respond to the normal family conversation. So I compared my mission log to her diary. They agreed ONE HUNDRED PERCENT!! Only Mother's trust in God and prayers made that possible.

My wanting to see my McMahan and Gibbs relatives and friends posed a problem. During the war many items were rationed including gasoline and visiting my relatives and friends required me to use the family car. Fortunately a good friend, Bill Harvell, owned and operated a service station in Bowdon, Georgia. The day after I returned he let me

know that he would give me all the gasoline rationing coupons that I needed. He and I were best friends until his death.

The first Sunday I was back my McMahan family and relatives got together on the Tallapoosa River near Ai for a fish fry and getting reacquainted gab fest. It was great being home!

The next Sunday my Mother's Gibbs family and relatives got together at the Gibbs homesite near Ranburne and had a similar getting reacquainted meeting.

Also, I visited my pre-overseas squadron at Albany, Georgia. It was great seeing my friends and Cpt Foster who I was told had posted the newspaper item on the Squadron Bulletin Board about my December 20 experience in a severely battle damaged B-17 with his comment "My Boy".

I learned that my brother Harold and I were not the only members of our family involved in the war. The non-military members had built a 210 x 34 foot chicken house and raised broiler chickens, and grew more cotton and corn.

At the end of my wonderful furlough I returned to Salt Lake City.

September 23 - Assigned to Dyersburg Army Air Base, Halls, Tennessee with a 30 day furlough home.

During my furlough I relaxed enjoying my family and friends. The quiet peaceful undemanding environment enabled me to essentially revert to my pre-combat status.

Upon reporting to Dyersburg I was assigned as a mechanic on one of the B-17s used in combat crew training.

A short time later I became aware that most of the Dyersburg enlisted combat crew instructors had not experienced combat. So, I made an appointment with the Base Commander, a Colonel (Col) and told him that I had completed a combat tour and would like to become a crew instructor. He told me that he was satisfied with the current instructors and asked me what I did before my combat tour. I told him that I had been an airplane crew chief, flight chief, and NCO of my squadron aircraft inspection crew.

He sent me to Wright Field, Dayton, Ohio for a week to test 50 caliber ammunition, a fun assignment. Then back to Dyersburg.

October 10 - Crew chief of a B-26.

October 25 – Supervisor of squadron B-17 50/100 hour inspection crew.

October 29 - I was washing the tail of a B-17 when I heard someone say "RED, (I had red hair) WHAT THE GODDAMN HELL ARE YOU DOING WASHING THE TAIL OF A B-17?" It was Gen Frank Armstrong who had been the Commanding Officer of the 306<sup>th</sup> and had inspected the December 20, 1942 battle damage to WAHOO. I responded with a salute and said "Sir ask the Colonel". He said "OK" and asked me what had happened. I told him about my experience. We then had several minutes of friendly discussion of our memories of Thurleigh, saluted and he and the Col continued their inspection.



October 30 - Told to report to the Col's office. I went, saluted and introduced myself. This time he was very nice. Obviously he had undergone an attitude adjustment and after discussion about my combat experience he assigned me as the engineer gunner on the Training and Standardization Board (Stand Board). I told him that I flew my missions as a tail and ball turret gunner, not as an engineer gunner. He dismissed me.

The next day I reported to the Cpt in charge of the Stand Board who I'm sure had received guidance from the Col and told him my combat experience and background. He agreed to give me the opportunity to prove that I could do the job.

Having been a B-17 mechanic and knowing its mechanical, electrical, and hydraulic systems I knew the things an engineer had to know and do. I just needed practice. He ran me through the procedure several times on the ground and in the air and pronounced me qualified.

Before proceeding I must describe the purpose of the Stand Board. Each combat crew member, pilot, copilot, navigator, bombardier, engineer gunner, radio operator gunner, ball turret gunner, waist gunner and tail gunner must be able to move to the same position on another crew without degrading crew performance or requiring additional training. To accomplish this required that all crew instructors taught combat crew trainees the same information. The Stand Board instructors did that by periodically checking that every crew position instructor taught the same information as all other same crew position instructors.

As the Stand Board engineer I was the senior enlisted crew member. I contacted Base Personnel and had them send all enlisted combat experienced returnees to the Stand Board that interviewed the returnee and those who were qualified and desired to become an instructor and were assigned that duty. Then Base Personnel assigned one of the instructors that had not experienced combat to a trainee crew and was sent overseas. Until all noncombat instructors were replaced I was the most unpopular person on the base!

Every month or so all Stand Board members would have sessions to get to know each other better, improve their instruction and evaluation methods and record keeping, etc. Frequently the subject was our combat experiences and the capabilities of the B-17. Often these sessions resulted in flights to prove what the B-17 could do. I remember two of these flights. One was to determine what altitude the B-17 could reach. Our best effort was 38,600 feet. Another was to see if we could feather all four engines and see how the B-17 would glide. To do that we started the auxiliary power unit to be sure we had power to restart the engines, climbed to about 15,000 feet, made certain that we had our parachutes on and feathered all four engines! We proved that the B-17 glided with full control and that the engines could be restarted with no difficulty. Of course we never told anyone about that!

On one of those days we were discussing that if the pilot and copilot were disabled could the engineer gunner land the B-17. I told the Stand Board members that I could take off and land a B-17 in an emergency. The Cpt in charge of the Stand Board promptly said "Let's find out". We went to the B-17 assigned to the Stand Board. I sat in the pilot seat, started the engines and taxied to the starting position. He called the tower for clearance

and told me to show him. The takeoff was OK so I flew around getting the feel of the controls. He called the tower for clearance to land. My landing approach was all over the sky and the landing was hard. I then taxied to the assigned parking site and parked the plane. He never touched the controls. He congratulated me and said that he was convinced that in an emergency an engineer gunner could take off and land a B-17.

SSgt Leonard Webb, a member of the Stand Board, and I were very good friends. Often he told me about the rugged beauty of his home area in Montana, about the Hungry Horse Dam that was to be built on the South Fork of the Flathead River and the post war development opportunities the West Glacier area offered. He said that when the war ended tourists would flock to the Glacier National Park area and that the lack of tourist facilities offered a fantastic opportunity to anyone who provided those services and asked me to join him in such an endeavor. I told him that my priority was to reenter Auburn and get my degree. He told me that the offer would always be open.

Christmas 1944 - I and several other airmen were hospitalized at the base hospital with severe mumps orchitis. My testicles were very swollen and padded and supported with soft material. The attending Army Air Corp doctors told each of us that our condition was the most severe they had ever seen. Upon discharge from the hospital we were told that it was very unlikely any of us would father children.

In anticipation of the end of hostilities the Army Air Corp developed a point system to discharge personnel. It included points for length of service, combat experience, time overseas, etc. I had enough points of 10 months 16 days in England, Gibraltar and Africa and was discharged September 2, 1945 at Fort McPherson, Atlanta, Georgia.

September 23, 1945 - I enrolled at Auburn as a Sophomore majoring in Soils Chemistry. That was made possible by the GI Bill that paid tuition, books, lab fees and \$50.00 for other charges. To help pay the other expenses I worked for my faculty advisor in his chemistry laboratory analyzing soil and plant samples for 25 cents an hour, not much but it helped financially. For my meals I served food at the Navy Reserve Officers Training Corp mess located on the Auburn campus.

I joined the Alpha Gamma Rho Fraternity, a fraternity for Agriculture and Veterinary students.

In Spring of 1946 while at Auburn, I corresponded with Leonard Webb (a tail gunner on one of my crews) and decided that in the summer I would visit him to check the situation and decide if I should join him in building a tourist camp. At the end of the college year I borrowed \$1000 from the bank of Heflin. To save money and pay for the adventure I hitchhiked to Montana.

Leonard and his mother lived on a few acres alongside a beautiful rushing mountain stream, an idyllic location with a view of the forests and mountains. The sound of the nearby stream always lulled me to sleep.

Soon, based upon my prior survey crew experience I got a job as a chainman on a crew surveying the area where Hungry Horse Dam was to be built. We established contour lines and located the sites where a drill crew took samples to ensure the rock formations

were suitable for a dam. The area was very rough and steep and climbing over the mountain side was strenuous tiring work, a great outside job!

It wasn't all work though. Leonard liked to fish for trout and hunt. He fished with a fly rod and flies. I had never done that so he gave me lessons. With practice I was soon catching beautiful rainbow trout.

At the end of the summer I hitchhiked home to Alabama.

During my time back at Auburn and the summer in Montana problems caused by my Christmas 1944 mumps illness disturbed my activities and sleep. Local doctors and specialists were unable to provide relief.

I received a letter from the Army Air Corps stating that I could reenlist as a Staff Sgt (SSgt). So October 25, 1946 I went to Maxwell Field and reenlisted for three years as an aircraft mechanic to let the Army Air Corp care for my mumps problem. To make a long story short Mother Nature and the passage of time with many visits to Army Air Corp medics reduced my problem to a manageable condition!

A few days after reenlisting a notice was on the Squadron Bulletin Board that anyone interested in becoming an IBM Punch Card Equipment Repairman should go to Base Personnel for screening. I was interested so I went, took a battery of tests and was one of twenty airmen chosen to attend the four month IBM Customer Engineer School in Endicott, New York and was assigned to Maxwell's IBM punch card facility to get exposure to its equipment and use.

January 4, 1947 - Reported to the IBM Customer Engineer School at Endicott, New York for 16 weeks training on the maintenance and repair of IBM punch card equipment. It included paper tape punches and readers, key punches, verifiers, interpreters, sorters, collators and printers.

No military facilities were available in the Endicott area so the Army Air Corps contracted for students to be housed and fed in the Hotel Frederick located within walking distance of our training site.

While training a test scoring machine sat in our classroom. Our instructor told us test scoring machines were not used by the Army Air Corps.

Upon completion of training I returned to Maxwell. My first trouble call was on a test scoring machine used to grade Air University student's tests and repaired it!

A couple of weeks after returning to Maxwell I was informed that I was one of five students capable of maintaining an IBM 077-A Electronic Collator at an overseas installation and sent to Wright-Patterson Air Base, Dayton, Ohio for three weeks training. While taking the class I overhauled, tested and crated a used 077-A for shipment to Germany. Upon completion of the class I was given a 30 day furlough and orders transferring me to Wiesbaden, Germany.

July 1947 - I went overseas on an Army troopship.

A few days after getting to Wiesbaden I questioned the resident IBM Customer Engineer about the 077-A Electronic Collator and told him that I had shipped one to Germany. He

said it was at Erding, near Munich, and that the on-site German IBM repairman had not been able to make it operative. Immediately we contacted the Commanding Officer (CO) of the Wiesbaden unit who I told that I had trained on, overhauled, crated, and shipped the 077-A.

The next day I was transferred to the 26<sup>th</sup> Statistical Control Unit, Erding and taken there by the Wiesbaden IBM Customer Engineer in his car.

Erding was Headquarters, Army Air Corps Supply Depot for Europe. It had been a German Air Base with stone and concrete administration, living/dining quarters, and metal storage buildings. Also it was the site for the disposal of excess, obsolete and recyclable items - much of it to be sold as scrap.

I examined the inoperative 077-A, corrected its problems and demonstrated to CO Maj Edward Sime that it would properly merge two files of alphabetically sorted punch cards into one file. He was pleased and gave me a three day pass and told me to go to Munich and get acquainted with the area.

I took the train to Munich, got a room at the American Red Cross and wandered around seeing the unbelievable damage caused by World War British and American bombing. The destruction ranged from slight to total. Consequently many streets were full of rubble and impassable. The German people were living in rooms, in basements, any place that was habitable.

Life was very difficult for the German people. There were few jobs, food was scarce, clothes were old and tattered and living conditions were very depressing. Though I felt sorry for the German people, they were reaping the results of actions by Hitler and his underlings.

The Erding Data Processing unit had the usual complement of IBM key punches, verifiers, sorter, collator and printer. The key punch and verifier operators were German females who spoke English. The IBM equipment operators were American airmen with an American civilian supervisor.

When I arrived in Germany my goal was to understand, speak and if possible, write German. To do that I enrolled in a German language class and asked the German key punch operators to help me learn their language. Many Mondays Karl Heineman, the onsite German IBM Customer Engineer who spoke English, would tell the key punch and verifier operators to speak only German to me and that he would do the same, except for technical terms. That helped me learn to speak everyday German.

I setup a program to periodically inspect, clean and adjust the IBM punch card equipment. Trouble calls were greatly reduced.

Having time and curiosity about the piles of surplus and unusable items alongside the metal storage buildings I checked and was surprised by the hundreds of WW secret Norden Bomb Sights. I took a couple back to my shop and disassembled them.

In early 1948 the Army PX advertised reconditioned Jeeps for \$575. I didn't have a vehicle and wanted to buy one. When I mentioned the sale to Maj Sime he told me that if I did not have the money to buy one he would loan me the full amount as I would need

the money I had to have a top and sides installed. I accepted his offer and bought the Jeep and put a body on it using surplus aluminum sheets from salvage.

I then took the Jeep to a German coach maker who for two cartons of cigarettes installed a top and doors. My Jeep was a perfect vehicle for my hunting, fishing, visiting historical sites and scouting around. Just before returning to the US I sold it for \$1000!

Having a Jeep enabled me to visit the historical sites in the Munich area. The most significant was Dachau. In March 1933 a concentration camp for political prisoners had been set up at Dachau that served as a model for all later concentration camps and as a "school of violence" for the SS men under whose command it operated. In the 12 years of its existence over 200,000 persons from all over Europe were imprisoned there and in numerous subsidiary camps. 41,500 were murdered.

I can't remember the name of the name of the place anymore but the site where the Germans had executed and cremated Jewish and displaced workers was nearby.

April 29, 1945. American troops had liberated the camps and its survivors.

Many WW downed American bomber crews had been imprisoned at Moosberg 'Stalag VII-A', located near Munich, Germany.

In summer 1948 I was sent TDY (Temporary Duty) to Burtonwood, England. At the Frankfurt train station I bumped into Ed Krom, a friend going TDY to Erding. We talked a few minutes and exchanged car keys. After checking in at Burtonwood I decided to have a short drive around the area. It was just getting dark when I drove off the Base, the English drivers flashed their car lights. I had forgotten that they drove on the left side of the street. A quick lane change and return to the Base took care of the situation. The next day with refreshed memory I drove on the proper side. On completion of the TDY I returned to Erding.

During my time at Erding regulations required military personnel, unless involved in activities that required other clothing, to wear the olive drab uniform when off base. That immediately identified military personnel. There was a small village several miles from Erding where locals got together on Saturday evenings to drink beer, sing songs to the accompaniment of an accordion and have a good time. American military personnel were forbidden to frequent these places!

I was friendly with the local people including a tailor and the chief of police who I kept in gasoline for his motorcycle. In turn they would have a Bavarian pipe, lederhosen, jacket, hat and hose for me. When the Military Police checked I was one of the Bavarian participants!

In a conversation with Lt Ed Ormsby, one of the unit officers, he invited me to go fishing with him. He loaned me a rod and reel until I could buy my own and from that time until I left Germany I fished most days during fishing season. The German people were forbidden to fish so I gave the fish that I caught to the local people.

Ed liked to hunt. The US Military Government (MG) controlled hunting and fishing. To hunt one called MG and requested permission as to when, where and how many persons would be involved. If hunting deer a German hunting guide was necessary. Hunting wild boar (hogs) was done at night so no guide was required.

To hunt boar required a rifle with night telescope sights so each of us bought a surplus Army 1903 Springfield rifle from Base Supply for \$10.00 and a night telescope sight on the German market, and had the German gunsmiths working in the Base hobby shop convert them into hunting rifles with telescope sights and custom fitted stocks. The cost for conversion to a hunting rifle, custom fitting a stock and mounting the telescope sight was two cartons of American cigarettes.

One night Ed and I were hunting wild hogs in a large potato field with two hunting stands, each at the edge of the woods. Ed was in one and I was in the other. I was watching the potato field and Ed when I saw him climb down from his stand and begin crawling across the field with his rifle towards a hog. It became aware of him and charged. He stood up and by fear generated strength broke the leather strap, dropped his rifle, and fled to his stand. As Ed caught the stand and swung up the hog passed under him. It angrily circled the stand a couple of times and entered the woods. Ed retrieved his rifle and we went back to the Base.

One experience that occurred at Erding stands out. I received a call from the General's (Gen) secretary that his IBM electric typewriter was not working properly. I knew very little about typewriters and nothing about electric typewriters so I told her I did not know how to repair it. She responded that I should see the Gen so I went into his office, saluted, introduced myself and told him that I knew nothing about electric typewriters. He simply asked me "Are you the IBM Customer Engineer on this base?" I replied "Yes Sir". He said "Then you are my IBM typewriter repairman" and demonstrated the problem. I took it to my shop, removed the cover to learn how it worked, adjusted a couple of screws and it worked perfectly. I cleaned and lubricated the typewriter and returned it to him. He checked it, thanked me and I went back to my shop. In a matter of an hour or so he called my CO and told him "Keep Sgt McMahan in his shop, he is too valuable to do military activities!" After that I never marched in any of the Erding parades!

While at Erding I took a midsummer furlough to Denmark, Sweden and Norway. In the Frankfurt rail station I met a Danish man in his mid 20s who spoke excellent English. We talked about our families, wartime experiences and travels. His father was a musician in the Danish Symphony opera and his mother was a housewife. He invited me to stay in his home while I was in Copenhagen which I did. All members of his family spoke English so we had good conversations, shared some great home cooked foods, listened to good music and toured many places of interest. I particularly liked the delicious open faced fish, meat and vegetable sandwiches sold by street vendors.

I then went to Stockholm by train and ferry and visited the museums and restaurants with their great seafood. I was very impressed with the people and the clean, orderly condition of the city.

Next I went to Oslo via train, visited the museums, toured the area and ate the delicious seafood that is common in the Scandinavian countries. I think that I only remained in Oslo for three days.

I was curious about the fjords along the coast of Norway. Fjords are long, narrow inlets with steep sides or cliffs, so I took a ferry to north of Bergen and visited a magnificent, awe inspiring fjord whose name I cannot remember. I returned to Erding.

Later I took a vacation to Paris, visited the Opera, Louvre, Arc de Triomphe, Cathedral of Notre Dame, Sacre Couer, Napoleon's Tomb and Follies Bergere, plus other forgotten sights. Especially enjoyable were the side walk cafes and food. At that time I smoked a pipe so I bought a Meerschaum Pipe, a real beauty and pleasure to smoke.

While stationed at Erding I experienced one episode that I will never forget. My closest friend Sgt Joe Cortes was an amiable Italian-American IBM machine operator from the Bronx. He was always jovial, smiling, and helpful. We frequently fished together. He owned a three wheel two person Italian Fiat Topolino, a vehicle that you entered by raising the front. He had a beautiful German girl friend Hilda, who he dearly loved and planned to marry. A couple of my friends were First Sgt Frances Holcomb and Sgt Jobe.

Summer 1948 - One day as I was getting ready to go fishing Joe stopped by and asked me to keep a small match box. I placed it in my foot locker and forgot about it.

A few days later my CO asked me if I had seen or heard about a GI robbing a German man of diamonds that he was selling to military personnel. He told me that the robbery had occurred in the area where I fished. I told him that I had not seen or heard anything. He asked me that if I learned anything about the robbery to immediately tell him.

Several days later the German man who had been robbed was at the Base entrance gate attempting to identify the individual who robbed him. When Joe drove in the gate the man identified him. Joe confessed and was arrested! He came to my barracks under MP guard and told me that he was the robber and that Holcomb and Jobe had planned the robbery and that the match box that I was holding contained the stolen diamonds! He apologized for the situation in which he had placed me and assured me that I was totally innocent. I gave the match box to the MP.

A day or two later the investigating officer, a Cpt in the MP, whom I had hunted with and considered a friend, called and said he wanted to talk to me. I went to his office and we had a friendly chat. He then asked me to tell him everything I knew about Joe and the robbery. I told him everything that I knew and he asked me to tell him again, which I did. He then said I knew more than I had told him. When I said I knew absolutely nothing more he said "You are a liar!" He even said that I had helped plan the robbery and progressively used more accusatory terms and called me names. This continued until about 4 in the morning. Finally he said that he had thought I had a part in the robbery and apologized for his grilling me. I refused to accept his apology and never again talked to or hunted with him!

I later learned that the man who was robbed was an informant to the US Military Government and had reported the robbery to the MPs.

Joe told the MPs that Holcomb and Jobe had planned the robbery and enlisted him to be the robber. Both denied it.

At the court-martial I was the chief prosecution witness. Joe was convicted and sentenced to prison for several years. Holcombe, the planner, was sentenced to a long prison term and Jobe for several years as well. All were sent to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

After being sentenced Joe asked me to sell his Fiat Topolino vehicle and give the money to Hilda, his girl friend. I sold it for \$1000 and gave her the money. Years later I was told that Joe had gotten out of prison and committed suicide by stepping in front of a fast moving car.

February 1, 1949 - Promoted to Technical Sergeant (TSgt).

July 1949 - My orders returning me to the US included a 30 day furlough that I planned to spend getting reacquainted with my family, relatives and friends. As usual it was on a slow Army troopship. Only 10 or so Army Air Corp personnel were on board and I a TSgt was the senior airman. The Army officer in charge told me that if we would sleep in and guard the baggage area we would not be assigned any other duty, be first in the chow line and to get off the ship. I accepted and assembled the Army Air Corp members and told them of the arrangement. Everyone was pleased.

We had no guard duty and we were first off when we disembarked. Each of us was given a 30 day furlough to visit our long unseen families.

Seeing my family and their lack of an inside bathroom caused me to want one for the family home.

At that time Sears had a service to design and provide every item needed, including loaning the tools for the installation. So I sent Sears information including bathroom location, dimensions, distance between the bathroom floor and earth, location and dimensions of the septic tank and drain field. I ordered the material and Dad, my brothers Charles, Earl and I began building the bathroom. In a few days everything needed to install the bathroom, septic tank and drain field was delivered.

Building the septic tank was the most difficult item. It required digging a large hole for the septic tank, building the tank form, mixing the concrete and pouring a two compartment concrete tank and top. We then dug trenches and installed the drain field. Hard manual labor! Doing that took about 20 days but it was worth the time, effort and cost for the convenience of a bathroom for MY FAMILY!

1950 - Getting reacquainted with my family, relatives and friends required a car so I bought a Ford sedan and visited many of my extended family.

In addition to my assigned duty of maintaining Maxwell punch card equipment I was sent TDY (Temporary Duty) to Biggs Field, El Paso, Texas to maintain the IBM punch card equipment installed there.

Properly maintained punch card equipment operates with few breakdowns. So instead of just sitting around waiting for an equipment malfunction I began supervising one of the Personnel applications. As I gained knowledge and experience, I took on a couple of applications as a means of advancing to a management position.

As I mentioned earlier, I began smoking cigarettes December 20, 1942, the day of my first combat mission. In addition to cigarettes I also smoked cigars and pipes. I especially liked the smell of a good cigar or a well seasoned pipe with good tobacco. But I mainly smoked cigarettes. As normally happens with heavy smokers I developed a cough and had a bad taste in my mouth. This made me realize that I should quit the habit. While at



Auburn in 1945-46 I had quit for several months but could not stay off the tobacco and started smoking again.

November 1950 - I resolved that I would stop smoking. One evening several of my friends and I went to a Montgomery restaurant for dinner and a couple of beers. At the beginning of the evening I told everyone that when I finished my pack of cigarettes that I would stop smoking. FOREVER! They pooh-poohed my statement which just stiffened my resolve. About 8 o'clock I smoked my last cigarette and told them that I was an ex-smoker! They said that come morning I would have a cigarette.

The next day I told everyone that I had quit smoking. Many told me that I could not and bet that I would be smoking within a couple of weeks. I took bets for such things as a beer, hamburger or milkshake. My pride in keeping my word was, and still is very strong. I won every bet! Since then I have not smoked a cigarette, cigar or pipe!

I think it was in the summer of 1950 that I decided that I would visit all 48 states that I had not already been in and started from Alabama, my home. I carefully zigzagged through the southern half of the US from east to west and when I reached California I repeated the procedure for the upper half from west to east ending up back in Alabama. I then drove to the extreme southern Florida Keys. I do not remember how many miles I drove but it was thousands.

January 8, 1951 - Received orders transferring me to the 44<sup>th</sup> Statistical Services Unit, Kelly Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas being formed to provide data processing for the projected supply function at the Air Depot to be located at Deols, a French Air Base near Chateauroux, France.

Maj Edward Zitar, CO, had assembled a cadre of experienced Army Air Corp officers and enlisted individuals supplemented by reservists from area punch card installations. Most had limited experience. Fortunately, two exceptionally capable key individuals had been selected, TSgt William Simmons, operations supervisor and Sgt Norton Boothe an active duty Air Force Reservist and IBM employee who later played a role in the development of the IBM 360 computer. To mold all of these individuals into a functioning outfit they worked in the Kelly punch card installation.

Early April 1951 - Word filtered back to Depot Commander General (Gen) Hicks that the facilities at Chateauroux were very primitive and major remodeling and construction would be required before the IBM punch card equipment would be operational. Gen Hicks and Maj Zitar discussed the absolute necessity for having the data processing function fully operational before the Supply function could begin. To determine the status of the French facilities and ensure that the data processing unit would be ready for operation Gen Hicks sent Maj Zitar and me to Chateauroux to survey the facilities and return to Kelly and report what must be done to become operational.

There were no American military facilities at Chateauroux so Maj Zitar and I each took several hundred dollars of cash and travelers checks.

Our orders directed us to fly via commercial air to Fort Dix, McGuire Air Force Base, New Jersey with the remainder of the trip via Military Air to Paris and then to Chateauroux by train.

Neither the Chateauroux bank nor the St. Catherine Hotel would accept our dollars or travelers checks. We contacted the US Embassy in Paris and were told to relax while they made arrangements. It was touch and go for a few days until the bank would exchange francs for dollars and travelers checks.

Maj Zitar and I tried to visit the French Air Base at Deols but the French military would not let us. So we again contacted the US Embassy and were told to relax until the problem was resolved through diplomatic channels. After a few days we were notified that we could visit the Base and inspect the facilities. Our inspection showed that it was old, that the buildings were in very poor condition and major renovation and construction of buildings, runways and barracks would be required before the Base would be an efficient habitable installation.

The requirements for a punch card installation were dependable electric power, a clean dust free concrete floor and properly located electrical outlets. We were told that the French electrical system was undependable which meant that we had to provide our own power. As I remember two 100 kilowatt (kw) diesel generators, one for normal operation and the other for backup, a 10 kw gasoline powered generator for emergency operation and a 5 kw gasoline generator were requisitioned. That meant that we had to have a second building near our main building for our electrical power equipment. There was only one building on the Base that could be adapted to house our punch card equipment and it had a small building alongside that would make an ideal generator building. It was the French motor pool's vehicle servicing facility complete with a concrete grease rack, ideal for the US Air Depot motor pool's use.

I told Maj Zitar that I could remove the concrete ramps and vehicle rack so that the motor pool would not want the site if when our squadron personnel and equipment arrived he would get a truck with an air compressor and air hammer before the motor pool personnel had time to survey the facilities. He agreed with my idea.

We sent a report to Gen Hicks and informed him that we should remain in France and supervise whatever might develop and requested permission to do so. He agreed.

One item needing immediate action was arranging for repair parts for our IBM punch card equipment. We went to US Army Air Corp Europe (USAFE) Headquarters, Wiesbaden, Germany and setup the procedure for repair parts.

Maj Zitar needed a car so we went to Paris and he bought a Quatre Chevaux (Four Horsepower) Renault, a very small car with all the extras. The cost was less than \$1000!

July 1951 - Air Depot personnel and equipment arrived. Maj Zitar got a truck, air compressor and air hammer and I recruited some 44<sup>th</sup> personnel and removed the vehicle service concrete ramps. When the Air Depot motor pool learned what had been done they were very upset but the deed was done. Gen Hicks, the Air Depot Commanding Officer, told everyone that the buildings belonged to the 44<sup>th</sup>!

At that point Maj Zitar told me to do whatever was needed to get our buildings renovated and IBM punch card equipment installed and that he would clean up any management problems. He told the unit officers in my presence that I was in charge and that they must carry out my instructions! A few difficult situations arose but Maj Zitar was true to his word and the 44<sup>th</sup> was operational two weeks before our scheduled date!

When I drew the plans for renovation of the IBM equipment and power buildings I included an IBM equipment maintenance room. When the 44<sup>th</sup> personnel arrived I asked them to scout around and liberate about 15 pieces of 10 foot 4 x 4s and several sheets of quarter inch plywood. A work bench top was made from 9 pieces of the 4 x 4 material joined together with threaded rods that I bought on the French market and hand planed flat. A sloping plywood area was built on the back for a voltmeter and tube tester. The remaining plywood was used for the workbench drawers. The bench was a big help.

Several events that occurred at Chateauroux stand out in my memory. The most vivid involved our power shack with the 2 diesel and 2 gasoline generators. As I mentioned earlier the French motor pool had used the generator building to service their vehicles. The floor was oil soaked and even though we had scrubbed the floor several times we could not get all of the oil and grease out. A few weeks after we became operational our power operator spilled oil and diesel fuel on the floor. Then while one of diesel generators was running, he cleaned the floor by scrubbing it with gasoline and decided to check the 5 kw generator whose exhaust discharged downward about 3 to 4 inches above the floor. When he started the generator the gasoline on the floor ignited! He ran into my maintenance room and told me the generator shack was on fire. I grabbed a large CO2 extinguisher and spraying on the shack floor in front of me I walked to the middle and then turned round and round and sprayed the floor until the fire was out. While this was happening Maj Zitar came out to the generator shack and saw what I was doing. He never stopped congratulating me and telling how stupid a redheaded Irishman can be!

January 9, 1952 - Promoted to Master Sergeant (MSgt).

Later I visited Paris and bought an English made Singer 1500 convertible with a four-cylinder engine, cost \$1850.00. In top tune it would do 87 mph downhill! With the top up it looked hideous, but with the top down it was a beauty. The body was formed aluminum skin fastened onto a wooden frame with small nails. The doors were attached to the wooden frame with screws which meant that Chateauroux being a rainy, muddy place caused the doors to sag and the metal body skin to loosen. Frequent maintenance was necessary to tighten the nails and screws! The Singer's strong suite was the way it handled. In a sharp 90° turn at 60 mph all four wheels stayed on the ground. It handled like a sports car!

In mid-summer I took a furlough to England, shipped my Singer through the 'Chunnel' and visited London and tried to visit Thurleigh, my wartime base. To my surprise it was a classified Royal Air Force station and I was not permitted to visit it.

Early 1952 – A test for Warrant Officer was administered to qualified enlisted personnel. I took the test and received orders commissioning me a Warrant Officer 3 in the Reserve effective August 21, 1953.

Late 1952 - Norton Booth and I took a furlough to Paris and Spain. Both of us spoke German and French but neither of us spoke Spanish! We drove Norton's Austin A40 Sport Convertible as it was more comfortable than my Singer. Our first stop was Paris. We spent two days seeing the sites and then drove to Spain.

At that time Spain was ruled by Dictator Francisco Franco. The Spanish military was everywhere. Frequently we were stopped at checkpoints by armed guards and our

papers (military orders), luggage and vehicle were examined. Norton and I were not concerned, just curious about the people and culture.

The day we reached San Sebastian it snowed in the mountains causing a couple of days delay.

When the snow was cleared we drove to the historic city of Pamplona and had an interesting tour of the site of the movie 'Running of The Bulls'. For centuries bullfighters have run ahead of the bulls the half mile between the bulls release from their corrals and the bull ring. At that time a number of bullfighters had been killed by the bulls and others seriously hurt.

We drove to Madrid and visited the usual museums and tourist sites for several days.

Then we drove south visiting sites in Toledo, Córdoba and Seville. A few kilometers before reaching Jerez I was driving about 40 mph through the rolling countryside when the engine developed a loud clunk. I immediately pulled over and stopped. We had no idea what was wrong, just that we had a problem! While we were discussing our dilemma two Spanish laborers on a truck going in our direction stopped and spoke to us in Spanish which neither of us understood. We tried English, French and German with no luck. After a few minutes they took a tow cable from their truck and motioned that they would tow us. We shook our heads in agreement and they towed us to the Austin garage in Jerez. We tried to pay them but they refused. We then offered each a pack of cigarettes which they gladly accepted. A fantastic deal for all of us!

We were lucky! The owner of the garage spoke Kings English. His head mechanic listened to the engine and told us that the crankshaft was broken and that a replacement crankshaft would be ordered from England and delivered in a few days. Norton told him to repair the car. The garage owner invited us to stay at his nearby ranch, on which he raised fighting bulls while we waited for the car to be repaired. Not wanting to be stuck out in the country without transportation we declined and took a room at a hotel in Jerez.

Our plan was to use local trains and buses to visit towns and villages in the area. The second day of visiting the area our tour bus stopped to help a stalled car. It was an English Army Major and his wife who were stationed at Gibraltar. He was working on his car engine wearing nice leather gloves. He was a dentist and wanted to keep his hands clean! We mentioned that our Austin A40 Sport was in a Jerez garage for repair. He was familiar with the area and asked which garage our car was in. When we told him he said that the owner was an unscrupulous crook and advised us to have our car trucked to Gibraltar for repair.

On our return to the garage we found the engine had been disassembled and parts scattered throughout the garage. Norton told the garage owner that he wanted the car and disassembled engine placed on a truck and hauled to Gibraltar. The garage owner protested but after some heated discussion he agreed to get a truck. The car and engine parts were loaded Friday evening. Early the next day the driver, Norton and I departed for Gibraltar. The drive to the Spain-Gibraltar border was uneventful. At the border the Spanish border guards would not let the car cross into Gibraltar. Spanish law required a vehicle to cross the border under its own power. After discussion we called the American Consulate in Gibraltar for help. A member of the Consulate staff met us and arranged for the car to be unloaded so Norton and I could push it across the border. A truck from the

Gibraltar Austin garage loaded our car and transported it to their garage. After examining the engine a replacement crankshaft was ordered and we were told it would be about a week before the car would be ready for pickup. That would cause us to be AWOL (Absent With Out Leave) before the car was repaired. We sent a telegram to Chateauroux that we had car trouble and would return after it was repaired.

Norton and I discussed what we would do during the week and decided to visit North Africa. We took a ferry to Ceuta, Morocco which we toured and then on to Tangier. After a couple of days we returned to Gibraltar. We decided that while waiting we would see as much of Spain as time permitted. So we took a room at the Hotel Reina Cristina in Algeciras a few kilometers from Gibraltar. The rooms, service and food were tops. In 2000 I learned that it was rated as one of the 300 best hotels in the world! Though drinking was never my style I remember the hotel bar had an unlimited supply of anchovy stuffed olives and being fond of them I would order a drink and gorge myself and then suffer from an unquenchable thirst!

I can't remember what sites we toured while waiting for our car repair, time has dimmed my memory. The day the repair was completed we departed Gibraltar.

Though technically AWOL we decided to proceed with deliberate haste on our return to Chateauroux. There were too many interesting sights to hurry. The Spanish part of our route took us through Malaga, Grenada, Lorca, Murcia, Valencia, Tarragona and Barcelona. We visited the sites in each of these cities. On our way through France we visited the historic walled city of Carcassonne. Needless to say we were welcomed back amid spurious accusations of being AWOL!

For me one of the great pleasures of France was the food. Even the smallest French restaurant served tasty food at very reasonable prices. One of my favorites was the omelet. I never had a bad one!

A month or so before the end of my 3 year tour I was asked to extend my tour for an additional year to help setup a new IBM Punch Card unit planned for Wiesbaden, Germany which I did. I was told that the building was completely bare. My job was to determine the electrical requirement, placement of the IBM equipment and electrical outlets and lighting levels. Cpt Klette, whom I had worked with for over three years, would be the officer in charge. My friends, MSgt William (Bill) Simmons, SSgts Harold (Jack) Scarborough and George Hurley made up the IBM operator cadre, all were top-notch. I sold my Singer.

We traveled via train from Chateauroux through Paris to Frankfurt and Air Force station wagon to our Lindsay Air Station at Wiesbaden, Germany.

The plans for the equipment layout and electrical outlets and lighting took a week or so. My duties were complete so I asked Cpt Klette to let me return to the US. Good-naturedly he said that I had extended for a year and he wanted me to install and maintain the equipment that would be delivered in about two months so I requested a 30 day furlough to travel around Europe. My request was approved.

At that time the Army PX (Post Exchange) at Frankfurt sold cars. So, I went to the PX and bought a four door Chevrolet sedan; cost \$1800, registered it and began my vacation. I visited Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg, France, Monaco, Italy, San Marino, Switzerland,

Liechtenstein, Germany and Austria. By the time I returned the building was ready for use. Shortly afterwards the equipment arrived that I checked and we were operational.

In the evenings Sergeants William "Bill" Simmons, Jack Scarborough, George Hurley and I would go to a local beer garden and enjoy a bottle of beer. My weight climbed to 162 pounds. I stopped drinking and my weight decreased to my normal 147 pounds!

At the end of my one-year overseas extension I returned to the US via troopship. My orders assigned me to Plattsburgh AFB, New York.

For reasons only the Air Force knew, my orders were amended assigning me to the Strategic Air Command (SAC) data processing unit at Carswell Air Force Base, Fort Worth, Texas to maintain the IBM punch card equipment. Soon after my arrival Strategic Air Command ordered that the unit be phased out in about six months. The Lt Col in charge and other unit officers were transferred and I, the senior military person, was in charge of the 12 to 15 military and civilian personnel. All processing was done in an exemplary manner and on several occasions I was commended on how well the unit was performing. As workload decreased we lost staff and SAC closed the base.

A month or so after my arrival at Carswell the Fort Worth IBM Customer Engineer supervisor, a Col in the Air Force Reserves, visited and commented that there had been no calls since I was on site. We discussed my experience and he invited me to visit him in his office which I did. Our discussion included my scheduled October discharge and plans. He offered me a job at a very good salary. Even though I would have 14 years one month and 20 days service I accepted his offer!

In early October I had my discharge physical and flunked it, albumin in my urine! Immediately I told the IBM office customer engineer supervisor. He agreed that I should reenlist and complete my 20 years and told me he would pay me more when I retired.

Computers were coming into use and I wanted to get into that field. Maj Zitar, my Squadron Commander at Chateauroux, France, had retired and was assigned to the Directorate of Data Automation at the Pentagon as a member of a team installing an IBM 705 computer. I called and told him that I wanted to get into the computer field as a programmer. He advised me to get discharged, drive to Washington and reenlist for duty at the Pentagon. After reenlisting I would take a programmer aptitude test that he had no doubt about my passing.

October 15, 1955 - Discharged and drove to Old Hopewell, Alabama and visited my parents for a few days, then drove to Washington.

October 25, 1955 - Reenlisted at Fort Myer, Virginia, took and passed the computer programmer test and was assigned to the Directorate of Data Automation at the Pentagon as a programmer for the IBM 705 computer scheduled to replace the IBM punch card equipment.

Teams were being assembled to program and implement computer processing of data submitted by the Air Force commands then being processed on IBM punch card equipment. This was December 1955, the infancy of large computers. None of the supervisors, analysts, programmers or operators had any computer experience. Hence all were required to attend an IBM conducted computer course. Supervisors to have a

good understanding of the computer system and how every application and person involved fitted into it. Analysts to have detailed knowledge of the data and processing used in the IBM punch card system and how to draw detailed step-by-step charts showing how the data is processed to produce the desired reports and programmers to know how to convert the analyst prepared charts into the language that the computer used and operators how to operate the computer.



*Me at IBM 705 console in Pentagon*

The computer to be installed at the Pentagon was an IBM 705 with 10K (10,000) memory, later increased to 20K, tape drives, card readers, punches, a printer and other supporting equipment in a large raised floor room. The computer required 65 tons of air conditioning. A brief explanation of how a computer program was created in the 1950s will help one understand what a programmer did. An Analyst, a person who knew the data and how it was processed to produce the desired report, drew a chart of the steps the computer must perform.

A Programmer converted the chart into the operations a computer performs to process the data and produce the report and then coded the steps that were punched into IBM cards and processed to convert them to a computer executable language and then created data to test and assure the program produced accurate results.

After completing the programmer class I was assigned to the Personnel team. I coded several programs that summarized data submitted by the Army Air Corp commands. The program flow diagrams were drawn by a GS civilian analyst who knew how the command data was processed. After I completed coding each program it was punched into cards that were converted to a computer program and listings made. Each programmer developed data to test their programs. Since our computer was not yet installed we made several trips to IBM Wall Street, New York and tested and debugged our programs.



After a program was debugged with programmer prepared data, it was tested using Command data that often revealed unusual conditions the analyst had not included in the flow diagram causing incorrect results. When that occurred the responsible programmer was contacted to determine the reason for the failure and program a routine to process the condition. The computer was used around the clock so calls to the responsible programmer sometimes came in the middle of the night! I worked as a programmer and after some months became a lead programmer.

*May 24, 1958 - Awarded Commendation Medal.*

Unmarried enlisted male and female personnel assigned duty at the Pentagon ate in the same mess but were billeted in separate barracks at Fort Myer, Virginia. The barracks and mess were located near the Pentagon so on nice days many of us walked to and from work.

THE FIRST OF THE TWO BEST THINGS that ever happened to me was the result of my assignment to Fort Myer and the Pentagon. A month or so after I reenlisted I was in the Fort Myer enlisted mess for the evening meal and saw a WAF (Woman in the Air Force) SSGT walk by and thought "That's the one for me". A mutual friend knew her and introduced us. She was Delphine Lucy Ostrowski, from Hamtramck, Michigan, a clerk/typist for the Director of the WAF at the Pentagon.

There was an immediate attraction. We began dating and it quickly developed into love - the only serious involvement of my life.

Neither of us had much money so we visited interesting sites in the Washington area. As our love and desire to know each other grew we discussed our childhood, families, personal ideas and problems. One of the items we discussed was that as a result of my 1944-45 case of mumps, I could not father children. Del said that was not a problem.

I visited Del's family in Hamtramck and truly enjoyed her father, brothers and sister. Her half Polish- half German mother had died several years before. Her Polish father, Anthony Ostrowski, was born in Russian occupied Poland and about 1914 had migrated to the US to prevent being drafted into the Russian Army. In 1917-1918 he had served with the American Expeditionary Force in France as a machine gunner. He spoke several languages: Polish, English, German, Russian and French. He had worked and retired from General Motors.

Soon after my visit Del and I became engaged. She was a member of the Catholic Church. We attended Mass at the Fort Myer Chapel. After some time we discussed my becoming a Catholic. We discussed it with Father John McNulty, the Catholic Chaplain, and he agreed to instruct me in the Catholic faith. After religious instruction I was baptized and received Holy Communion.





January 8, 1957 - Del and I were married by Father McNulty in the Fort Myer Chapel. Our best man was George Hurley, a Catholic friend whom I had served with at Chateauroux, France and Wiesbaden, Germany and the bridesmaid was Del's sister Irene who came from Hamtramck for the wedding. Our first home was an apartment on Quaker Lane, Alexandria, Virginia. Del continued working as a clerk typist and I continued my duties as a computer programmer.

### *My Wedding Day*

The District of Columbia had innumerable interesting sites and activities. During weekends Del and I visited the Smithsonian, Botanical Gardens, Lincoln's Monument, Washington's Monument, Haines Point, Arlington Cemetery, Thomas Jefferson Memorial and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier to name a few of the many interesting sites.

October 1958 - Foreign duty appealed to Del and me so we volunteered for Germany and were transferred to the 7260 Support Squadron, Camp Lindsay, and Wiesbaden, Germany. We flew there via military air. Del was assigned as a clerk/typist and me as a supervisor and computer programmer/analyst.

We were assigned a two-bedroom apartment in an Air Force enlisted married personnel housing area.

The 7260<sup>th</sup> had an IBM 650 Tape RAMAC (Random Access Method of Accounting and Control) computer used primarily for personnel processing. The IBM 650s capabilities were limited and evolving requirements to process more personnel applications and classified data for an Intelligence organization located on Camp Lindsay mandated that we get a computer with greater processing power. An analysis of our needs showed that an IBM 1410 Electronic Computer with several tape drives, printer, card punch and reader would provide the needed capability so one was ordered.

March 1, 1959 - Promoted to Senior Master Sergeant (SMSgt).

Getting the 1410 required retraining the entire staff. An IBM instructor taught our analysts, programmers and operators how to program and use the 1410. After converting our IBM 650 programs with the needed additional features, they were implemented on the 1410. The Intelligence unit programmed and implemented their applications.

June 1, 1960 - Promoted to Chief Master Sgt (CMSgt).

As Del and I had time off we visited European countries. Many weekend or longer visits were made to cities in Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Luxembourg, Belgium, Holland and France.

Summer 1960 - We made a memorable 30 day 5000 mile trip through France to Spain, Portugal, Andorra, back into southern France to Monaco, Italy, San Marino, Switzerland, Liechtenstein and back to Germany. Our visit to the four small European countries Andorra, Monaco, San Marino, and Liechtenstein was really interesting. Very few persons know their uniqueness; even fewer visit all 4 of them.

Both of us wanted to learn about the German culture so we enrolled in a German language class. During my previous tours in Germany I had learned to speak and read some German but wanted to improve. The instruction greatly helped each of us learn and experience the German culture enabling us to become good friends with several German families. We were especially close to the Willibald Fabian family that lived in Bingen on the Rhine River. On numerous occasions they visited and dined with us in Wiesbaden and we did likewise in their home. They had a vineyard on the Rhine and in the harvesting season Del and I helped harvest grapes and saw the early steps of winemaking.

We frequently visited orphanages in the area. Most could provide only the bare necessities. They seldom had enough to give the children any treats. We got great pleasure in buying and taking cookies, candy and chocolate to an orphanage and seeing the children's faces light up with the goodies.

We were strongly affected by seeing the orphans. We wanted a child to complete our family! As I previously mentioned Del and me had discussed the fact that due to the mumps I could not father children. We decided that we would try to adopt a boy or girl or both. A check with the Air Force legal section told us what was required to adopt a child and the German agency to contact.

We contacted the German adoption agency and told them that we wanted to adopt a child and that gender and age were unimportant. Del told them that she would gladly get discharged from the Air Force and I told them that we were eager to accept the responsibility of parenthood. After the agency checked our military status, religion, visited our apartment and discussed our American family backgrounds, we were approved to adopt a child.

December 28, 1961 - Del discharged from Air Force as a Staff Sergeant (SSgt).

Early January 1962 - Lady from German adoption office took us to a Catholic orphanage to see a child they thought would be good for us to adopt. A three-year-old boy dressed in gray short wool pants and suspenders with his tongue in his right cheek and a very quizzical look on his face was brought in. We held and talked soothingly to him. He did not pull away or cry. We immediately told the lady that we wanted to adopt him. She told us his name was Uwe Wolfgang Armin Pohl, born November 7, 1958 in the Wiesbaden-Sonnenberg Hospital. His mother Evelyn Pohl, residing at 97 Augustenstrasse, Stuttgart, West Germany had left him at the orphanage when he was six weeks old and though she had not released him for adoption thought she would soon do so. We visited Uwe at the orphanage every weekend to let him become comfortable with us. Our love for him grew with each visit.



*Hugh before we adopted him.*



*Hugh and Del at our home.*

April 13 - Lady from the German adoption office brought Uwe to visit in our apartment. He showed no fright and was curious about everything. In our presence the lady told him, in baby German, that all kittens had to go home and this was to be his home. We made a fast trip to a Wiesbaden department store and bought a couple of complete outfits since he would have only the clothes he came in.

April 14, 1962 - We brought Uwe home to live with us, a truly great, happy day. The SECOND OF THE TWO BEST THINGS OF MY LIFE!

Before Uwe came to live with us Del and I discussed what American name we would give him. After considering several names we decided he would be called Hugh, which sounded a bit similar to his German name and for his middle name we considered Del's father's name, Anthony, but felt that it was undesirable because that would result in the initials HAM, so we settled on my father's name, Joseph, as his middle name. On bringing Uwe home we called him Hugh and in a few days he responded perfectly.

We knew that due to shortages the children in German orphanages were not fed a balanced diet and lacked proper healthcare.

April 16 - Del took Hugh to the Air Force Hospital in Wiesbaden for a checkup, x-rays, inoculations and a TB (Tuberculosis) test. He had rickets due to his poor orphanage diet so we were told to be sure he took the prescribed supplements and ate the proper foods to correct the condition.

April 18 - Del and Hugh returned to the hospital for new x-rays and to check the results of the TB test. It was negative.

May 4 - Hugh got his first barbershop haircut.

May 5 - He woke with a fever so Del took him to the Air Force hospital where he was given medication.

May 7 - Fever broke and May 12 he got a gamma globulin shot for measles.

June 2 - Del and Hugh went sightseeing for the first time. He only knew baby German and that posed a problem for us. We had a wonderful German maid, Frau Gutjahr, who came each week. She recognized our problem and coached us in baby German and how to communicate with Hugh. He was an intelligent child and after a few days through baby talk, signs and intuition we began to understand each other.

We introduced Hugh to foods and fruits that he had never eaten. He was not a picky eater - his favorite fruit was tangerines.

Initially he had trouble sleeping. We soon learned that he would sleep when we held him so for a time we were up until late cuddling him. Also we learned that he would sleep while I drove around in our VW convertible. After a few weeks he began to sleep without being held or being in our car.

When we pointed to an airplane flying overhead he would say "Vo?", the German word for where. A trip to the Air Force optometrist and glasses cured his problem.

Due to limited staffing and the children's age orphanage life was very sheltered and play was strictly controlled. We encouraged Hugh to play with the children in our housing area. It was very satisfying to see his agility, speech and confidence improve. He was adapting to his new environment.

Del, Hugh and I quickly became a loving family, emotionally and physically dependent on each other.

To help his development Del took every opportunity to introduce him to interesting and varied activities. They frequently took the train to the Frankfurt Zoo or to Mainz to see other sites, went to cafés, movies, for walks around the neighborhood, Camp Lindsay, city parks, anything to broaden his knowledge and socialization. Daily we could see changes in him.

For-pay helicopter rides were offered on weekends. So on a beautiful sunny Sunday we had an exciting 15 minute flight over the Wiesbaden area, a first for all of us.

Knowing that we would soon come back to the US and that I would retire and wanting a car larger than our VW Bug I bought a VW 1500 Squareback Sedan and shipped it to New York for pickup on our return to the US and sold our VW Bug.

According to military regulations my overseas tour was supposed to end October 3, 1962. However, since Hugh's mother had not signed the release for his adoption my tour was extended to April 3, 1963.

January 8, 1963 she signed the papers. Processing of the documents for his adoption and their translation into English were completed and signed March 22.

March 24, 1963 - We flew via Air Force passenger plane to the US landing at McGuire Air Force Base, Trenton, New Jersey.

My retirement was scheduled for March 31. Normally Del and Hugh would remain to see me retire. However, Del's father was seriously ill so they flew to Detroit, Michigan and joined her family in Hamtramck. Unfortunately, her father died before they landed.

March 31, 1963 - Retired from the Air Force as a Warrant Officer 3 in Reserves with 21 years 6 months and 27 days service. All of my service had been as an enlisted airman and my active duty rank was Chief Master Sergeant.

Drove to Hamtramck and joined Del, Hugh and her family and visited for 10 days.

Knowing that my Air Force service was completed, I made a list of my time overseas.

<u>Years</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Time</u>
1942-1943	England, Africa	10 months
1947-1949	Erding, Germany	28 months
1951-1954	Chateauroux, France	36 months
1954-1955	Wiesbaden, Germany	12 months
1958-1963	Wiesbaden, Germany	<u>53 months</u>
		<b>139 months = 11 years 7 months</b>

We drove to my parent's home at Old Hopewell, Alabama and visited until April 28 - an especially good time. We were getting reacquainted with our families. Family has always been one of the most important things in my life and still is to this day. Life was very different at this time in history. In many ways it was much simpler and people seemed to care about each other much more than they do today in general.



*From left to right standing: Myself with Hugh; Bennie Tate; Clifton and Gail; Verbena and Charles (Verbena is holding Chuck, Charles has his hands on Shiela); Geraldine; Clara; Julian; Harold and My Father, Arthur. From left to right sitting: Carolyn holding George; my Mother Georgie; Del; Hal; Earl holding Jan and Jill; Judy and Patricia.*

I have always worked hard to achieve what I have as did each and every member of my family. Working a farm in the Alabama heat is no picnic but you just did what needed to be done regardless of what you would rather be doing or you didn't eat.

It makes it a little easier with a large family as you have more people to spread the work across. We always worked together to accomplish the needs of the farm. Looking back now, it was a very rewarding and satisfying lifestyle that made me who I am. God, family and country are all important.

In mid April I contacted my former commanding officer Lt Col Edward 'Ed' Zitar, Retired who was employed by the Air Force division of RCA Electronic Data Processing and told him that I was looking for a job. He told me that RCA would hire me but he must discuss it with his supervisor Andy Anderson who had been a civil service employee at the Pentagon in the data automation area and we knew each other. Ed called me the next day and said that Andy wanted me to work as the RCA liaison with the Air Force at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Dayton, Ohio. I would begin May 1 and my salary would be \$12,000, but that I could not tell my RCA supervisor since I would be paid more than he was. I accepted the offer and terms.

May 1, 1963 - Reported to the RCA office in Dayton and was taken to the Air Force office responsible for the RCA computers and was pleasantly surprised that the Air Force Officer in Charge was Col Petty who I knew from my time at the Pentagon. He and Andy briefed me on the RCA/AF computer program. RCA had recently installed two special use computers, one at Newark, Ohio in an underground facility that was used to calibrate guided missile warheads, the other at Tulle, Utah that was being used in a classified missile program.

Del and Hugh stayed in Hamtramck with her sister Irene while I was getting settled at work. In a week or so I drove to Hamtramck and brought them to Dayton. The first thing we did was to look for a house. We checked houses in Huber Heights, a new subdivision several miles out in the country from Dayton, and rented a three-bedroom ranch type house. Our choosing the house was influenced by the large number of young children in the area. Soon our household goods arrived from Wiesbaden. With our furnishings it felt like home!

Del continued exposing Hugh to everything possible to Americanize him as quickly as possible.

Del had never driven and living in the country made driving a necessity. I gave her some driving lessons to let her get experience and feel more comfortable. One evening she was driving slowly on a curvy two-lane street as she was approaching a curve to the right. The car behind us moved into the opposite lane and as it passed us it crossed the centerline and scraped our car. The driver stopped several lengths in front of our car. A person in a nearby house called the police who arrived in a few minutes and stopped between our car and the offending car. After the policeman had written a ticket he noticed an FOP (Fraternal Order of Police) sticker on the vehicle and said "Damn". The driver was a drunk policeman! Nothing was done, no ticket, no report, nothing! I could not get one bit of information from the local police department. Though it was not Del's fault, she stopped learning to drive!



My work was such that I was occasionally away from home a few days. I did not like being away from my family so I called my friend Willie Wilson who worked in Washington, D.C. He told me that ADSC-Washington, a company that processed AARP (American Association of Retired Persons) and the NRTA (National Retired Teachers Association) insurance payments needed an assistant computer operations manager. I was hired, pay \$14,000. We moved from Ohio to Northern Virginia.

### *Our House in Alexandria, Virginia*

Our first task was buying a home. We bought a three level three bedroom house in Alexandria, Virginia. It was in a neighborhood with young families located about 6 miles down Shirley Highway from where I would be working.

A couple of months after I was hired the Computer Operations Manager was fired for stealing company money and I was promoted to Computer Operations Manager with a \$700 raise.

ADSC had an office in Philadelphia doing the same processing for different states than our Washington office. I told my ADSC manager that we should combine both operations at either the Washington or Philadelphia site. He asked me to do a study and tell him which site should be closed. I told him that if my study indicated the Washington facility should be closed I would get the combined site operational but that I would find another job and remain in the District of Columbia (DC) area. He told me that I would remain on the ADSC payroll until I had a job making as much or more than I then did.

My study indicated that the Washington facility should be closed. He agreed and the DC operations were moved to Philadelphia.

When I started the feasibility study I applied for a GS employee position in the Air Force Pentagon computer facility where I had worked while in the Air Force. Instead I was hired in the newly established Technology and Standards Branch to begin the day after I left ADSC.

One of the functions of the Technology and Standards Branch was examining and recommending specific computer programming languages and techniques that could be adopted Air Force wide thereby reducing the costly, time-consuming programming that occurred when new, more capable computers and programming languages became available. I had worked here while in the Air Force.

My first task entailed validating the usefulness and possible Air Force adoption of the Common Business Oriented Language, COBOL program. My conclusion was that COBOL could and should be adopted Air Force wide. But Air Force Commands resistance to being told what to do by Headquarters prevented widespread adoption.

Also, I worked closely with the National Bureau of Standards and commercial enterprises to ensure the proposed COBOL standard could be applied industry-wide.

One standard that was adopted was the now ubiquitous Barcode in use today by cash register and product tracking scanners.

As the importance of standards increased, my job entailed developing, implementing and maintaining computer programming and documentation standards for assigned Air Force management supporting systems.

February 24, 1964 - Dad died at Tanner Hospital in Carrolton, Georgia from emphysema caused by his breathing polluted chicken house air and was buried in the Old Hopewell Baptist Church cemetery.

The next day Mother moved from Old Hopewell to Heflin and rented a duplex apartment where she lived for several years. She was known for long daily walks in the area.

She then rented an apartment from the Heflin Methodist Church and continued her daily walks.

I was promoted to GS-13 in 1965.

Summer 1967 - Del, Hugh, Irene, Bella Bratt, Irene's friend and me made an especially interesting trip along the Canadian side of the US border to visit Delores and her family, Lt Col Marvin Johnson and children Stephen, Marvin Jr. and Teresa. He was a B-29 bomber pilot stationed at Loring Air Force Base, Limestone, Maine in the extreme northern part of the state.

We drove north and crossed into Canada and drove major highways as much as possible for safety and time.

Our first sightseeing stop was Niagara Falls. The American Falls were dammed for maintenance and channeled to the Canadian Falls permitting us to walk at the base of the American Falls.

Our next stop was Toronto where we used the elevator to the top of the 2,000 foot CN Tower and used the telescope to view the surrounding area.

We visited sites in Montreal and Quebec, crossed the St. Lawrence Seaway and drove to Riviera du Loup, Canada then south to the Canada/US border and to Limestone, Maine.

During the next several days we toured the surrounding area and crossed the US/Canadian border into New Brunswick, Canada for a delicious lobster feast. Our visit with Dolores and her family was great. We had time to get reacquainted and to catch up on what happened since we were last together. It was fantastic.

On the trip home we drove US 95 with side trips to places of interest. The first stop was Bangor, the capital of Maine and then drove to Bar Harbor and visited the area.

We returned to Bangor, and drove US 95 enabling us to visit many of the historic and interesting sights along the way. We visited Portsmouth, Boston, Providence, Hartford, Baltimore, White Plains, Patterson, Trenton, Wilmington, Washington and then back home to Alexandria, Virginia. It was a fantastic trip. The next day Irene and Bella flew back to Detroit.

December 31, 1967 - Promoted to GS-14.



Another facet of my work was the Standards Planning and Requirements Committee, (SPARC), that proposed standards for computer related activities.

December 27, 1970 - Promoted to GS-15, Chief of the Technology and Standards Branch, and continued promotion of standards for all data activities.

I have been so busy documenting my work experience that I have neglected telling about my wonderful family Del and Hugh and our home. So, here goes beginning with memories of our lives in Alexandria.

Sometime after moving to Alexandria we decided that Hugh should have a dog for a pet. We took him to the dog pound thinking it would have one that he liked. When that did not pan out we went to a pet shop where he saw the ugliest puppy you can imagine, a Pug. The instant he saw the puppy he said "That one". So we bought him. A couple of days later Hugh named him Sam and they became almost inseparable. A few days after that Hugh became restless and grumpy. So we put Sam in his bed to soothe him. It worked and afterwards they shared a bed.

As we often did one Saturday Hugh and I went into Washington to visit some interesting site. As we drove in we saw a tethered hot air balloon on the lawn of the Smithsonian Museum. We hurriedly found a parking place and investigated. We were told that they were giving explanations of how hot air balloons worked and free demonstration flights. So we hung around and soon it was our turn. We got into the balloon's wicker basket and the pilot fired the gas burners that made the air in the balloon hotter and lighter causing the tethered balloon to rise to perhaps 100 feet. The pilot shut the burners off causing the hot air in the balloon to cool and sink back to the ground. It was a truly interesting and educational experience!

*Hugh wrote the following:*

*Looking back one of the many things I remember is the traveling we did when I was a child, and the many places we visited. Trips that really stand out are the time we went to Niagara Falls when the American falls were dammed so that all water was channeled to the Canadian Falls. I remember being able to walk at the base of the American Falls. Other trips I remember were to Boniface, PA and going down into an old coal mine. I remember Kitty Hawk, NC, seeing where the Wright Brothers first flew, seeing Cape Hatteras with its large lighthouse which we climbed to the top and attending the World's Fair when it was in New York State.*

*One trip really stands out. The trip to visit Mom's sister Delores and husband Col Marvin Johnson and my cousins Teresa, Steven and Marvin Jr. We traveled with Dad, Mom, Aunt Irene and Bella Brat, a family friend. We left on our trip from Detroit, Michigan to Caribou, Maine. We traveled on the Canadian side of the Seaway. Our first stop was Toronto where we went up the 2000 foot tall CN Tower. We also stopped in Montreal and Quebec City. We then crossed into Maine. While visiting Mom's family we traveled into New Brunswick, Canada and dined on lobster. We also traveled around Maine and went to Arcadia National Park in the mountains; and to Bar Harbor. It was a wonderful trip for all.*

1969-1972 - Hugh attended William Ramsay Elementary School and John Adams Middle School in Alexandria, Virginia. Both were in walking distance from our home.

When Hugh was old enough to be in Scouting Del organized a Webelo Den of neighborhood boys and was the Den Mother. By her loving care and guidance her Webelo's won several awards.

His experience as a Cub Scout caused Hugh to want to continue Scouting. A check divulged that local Troop 600 was virtually inactive because none of the Troop's qualified men would be Scoutmaster though they actively helped. Though I had never been a Boy Scout I volunteered and became Scoutmaster.

We had monthly campouts in the mountains, hiked the C&O Canal from Washington to Hagerstown, Maryland and had our annual campouts at Camp Goshen in the Blue Ridge Mountains. It was his experiences in scouting that gave Hugh his love of nature, science and the outdoors.

May 1972 - Del and I decided that I would retire from US Civil Service and move to Michigan to be closer to her sister Irene and brother Edward.

June 30, 1972 - Retired from Federal Civil Service as a GS-15.

Del's brother Victor had rented a 10 acre farm with a decrepit two-story house and garage, barn and sheds in the Bristol community located between Tustin and Luther Michigan. He did not pay the rent. We liked the area so we paid the rent with the intent of buying the 10 acres, and if available, the remaining 30 acres for a total of 40 acres.

The house, built in 1914, was covered with green asphalt siding and was heated by a wood-burning stove in the living room. Poor construction caused the houses back wall to tilt outward several inches at the top and the roof to sag. There also was an inoperative windmill over a well with a hand operated water pump. There was a two hole outside toilet.

A couple of weeks after I retired I rented a U-Haul truck in Washington and Hugh and I moved our furniture into the old house, turned the truck in at Cadillac, Michigan and flew back to Washington.

August 1, 1972 - Moved from Alexandria into the Bristol house. Hugh entered Pine River High School as an eighth grader.

A few days after moving I was contacted by a Pine River School bus driver who said the school badly needed bus drivers. I told him that I had never driven a bus and had other things to do. He returned a day or two later saying the school desperately needed a bus driver. I told him to bring me an application which I would complete and he could turn it in to the school with the information that I would drive only in an emergency.

The bus driver supervisor called saying they were critically short of drivers for the rapidly approaching school year. After talking with her I agreed to drive, took bus driving instruction, driving test and got the required license. My route took about two and half hours in the morning and the same in the afternoon. Each day during the remaining hours I busily remodeled our house.

Our first action to make the house livable was to install modern downstairs and upstairs bathrooms, an electric well pump and plumbing to supply water and hire a contractor to install a septic tank. Next, we removed the old chimney, leveled the basement sand floor, poured a concrete floor, installed a new chimney, a Norwegian Jotul super-efficient wood fired stove in the basement and an oil fired furnace to heat the entire house in preparation for the coming winter.

When the wintry blasts arrived the house was very cold even with the furnace and stoves going full blast. So we removed the drywall on all inside walls and ceiling and installed insulation and covered everything with clear plastic sheeting making the house comfortably warm. Beginning in the spring we secured our houses tilted back wall by tying it to the front wall with strap iron anchored to 8 foot long 4 inch angle iron pieces under the front and back eaves and removed the roof shingles, built a new roof over the old one and installed shingles. Before we completed installation of the shingles a late afternoon rain began. Hugh and I began putting a tarp over the roof but were having problems and it was getting dark. Del, though very afraid of heights, climbed a ladder onto the roof and helped get the tarp fastened down. That was trust and love! We never forgot!

Then the real work began. We leveled the house's uneven floor and one by one, remodeled each room by installing double pane windows, insulation, electrical and telephone wiring and covering the walls with paneling. Our final steps were to install kitchen counters, cabinets, lighting, furniture and appliances.

The area needed landscaping so we bought several truck loads of good soil and graded the area, planted grass, installed shrubbery, transplanted walnut trees and a thumb thick Willow as a Mother's Day gift for Del. After all that was done I remodeled the basement and set up a work area for my projects: building a color TV, simple radios and an area for my McMahan genealogy research. Then Del suggested that we have a second kitchen in the basement for the cold winter by installing an electric cook stove, microwave oven, dining area, radio and TV. Everything we needed to be comfortable, which we did.

While remodeling the house we realized that we needed an attached two-car garage. Hugh and I leveled the site and had a concrete approach and floor poured. Then we laid one row of concrete blocks for the walls, cut and installed the 2 x 4 framing and board on the outside. We purchased the rafters and neighbors helped us get them in place. Next Hugh and I installed insulation in the walls and ceiling, decked and shingled the roof and installed an electrically operated garage door.

We then tore down the sheds and painted the barn red. That really improved the appearance of our property.

Doing this sounds simple. With the exception of the septic tank, pouring the basement and garage floor and approach and installing the purchased garage rafters, Del, Hugh and I did everything.

Hugh attended Pine River High School and I drove a school bus one year. Del helped in unbelievable ways. It took more than four years for the remodeling and landscaping but it was worth it. We were justifiably proud!

Summer 1973 - Contacted the US Soil Conservation Service concerning what could be done to our hilly sandy property. It had been unused for many years and was covered with sparse grass, weeds and scrub bushes. A walk-over survey by US Soil Conservation Service personnel indicated it should be planted in pine seedlings that would grow to harvestable timber in 2043 - 70 years! We had the pine seedlings planted and bought the 40 acres.

Being busy remodeling the old house meant that I was always around. While reading the Cadillac newspaper Del saw a help wanted advertisement for an Electrical Occupations/Electronics class Teacher's Aide at the Wexford-Missaukee Area Vocational Center in Cadillac and suggested that I apply. I did and was hired. I jestingly accused her of wanting to get me out of her house!

My first day at Wexford-Missaukee the Electrical Occupations Instructor was absent. So, I took the class to the site where the Building Trades class was building a house and the Electrical Occupations class was doing the electrical wiring and kept the wiring going. Robert Deck, the School Director, an ex-Navy officer, thanked me and told me that I had again demonstrated that his choice of ex-military personnel as instructors was good policy.

Even though I was only a Teacher's Aide, the Electrical Occupations Instructor took advantage of how in his absence I taught the class. A priority of mine was to always be ready to teach the class. At the end of the school year the Instructor quit and I was offered the position of Electrical Occupations Instructor. I accepted, pay \$28,000 per year.



Joining our property was a 30-acre tract that with the exception of about six acres of forest was in the same condition as our 40 acres. We hoped to buy the 30 acres so we had 24 acres of it planted in pine seedlings. Several years later we bought the 30 acres for a total of 70 acres!

As Hugh aged he worked hard and being an excellent Scout earned numerous badges and advanced through the ranks and became an Eagle Scout, an accomplishment and honor that very few attain. Also he did some activities for Explorer Scout.

*Our House in Bristol, Michigan*

1977 - Hugh graduated Pine River High School and entered college at Central Michigan University majoring in Psychology.

1980 - Mother was living with my sister Carolyn in Norcross, Georgia. She became ill and was diagnosed with colon cancer that was removed at St Joseph's Hospital in Atlanta. After her surgery she lived at Ashton Woods Nursing Home in Atlanta and was crowned "Mrs. Georgia Nursing Home".

February 20, 1981 – Mother died at Ashton Woods from colon cancer and was buried alongside Dad at Old Hopewell Baptist Church.

1981 - Hugh had a chance to go to Alaska with a friend and liked it so much he decided to stay. He moved there and worked for the Anchorage School District, the State of Alaska Department of Corrections and The Boys and Girl Clubs of Alaska. He also worked as a State of Alaska Nationally Certified Substance Abuse Counselor.

1982 - Hugh joined the US Army Reserve as a parachute rigger in the 504<sup>th</sup> parachute infantry Regiment attached to the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division. He stated that he made many jumps and was discharged in 1991 as a Sergeant.

Early 1982 - My lower back began to bother me and worsened so in early 1983 I had a disk removed.

Summer 1983 - Del and I drove to Anchorage to visit Hugh. It was a memorable trip from Luther to Ludington, ferry across Lake Michigan and north into Canada at International Falls, Minnesota. Then to Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Edmonton, Prince George, Dawson Creek, Fort Nelson, Weston Lake, Tesla, Whitehorse, Haines Junction, Beaver Creek into Alaska, then to Tok, Fairbanks, Denali National Park, Wasilla and Anchorage. As part of our visit we wanted to see the midnight sun. Del, Hugh, and I drove to Fairbanks and spent the night.

June 22, 1983 we drove about 100 miles north of the Arctic Circle and spent the night watching the sun move across the horizon without setting! Hordes of mosquitoes forced us to keep the car windows up! On our return we drove to Cantwell then east on a summer-only road to Paxsons, south to Glenellen and visited Valdez the site of the historic oil spill. We retraced our drive to Glenellen and south back to Anchorage and then Michigan. HOME! A fantastic trip!

Early 1986 - I had back surgery for Lumbar Stenosis.

June 1986 - Del and I drove to Alaska and visited Hugh. We essentially followed the route of our 1983 trip.

1986 - Hugh moved to Aiea on the Island of Oahu, Hawaii and worked for the West Oahu Camp Fire Council as the director of their before and after school programs throughout the Island. A high light of his living there was attending the World Surfboard Championship on the North Shore of Oahu that Winter.

January 31, 1987 - Retired after teaching Electrical Occupations at Wexford-Missaukee Area Vocational Center, Cadillac, Michigan for 12 years.

1988 - Hugh moved from Hawaii back to Anchorage where he continued to live and work until 1995 at which time he moved to Washington State. Upon returning to Washington State, he worked at various jobs, as a Mental Health counselor at a 64 bed center for persons with severe and chronically mental illness. After that he was hired by the State of Washington and worked as a Child Welfare worker, Counselor, and with the Native Tribes of Washington.

Early February 1988 - Called Del's brother Art in Riverside, California and told him that we would like to visit him and his family. Our plan was to visit my McMahan relatives in Amarillo, Texas. It began snowing and by the time we got to Amarillo the snow was too deep to visit them so we spent the night in a motel. The next morning I-40 was cleared but it was still snowing. As I drove it snowed more and snow ruts developed lumps of wet

frozen snow. At a gasoline stop the attendant said that I had a bad tire. I checked it and saw a bump on the side of the tire so I checked the other tires and saw the same damage. All four were replaced! So we stayed at Tucumcari, New Mexico until the snow was cleared. We then drove to Riverside and had a great visit!

Sometime in the mid 1970's I learned that in 1902 my Great Uncle Wiley McMahan had written a multi page "McMahan Blood" about the McMahan family and that my Aunt Izora Giles had a copy. She made one for me. After reading it and trying to understand how the different families fitted in, Aunt Izora, Jewell (McMahan) Bush, and Dewey McMahan helped put the families in their proper place. To learn more about my McMahan family I wrote a few of the older persons asking for more details. Every time I got information I filed it and made notes to help me remember. As the stack of notes thickened I decided to update Uncle Wiley's 'McMahan Blood' book.

Proper handling of the information required a computer. Carolyn had an Apple computer that she, a teacher, used in her class preparation that was available to me every day. As I collected more information it became evident that a more capable computer was needed.

December 1981 - Organized collection of McMahan family information really got underway. I wrote letters to some of my older relatives that I was going to update Uncle Wiley's 'McMahan Blood'. I estimated that it would take two years.

Sherman Isbell, a descendant of Uncle C. B. McMahan, who was seriously involved in genealogical research on his Isbell family, learned of my effort and contacted me. He recommended that I use the Brothers Keeper (BK) genealogy program to document my research.

February 1986 – I had been using Carolyn's antique Apple computer so I bought the BK program, an IBM computer using Word Perfect and a printer to compose, index and print McMahan Blood!

My approach to collecting information was that for every person for whom I had an address I would print the information I had about their family and mail it to them with the request that they update their material and return it to me. When I received their updated material I would update their file and using the information compose each person's proposed biography for the to-be-published McMahan family history and return their biography for their approval or further work. At one point I had addresses and phone numbers for more than 800 McMahan descendants that I was mailing to. The cycle was repeated until I had information on all known William/Adeline McMahan descendants. More than 4000 persons!

Late 1989 - I had gotten information on every known William and Adeline McMahan descendant to compile a hardbound indexed 676 page book 'McMahan Blood II' (2) that I published in 1990. The first printing of 300 copies was followed in 2000 with a printing of another 100 copies. The per copy cost, including mailing of the first printing was \$40, for the second printing it was \$58.30.

My initial estimate was that it would take two years to collect the information and write the book. Actually, it took almost 10 years, over 11,000 letters, hundreds of phone calls, driving over major parts of the US visiting ALL KNOWN William/Adeline McMahan

descendants, cemeteries, courthouses, and US Census records collecting vital information.

Doing 'McMahan Blood II' was a labor of love, not one penny of the thousands of dollars cost was passed to the family! It took untold hours to write the many individual letters and compose the book. Without Del's encouragement and help I would have never completed it. She folded and inserted the letters into the envelopes and placed stamps, mailing labels and return address on and sealed the envelopes - did everything the post office required.

Researching, compiling, publishing and distributing 'McMahan Blood II' (2) is the most rewarding thing I have done in my life. I SINCERELY HOPE AND PRAY THAT IT IS APPRECIATED! For anyone interested in further information about my family lineage, the entire book, "McMahan Blood II" is available for sale on Amazon and other sites.

After we finished remodeling our old Bristol house I was busy with teaching, Hugh was a student at Central Michigan University and Del, a non-driver, was homebound! To get her out of the house and around people I offered that we buy the car of her choice. Reluctantly, she agreed. We checked several different cars and she chose a tan air-conditioned four-door Dodge Omni that I gladly bought. She then took driving lessons and got her driver's license. At first she would only drive close to home but as she gained experience and confidence she began visiting nearby friends and going to the Luther Senior Citizens Center and Cadillac.

Monday through Friday the Senior Center served healthy meals to area senior citizens. She developed new friendships and visited the Center every day. In addition to serving food the Senior Center sponsored entertaining games.

I remember two items about Del and the Senior Center. First, it needed a refrigerator and new kitchen stove. She wrote a grant request and got both.

The second item occurred in the winter as she was driving to the Senior Center. The blacktop roads were slippery from ice and snow. A strong cross wind caused her to lose control of her car and it flipped onto its top. She was not hurt and crawled out of the upside down Omni. Shortly afterwards, our US Post Office Mail Carrier, whom she knew, came along and took her home. She called me while I was teaching school and in a matter-of-fact manner quietly told me about it. Fantastic! Del had become a confident, self-reliant driver!

An auto body repair shop popped the slightly damaged roof back into shape and painted it. Good as new! Afterwards she was an even more confident driver!

After I retired Del and I went to the Senior Center almost every day. We became good friends with the people of the area. We enjoyed their fellowship.

Del was close to her sister Irene and frequently drove the 200 miles to Hamtramck to visit her.

December 27, 1984 - Irene had a heart attack. She delayed going to the hospital and died the next day. Having served in the WAC (Women's Army Corps) during World War II she was cremated and her ashes were inurned in Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, Virginia.

Sometime before her heart attack and death Irene had appointed Del her estate administrator. After her death while going through her possessions, and knowing Irene's frugality and habit of placing money in magazines for safekeeping, Del and I thumbed page by page through stacks of magazines looking for and finding several hundred dollars.

Del spent several weeks in Hamtramck sorting, inventorying and cleaning Irene's house. She notified Irene's siblings to take any household items they wanted and sold the other items and gave the proceeds to her siblings.

During our time at Bristol Del and Anna Pegon, the mother of Evelyn, wife of Del's youngest brother, Edward, developed a close friendship. Often Del would pick up Anna and they would go shopping at Cadillac, to lunch at the Senior Citizens Center in Luther and visit places of interest.

March 22, 1989 - The weather and roads had lost most of their snow and ice. Del called Anna and they went shopping in Cadillac. I will never forget the beautiful happy smile on her face as she left to pick up Anna.

I was teaching an evening class to a group of senior citizens on how to use computers when I received a call that Del had been seriously injured in an automobile accident and had been airlifted to a Grand Rapids hospital. I cancelled the class and drove to Grand Rapids.

By the time I arrived at the hospital surgery had been completed. The operating surgeon told me that Del's head injuries were very serious and if she survived she would not be normal. He was concerned because he could not find a small piece of her skull. He was relieved when I told him that a small piece of her skull was missing from having been run over by an automobile when she was four years old.

March 23, 1989 - Del died in Grand Rapids. In accordance with her wishes, her organs were donated to the Michigan Organ Donor Bank. She was cremated and inurned in Arlington National Cemetery.

With Del gone and Hugh living in Anchorage, Alaska I no longer wanted to live in Michigan. So I sold my 70 acre property to Laurel Trowbridge whose family owned adjoining property.

June 2, 1989 - After Del's inurnment I moved to Norcross, Georgia to live with my sister, Carolyn Tate.

January 1990 - Hugh invited me to visit him so I flew to Anchorage. After a few days there I decided to buy a house so we could live together. We looked at several houses and bought one on Mackenzie Drive, off Cook Inlet. The ground floor had a cathedral ceiling living room, a dining room, kitchen, three bedrooms and a bath. The full basement had three bed rooms, kitchen, dining area, game room, utility room and bath. The house had a three-sided stone chimney in the basement. Thanks to superior construction the house had suffered only minor damage from the 1964 Good Friday earthquake.

December 1992 - I flew back to Atlanta to be with my brothers and sister for the Christmas and New Year's holidays intending to return to Anchorage soon after the 1<sup>st</sup> of January.



During my visit the Atlanta Journal-Constitution newspaper had a front-page picture of a B-17 model with the caption 'Fighting and Dying at 25,000 feet' with comments by Saul Kupferman about the World War II 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group and listed his phone number. I had been a tail and ball turret gunner in the 369<sup>th</sup> Squadron of the 306<sup>th</sup> so I called Saul and told him that I was going back to Alaska in a few days. He told me that he had completed a combat tour as a radio operator with the 423<sup>rd</sup> Squadron of the 306<sup>th</sup> and that the Georgia Chapter Eighth Air Force Historical Society was having its annual reunion the third weekend of January and if possible I should stay and attend. The existence of the 306<sup>th</sup> and the Eighth Air Force Veterans organizations was a surprise and piqued my curiosity so I changed my return tickets and attended the reunion. It was the first time since the war that I had knowingly been with other Eighth Air Force personnel. It was a truly exciting time being around and talking to others about our wartime crews and experiences.

Saul called Russell Strong, the Secretary of the 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, and told him about me. Russell in turn called my pilot, Robert Riordan enabling all surviving crewmembers to establish contact. I learned that they had been trying to locate me.

After returning to Anchorage I learned that the 1993 306<sup>th</sup> Reunion would be in Seattle, Washington. I attended. The living crew members of WAHOO, Robert Riordan pilot, Anthony Santoro engineer gunner, Gerald Rotter bombardier, Charles Davis ball turret gunner, Robert Dwiggins waist gunner, and me, the tail/ball turret gunner were together for the first time since completing our 25 mission combat tour 47 years ago! I have attended most of the 306<sup>th</sup> reunions from 1993 until now.

Summer 1993 - Hugh and I flew to Prudhoe Bay on Alaska's North Slope and saw how oil wells are drilled and the oil transported down the Alaska Pipe Line. We saw wild Arctic Fox and assorted wildlife. Hugh stuck his hand in the Arctic Ocean. It was a great trip!



*Beginning of Alaska Pipeline*



*Hugh beside oil pipe cleaning "pig"*

Alaska received 85% of its operating revenue from oil. In 1995 the price of oil dropped to \$11 per barrel requiring drastic measures by the State of Alaska to balance its budget. One was to terminate thousands of employees. Hugh, a Mental Health Counselor was terminated.

With the bleak employment outlook and to reduce expenses I decided to sell my property, buy a condo, and bank any profit. A few days after listing my house for sale I received a good offer, sold it and bought a condo near Anchorage.

Spring 1995 - I sold the condo and Hugh and I moved to Puyallup, Washington and bought a double wide trailer. Hugh was employed by North West Mental Health in Auburn, Washington where he provided counseling to residents in a 65 person community of individuals with severe and chronic mental illnesses.

July 1995 - Moved from Alaska to Norcross, Georgia to live with my sister Carolyn Tate.

After moving to Norcross I became active in the Georgia Chapter Eighth Air Force Historical Society. I served as President for two years and Editor of the quarterly newsletter "Tall Tales" for four years. Also, I was active in my World War 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group organization and served as President and Secretary and organized three reunions.

1997 - Hugh worked with the State of Washington Department of Family and Youth Services.

2001 - He transferred to Vancouver, Washington across the Columbia River from Portland, OR and continued to work for the State of Washington until 2005 when he moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico.

2005 - Hugh had surgery for a back/disc blow out. In 2009 he had a severe brain injury. Since then he has been on Social Security Disability Insurance.

2005 - I had triple bypass surgery and quit driving.

2007 - Hugh was seriously ill with Serotonin Syndrome.

2009 - Hugh continues to enjoy his hobbies of photography, music, Alaska and New Mexico native culture/issues, German studies and language, playing electric bass guitar and the out of doors.

As most of you know Del and I adopted Hugh in 1961 while we were stationed in Germany. His German birth name was Uwe Wolfgang Armin Pohl and he and I wanted to find his German birth family.

2010 - Hugh and I flew to Europe to try to locate his birth Mother and Pohl family. Through a series of events that can only be called a modern day miracle, we located his birth family. Unfortunately his birth Mother, Eveline Pohl, had died in 1975. We were able to locate and meet with two of his German relatives, his Mother's Brother Jurgen Pohl, and daughter Christine. We learned that he also has another uncle, cousin, and four 2<sup>nd</sup> cousins living in Germany. He continues to communicate with his German uncle and cousin.

*Hugh wrote the following:*

*As most family and friends know I was adopted as a young child. My Father Albert supported me in locating my birth family. Without Dad's support, neither of the two trips we took to Europe would have happened.*

*In 2010 Dad and I flew to England and Germany. In England we toured London and Bedford and Thurliegh where he had been stationed and from where he flew as a tail and ball turret B-17 gunner on combat missions during December 1942 to late June 1943. There we toured a wonderful US 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force museum and Dad visited old friends. We spent a week in England, and then flew to Frankfurt, Germany.*

*In Germany we focused on finding my birth family. We went to the Wiesbaden Youth and Family Services office but they had no info to help. As we were leaving I asked if anyone knew what "Maria Helfa" was. It was a Catholic Church. We called and it had a copy of my Baptism records. We picked up the Baptism form which listed my Birth Mother's name, Evelyne Pohl and Jurgen Pohl as God parent. I had become friendly with the hotel front desk and told her about our day. She stepped in back and came back with a list of three Jurgen Pohls in the area. We called the first name on the list and determined that he was not my family. We called the 2<sup>nd</sup> name on the list. He was very evasive in his answers. We agreed to call back in a few days. The 3<sup>rd</sup> name listed was also not a relative.*

*The day before we were to return to the US we called the 2<sup>nd</sup> listed Jurgen Pohl. He answered and thanked me for calling back. We talked and determined that he was my Uncle. I had located my Birth Family! I also talked with his daughter Christine, my cousin, and we promised to stay in touch and have done so. Then we flew back to the US.*

*2011 - Dad and I returned to Germany. We traveled to Munich by high speed train and to Erding where he was stationed 1946-1949 as an IBM punch card repairman. We traveled by train and taxi while in Germany. We traveled to Frankfurt/Wiesbaden. In Wiesbaden we had a wonderful time visiting with my Uncle Jurgen and Cousin Christine and her husband and two daughters. I keep in touch with my German family.*

*Spring 2011 - Hugh and I flew to Europe and visited London with its many historically important sites. We rented a car and drove to Thurliegh, where I was stationed and flew combat missions during December 1942-June 1943. At the old Air Base we toured a wonderful museum and I had a chance to see old friends.*

*Fall 2011 – My nephew George and I were burning leaves and debris that had accumulated in his Mother (my sister) Carolyn's backyard. I saw a snake in the leaves that came out due to the fire and wanted to catch it. While George was getting a rock to kill it I reached down to catch it. It turned its head and bit the thumb side of the tip of my right hand index finger with one fang. George then caught the snake and called 911. In a few minutes my finger was swollen to twice its normal size and began turning blue. He took me to the Norcross Fire Station and gave the snake to the EMTs who immediately took me to Gwinnett Medical Hospital. They identified it as a Copperhead and gave me anti-venom and kept me overnight for observation. I was released the next day.*

2013 - In November my sister, Carolyn Tate with whom I had been living died from pancreatic cancer. At that time I moved to Lawrenceville, Georgia to live with her son George Tate, his wife Lisa and their son Joshua. I have lived here since and they have treated me like royalty and provided me with everything I need. They have taken me to all of the events and meetings of the Georgia Chapter of the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force Historical Society, the 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group and doctor's appointments and such.

2015 - Hugh went to Germany again and visited his Uncle Jurgen and Cousin Christine.

One of the accomplishments of my life that I am most proud of is my involvement in the creation of both the Georgia Chapter of the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force Historical Society and the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force Museum in Pooler, GA. The Georgia Chapter was created April 21<sup>st</sup>, 1984. There was a meeting at Dobbins Air Force Base to swear in the officers consisting of Hap Chandler as President and Henry Hughey as Vice President among others and it was done. It was on that night that the idea of creating an 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force museum was first discussed.

As for the Museum itself, it took a lot of people and a lot of effort and time on everyone's part to make it actually happen. At first the location discussed was Atlanta Georgia but it then it was decided that Savannah was the better choice due to the fact that the 8<sup>th</sup> AF was conceived in Savannah and that's where it should be. My involvement was basically accompanying Henry Hughey to meet with different individuals in Savannah to discuss any and all aspects of the museum. We made numerous trips down to talk with Wilbur Bell who was instrumental in the entire process as well as Russ Abolt who located the land where the museum sits today.

Thanks to Wilbur Bell for meeting with the Chatham County Commission and his persistence, they agreed to sell the Georgia Chapter the land for the museum. Since we were having trouble raising the funds to pay for the land and build the museum, Chatham County came to our aide by raising a bond issue which provided 12.7 million dollars for the project. As revenue was not what was hoped for in the beginning, they implemented a 1% county wide sales tax and paid for the entire project within one year. Without everyone's help including Henry Hughey, Wilbur Bell, Russ Abolt, Jimmy DeLoche and the Chatham County Commission, the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force Museum would simply not exist.

The Museum today is one of my favorite places to visit. They have a completely restored but non-operational B-17 on display as well as a multifaceted combat experience event that everyone can participate in. It gives a small representation of what it was like to go on a bombing run in the war. That is my favorite thing to do there. There is a beautiful Memorial Garden and a B-52 as well. For anyone who has not yet visited the museum, it is well worth the trip. I encourage everyone to go there at least once in their life.

Current and recent events of my life include my ongoing involvement in the 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group and the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force Historical Society consisting of monthly meetings, trips to Savannah, Georgia to the museum located there as well as annual trips to the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force reunion. I like going through the B-17 at the Savannah museum every time I am there. I very much enjoy staying in touch with old friends as well as making new ones whenever and wherever I can. My time in the military defines a large part of who I am and my "brothers in arms" in combat during that time will always be very special to me.

As for my life with George, Lisa, Josh and JoJo (the dog), when I feel up to it we go camping which I enjoy very much and have even gone panning for gold in north Georgia and to the diamond mines in Colorado. We took a vacation not long ago where Joshua took me on a fun ride on a jet ski. I love being outdoors and staying active as much as my body lets me.



*Camping at Lake Lanier with JoJo*



*Riding the jet ski with Josh*



September 1, 2015 - My Birthday! 95 years young! George, Lisa and Joshua took me on a bi-plane ride at Peachtree DeKalb Airport, a real treat! We attend at least one air show annually which I truly enjoy. It gives me a chance to hang-out with friends and spend time together. I think it was 2006 or 2007 when I had the opportunity to fly on a B-17 and one of the people who was scheduled to fly, I think it was Neal Bortz, did not attend so Joshua flew with me. He and I both thought it was a fantastic event.



Sept 1, 2016 – My 96<sup>th</sup> birthday. Members of the Georgia Chapter had a party at the “57<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group” restaurant by PDK Airport. An operational 1944 AT-6 advanced training plane flew to the airport and I got to ride in the rear seat as he flew around North Atlanta and the surrounding area. Everyone at the party knew about this but me but that’s OK. It was a real treat I will never forget!



I am currently 96 years old, soon to be 97 (Lord willing and the Creeks don’t rise!) and try to stay as active as I can. I wonder what they will do for next year. I like to take walks around the subdivision and talk to all the neighbors. George is currently building a Tiny House on Wheels and sometimes I help him with whatever I am able to do. He says upon completion he will christen it “WAHOO” (my WWII B-17 bomber) in my honor. Everyone tells me that I am going to make it to 100 and I am more than willing to make honest people out of them. What do the doctors know anyway? As for now, I will keep on taking it one day at a time.

Author: Albert Neal McMahan (1920 – Who knows!)