

World War II

The US was preparing for the possibility of involvement in the war in Europe so men were drafted for one year of training and then being part of the reserve. George was drafted in December 1940 and I was drafted in February 1941. When George's one year was up the US was in the war. George had been training for a year and soon was sent to No. Africa to fight against the Germans led by Rommel. I was sent to Ft. Benning Ga. for my basic training with the 8th Inf. I was assigned to the 4th Div Quartermaster as a truck driver. We continued to train for war and that included marksmanship, parade marching, 30 mile hikes with packs and rifles. I had enough of this and decided to try for pilot training again. Our outfit was transferred to Ft Gordon in Augusta GA, which was a newly constructed base, and near a nicer town. As a truck driver I would make trips to Atlanta with dirty laundry and pick up clean laundry. I kept my truck in top condition and would tune it up myself. Other drivers asked if I would tune up their truck so the word got out and I was sent to a mechanics school in Aberdeen, Md. This was great because I would hop a train home on weekends. At home I got engaged to a high school sweetheart. When the course was over I was transferred to the vehicle maintenance shop. I had brought my 1938 Buick to Georgia. On one trip to town I went to Woolworths to get a birthday card for my fiancée. At the counter there was a cute Georgia Peach. She was being helpful and said "didn't we have a good time last night". I had been at the USO the night before but I didn't remember seeing her. I made a date to see her again. On August 19 1942 I married the "peach" my million dollar baby from a 5&10 cent store. Of course things weren't so good at home but I had been upset with my fiancée with news that she had been seeing other soldiers and I wasn't getting mail from her. My mother and George's wife came to the wedding. Our honeymoon was a three-day pass and we stayed in the nicest hotel. The next morning my wife told my mother that Eddie is really the stuff. Down south that would mean that she loved me. My wife's middle name was Evelyn Daisy West and I called her Eve. She was really the stuff. September 28 1942 I was transferred to the Air Corp. October 14 they sent me to Nashville Tenn. for physicals and indoctrination. Then to Maxwell Field AL. for preflight school. There we were cadets similar to West Point underclass and upperclass. This was tough. I passed over 90% and we were sent to Carlestrom Field in Arcadia FL for Primary Flight training. We had to learn how to fly the single engine biplane in eight hours of instruction or we would washout. Allflight courses were nine weeks. Then to Basic training in a single wing single engine much more powerful in Bainbridge GA. The plane flew at 140mph 210 top speed and landed AT 100 Mph. Next to Columbus MS for twin engine flight training where I got my wings and became a second lieutenant on July 28 1943. I applied for fighter pilot but I wound up as a 4 engine bomber pilot and was sent to B-17 school at Columbus Ohio. Oct. 20 I was sent to Salt Lake City Utah for more physicals and assignment. I was told that I would be a B-17 pilot. They would make up the crew of 2 pilots, navigator, bombardier, radio operator, engineer and four gunners. To find out who would be first pilot we were to flip a coin and so I became a co-pilot. Then things really got screwed up which is normal army routine. They changed our assignment from B-17 to B-24 so the pilot designation remained the same and I was a co-pilot on a B-24 with a newer crew. I was very upset but now I know that what happened was for the best. We were then sent to Mountain Home Idaho for more training as a crew . Then to Pocatello Idaho for phase training which we completed in three months. I was then assigned to the 464th Bomb Group 778 Bomb Squadron. Next the war.

Family kept all my letters home so most of the info is taken from those letters. We flew as a crew to Topeka Kansas February 7 1944 for more training. The navigator's wife and Eve followed us there. February 16th we flew to Lincoln, Nebraska and the wives had to leave us. February 21 we flew to Morrison Field Florida. February 23 we flew to Trinidad, February 25 to Belem Brazil. We developed a gas leak and flew to Fortaleza Brazil for repairs. We had nice accommodations and freedom to go to town and the beach. The natives were out with their wares to sell to the soldiers and we had the money. I did buy a few trinkets as souvenirs. March 8 we crossed the big pond to Dakar No. Africa. Then to Marakech and finally to Tunis where we were temporarily based until our field in Italy was ready. Here we lived in tents and that would be for all of my duty overseas. Training continued and we flew practice missions. Before we left the states the other pilot's brother had given us a puppy which we called "putt-putt " We made up the name after our small generator on board the ship for emergency electricity. He stayed with us and usually would hang out in the shade underneath a truck nearby. It happened that the truck moved and poor little putt-putt was killed. We felt that this was an omen of what could happen to us. I missed breakfasts since milk and eggs and coffee was powdered or ersatz. The Arabs would sell us eggs fifteen for \$2.00 and we cooked them on our stove in the tent. This was a treat. About the stove, it was made from 1/2 a 55 gallon drum with the open end at the bottom. We got some parts from the mechanics to run a tube with a valve to adjust the gas to flow as a drip. This kept us warm and could be used as a stove for cooking. Moved to a temporary base at Goia, Italy and started our missions on May 2nd 1944. The first one was to Spezia, Italy and our group lost one plane due to a mid air collision. May 25 our other pilot flew as co-pilot on our plane with a higher ranked officer and was hit by flak and fighters. They were forced to crash land and we found out later that he was captured and a prisoner of war. The crew and I would go on missions as replacements for other crews. I was offered the opportunity to take over as first pilot but I decided to keep things as they were. Who knows how it would work out as all crew members returned to the states with no disabilities. We finally were moved to a permanent base at Panatella Italy . Still in tents. We were on a hill on one side and the 465th was on the other side with the runway in a valley in between. Usually they would wake us at 5:00 AM when we had a mission . We would have breakfast and then go to a briefing where we would get info on target, enemy fighter and flak and our fighter cover and escape route in case we had to bail out or crash land. On return we would be interrogated on all we observed. By that time we were ready for sack time. Thought this would be interesting. At briefing the chaplain would say a prayer. This is one of them.

AN AIRMANS PRAYER

Lord guard and guide us as we fly through the great spaces in the sky. Be with us as we take the air in morning light and sunshine fair. Eternal father strong to save Give us courage and make us Brave. Protect us wherever we go from shell and flak and fire and foe. Most loved member of our crew rides with us up in the blue. Direct our bombs upon the foe But shelter those who thou dost know. Keep us together on our way Grant our work success today Deliver us from hate and sin And bring us safely down again. O god protect us as we fly Through lonely ways across the sky. The end. And I wrote " There are no atheists in the air."

On July 7 the Red Cross notified me that my brother George was killed on June 17 He was a staff Sergeant in the 9th Div Recon Troop at St. Lo France, his squad was hit by artillery fire. I was told that I would not have to continue in combat but I decided to finish my missions. I had 27 more to go and I wanted to get revenge. I got a break in between missions and was allowed to get some R & R in Rome. Took the tour and especially enjoyed the visit to the Vatican. We went to an Italian restaurant "Broadway Bills" and had the works including all the wine we could drink. Back to complete my missions and as it turned out the 50th was the one that scared me the most. We were hit with flak which tore a big hole in the rudder and injured a tire. Made it back to base without a mishap and the grace of god.

On a letter home dated August 22 I expressed my relief that the stress was over and I would be waiting for my return home aboard a troopship out of Naples. After each mission the Red Cross would offer us a shot of whiskey if we wanted. We decided that we would let it accumulate so all finished with our missions would have a celebration party. So on August 24th we had the party but suffered the next morning. Two of our crew weren't there. One was missing in action and the other was a prisoner of war. We did a toast to them. August 26th I got my silver bars as first lieutenant. September 4th I went to the Isle of Capri for R&R. Had a wonderful time first class accommodations, wine and untouchable women. Went to the beach and the Blue Grotto. Music while we eat with waiters to serve us, movies and dances. Sometime after September 27 I must have been enroute back to the states. We landed in Norfolk, VA and then home on leave. I had R&R at Atlantic City either on my return overseas or after my discharge. My next assignment was to gunnery school in Ft. Myers FL. To fly B-24's with gunners practicing shooting at targets. I had to have transition course in piloting, link trainer code, physical training, lectures and orientation. Eve was with me and we had to find a place to stay since we couldn't afford the cost of a room at the hotel for \$4.00 per day. We did find a room in a house for \$8.50 per week. I knew that my stay at gunnery school was temporary so I applied for instructors, engineering school and instrument school but to no avail. I bought a 1941 Nash convertible because I was limited to taxi or bus to travel back and forth from town and around the airbase. There were no cars built for civilians from 1941 to 1946 only military vehicles. Some of my flight time was on a PT-17 making passes at a tower so the gunners could track fighters in combat. I really enjoyed it since it was the same type of plane that I learned to fly. After finishing my mission with the gunners I would get permission to leave the area to a location where I could do aerobatics. One mission on the B-24 was night mission around the state for gunners to get training and my co-pilot was one of the Firestones (the tire company). I doubted that he would ever see combat. We made a trip to Augusta and Eve stayed to wait the birth. I returned to base and was told that since the war was almost over I would get my discharge. It seemed like a good idea to me and so I was at the hospital at Camp Gordon when George Russell was born August 2 1945. I worked a short time at Daniels Field in Augusta where they were reconditioning military trucks. When Russ was old enough we moved to NJ and stayed with Mom & Pop for awhile.

While looking for a story I came across my brother George's' high school yearbook. One of his classmates was Robert Lewis. I knew "bud" as I called him. He was active in baseball and football and was in the German club and science club. He became a man in U.S. history. Bud served time as a pilot during World War 2. Toward the end of the war he trained as a B-29 pilot. August 6 1945 he was the co-pilot of the Enola Gay with Colonel Paul Tibbets as first pilot and commander. The atomic bomb called "little

boy" was dropped on Hiroshima Japan. Robert Lewis' expression was "my god what have we done? "I write from the conversation on the flight recorder at the minutes prior to the drop. "Col. Tibbits: five minutes to target drop // Capt. Lewis: I don't like this at all Paul // Col. Tibbits: it's a little late for objections // Capt. Lewis: I don't care we are Americans, we have the right to speak our minds. That is what makes us different from the japs and krauts. (some incidental conversation) // Col. Tibbits: Drop the bomb. Little boy is away. I'm losing control. // Capt. Lewis: It's the shockwave. Later Lewis would say "If I live a hundred years I'll never quite get these few minutes out of my mind". Lewis later became hypnotherapy patient of psychology professor Dr. Glenn Van Warrebey of Sparta, N.J. who has written about Lewis' case. Lewis and other crew members at times had guilty feelings for the 140,000 lives that were lost in Hiroshima but then find justification for the many Allied lives that were saved. Lewis created a Mushroom statue of Italian marble which he called God's Wind interpreted from Japanese as God's Will. Lewis like many of his crew has gone to their graves deeply wondering if they had done the right thing.

I can account for 225 letters home, 60 to my wife and many to friends, brothers in the service and buddies in the service. So from February 1941 (Fort Dix) to July 1945 (Fort Myers FL) I can justify at least 350 letters. When I thought about including some of those letters in my memoir the task seemed impossible so I will pick out a few letters and write parts of the letter. February 27 my first letter " We are getting the works these first few days. I'm in a tent with four other fellows and they are all nice guys. Last night we got some good entertainment. The food is O.K. and we get plenty. Expect to be leaving soon for Georgia. Give my regards to all will write soon as I get to next location . Love to all Ed. Nov. 1 1941 On maneuvers in No. Carolina I met up with George who was with another fellow who had a brother in my outfit so we went to town had supper and went to a movie and took a shower where the town had arranged for soldiers in schools and recreation centers. We went to a church recreation room and are writing our letters. The people in town have been nice to the soldiers since they had heard stories about how rough the soldiers were. Time to get back to camp. Love to all Ed. Dear Folks, 8/17/42 (We had moved to Camp Gordon from Ft. Benning in Georgia.) This is probably the last letter from Eddie as the next will be from Eddie and Evelyn I have a few minutes before going on a 15 mile hike so I'll write a few lines. We are getting married in the chapel by a catholic priest about 8:00pm Wednesday evening. Afterwards we are having a reception at Eve's sister Tweetsie's house. I am glad to hear that Mom will be here with George's wife. Hoping you will like her as much as I do. Love to all Ed. May 6 1943. At Bainbridge flight school:

Dear Mom, Sunday is mothers day and I know it is a hard day for you with three of your sons away for nearly a year. I know it will make you think when we were all together. I hope it will be a comfort to know that on Mother's Day we will all be thinking especially of you. Jack in Texas, George in No. Africa and me here. We are thinking that we will get this mess over with so you and millions of mothers will not have those sleepless nights and never-ending worry. I know that it sounds like I copied from other peoples writings but it's me speaking from my heart. Just like million's of soldiers are saying today 'I've got the best mother in the world. Love always. Eddie. July 7 1943 somewhere in Italy the Red Cross notified me this morning that George was killed in France on June 17th. I've been trying to write you all day but I haven't been able to put my thoughts in writing. It is shocking news and I can't help thinking how upset you all must be. I only wish that there was something I could do. Being so far away I am lost and know we

should all be together at this time. It's been hard for all of us while George was in No. Africa and Sicily I know that you all had the same thoughts as I expecting the worse and praying for the best. The uncertainty is what made it so hard. Then came the invasion of France and the odds were lowered. It's not fair> I see no reason why men should have to be subjected to so much when a rotation could and should have been affected. Those men had more than their share. They weren't hardend, I know. The more a person has to go through that hell, the more he becomes scared. He can see it happen to others too often. The only way a experienced soldier benefits is that he knows better how to protect himself. Sorry I seem so bitter but I've always felt that way about the 9th Div. They are a great outfit and they've done a great job. They deserve a rest. Now I want to complete my tour as soon a possible and get home to you. It's been a tough war for our family. Let us get out of it and let some of the civilians in uniform back in the states take their turn. My thoughts and prayers are more with you than ever before Please don't take it so hard. I know it is easier to say than do but it is something we will have to force ourselves to take and it hurts. I'm sorry. Your loving son. Eddie -----

I flew the next day after and wrote: "It was one of our most successful missions. I was glad. Somehow I believe that more than one German paid that day from bombs from our plane. " "Somewhere in Italy 8/22/44 It's all over but the shouting. Finished today and now I'm a ground pounder. Nothing to do but wait for orders to go HOME. I'm thankful for all the prayers and hoping I would make it. Seeing you soon. Your loving son."

During the war Pop loaned his Chris Craft 26ft. cruiser to the Coast Guard to cruise NY harbor checking for any signs of enemy action. I was away and not sure of his job. However, I know he had some duty since I have a picture of him in a Coast Guard uniform. He was a member of the Elks Club and active in the crippled kiddies committee. He had docked his boat in Staten Island NY and somehow got information of the soldiers rehabilitating at Halloran Hospital who were disabled and some who were paraplegics. He had a good heart and wanted to do something for these soldiers. He arranged to get permission to take them on a day trip fishing and cruising. To add to their enjoyment he would have girls from our family go on the trip as they were all about the same age as the soldiers. What could be better than cruising with drinks, food, fishing and pretty girls? In addition, Pop would organize trips to a restaurant and theater on Broadway with other Elks members and a night on the town. Also Pop was instrumental in a plan for the soldiers to get an award of money to help them buy a car with special devices installed for them to drive.