

CPT. VICTOR E. STOLL MILITARY HISTORY

August 1941-Nov 1948

Introduction

- The following data was taken from Dad's military records, the 603rd Bomb Squadron History obtained at the 398th Group's sixth annual reunion in Dayton, Ohio Sept. 20-23, 1989, and the 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association's web site <http://www.398th.org/>, along with other varied web searches. I encourage you to visit the 398th web site since it contains far more information than I could possibly include in this summary.
- Prepared respectfully by Bob Williams, a proud son-in-law who was privileged to have known him as Dad, and Doug Williams, our son. Doug contributed the Google Map Link and was able to embellish my efforts due to his history background and numerous conversations with his Grandfather regarding both of their military flying experiences.

Topics of Discussion

- Major events, assignments, locations, training, overseas deployments, combat missions, awards and decorations, and recognition and promotions during Dad's service to his country

The War Years



The War Years

- Aug 28, 41 inducted into US Army - Chicago, IL
- Sept 8, 41 Ft. Sheridan, IL - enlisted in cavalry for 3 years at Ft. Riley, KS
- Dec 11, 41 US declares war on Germany
- Aug 5, 42 accepted as aviation cadet
- Dec 42 completed primary flight training (9 wks at Dorr Fld, FA)
- Feb 43 completed basic flight training (9 wks at Gunter Fld, AL)
- Feb 20, 43 married Helen Kathleen Butler at Montgomery, AL
- Apr 12, 43 death of his Dad (Henry George Stoll)
- Apr 20, 43 earned his wings as US Army Aviator (Blytheville, AR-Class 43D)
- Apr 29, 43 commissioned as 2nd Lt US Army
- May 43 completed advanced flight training (9 wks at Blytheville, AR)
 - This was multi-engine training (just enough to make you dangerous)
- May 15, 43 qualified as 4 engine pilot and designated co-pilot status
- Jun 4, 43 assigned to 603rd Squadron, 398th Bomb Group - Rapid City, SD
- Jul 1, 43 398th re-designated from an Operational Training Unit to a Replacement Training Unit
 - This removed them from operational status and dedicated them to training replacement crews for other units, a relief for the wives, but a source of irritation for the officers and men.

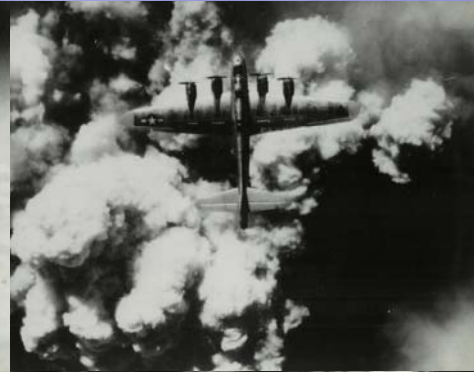
The War Years

- Dec 18, 43 temporarily assigned to Byran, TX for instrument training
 - This was an accelerated course in instrument flying that basically gave you enough skill to climb through a cloud layer - nothing more (such as an instrument approach to landing). They followed more highly trained pilots through the clouds on approaches (a dangerous invitation to a mid-air collision in near zero visibility).
- Jan 1, 44 Designated 1st pilot B-17
- Jan 1, 44 398th returned to operational status - Col Frank Hunter commanding
 - Col Hunter (Foxy) was a highly respected commander who later lost his life on his 17th mission over Germany.
- Jan 4, 44 Promoted to 1st Lieutenant
- Jan 16, 44 Completed instrument training at Byran, TX
- Apr 29, 44 398th departed for England for combat deployment - arrived May 5
 - They self-deployed flying their B17's over the Atlantic (Dad could not swim).
- May 19, 44 First combat mission
- Jun 2, 44 Awarded Air Medal - given for specified combat flying time
- Jun 22, 44 Awarded 1st Oak Leaf Cluster to Air Medal - same requirement as above
- July 18, 44 Awarded 2nd Oak Leaf Cluster to Air Medal

The War Years

- July 27, 44 Promoted to Captain
- Aug 3, 44 Awarded 3rd Oak Leaf Cluster to Air Medal
- Aug 3, 44 Last combat mission
- Aug 3 Received the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC)
 - The DFC is the highest and most coveted aviation specific award. Only the Medal of Honor and Silver Star rank above it. This was awarded to Dad, not for a specific endeavor, but for the continued bravery shown throughout 29 combat missions.
- Oct 20, 44 Departed England - arrived USA Nov 1
- Jan 11, 45 Orders to attend Instructor School
 - Conducted at Hendricks Field, Sebring, FL. (This is where they finally became fully qualified to fly in instrument conditions and became fully qualified instructor pilots).
- Feb 17, 45 Completed 4 Engine Instructor School at Lockbourne AAF, Columbus, OH
- Mar 10, 45 Received Instrument Pilot Certification at Sebring, FL
- May 14, 45 Transferred to Ft Sheridan, IL to process for separation
- Jun 20, 45 Relieved from active duty
- Nov 4, 48 Applied for Regular Commission in US Air Force
 - Dad was contemplating a military career. (He was making \$500+ a month in the service - better pay then farming. I think Mom decided they were going to farm.)

The Missions



The Missions

This map shows the target area of Dad's missions and the location of his base in England. For more detail go to the following web site where you can move the map, zoom in and see text boxes with brief mission descriptions.

<http://maps.google.com/maps/ms?ie=UTF8&hl=en&msa=0&msid=114002511217267338178.000441724e98b52f15b9c&ll=56.36525,6.767578&spn=11.366033,29.135742&z=5&om=1>



The Missions

- (1) Berlin - May 19, 44 - The "BIG B"
 - This was the 19^h mission for the 398th and Dad's 1st. Berlin was among the most feared airspace in Germany, having some of the best Germany could muster in fighter and flak defense. The 398th lost their first aircraft on this mission when #399 took a direct flak hit on the nose, drifted right, and one of the high B17's dropped their bombs on it. Six of the eight man crew perished. It must have been terrifying to be pilot in command on your 1st mission with an inexperienced crew, and have it be such a tough target. It lasted 10 hours and 15 minutes.
- (2) Kiel, Germany - May 22
 - The target was German war ships docked in the Kiel Canal, which is on the North side of Germany on the North Sea. The battle ships put up a tremendous amount of flak, causing a near loss of one of the B17's that fought an engine fire and fighters across most of Germany. Dad's airfield (Nuthampstead, England) was attacked by German fighter bombers the night before, so they must have taken off dead tired.
- (3) Berlin - May 24
 - Dad was flying the #4 slot position behind his friend Brodine (Brody), one of two shot down that day. Brody's plane, with Squadron Commander Major Gray aboard, exploded over the target. Dad's aircraft probably flew right through the debris. Dad would take Brodine's place as Flight Lead on Jul 17. They were chewed up by flak and German ME109's and FW190's. Had it not been for the American P38 and P51 fighter protection it would have been a slaughter.

The Missions

- (4) Nancy, France - May 25
 - This time they bombed an enemy airfield, taking out aircraft, runways and supporting buildings. There is little history on this mission, leading one to believe that it was one of the easier ones. However, bombing an airfield usually results in an angry response from enemy fighters. Time enroute - 7 hours and 40 minutes.
- (5) Ludwigshafen, Germany - May 27
 - The target was rail yards. They were awakened at 3:00am, briefed at 4:30am, and took off at 8:30 am. Flying along the Alps at 24,000 ft, they encountered heavy flak over the target. There were losses, but it is not documented which squadron or group suffered the losses. They inflicted heavy damage on the target.
- (6) Dessau, Germany - May 30
 - The target was the Junkers factory (which produced the fearsome JU-88 dive bomber) southwest of Berlin. They took off in 150 foot visibility. Each pilot in command was awarded a letter of commendation on this mission, for taking off in horrible weather conditions with very heavily loaded aircraft. Imagine spiraling up through the clouds, hoping to not have a mid-air collision with another B17, then forming up into formation for the flight to the target. Dad was flying lead in the 4th element of the lead group, in the low box. The lead group took a beating from the ME109's and flak. American P47's and P51's provided excellent protection to and from the target. RAF fighter protection over the target was not quite so good. One hundred eight B17's launched that day, eleven did not return.

The Missions

- (7) Maninen, France - Jun 3
 - The target was a heavy naval gun emplacement. Eighteen B17's with P38 escorts bombed through 9/10ths under-cast. Both sides were shooting blind, so the flak was light and off target. The load was six 1,000 bombs and the flight time was 4 hours and 25 minutes. Although deemed an easy mission, one P38 was lost.
 - The Allies had established a fictitious army of inflatable and wooden tanks, airplanes, fake radio traffic, etc. in Maidenhead, England. They placed Gen Patton in command of this non-existent army to try to convince Germany that the invasion would occur at Calais, across the channel from Maidenhead. The Germans believed Patton would be the leader of any Allied invasion. This target was in the vicinity of Calais and may have been staged to convince Germany that the invasion would take place there. A lot of Hitler's senior officers fell for the ruse, but Hitler remained convinced the invasion would be at Normandy, and kept most of his coastal defenses there.
- (8) Caen, France - Jun 6
 - This was D-Day and the target was invasion support. This was the first attempt at using heavy bombers for close air support. One mission was put up in the morning and encountered total under-cast. The afternoon mission was scrubbed due to weather. There are recollections of Dad saying he flew on D- Day but did not bomb due to weather. He was troubled that they could not have helped the troops more. We believe he flew the afternoon mission.
- (9) Kerlin, Bastard, France - Jun 7
 - This was a tactical mission in support of invasion forces. It was a relatively easy mission with a 4:55pm take off carrying 12 - 500 lb general purpose bombs. Flak over the target was moderate, and they took fire from German warships in the channel on the return. They landed in a pelting rain.

The Missions

- (10) Le Touquet, France - Jun 10
 - A milk run. The target was gun emplacements. They were awakened at 1:15am, briefed at 2:15am, and took off at 5:15am. The bomb load was 2-2000 lb bombs, and they dropped through a full cloud under-cast from 21,000 ft . Flak was minimal and they landed at 9:15am.
- (11) Beauvais, France - Jun 13
 - This was supposed to be a milk run. Originally briefed at 11:30pm as a mission to Bremen, Germany which was scrubbed, it was changed to Beauvais the following afternoon. The target was an airfield and there was no fighter escort. They were briefed at 3:30pm and took off at 5:05pm. The flak was light to moderate to and from the target. Several B17's were badly damaged with one shot hitting three. They bombed through a total under-cast. The flight lasted 6 hours and 10 minutes, a 24 hour day!
- (12) Bordeaux, France - Jun 15
 - The target was a Fock Wolf assembly plant (assembled the deadly FW190). Briefed at 2:30am, they took off at 4:55am for a 7 hour and 35 minute mission. The 398th put up 36 planes, escorted all the way by fighters. Flak over the target was very heavy, with the 600th squadron alone losing 3 B17's. They destroyed the target in excellent visibility with the Pyrenees Mountains and Spain in view from 25,000 ft. Col Hunter was awarded the DFC after this mission.

The Missions

- (13) Hamburg, Germany - Jun 18
 - The target was oil refineries around Hamburg. They took off at 5:00am, climbed to 25,000 ft. and dropped through an 8/10th under-cast. The flak was described as the heaviest ever seen. No fighter escort was provided. The B17's suffered a lot of battle damage, but I could not find an accurate assessment of losses.
- (14) Cazeaux, France - Jun 19
 - The target was a fighter trainer airfield. The mission consisted of 36 B17's from the 398th logging 8 hours and 30 minutes each at altitudes ranging from 25,000 to 30,000ft. Flak was light en-route and non-existent over the target. The 8th Air Force lost 11 bombers and 7 fighters that day. The 398th had one B17 crash on the beach in England on the return from target. Reports started to surface about German flown B17's with US insignia joining formations to get their altitude, airspeed and heading, to direct ground fire before departing the flight. The Germans had our radio frequencies and color identification codes, so it was virtually impossible to distinguish them as friend or foe. The rules of war were being cast aside by the Germans out of desperation.

The Missions

- (15) Berlin, Germany - Jun 21
 - This was a massive mission conducted in retaliation for V1 buzz bomb attacks. The 8th Air Force put up 2,000 bombers and 1,200 fighters. The targets were the FW190 engine plant, rail yards and various other factories in and around Berlin. Over 2,000 tons of bombs were dropped that day. Forty three bombers and fifteen fighters were lost, and twelve bombers landed in Sweden. The flak was extreme and the bombers were met by ME109's, FW190's and ME110, 210 and 410 twin engine fighter bombers (the latter three being easy pickings for the American fighters). The mission lasted 9 hours and 10 minutes and was carefully coordinated, since the chance of a mid-air collision was extreme.
- (16) Crepy (Belloy-sur-Somme), France - Jun 24
 - This was one of the few missions deemed a total failure. Group put up 12 B17's, none having PFF ("Pathfinder Force" an English invented bombing radar that gave them a blind bombing capability but replaced the ball turret and left the underside of the aircraft exposed to fighters). This and being the target of choice for head-on attacks by enemy fighters were two of the many perils of flying the lead ship. The target, requiring pin point, precision bombing, was totally obscured in clouds. Lacking radar, they were forced to turn back and drop their fused bombs in the channel. Once armed, the bombs carried that day could not be disarmed in flight.

The Missions

- (17) Toulouse, France - Jun 25
 - The target was an aircraft repair depot. They briefed at 2:30am and took off at 4:30am. The mission lasted for 10 hours (a long time in the cramped, cold B17 and on oxygen). Heavy flak was encountered over the coast and over the target. Visibility was good, as were the bombing results. They returned over the Atlantic to avoid the flak over the channel coastline. The 398th lost 1 B17.
- (18) Fresnoy, France - Jul 8
 - How wonderful it must have been to have almost 2 weeks between missions. The target was a V1 & V2 weapon site. These unmanned aerial bombs were decimating London. This was supposed to be a cake walk for 24 bombers with no fighter opposition and only light flak. (It seemed to be forgotten that the 8th had lost 79 planes on this target previously.) All went well until they turned from the initial point (IP) toward the target. Heavy flak took out the first three ships in the flight. Three of the four seriously hit that day were lost. The fourth crash landed on the beach near Manston Air Base in SE England. They managed to thread their way between concrete posts, losing altitude with only 1 engine running. These concrete posts had been erected to impede invading German tanks. Finally they came to rest in the middle of mine fields. Locals came to the crews rescue guiding them out of the mine fields. The flak was so intense that after several passes some of the Forts were unable to drop their bombs on the target. Another tough day for the 398th.

The Missions

- (19) Humieres, France - Jul 9
 - Not much is recorded about this flight. The target was simply listed as Humieres, and one crew was known to bail out over England on return.
- (20) Munich, Germany - Jul 16
 - The target was warehouses. They were awakened 30 minutes after midnight for a 2:00am brief. They encountered contrails approaching the target forcing them to climb above 29,000 ft. (quite a challenge for a B17 with 6000 lbs of bombs and still heavy with fuel). Contrails made formation flying almost impossible and highlighted them for enemy fighters. They could not exit the contrail conditions and broke up to approach the target individually. Dad's squadron lost one aircraft that day. The crew, piloted by 1st Lt Ray Gallagher managed to bail out over the target. While not specified, if they survived the bailout they were assuredly prisoners of war until the end of the conflict. This was the 50th mission for the 398th.

The Missions

- (21) Dessau, Germany - Jul 20
 - The target was a jet propulsion factory. Dad flew the lead aircraft in the lead element with Group Commander Col Hunter on board (talk about pressure). Lead was usually the first one the ME109's would pick off with a frontal assault. Flak was heavy and accurate along with strong fighter opposition. They had American fighter escort until an hour after the target. Still a flight of 20 ME109's shot down six B17's from the 444th Group. The flight lasted 8 hours and 20 minutes.
- (22) Mentreuli Area, France - Jul 24
 - The target was enemy troops and gun emplacements in the St Lo area. This was the breakout from hedge row fighting and the Allies advance toward Germany. The aircrews were anxious to lend support and minimize Allied casualties. Flak was light and inaccurate. Weather was a problem with the target obscured by haze. While not taking losses, it was a sad day. Some of the planes did not bomb due to weather; one squadron dropped on friendly troops. Such are the perils of war and you have to live with it. The flight lasted 6 hours.
- (23) Mentreuli Area, France - Jul 25
 - Same target as the day before, but in spite of poor weather the results were reported as outstanding. They dropped 6 minutes prior to the Allied ground assault on the target (some timing). Unfortunately there were more American troops killed and wounded by some of the Group's bombs. Fifty-two B17's were in the strike group. Dad flew #2 position in the 4th element. The first man in the 398th to complete his missions got doused by Col Hunter with a fire hose that day. The flight was a cake walk, lasting 5 hours and 30 minutes. More can be learned about the tragic bombing of friendly troops at the following web site: "http://30thinfantry.org/st_lo_battle.shtml"

The Missions

- (24) Leuna, Germany - Jul 29
 - The target was oil refineries in the Merseburg area. Dreaded Merseburg was ringed with twice the number of anti-aircraft guns as Berlin. Results were excellent; flack was moderate and accurate; fighter opposition was light and fighter escort was superior. Seventeen bombers were lost that day and they returned to find their airfield socked in with weather. The flight broke up with some circling in the clouds hoping the weather would clear and praying they would not have a mid-air collision with another B17. Others wisely diverted to the refuge of alternate airfields and waited for the weather to clear before returning to home base. (These were probably the more highly trained crews that were truly qualified for instrument flying). The flight lasted 8 hours and 20 minutes.
- (25) Munich, Germany - Jul 31
 - The primary target was a jet-propulsion factory, and the secondary target was the rail yards. They were escorted all the way by American P38's, P47's, and P51's. They did a radar (PFF) drop due to having a 6/10th under-cast. Results were mixed. They crossed Belgium and then proceeded straight to the target, returning the same way. The flight lasted 8 hours and 30 minutes.
- (26) Saarbrucken, Germany - Aug 3
 - Rail road marshalling yards were the targets. Results were mixed with some bombing visually and others by radar through a 5/10th under-cast. Visual was always more accurate. They took off at 11:00am, a rare luxury. Flak was moderate and accurate at 26,000ft. One B17 crewmember had his hand almost severed by flak. A P51 escort took a direct hit from flak and dove straight into the ground. The flight lasted about 7 hours.

The Missions

- **(27) Kolleda, Germany - Aug 24**
 - Take note that three weeks had passed since mission 26. The 398th was probably trying to determine how many missions were required of Dad since he got extra credit for being a flight lead. An extra flight could spell the difference between surviving the tour or not. The primary target was an airfield by Kolleda; the secondary was an airfield at Coslar. Dad was flight lead for the low group and CA (Commander of Aircraft-meaning he was commanding the 12 ships of the 603rd Squadron). Their bomb racks malfunctioned over the primary (probably due to the -40 degree temperature) so they hit the secondary target. Clearing the racks usually meant sending a crew member into the bomb bay to kick and pry the bombs to break the ice free. No fighter opposition was encountered and the flak was light but accurate. The weather was clear and bombing results from 25,000ft. were good. The route in took them close to Berlin where they saw heavy flak.
- **(28) Neubrandenburg, Germany - Aug 25**
 - The target was an ME109 construction and test site. The route was over the North Sea, across Denmark, over the Baltic Sea and near Berlin. It lasted 9 hours.

The Missions

- (29) Eindhoven Area, Holland - Sep 17
 - Eindhoven was the location of one of five bridges the Allies hoped to capture by a armored thrust up through the Netherlands to Arnhem, Holland with airborne and glider insertions near the bridges. Named Operation Market Garden, it was Britain Field Marshall Montgomery's idea for ending the war quickly. It was an absolute disaster, resulting in terrible losses to the 1st Polish Airborne Division and the death and surrender of many of the British Airborne to a German Panzer Division at the Arnhem bridge over the Rhine. The armored column intended to relieve the paratroopers along the way only made it part way due to German defenses and blown bridges. This battle inspired the book and movie entitled "A Bridge Too Far". The 398ths target was flak and artillery sites in the Eindhoven area, along the route the armored column was trying to advance. They carried the newly designed fragmentation bombs which wreaked havoc on enemy troops. On return, the crews reported seeing the sky over the channel full of gliders being towed by cargo and bomber aircraft. The mission lasted 6 hours and 15 minutes.
 - Eindhoven completed Dad's required 30 missions since he had flown several as flight lead. In fact, he was later credited with 31 so he probably flew one more than required. The 398th continued to fly missions until April 25, 1945. They were part of the 8th Air Force that suffered a 12.7% mortality rate, about 4 times that of the US Army and Marine Corp. Early in the war 33% completed their required 25 missions. In Dad's tour, they were required to complete 30. During that time 66% made it.

Summary

- This is a story of a farm boy with a 10th grade education that went from being an assistant postal clerk to piloting one of the most sophisticated airplanes in the world. He commanded an airborne squadron of twelve airplanes, as well as his crew, in one of the most dangerous environments known to man. He trained them, flew them over an ocean, took them to war, led them through it and brought them home. He was a man of intellect, character and courage. To him and others like him we owe our freedom. His truly was the greatest generation.
- Born November 27, 1916
- Died March 21, 2007

