

## **MOS 580 – Remote Control Turret Mechanic-Gunner: SGT Floyd Richard McCormick**

I finished High School in three years and, at the age of seventeen, signed up with the Army Air Corps Cadet program for 17-year olds. I went on to take the Army ASTP test and was accepted but opted for the Air Force. After three months (April 1944) I was sent, as an Air Cadet, to Biloxi, MS – Kessler Army Airfield – for Basic Training. Basic training lasted four weeks, during which classifiers determined the type of follow on schooling that each recruit would receive. Many stayed at Keesler to become airplane and engine mechanics, while others transferred to aerial gunnery or aviation cadet schools. We took a battery of tests – you needed to pass nine or ten in order to be assigned flying duties. They selected GCT of 120 or better for training in B-29 CFC. I also volunteered for Guard Duty while I was at Kessler; I guarded the Colonel's house. We would receive weekend passes to New Orleans.

From Kessler Field I went to Lowry Field in Denver Colorado. In the first three weeks I learned basic electricity and about the .50 caliber machine gun – how it worked and how to maintain it. Then I had two eight-week courses: one focused on how to maintain the plane's guns – there was a mock up of the Central Fire Control System.... (BUS BAR ?) There was such a strong current it burnt the pliers; the other was ground crew and maintenance training which spanned the entire 16-weeks.

Then it was off to Fort Myers, Florida, Buckingham Field. Buckingham Army Airfield was a training base, established in 1942 under AAF Eastern Flying Training Command, and when active, was the largest airfield in the State of Florida. Its primary mission during World War II was to train the aerial gunners who would defend bombers. Buckingham Field was designed to be nearly self-sufficient, with not only hangars, but barracks, warehouses, hospitals, dental clinics, dining halls, and maintenance shops were needed. There were libraries, social clubs for officers, and enlisted men, and stores to buy living necessities. As the base was east of the developed area (at the time) of Fort Myers, a seven mile-long railroad spur was constructed between the Seaboard Railroad depots in Fort Myers to Buckingham AAF. Buckingham even had its own switch engine to move railcars around. The switch engine was powerful enough to move passenger cars with new students or freight cars filled with supplies from the depot to the base.

Part of the training program was decompression/high-altitude training. This involved going into a sealed room with about 20 other trainees, the air pressure in the room was reduced in stages, simulating the climb of the non-pressurized bombers in service at the time. The first time up, I became ill. Other students developed ear problems as the pressure in the room varied to simulate flying conditions.

B-24 Liberator aircraft were the primary aircraft used for the air-to-air gunnery phase of the training. The Liberator was not pressurized and had room in the fuselage to accommodate the trainees and their instructors. B-24s were modified with sealed bomb bays and could be used for both waist and turret training, carrying large amounts of ammunition and both the .30 and .50 caliber machine guns. A B-24 might have 12 student gunners each having 2,000 rounds of the special ammunition to fire at the RP-63 Pinballs.

While at Buckingham Field, I earned two stripes and left a Corporal. In the fall of 1944 I was ordered to Lincoln, NE after Thanksgiving, giving me some downtime until then. We were shipped to Alamogordo, NM and it was there I met my B-29 crew. The standard operating procedure was to take off with four engines and land on three. We trained with one A/C for 3-4 weeks, but he subsequently broke his ankle playing softball and one of the instructor pilots became our new A/C...but only for 1-2 weeks – he didn't show up for roll call one day, apparently he had appendicitis. Our remaining crew was split apart and put into pools; about 2-3 weeks later I was called to join Freeman's crew. We traveled by train from NM to CA. President Roosevelt died while we were processing to go overseas. We picked up a brand new B-29, flew from Sacramento to Hawaii, then to Kwajalein, then to Guam. We arrived on Guam during daylight hours while crews were returning from their mission. We had to go around again in order to let planes returning from Japan with low fuel land first; one came in with the front bomb bay open and a 500lb bomb rolled out.

We practiced formation flying; Rota was our IP and the runways were our target. Three weeks later we were sent on our first mission (May 1945). It was a daylight raid, no fighters, after dropping our bombs we made a ninety-degree turn for home and found a Japanese Fleet, which sent up some flak. We completed six more missions during the month of May; 9 missions during the month of June. We were then sent to Iwo Jima for some "R&R" for 10 days.

We flew a DUMBO mission looking for a P-51 Pilot due East of Japan...we flew a grid pattern but only found the wing tip near a fishing village. We were in the air 18 hours...we carried no bombs and extra fuel. We completed 6 missions in July and 3 missions in August. During our briefing on August 15<sup>th</sup>, we were informed of a massive bombing raid and that negotiations were ongoing. Radio personnel were to be tuned in all the way up to Japan in the event we should salvo our bombs...that instruction never came. There were several targets and the lead planes carried 4000lb bombs; every other plane carried incendiary bombs...simulating A-Bomb drops. We had an in-flight

lunch and brought the leftovers back to the Mess Hall before debriefing. On this particular day the Mess Hall staff came running towards us, alerting us that the war was over. We had our usual shot and went to bed.

Now what do we do? The crew dispersed. I had made up my mind to go into Physical Education. I volunteered for the Special Services (recreation program). I was a T/Sgt now. Special Services had their own tent and I handed out equipment (baseballs, gloves, volleyballs, footballs). We would be taken down to the beach (dropped off) and hitch rides back; one day I had 3 rides, the drivers were a one-star general, a Bird Colonel and a Lt. Colonel.

I was assigned to a Replacement Crew and flew with them 2-3 times; I flew as a scanner. These flights earned me more points. I also flew in the Show of Force Mission.

I left Guam and met another "Walden Boy", Bob Kimball (458<sup>th</sup> Squadron), on Kwajalein on the way home. I ended up on the West Coast and traveled to Pittsburgh by train. I still had winter clothes...I kept and still have my flight jacket and silk pouch. I also had - from my time on Iwo - a Jap helmet, ammunition, and anti-aircraft shells.

My father was a Freight Railroad conductor; he would travel from Orange County to Connecticut and stay overnight. He would go to the movies to pass time; one time they showed a Fox Movietone reel of B-29s taking off and he thought he saw our plane K-9 "Pluto"...he did.

I was 19 years old when the war ended; I was home on leave from before Thanksgiving to New Year's. Mid-January orders came to report to Greensboro, NC. I had 21-months of active duty, 6 of those overseas; I earned a DFC and 3 Air Medals. My discharge took 48-hours.

I went to Syracuse on the GI-Bill, during registration I recognized another CFC Gunner, and he mentioned that Ted Lewis was also at Syracuse but I never saw him. I completed my Physical Education Major and a Minor in History...which required an additional two months of coursework - I went to Summer School. Upon graduation I looked for placement within an Elementary School. I taught in a one-room school - grades 1<sup>st</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup>. The Board of Cooperative Education had an opening for a Physical Education teacher and I taught there for 28 years. I retired in 1988. I have four children and 12 grandchildren. I attended the very first 330<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group (VH) Association Reunion and only missed two over the years.

**Editors Note:** The following article appeared in the *Hudson Valley Insider* on Oct 23rd, 2012:

Newburgh, NY - When NRC Programs Director Coach Ed Kennedy decided to name the Newburgh Rowing Club's last crew shell meet of the year for one of his rowers who was killed in Iraq, he had no idea he would bring one of the adult rowers, a WWII Command Gunner on a B-29, back in time to the Battle of Iwo Jima, once again thanking the 6,981 U.S. Marines who gave their lives to clear the tiny island for the Air Force to create a U.S. stronghold.

Immediately prior to the NRC's Legend of the 48 Regatta on October 21, Coach Kennedy had Luke Sendelbach, a rower for NRC, Boy Scout and Eagle Scout candidate, raise the U.S. Flag on the Cpl. Joseph Tremblay Memorial Flagpole, and Coach Kennedy called for a Moment of Silence for the 48 Marines of the 3rd Battalion, 25th Marines, who gave their lives during the Surge in Iraq in 2005, among them Cpl. Joseph Tremblay. "Joey rowed for me at NFA and also the Rowing club from 7th to 12th grades," said Coach Kennedy, "Mr. Scholl built this flagpole for him and has a brass plaque dedicated to his memory. But after his dad, Larry Tremblay, told me about the 48 Marines, I wanted to do something where they could all be remembered together, which is when we founded the Legend of the 48 Regatta."

One of the adult rowers, who medaled in two races, was 87-year-old Richard McCormick, of Kingston, NY, who had been a rower for Syracuse University, attending on the GI Bill, and who had been an Air Force gunner commander during World War II. "That flag raising ceremony and remembrance of the 48 Marines really meant a lot to me, because I am personally very grateful to the U.S. Marines who went into Iwo Jima and sacrificed themselves so that the U.S. Air Force could establish an Emergency Landing Field for B-29 Fighters and B-51 fighter escorts."

"We (the U.S. Air Force) had tried to clear the tiny island of Iwo Jima but hadn't been all that successful, so the U.S. Marines had to go in there on foot and clear it for us. When I landed, there was still fighting going on, and I saw the conditions that they had been through, it was nightmarish, how they had fought and died to preserve it for us. You see, if we had lost Iwo Jima, that could have been very bad for the U.S. The surf on the island was like roller bearings, you couldn't stand, and the Marines had 65-lb. packs on their backs and were being shot at from enemies who were hidden well. If the Marines fell, they would drown before they could be shot. We, in the Air Force, always appreciated that the Marines gave their lives to clear Iwo Jima for us. And to come down here and hear the Coach thank the 48 Marines of the same Battalion that was at Iwo Jima, was really moving. Those boys, the Marines, really are the first in battle."

McCormick flew 25 missions during World War II, including the very last air mission of World War II, from August 14 overnight to August 15, 1945. "The target was just north of Tokyo," said McCormick. Over 500 B-29's were in the air. That night, when we landed, we were told the war was over." Asked how he felt, McCormick said, "Tired. It was a 15-hour mission. Then happy."

McCormick was discharged in 1946, and went on to Syracuse University where he attended under the GI Bill. He joined the Crew Team, and was at the very last Intercollegiate Rowing Association Championship (the equivalent of Football's BCS in the rowing world) to be held in Poughkeepsie, NY in 1949. "I was on the J.V. Team at the time but we were the 'Hope of the East.' While we were all young as far as college rowers go, we were also all WWII combat veterans, so I guess you could say we were pretty tough."

McCormick went on to coach varsity golf (1968 - 1988), swimming (1978-1988), football, and JV soccer for Kingston High School, retiring in 1988. He has an extensive family and lives in Kingston, NY, where he is a member of the Rondout (Kingston) Rowing Club. Rich McCormick rowed in two races during the Legend of the 48, the Men's 8+ and the Men's 4+, taking second place in both and, in the local rowing world, creating his own legend.

