

SSGT Albert DeVuono—Airplane and Engine Mechanic

I was working as an Assistant Manager in a grocery store in the Philadelphia area when I was drafted into the Army Air Corps. My Basic Training occurred in Miami Beach; they wanted me to be a tail gunner because I was 5-feet, 4 inches tall, but I am color blind so no gunnery for me. I was then sent to Dearborn Michigan for Aircraft School – it was an encampment with 10 barracks; each week a barrack would graduate and a new group would arrive. We went right into the factory at the Ford Rotunda, where everyone was trained as an Aircraft Mechanic. The planes were coming in from a Manufacturer in Herington, Kansas ... B-17s and B-24s.

The next phase of my training occurred in Seattle at the Boeing School. I spent a lot of time working on Electrical Hydraulic systems. They didn't tell us until the end of our training that we would be working on B-29s. They gave us our 20th Air Force patch but we couldn't sew it on because it indicated a pacific location. When we finally saw a B-29 it seemed gigantic! I went to Hays, Kansas for a while where I worked on the setup and put-put. Then back again to Seattle and the Boeing school.

We departed Seattle by LST transport – with winter gear! – we shed our winter gear as the temperatures rose. We stopped at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on our way to Guam. While on the boat, we only had salt water showers, so we never felt very clean. When we arrived at Guam, they threw a rope net over the side of the boat and we had to shimmy down. Trucks then transported us to North Field and a contingent of Marines stood guard during the night. We were given pup tents to use, but I just wrapped it around me and slept on the ground; eventually I stayed in a 10-men tent. We had to drive in the pegs for the tent, and many axe handles were broken trying to get the pegs into the coral. We received the Bronze Star since the island of Guam was not secure upon our arrival; there were no runways on Guam when we arrived, either.

Eventually pre-fabricated tents were acquired, but we had to grade the ground before we could erect them. I cut down some trees and criss-crossed them together using chains; a Sergeant came by and wanted to know how to utilize this—there were two handles for steering and you would pull one or the other depending upon the direction you wanted to go. The Seabees and an Army Corps of Engineers (a Black/African-American outfit) established the runways, at some point using hot tar to do so. A month or so after my arrival on Guam, the B-29s arrived.

I helped build the Mess Hall; for the most part, we lived on K-rations. One day we heard we would have “Australian Steer”...it ended up being Lamb. The Japs in the jungle would try to sneak into the Mess Line; we would arrange to put them to work in exchange for food—I don't recall any conflicts with those that agreed to “work for food”. I also recall our Baseball Diamond on Guam; during the game the Japs hiding in the jungle would cheer, “Hit the ball!” We played a lot of cards and gambled, too...I recall once during a card game a plane went overhead and the lights went out...while in the dark, everyone tried to grab the money! We would watch movies while sitting on logs, but I don't recall any live entertainment. I kept in touch with family via V-Mail, I wrote almost every day. I asked my friend on Guam, Bruno Gallucci (who later changed his name to John Gale), to write a letter to my mother in Italian, which he did...my mother thought that was great!

I was assigned to the 457th squadron, and I was 1 of 4 men that floated from plane to plane, as



needed. We worked on the planes when they returned from the Missions. It was a 24-hour operation; day and night. I didn't feel pressured or stressed - just busy.

One time when I wandered over to the Navy headquarters, I bumped into a kid from Delaware and we became friends. I would visit when I could. One time I asked him for a kitchen sink, sure enough, he gave me one, and I gave it to a Bombardier to throw over Japan...so we can say "the Americans are throwing in everything, including the kitchen sink"! I got a "thumbs up" from the Bombardier. I also asked my naval friend to get me a mattress; I built a frame and criss-crossed inner tubes from tires to support it.

Le May came by one time while I was working on some planes - and I was wearing a naval cap; he stopped to inquire...I said I was just getting these planes fly-worthy. He said, "That's great, but take off that goddamn hat!"

I have a photo of a Cletrac (Cleveland track) I helped build using a tractor and a steel boom, it to expedite engine changes; it also helped get a crashed B-29 up a bit so the fellas trapped could get out, once. Another crash I saw ... towards the end of the war ... a B-29 landing after a Mission, went up full throttle and then crashed - it was sad to watch.

There is another photo I have of me on a crew chief stand, but I did not have a camera or keep a diary.

When the war ended, my transport home was once again a LST, which took me to San Pedro, CA. We were on a day coach that stopped in Las Vegas on New Year's Eve; they wouldn't let us off - they were afraid we wouldn't come back! So I went on to Cumberland, PA and was given cab fare to get back to Philadelphia. I hung around for quite a while during my first weeks/months back - jobs were hard to get. I played football with the Pop Warner League. I would often go to Wildwood, NJ to - quite frankly - booze it up. It was a beautiful beach and there was a rooming house with six guys to a room. We would cat call to the girls.

When we were there Labor Day weekend, I saw a particular girl and I told my friend, "I'm going to marry her". When she walked by I asked, "Can I talk to you, sweetheart?" She allowed me to and she agreed to go to a movie—on one condition—no night clubbing afterward; I agreed ... after the movie we ended up talking until 2 or 3 AM. We dated for months, I asked her to marry me. She wondered why she hadn't met my mother. I explained: I'm Italian; if you bring a girl to meet your mother that means you want to marry her. So we arrange for her to meet my mother on Christmas Eve. My mother, after meeting my girlfriend, took me aside and asked, "Albert, is she Eye-Rash?" (Irish)...I said, "Yes, Mom." Then my mother said, "I like her!" We were married for 58 years, have 3 children, 7 grandchildren, and 5 great-grandchildren. I worked at Atlantic Refining as a Rigger for 3 years and at Mrs. Smith Pie for 7-8 years, before working many years as an auto mechanic. I repaired cars for a client who worked at the DuPont Company, one day someone from the DuPont Company called and offered me a job - I was 50 years old! I accepted and retired under their early-retirement plan at 62 years of age. I have been a member of the 330th Bomb Group Association since its start.

