

My Twenty-seven Month Journey to the 330th Bomb Group (VH)

By Ralph M. Leftwich, Crossville, TN

It started on March 4, 1943, drafted and sent to an Infantry Replacement Training Center at Camp Wolters, Texas. Over three months trained as a foot soldier in the dust, mud, heat and rain, day and night with the M-1 rifle as my constant companion.

Is this the only way to fight a war?

Later part of July the question was answered. A notice was posted on the bulletin board that the Air Force was accepting applications for Air Cadet Training. WOW! Can I make it?

Completed the required physical and mental exams and was transferred to the Air Cadet Training program.

On July 7, 1943 I was officially in the Air Force—thank you Lord—transferred to Sheppard Field, Texas for Air Force “basic” training. Then on to Creighton University, Omaha, Nebraska for CTD.

Life has changed dramatically with tailored clothes, great food and higher respect. We now march on paved streets or the grassy stadium. No more pup tents or meals in the rain. We march and sing as we go to eat in a cafeteria in downtown Omaha. Had the joy of people standing and watching and sometime clapping as we marched and sang “Off we go into the wild blue yonder. . .,” many times with my wife watching.

Life is GREAT! Completing the studies required at Creighton, and having flown for the first time in a Piper Cub we head to Santa Ana AAB, Santa Ana, California to start Classification and Preflight school. California, the place of Hollywood, the Pacific Ocean and orange groves was an impossible dream of a 20-year-old from Tennessee.

Was classified as a pilot and would start Primary training after completing nine weeks of pre-flight. Now we start learning HOW to fly. Starting February 1944 in the desert of Southern California at Blythe I solo in the PT-17. Oh, what a day that was—scared to death—but made a successful landing ALONE. Then on to Basic at Cal-Aero Academy at Ontario, California. After Blythe, Pomona was paradise. Finished flying the “Vultee Vibrator” BT-13, then on to Advanced Single engine training at Williams Field, Chandler, Arizona. Flying the AT-6 was pure joy. Receiving the Silver Wings on September 8, 1944 and appointed as Flight Officer, AC.

Following a long awaited leave, my wife and I visit Nashville.

On the return, orders were waiting, transferring me to Pecos, Texas for twin-engine transition then on to Albuquerque, New Mexico for four-engine flight training in the B-24 Liberator Bomber. This to me was a terrible disappointment. The B-24 was, I thought, the most difficult plane to fly. Finished the necessary flight time and instruction to be classified as qualified 1st pilot of the B-24 multi-engine. UGH!

Orders were issued to report to Lincoln, Nebraska on February 27, 1945, for two weeks Classification and Routing Pool. Left Lincoln on February 24, 1945 as part of Crew #586.

Arrived at Pyote, Texas as Crew #586 for R.T.U. and had our first flight in a B-29 on February 26. Completed crew training in the Superfortress and reported to Kearney, Nebraska to be processed for overseas shipment. Assigned a new B-29 plane #44-61658. On June 13 arrived at Mather Field, Sacramento, California. Processed for overseas shipment.

Departed Mather Field for John Rogers Field, Hawaii, arriving at 10:30 am. Visit to Waikele Beach and dined at the Willard Inn Officer’s Club.

Departed Hawaii on the 19th of June 1945. Landed at Kwajalein Atoll on the 20th of June (Crossed International Date Line). Enjoyed a “hot” beer and a night in a tent. We depart for Saipan, M.I. the next morning, arriving at Isley Field, Saipan at 3:00pm. Spent the night in the Transit Barracks.

On the 22 June 1945 depart Saipan for Guam. Assigned to the 20th Air Force, 314th Wing, 330th Bomb Group (VH), 458th Bomb Squad, Barracks #88.

AND THAT IS HOW I GOT TO THE 330TH BOMB GROUP.

