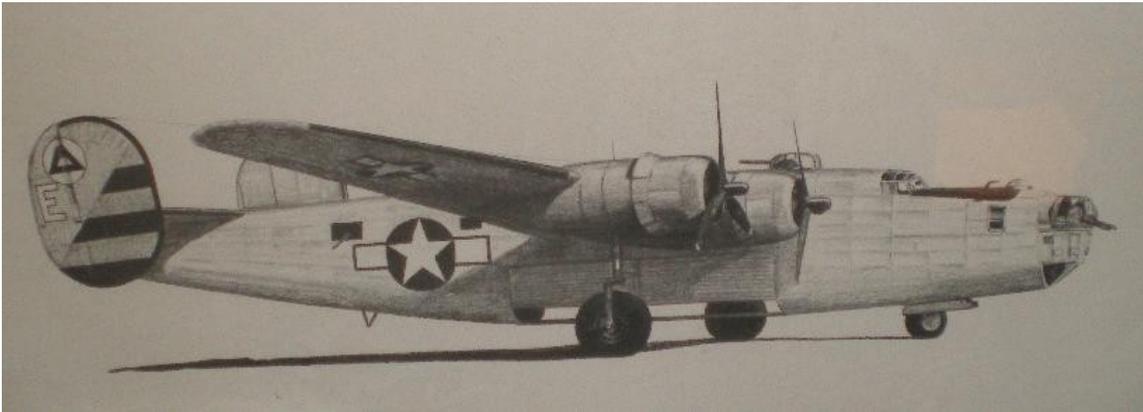


Life & Military History Of Joe McMahon



Joe was born on December 30th, 1924 and last December celebrated his 90th birthday. He was born in Columbus, Ohio and lived in Circleville, Ohio. His Father was a traveling salesman who sold razor blades and other items. In 1936 he moved his family to San Antonio as he continued his business here and to the East Coast. Joe is a graduate of Alamo Heights High School. He continued his education at San Antonio Junior College, now known as San Antonio College (SAC), graduating in 1943. Joe said that back then there were primarily only Catholic and colleges for women. He wanted to go to the University of Texas, but before that happened he was concerned that he would get drafted into the Army.

He decided to apply for the Army Air Corps and did so. However, he failed his eye test and was rejected. A friend suggested that he go see her eye doctor at the San Antonio Aviation Cadet (SAAC) Center, now known as Lackland Air Force Base. He did and passed his eye test. He was then sent to Dodd Field, known to us today as Fort Sam Houston Army Base. Shortly after that he ended up being drafted in June, 1943 and pulled KP, and cleanup details.

He was then sent to Sheppard Field (now Sheppard AFB) as a cadet. He was the only one or one of the few, of the recruits in uniform. It was thought that since he was already in uniform that he had completed basic training, and was put in with other personnel of higher rank than him. Here he was, 6 weeks into the Army, with no basic training. He put his free time to good use becoming a very good poker and black jack player.



He and the rest of his group were later sent to Alva, Oklahoma where they were given college courses. While there, they lived in what used to be the girls dormitory. They also had a small amount of flight training in a two seater open cockpit Piper Cub. They received four 45 minute flying courses, and on his first flight was told to take the controls. After receiving many choice words from his flight instructor regarding his lack of flying ability, it was determined that he was not pilot quality and was sent back to SAAC in San Antonio for classification.

While there, he was performing duty as the Barracks Charge Of Quarters (CQ) while the others drilled in the Texas heat. A call went out for Student Officer Candidates and he answered the call. He was sent to Ellington AFB in Houston, and went through Pre-Flight Aircraft Recognition school, learning to identify German, Japanese, US and other aircraft. From there he was sent to Gunnery School at Laredo where he became the first person to ever score 100% on the Emerson nose machine gun turret.

After Gunnery School, he was sent to San Marcos AAF (now San Marcos Municipal Airport) for Navigation School. He graduated as a 2nd Lt. Navigator in early 1944 and from there was sent to a Reserve Training Unit at Pueblo AAF (now Pueblo Memorial Airport) in Pueblo, Colorado. Here they learned flight crew flying training flying B-24's. By November, 1944 he and his crew were on the Gen. Gordon, a converted passenger liner on their way to Italy. It was a two weeks cruise, dodging U-boats, where he whiled away the time sharpening his poker and black jack skills much to his advantage once again.

After landing in Naples, Italy they were assigned to the 15th Air Force, 461st Bomb Group, 766th Squadron. In a couple of days after arriving they were on their first bomb run over Nazi occupied territory. Their first mission was to bomb the Blechhammer synthetic oil plants. The day before their first mission, one of their bombers was shot down by Luftwaffe fighters. This was the last day of German fighter attacks on them. By then the USAAF had gained control of the air over Luftwaffe fighters.

The low point of this first mission for Joe and his crew was losing one engine. On their return, they ran out of gas on another engine and was close to running out of gas on all four. There was a British air field on one of many islands off the coast of Yugoslavia and they were trying to find it to land at that base. At the last minute, they spotted it, and were able to land safely with hardly any fuel left. Repairs were made in a few days and they flew back to their base safely.

Joe flew numerous B-24's, some of questionable flying ability, some much better and even some newer ones. They often flew back with their aircraft looking like Swiss cheese, full of flak holes. The maintenance crews would work around the clock to have them patched and back in the air for the next mission, which was usually every other day. He flew as the Navigator and the Bombardier, performing both duties as needed. The B-24 was the most-produced military aircraft of WW II. 18,400 were produced and half of those by the Ford Motor Company. Mass production was brought into full force by 1943 with the aid of the Ford Motor Company through its newly constructed Willow Run facility, where peak production had reached one B-24 per hour and 650 per month in 1944.

Joe flew a total of 30 missions until the war ended, five missions short of the 35 missions that would have earned him a trip back home. He flew out of Italy, and their P-51 fighter escort was usually the famed black Tuskegee Airmen fighter pilots. They suffered no bomber losses under their protection. Joe said that by the time he entered the war, the German Luftwaffe had been so badly decimated that they were never attacked. The closest he came to seeing an enemy fighter plane was a FW-109 off in the distance who did not attack them. Their main concerns and damage to their aircraft was from German anti-aircraft flak. They had flak damage on every mission they made. No one on their aircraft every received any wounds from it.

The war in Europe had ended after their 30th mission and they were given a nearly new B-24 to fly back home on. They flew from their Italian base to Algiers, Dakar and then a long Atlantic flight to Natal, Brazil, which was the shortest route for them to take. Joe's navigational skills put them right over Natal after such a long over water trip. Flying out of Natal they ran into a extremely violent storm and he said he was more scared flying through it than while in

combat. The storm activity would drop or lift them thousands of feet all of a sudden, many times over. They are lucky they made it to British Guiana (now Guyana) alive. From there they flew to Puerto Rico and then on to Savannah, Georgia, where they left their aircraft.

After a 30 day leave, he went by train to Sioux Falls, South Dakota. From there, they were eventually discharged from the USAAF. At the time of his discharge he had earned the Presidential Unit Citation, the Air Medal with 2 oak leaf clusters for 30 combat missions, and other medals for his military service during WW II. He was discharged in September, 1945 and headed back home to Texas. He enrolled at the U. of Texas, in Austin as a Business Major and earned a degree in Business Administration. While at UT, he was driving a '38 Ford sedan which ended up being damaged by a certain UT football player. He ran into Joe's car, smashing it into another one, making an accordion out of it.

Dad was working as a merchandise broker for Linton Pencil Co. who offered Joe a job at \$50 a week, expenses paid and \$5 cents a mile for gas. He sold his '38 Ford to someone here who wanted to restore it and bought a used '46 Pontiac. He later traded that for a new '49 Pontiac, and then traded it for a '51 Chrysler Newport. Later he moved to the Linton Pencil Co. headquarters in Tennessee and worked there for several years before moving back to San Antonio. Here he was selling pencils by the gross, glue, locks, and other items, building his business. Later he was laid off by Linton Pencil Co. so he started managing apartment houses that he and his wife Sammi, a nurse, had bought. Sammi passed away in 2000. Joe has a daughter, son and step-son.

In the late 60's he was approached by Anabolic Laboratory Vitamins to come work for them. He worked for 2 years for them and then became a distributor of theirs. He worked for 18 years for them, forming DAVIS Corporation along the way. He retired at 62 years of age, and sold his business and has enjoyed the fruits of his labors ever since. They bought their present home in '65 and I enjoyed a tour of it very much. Joe has a very large model car collection in his office.

The first Tbird he bought was in the late '60's, a Lemonbrook Yellow '55 Babybird with no A/C. So that was his winter car. He later bought a '56 Babybird with A/C and that became his summer car. He sold them both and later bought a '62 Roadster from Carroll Brown. That he later sold to a man from California. He later bought his pretty Tbird Blue '02 Retro-Bird, with 11,000 miles on it a couple of years ago. In between he has owned a '53 Mercedes 220A Cabriolet, bought about '66 and sold early in 2000. He has also had, at one time or another, a Model A, a '66 and '69 Mustang Convertible, and a 31 Model A pickup. In the last few years, he bought a 2005 50th Anniversary Special Edition Retro-Bird with the Cashmere Tri-Coat paint. This Tbird only had 5,500 miles on it when it bought it and I doubt it has much more on it since he bought it. I drove with him to Houston to help drive it back when he bought it. It is a dream to drive! Here is his 2005 Retro-Bird 50th Anniversary Special Edition.



To honor Joe's life, military history and service to his country, at a club meeting held in March, 2013 we presented a gift to him. The South Texas Thunderbird Club gave to him a jean vest with his rank, Navigator Wings, and his Unit insignia patch on it. On the back we had placed a picture of a B-24 just like the one he had flown in during WW II. The tail fin even has the correct markings for the unit he was assigned to.



