

War Era Story Project 2012

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Age: 88

Shortly after turning 18 in 1942 I volunteered to be an Army Air Corp Pilot. I graduated as a pilot and a 2nd Lieutenant in May 1944. After four months of intensive training to become a B-24 combat bomber pilot, I was assigned my crew of nine airmen and we trained as a crew for four months. In January 1945, my crew and I flew our B-24, crossing the Atlantic to Africa where I celebrated my 21st birthday. Next, we flew to Italy to be a replacement crew for the 459th Bomb Group, 757th Bomb Squadron.

All new 1st pilots flew their first five combat missions with an experienced combat crew as a co-pilot. The roughest mission my crew and I flew was when we bombed the tank works in Prague, Czechoslovakia on March 25, 1945. The flak was extremely heavy, damaging our top turret and knocking out our hydraulic system. The hydraulic system is used to lower and retract the landing gear, the brakes and the flaps for slower landing speed. We hand-cranked the gear down and used parachutes attached to the gun mounts as brakes, and shut the engines down to get out B-24 down safely with no one hurt.

Our bomb group was stationed in Italy for 17 months with a complement of 60 B-24s. One hundred and four B-24's were lost in combat, with a normal crew of ten airmen.