

Theodore R. Small, World War II Air Force pilot



Ted entered the infantry in March 1941, nine months before the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. He was 21. During his first tour of duty Ted tested into the Air Force, and he learned to fly on a bi-plane. Ted earned his lieutenant wings in a twin engine Cessna. Ted was assigned to the 301 Bomber Group, 419th Squadron. Toward the end of his first tour of duty, Ted flew his first Strategic Operations combat mission a Boeing B-17 "Flying Fortress," the plane that dropped more bombs than any other U.S. aircraft in World War II.



Developed in the 1930s for the United States Army Air Forces (USAAF), the Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress was used primarily in the daylight precision strategic bombing campaign of World War II against German industrial and military targets. This four-engine high-flying, long-range bomber was known for its ability to defend itself and to return home despite extensive battle damage. Manned by a crew of ten men, the plane had heavy machine-guns positioned on its front, back, top, bottom and sides. The planes were unheated and open to the outside air. The crew wore electrically heated suits and heavy gloves that provided some protection against temperatures that could dip to 60 degrees below zero. Once above 10,000 feet, the crew donned oxygen masks as the planes continued to climb to their operational level that could be as high as 29,000 feet. Nearing the target, each crew member would put on a 30-pound flak suit and a steel helmet designed to protect against anti-aircraft fire. Parachutes were too bulky to be worn all the time, but crewmen did wear a harness that allowed them to quickly clip on their parachute when needed.

On days that a mission was planned, the airmen would be awakened in the early morning hours and fed a hearty breakfast followed by a briefing describing the mission. They would then be taken to

their planes and await the signal to take off. Once aloft, brightly colored "lead-ships" would direct the bombers to pre-determined points where they would organize themselves into their attack formations.

Missions that penetrated deep into enemy territory could last up to eight hours and be filled with anxious anticipation as all eyes searched the skies for enemy defenders. The pilot and crew could expect attacks by fighters armed with machine-guns, canon and rockets as well as heavy anti-aircraft fire from the ground and even bombs dropped from above. To provide the most effective defensive fire and to assure the most devastating results once their bombs were dropped, the bombers were expected to maintain their positions at all costs.

Prior to 1944, a crewman's tour of duty was set at 50 missions. After March of 1944, once the B-17s were given escort, men in the 8th Air Force were required to fly 35 missions before being rotated home. Ted was one of the airmen who were counting down their number of missions required, only to have the requirement increased.

As a measure of the hazards they would encounter, it is estimated that the average crewman had only a one in four chance of actually completing his tour of duty. The average lifespan for a B-17 pilot was 13 missions. Ted flew his 35 missions. He is shown below with his crew in front of a B-17 named FuBar.



A second Lieutenant, Ted's first mission was with the 12th Air Force as part of "Operation Torch," the Allied invasion of North Africa that began in November of 1942. The pilots operated from desert airfields in Algeria and Tunisia. After all remaining Axis troops surrendered in Tunisia in May of 1943, Ted

re-enlisted and in July of 1943 the 301st Bomber Group, having been reassigned to the 15th Air Force, participated in "Operation Husky," supporting the Allied landings on Sicily. In April of 1944 the 301st Bomber Group joined the 15th Air Force in the bombing of strategic targets in Romania and Yugoslavia. Ted's squad, the 419th, bombed a marshalling yard at Ploesti, Romania. Ted came home to Chicago after that mission and married Helen Bernice Jacobson on April 22, 1944 before returning overseas. During the summer of 1944 the 419th was engaged in shuttle bombing missions to airfields in the Soviet Union.



Emblem of the World War II
419th Bombardment
Squadron

All Air Forces awarded the Air Medal for the first five combat missions flown by an airman. Each Air Medal with an Oak Leaf Cluster was awarded for each next ten missions. In June of 1944, Ted was awarded an Air Medal and a ribbon. On July 6, 1944, he was awarded an Air Medal with an Oak Leaf Cross, a ribbon and a Purple Heart. On August 15, 1944, he was awarded an Air Medal with two Oak Leaf Clusters, a ribbon and a Purple Heart. Finally, on September 23 of 1944 Ted was awarded an Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters, another ribbon, and a Purple Heart. It was noted that at this time he was promoted to First Lieutenant. Distinguished Flying Crosses



*Ted's medals from left to right: an Air Medal,
a Purple Heart, and the Distinguished Flying
Cross for bravery under fire.*

Ted was released from the Air Force on May 24, 1945 as the 419th was largely demobilized after German capitulation. The B-17 Flying Fortresses were retired from duty as well.