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Elden Bevins

(Story 12)

OPTION # 1

(O.K. to Check-out & O.K to Make Copies)

(1994)

#12

TO: GRANDCHILDREN CHARLEY GEE, ANDREA GEE AND CAITLIN KOLOEN

Here is a little story for you about your grandfather Eldon Bevens and his military service from October 1, 1943 to January 1946.

World War Two for me was in Europe and we helped England and Russia defeat Germany. Hitler did take over France and Holland and was trying to invade England.

Your grandfather served in a heavy bomber B-17 group that flew combat missions from England over to Germany.

But first let me tell you about the kid that graduated from Dallas High School in 1943. During the summer I worked for the Polk County Fire Patrol Association and had the job of taking supplies to the forestry lookouts west of Dallas. The lookout towers on Doran Peak, Fanno Mtn. and Bald Mtn. also served as aircraft warning stations during the war. They reported airplanes flying in the area as the Japanese did launch airplanes from submarines and they flew over and dropped bombs.

In October 1943 a lot of my friends were in the military so I volunteered for the draft and went to Fort Lewis, Washington. From there I transferred to Buckley Field in Denver, Colorado. I qualified to take pilot training in the Army Air Corp. Several months of cadet training at Branch Agriculture College in Cedar City, Utah. The military then had too many cadets so I was transferred to Las Vegas Army Air Base in Nevada to train as a ball turret gunner.

In June 1944 I came home for a few days and then reported to Lincoln, Nebraska for crew assignment. As a B-17 bomber crew we went to Alexandria, Louisiana where we flew practice missions over the Gulf of Mexico, some flights were low level strafing over water.

Our crew returned to Lincoln Nebr., picked up our new B-17, flew to Goose Bay, Labrador on the first overseas leg of the flight. Next Morning we had three feet of snow on our plane and was held in Labrador for several days. Next leg of the flight was from Labrador over the southern tip of Greenland and landed in Iceland. It was dark for the full time we were in that country. Flying from Iceland to Valley Wales in England over the north sea was memorable as we could see rescue ships stationed along the way should on aircraft ditch.

Our crew flew it's first combat mission over Germany November 30, 1944.

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We had about 100 flak holes in our plane when we returned to our air base. We flew a total of six combat missions from England over Germany and January 5, 1945 we were forced to land in Laon, France as we had a bad oil leak. After getting out of the airplane our engineer stepped on a personnel mine and most of the crew was wounded. The French air base had been in the hands of the Germans. I was in the Laon field hospital for a few weeks. My co-pilot and I then returned to our base in England. We took the train from Laon to Paris, then a boat-train to London, then a train to our base in Framlingham, England.

For the remainder of the war I worked as night squadron Operations Sergeant. I did fly one more mission on a food drop to civilians in Haarle, Holland.

We flew back to the good old U.S.A. on 4th of July 1945 in a war weary B-17 bomber. It had flown over 100 combat missions.

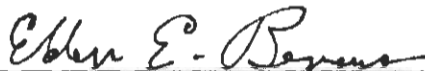
I was home for a month then had to report to Sioux Falls, South Dakota as our bomb group was scheduled to redeploy to the South Pacific and help end the war with the Japanese. Japan gave up while I was still in Sioux Falls. One evening I attended a u s o sponsored dance and I met your grandmother at that dance.

I came back to Dallas, went to college for awhile and then started full time work at the Tannery April 1, 1947.

In February 1948 I took the bus back to Sioux Falls and married your grandmother.

That's my military experiences. I was awarded the Air Medal for flying the combat missions and received the Purple Heart medal for wounds received.

SINCERELY,



ELDON E. BEVENS  
YOUR GRANDFATHER

Clint Gruber included a great idea in this last newsletter and thought I might follow his suggestions about my memories when with "The Mighty Eighth".

I was support staff after February 1945. Night squadron operations sergeant with the 570th BS, 390th BG. Duties were to line out the crews flying the next day and awaken them for their combat missions. Early morning I would borrow the commanding officers jeep and drive to the mess hall for fresh donuts to feed the crew in the operations office. One morning when returning from the mess hall I met the CO walking to headquarters. Thought I was going to lose my three stripes but his only comments were "thought I was going to walk to headquarters".

Working conditions were not bad. My quonset hut was near the squadron operations quonset. Only once can I recall burying my face in the mud when a JU88 came in on a bomb run. Not all his bombs exploded but enough did to get our attention.

In the spring of '45 the young English girls worked the nearby fields and there were always a few volunteers from the 570th squadron going over the fence to assist.

To clean my GI wool pants and shirts I would dip them in a 5 gallon can of 100 octane gas. They would dry fast and no odor. I would then hike over the fence, over the gully, over the road to a farm house where an English lady would press the uniform for me. Recreation and leaves were memorable. In March, 1945 after I was wounded I took a week holiday. Procedure at the base was to leave a day early. I planned to visit Aberdeen, Scotland and caught the train early for London. That evening I visited a dance pavilion arranged for the military and close to my hotel. I met a cute young Irish lady and was going to walk her home. When leaving the dance hall, G.I.'s left via one door and the ladies from another door. All passes and papers were checked by the M.P.'s. Eldon Bevins had papers made out for Scotland and they were dated to start the next day. I was loaded into

the M.P. paddy wagon and hauled off to headquarters. I often wondered what happened to that Irish girl waiting for me at the dance hall. An officer at the M.P. headquarters explained to Eldon Bevins that there were only so many military people allowed in London at one time and I wasn't one of them.

I promised to be on the morning train to Scotland and had to walk back to my hotel as it was after midnight. No taxi, no bus and blackout. I also had to walk by the Picadilly Square and the propositions I was offered were numerous. Going to Scotland by the G.I. was mainly a stop at Edinburgh. I decided to travel on up to Aberdeen and it was a great decision. In the week I was there I saw one other American G. I. Checked in to the Caledonian Hotel, Met a cute little green eyed brunette and she helped me have a good holiday in Aberdeen. We visited the Aberdeen beach, Union Street, The Marischel College, the Aberdeen harbor, the fish market, the Union bridge, the Girdlenes Lighthouse, the H. M. Theater and the Wallace Statue. The young lady took me to the home of her parents on Hilton for tea. I was honored with a serving of two eggs which were highly rationed during the war. Great holiday. Back to the base and on April 18 we flew our 300th combat mission. First mission out of station 153 was August 12, 1943 and we put up a twelve plane formation. On this April 18 mission number 300 we led the 8th Air Force with a 27 plane formation. Each plane carried twelve 500-pound general-purpose bombs and one aircraft carried leaflets. At 5:00AM the crews were briefed, take off commenced at 7:30AM and the last plane left the runway at 08:35. The aircraft returned at 16:30 from their mission to a railroad junction at Tabor, Czechoslovakia. After this 300th mission the base was closed down for the weekend. Our celebration was held in a hangar that was decorated with colored supply parachutes hanging from the ceiling. I walked from my squadron area to the hangar and came upon a G.I. and his girlfriend that had been hit by a passing jeep. I

walked to the hangar, found an ambulance but no driver. I picked up the couple and took them to the base hospital. I returned the ambulance, no questioned asked. Sgt. Eldon Bevens continued his job as night operations sergeant but he did get to fly again. I had retained my flying status and the base put together a special "food mission" to Holland. The Germans moved out of Holland and when they did they took all the food with them. The Dutch had given the Germans a bad time and when driven out of Holland by the British and U.S. troops they chose to take all the food with them. This period was about the Battle of the Bulge time. The Dutch were starving. General Eisenhower arranged with the Germans not to shoot at us as we flew food to the Dutch at a low altitude. At our base we loaded our B-17's with food in the bomb bay rather than bombs. I got in the bomb bay and removed a tag from one package. It said "Margarine" . Brought that tag home and placed it in my memory book collection. We flew in over the Dutch fields and dropped our food. No parachutes, just like the bottom coming out of a paper sack when we opened the bomb bays. You could see people on the outlying parts of the open fields, ready to collect the food we dropped. Quite a difference dropping food rather than bombs. In 1995 and 2000 we visited Holland where the people were very appreciative of those food delivery.

Before being wounded I did fly six combat missions. I was a ball turret gunner and we were made up of an excellent crew. Pilot was Duppenhaler, co-pilot was Lyon, navigator was Barone, Engineer was Shaw, radio operator, Lawton, ball turret gunner, Bevens, waist gunner, Davis, waist gunner & toggelier, Smith and tail gunner Bovenkirk. Our first combat mission was November 30, 1944 and we returned with just under 100 holes in our B-17. I personally counted them. Our last mission was January 5, 1945 and it was to Frankfort. We had one engine throwing oil and the oil was freezing on the wing making a problem for the pilot. We

landed at a field taken back from the the Germans about three weeks previously. Landing at Laon, France was OK. We exited the plane and did notice bombs laying along the tarmac. Apparently our engineer stepped on a personnel mine and every crewman except the radio operator was wounded, arms and legs.

An ambulance took us to a field hospital up on the plateau in Laon. I had an upper right arm wound, penetration of the upper right thigh and a finger on my right hand. The battle of the bulge had filled the nearby general hospitals. The more seriously wounded were flown back to England. Co-pilot Lyon and I remained at this field hospital for a couple of weeks then given copies of orders to return to our base in England the best way we could. At each railroad station we gave a copy of our orders, moved from Laon to Paris, then to Dieppe, Dover, London, Ipswich and Station 153. Our most memorable and toughest mission probably was our first on November 30, 1944 Being our first mission it was new to us but from the ball turret position I could see a solid layer of black ahead of us which meant the Germans were putting up anti-aircraft shells knowing we would fly through it. We lost 65 crew people on that mission and many bailed out and were taken prisoner of war.

Our 390th Bomb Group(H) after the war was deployed to the Pacific but the Japanese gave up before we could relocate. All equipment had to be put in G.I.shape before leaving the base. I flew home on an interesting plane: Cabin In The Sky. 37 planes made up the original number flying over to England in 1943.

Of that number Cabin In The Sky was the only one to return to the states. It was a "war weary" but we flew from England to Iceland, then to Labrador and on July 4, 1945 we landed in Bradley Field Conn. I kissed the ground that day.

Our 390th Group was held in Sioux Falls, South Dakota until we could accumulate enough points for discharge from the service. During that time I met a cute little Norwegian

walking across a U.S.O. dance floor in downtown Sioux Falls. Married her in 1948 and been living here in Oregon ever since.

Eldon E. Bevens

561 SW Levens St.

Dallas, Oregon