Veterans speech2.doc 11/8/2012 Worcester Rotary Club

I was a freshman at the University of Maine and will always remember when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. My roommates and I were listening to music on the radio while studying and the program was interrupted with the announcement. We were a lot like the kids today and had not been following the international news that closely and it came as a complete surprise.

Early in 1942, I, along with several other students enlisted in the Army Air Corps but were not called for service until February 1943.

We were sent to Atlantic City New Jersey for a month of basic training where we stayed in the Marlborough Blenheim Hotel and marched up and down the very freezing boardwalk and to the rifle range which was about 10 miles outside the city. From there we were sent to Syracuse University for two months of ground school. At that time the Air Force was growing faster than the training facilities and airplanes . We were then transferred to San Antonio Texas on June 2 to start our training.

Shortly after getting there I tore the cartilage in my right knee which could have been the end of my Air Force career. There was a surgeon who believed that the only cure was surgery and several who had this treatment and could no longer walk. Just before I was scheduled for surgery he was taransfered and the new treatment was excercises. Soon I was back on track and went to Waco Texas to start my primary training.

For the next 11 months we were trained in PT-19, BT-13 single engine planes and AT-17 twin engine planes.

In May of 1944 we were commissioned as second lieutenants and got pay raise from $75.00 to $225.00. a month. I was one of those selected for B-24 pilot training and sent to Fort Worth Texas.

Picture,

There were 17,000 B-24s made during WWII. More than any other aircraft. Now there is only one completely equipped B-24 flying which was the one that visited Worcester a few weeks ago.

The design of the Consolidated B-24 was only completed in December of 1939 but immediately put in production at their San Diego plant early in 1940. Then in 1941 production started at a new consolidated plant in Fort Worth and also at Douglas Aircraft in Tulsa, Ford at Willow Run and North American in Dallas. Because of the urgent need the planes were delivered with very little testing and many accidents occurred

Some of you may have read the book Unbroken, the story of a B-24 pilot who was shot down in the early stages of WWII and spent a lot of his time in Japanese prison camps..

Fortunately our planes were not produced until 1943 and were very well tested.

After Fort Worth we went to Lincoln Nebraska to pick up our opilots, Navigators, Bombardiers and Radio Operators for another month of training before getting our other five crew members and going to Tucson Arizona for three more months of training and transfer to Hamilton Field California to await shipment to our combat units.

Here are two pictures of the crew.

The one with our flying jackets was the way we were dressed for missions for even though we were located only two degrees from the equator the
temperature at 30,000 feet was close to freezing and we had no heat in the plane. The other was the way we dressed on the ground.

On January 17, 1945 we arrived at Nadjab New Guinea for final training and on April 15 we arrived at our base in Moratai. a small island in the Halamahara chain of the Netherlands East Indies, 2 degrees north of the equator in the South Pacific. The island was about 40 miles long by 20 miles wide and only a dense forest separated us from some remnants of the Japanese Army.

Here we joined the 372 squadron of the 307 group in the13th Air Force. The little Air Force doing a big job. We were known as the Long Rangers because we were flying 10 to 15 hour missions, the longest missions flown by B-24s in any group in the world.

We flew 36 missions striking Borneo airports, refineries and oil fields, as well as missions to the Philippines, convoy covers, and shipping searches.

Here is a photograph showing the bombing of an air field in Borneo. Notice the yellow circled area which was the where our bombs hit the middle of the runway and completely destroyed it.

Typically we rose at 2:00 AM for breakfast, mission briefing, and transit to the air strip for takeoff about 5:00 AM.

In order to be able to fly the long missions we had to overload our planes. They were certified to take off with a maximum gross weight of 64,000 pounds with2200 gallons of fuel and 800 pound of bombs but we took off with 72,000 pounds. And 3000 gallons of fuel. When doing this we barely gained flying speed and
100 feet above the ground by the time we reached the end of the runway. Then after very slowly climbing to 500 feet we had to fly over the ocean at this altitude for 4 to 5 hours before we had burned off enough fuel to climb to 30,000 feet which was our bombing altitude.

Except for an hour or two at night when our navigator could use celestial navigation we had to rely completely on dead reckoning and one dimensional sun shots. There were no radio navigation systems.

There were never more than eight planes in our group for a mission. We flew alone until we reached the rendezvous point where we joined the other aircraft for the bomb run. We made one circular path to get into formation, made our bomb run and broke from the squadron for our trip home alone. The only time we used our radios was in an emergency or when we were 30 minutes from our base on the way home.

Enemy Flak over the target and our long flights were our biggest hazards.

At one time we had a visiting general leading our flight and when we approached the rendezvous altitude he came on the radio and told us to join the formation at 31,000 feet for our bomb run. Immediately we all quickly scattered to lower altitudes and made individual bomb runs leaving him alone at 31,000 feet. Strangely we were never reprimanded for disobeying his order.

Because of our very critical fuel situation we made dead stick, power off landings. We approached the field at an altitude of 500 feet until we reached a point where we could glide to a landing without using any power. If we should run out of fuel we could land safely. Needless to say a 60,000 pound B-24 without no power fell almost like a rock. This type of landing also meant that we would leave the runway free of turbulence so another aircraft could land right behind us. Often there were three planes on the runway at the same time. One was touching down, one in the middle of the runway and one at the end of the runway turning off.

There was one time that a plane turned off the end of the runway and all four of his engines stopped because they had run out of gas.

After each mission we were debriefed, given a 2 ounce shot of whisky and a dinner of fried, boiled baked or breaded Spam with dehydrated potatoes, dehydrated carrots and coffee and were in bed by 10:00 PM. Then two days off before our next mission.

We did not have enough planes for each crew to have their own and the planes flew every day putting a great burden on our ground crews many who had no leaves for five years.

Frequently I made test flights on aircraft that had been repaired.

On one of our missions we lost an engine. When this happens we had to do everything to lighten the plane including jettisoning waist guns, any other equipment and all personal equipment including our hand guns. During one of our reunions two of the enlisted men told of how they had been harassed by the government after getting out of the service for stealing their revolvers which they had thrown out.

Also at the same reunion the tail gunner claimed on that mission we lost two engines not one and that all these years he had faith that I always knew what was going on only to find that I didn’t even know how many engines were running.

We were much more fortunate than those who had to fight the war on the ground. We lived in tents with wood platforms and although we had a very sparse diet of powdered milk, dehydrated potatoes, spam, dehydrated carrots and powdered orange juice we did have clean beds to sleep in every night, crude officers' and enlisted men's clubs, an outdoor theatre, and even a tennis court that we built. I even built a seven sided poker table from old ammunition boxes. The training I had as a Boy Scout often helped me to adapt to the primitive conditions.

There was a small navy base on our island and frequently ships stopped for two or three weeks refueling. One was the Rocky Mount, a flagship and some of the officers learned about our tennis court and showed up one day to play. To reciprocate they invited me and my navigator to join them for Sunday dinner on their ship.

Since the only way we had to press our uniforms was to put them under our mattresses and the results were not that great. When we joined them for dinner we felt like poor cousins because they were all in their best perfectly pressed dress uniforms. However we did enjoy a full course meal an dessert.

Our medical facilities left something to be desired though. I had a Hemeroid operation where I had to bend over and grab my ankles for the operation and then walk back to my tent and fly the next day. Several years later when being examined for another Hemroid operation the doctor said it looked like a dentist must have done the first one.

On June 5, 1945 I was promoted to First Lt and awarded the air medal.

When VJ was announced on August 14 the crews whohadjust arrived went wild with celebrations but the older men were vert subdued because they were having trouble believing the war was over

Shortly before the end of the war I met a classmate of mine from the University of Maine who was in another group on Moratai. We frequently got together but just before I left the island I went to see him again only to learn that he and his crew made a forced landing in the ocean and was thought to have perished. We both had camps on Long Pond in Rangely Maine and it wasn't until three months later when I was visiting with one of the natives on the pond that I learned that the crew spent 10 days in life rafts before being picked up by a friendly submarine that for no reason had decided to surface only to see the life rafts near by and pick them all up.

Because we were in a Malaria Zone we were required to take Atabrin every day to suppress the symptoms. This made our skin yellow.

I never knew that I had Malaria until I returned home and to college at the University of Maine and got sick and lost consciousness. Fortunately there was a staff doctor who also had just returned and he recognized the symptoms and was able to recommended the treatment.

When we returned home from the war we were all very happy to learn about the GI Bill of Rights that had been passed by a grateful congress and over half of the 15 million veterans took advantage of it and went on to college.

Most of us did not talk much about our experiences to friends and relatives who hesitated to ask us about our experiences thinking we did not want to talk about them. In most cases this lasted for years. I don’t really think this was the case. We just came home and wanted to pick up our lives as quickly as we could.