

## *Chapter 1*

# **Pilot Training**

Learning to fly was a choice I made my senior year in college at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas. The government offered classes and free flying lessons through the Civilian Pilot Training Program. The ground-school classes involved Theory of Flight, Navigation, Meteorology, and Flight Regulations. The flying lessons involved eight hours in the air with an instructor, then the thrill of that first solo flight to be followed by more hours of instruction cross country flights. When the CAA Inspector wrote, “Private Pilot test passed satisfactorily,” my log book showed a total of 42 hours of flight time.

My older brother, Floyd, had personally bought his flying time and earned his pilot’s license. I felt fortunate that I could earn my private license with the government paying for my flying time. My license number, 78792-41, is dated 5 June 1941. Two of my close friends also participated in the program. One of them, Dale Hupe, became a marine pilot; the other, Clifford Jackson, became a Navy pilot. If what we did with our future was any indication, the program paid off for the government.

When I learned to fly, flying combat missions was not what I was thinking about. But in the fall of 1941, as my draft number got close, flying had more appeal than the infantry which had been the basis of my ROTC classes in college. When I took examinations for the Army Air Corps and for the navy, I was turned down for pilot training. My eyes had been overworked with college and long hours on a new job. The familiar letter, “Greetings from the President of the United States. You have been selected...” took me to

the Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, Induction Station on 1 December 1941.

That first week of December 1941, I was among a group of men who wondered why we were in service and for how long. Unity of purpose and a common goal did not seem to exist. Then came Pearl Harbor! In a few hours the Japanese had united our country for war to a degree no previously achieved in spite of President Roosevelt's efforts at preparation. On 8 December it was a new Army with a common purpose: "Let us fight it, win it, and go home!"

The next few months found me training for and performing different duties in the Medical Corps. I chose activities that would not tax my eyes in preference to detailed work that would strain them. Then I had another chance to take the mental and physical tests for the Army Air Corps, and this time I was successful and passed. This led to a transfer to Shepherd Field at Wichita Falls, Texas, to await assignment to a class of Flying Cadets. While waiting, we drilled and exercised daily in the hot Texas sun. It was the summer of 1942, and most of us in the company had been in the service from six months to six years – a boring experience. No other group on the base spent as much time on the obstacle course as we did.

In October of 1942, I was assigned to the class of 43F in the Gulf Coast Training Command and began preflight training at San Antonio, Texas. For eight weeks we went through rigid cadet training. During the four weeks as underclassmen and four weeks as upperclassmen, we experienced mental and physical conditioning. We received first-hand exposure to discipline and learned to cope with it. My previous ground-school classes, taken to earn my private pilot's license, were very beneficial in doing my classroom work. I also found my previous experience in a college fraternity valuable. It helped me to accept the pain in my aching back when I lay down on my bunk at lights out.

From the very beginning we were told that only about one-half of the group would be successful in accepting and passing all steps necessary to winning our wings as pilots and becoming officers. It was not surprising that some of the men quit voluntarily or were transferred out before completing preflight training. In my case, the experience increased my determination to succeed and made me more physically tough and mentally alert.

Upon completion of preflight training, we were sent to various airfields to begin flight training. I was assigned to the Primary Flight School at Pine Bluff, Arkansas. There I had my first flight in a Fairchild-built PT-19A on 2 December 1942. My first flight instructor at Pine Bluff was the one who gave the periodic check rides. He informed the six of us who had been assigned to him that because we all had private pilot licenses, he knew we could fly. His duty was to see if we could fly the Army way. Before he finished with us and assigned us to other instructors (so that he could proceed with giving check rides), he washed out one of the cadets that had over 200 hours of flight time. Flying the Army way took on a special meaning for me.

All phases of flight training involved ground-school classes, physical exercise, and military drill. We learned about the airplanes we flew and how to recognize enemy aircraft and ships, as well as our own and those of our Allies. Safety awareness was before us at all times, and yet accidents did occur. The temptation to enjoy the sky too much when those earthly bonds are broken can tempt a flier to take unnecessary risks. Self discipline is essential if one is to explore and stretch his skills within the limits of his knowledge and the capabilities of the airplane. But the willingness to take some of calculated risks is a key in the development of leadership.

Parachutes were issued with instructions on how to use them in case you got into a situation where the condition or the position of your aircraft was such that your ability to

make a safe landing seemed impossible. However, a simulated jump made from a tower was the extent of our parachute training.

Upon completion of primary flight training, we moved on to basic Winfield, Kansas. We were exposed to the torque of a propeller on a larger engine capable of pulling you off a straight line on take-off if you didn't correct for it. You now had a canopy covering you in the air to keep off some of the cold. There was a radio, and we got our first instruction to instrument flying and flying at night. In addition, we were spending hours in the Link trainer, which simulated instrument flying. From that time on, flying on instruments in the air and using the Link translator would be a regular part of our training.

When we completed basic flight training we were assigned to either a twin-engine or a single-engine school for advance training. Those assigned to single-engine advance flew AT-6 aircraft and upon graduation most were sent to fighters. I went to Altus, Oklahoma, and on 30 April 1943 I had my first flight in twin-engine aircraft, the AT-17 built by Cessna. This was preparation for flying larger airplanes, which meant bombers for most of us.

On 26 June 1943, I proudly put on my silver wings as a pilot and accepted my commission as a Second Lieutenant in the Army of the United States. After graduation I had a few days at home near Topeka, Kansas, and then it was off to Pyote, Texas, to begin combat-crew training as a co-pilot on the B-17 Flying Fortress. That four-engine plane was considered a large aircraft at the time. At Pyote it was easy to concentrate on flying and crew training because there was not much chance for distractions with the schedule we had and no towns nearby.

This was the beginning of our training in the type of aircraft we could expect to carry us into combat. For the first time, we came together as a crew and were expected to develop into a team. Prior to this, each of the ten men had

been trained for specific duties. Now, that training had to blend together on a single aircraft so that the skills of each man could contribute to the over-all objectives of the missions we would be assigned. Each man had to be able to skillfully perform his primary assignment and help another when necessary. All men needed general knowledge about the aircraft.

A crew usually consisted of four commissioned officers and six non-commissioned officers. Our crew was composed in that manner. After graduation from cadets, our pilot, like most, had received special training in the B-17 and was checked out as pilot. My first exposure to the B-17 was my assignment as co-pilot. We two pilots had to understand the operation of the airplane and work together to fly it.

The other two officers on the crew were the navigator and the bombardier. Each had graduated from cadets with special training including air time and gunnery training. They shared the compartment in the nose of the airplane. In simple terms, the navigator was expected to guide the pilots to the target area so that the bombardier could deliver the bombs on the target. They assisted each other when needed and saw that one or the other could man the guns in the nose of the plane at all times. Their compartment was forward and below that of the pilots.

Close by the rear of the pilots was the flight engineer, who had mechanical training and gunnery experience. He was expected to keep an eye on certain instruments and relay information to or interpret it for the pilots. He also checked mechanical aspects of the airplane before take-off and exchanged information with the ground crew that maintained the airplane. In combat, he operated the top gun turret.

Going from the nose back, the next compartment was the bomb bay which physically separated the five men in the front of the plane from the five at the rear. A narrow

catwalk through the center, where the bombs were hung on either side, provided access to the next compartment, which was the radio room. The technically trained radio operator had an overhead gun, which he manned in addition to his radio equipment.

The compartment behind the radio room was the most open part of the airplane. From there you could enter the ball turret, which hung below the plane. It was only occupied by the ball-turret gunner during flight. The tail of the airplane was equipped with twin guns operated by the tailgunner. He, too, took his position only in flight. The main door used to enter or exit the rear of the airplane was located on the side of this large compartment called the waist.

Both the right and left sides of the waist had a .50-caliber machine-gun mounted in it. A man was assigned to each gun, and they were referred to as "waist gunners." On our crew, one of these men also had training as a radio operator. The other one had mechanical training as an engineer. Although all of the non-commissioned officers were trained in aerial gunnery and could have alternated to another gun if necessary, the ball -turret gunner and the tailgunner were located in critical positions difficult to get to and it would be a rare situation for either to leave his guns for another position during combat.

Each man had the responsibility for maintaining his guns and having a supply of ammunition. Each person also needed to understand the critical aspects of the area of the airplane where he was stationed and how he and the aircraft might be affected by possible battle damage.

Our training from this time forward would be designed to increase the proficiency of each man and the crew as a team. Classroom courses and physical training continued along with our time in the air. Our flight-training missions involved many take-offs and landings, including emergency procedures. There were navigational flights day

and night along with practice bombing missions and gunnery practice. We spent hours flying formation with other bombers to improve our skills and to give the crew a feel for that type of flying.

Flying high altitude on oxygen was an important exercise. We also practiced emergency bail-out procedures in the air and on the ground. In the air we did not leave the airplane, but on the ground we did and often timed how long it took us to execute an emergency exit. There were over water training flights in the Gulf out of sight of land to prove our navigator's ability and to expose the crew to future situations.

Before completing our combat training and leaving the United States, we went through three phases of training. Phase one at Pyote was followed with two additional phases at Dyersburg, Tennessee. After that we were sent to staging for preparation to being shipped overseas. I was lucky that our staging took place at the air base at Topeka, Kansas, which was only a few miles from my home. It gave me one last chance to spend some time with my parents before leaving the United States.

From the time we started our combat-crew training at Pyote the objective was always clear. We were told: "you can expect to be flying daylight bombing missions from England. Your ability to fly a tight formation and function as a team is critical." It was generally understood that, if as a team you were good at your job, and lucky, you had about one chance in four or five of completing 25 combat missions and returning to the United States in a year or less. Even if you were good, you could have the misfortune of being shot down by flack or fighters. If shot down there was still hope if you landed safely: "Some people have been fortunate enough to land in an occupied country and escape."

The primary goal then was to be the best you can be and complete 25 missions. The secondary goal: To know and

do the right things to try to escape if you must bail out or crash-land in enemy territory. The successful achievement of either goal required sufficient training and knowledge to believe in yourself, your crew, the power of divine guidance and a lot of luck. Training and knowledge properly applied are great confidence builders to guide behavior in a crisis or an emergency.

We boarded the *Queen Elizabeth* at New York on 2 November 1943 to cross the Atlantic unescorted. The ship's captain and his superiors were betting on the speed of that fantastic British liner to avoid German U-boats. The only drawback about my stateroom was sharing it with 20 other officers. That was a fact of life when a cruise ship was converted to a troop ship. On 9 November we were in the quiet harbor at Glasgow, Scotland. It was such a tranquil site that except for the thousands of us going ashore, it certainly lacked the environment of war.

We went by train to a location from which we could be assigned to our Bomb Groups as replacement crew or to increase the strength of the unit. In this replacement depot we had time to write letters, but were warned against revealing secret information. In helping censor a pile of mail, a pair of scissors became an often used tool. I recall censoring one man's mail in which he thought was clear to tell his mother everything. After I had cut out what he couldn't tell, the letter was basically, "Dear Mom," – "Love, your son." Once we were assigned to our unit, the enlisted men on a crew would usually take their letters to an officer of the crew to be censored. If a man wrote something he should not, I'd take it back for a rewrite. That avoided the recipient wondering about what was censored out.

On 17 November 1943, our training crew was assigned to the 358<sup>th</sup> Squadron of the 303<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group at Molesworth, England. We had become a part of the First



Division of the Eighth Air Force. The crew was listed as follows:

<b>Position</b>	<b>Rank/Name</b>	<b>Number</b>
<b>P</b>	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt. Karl B. Arundale	0742551
<b>CP</b>	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt. Clayton C. David	0682818
<b>B</b>	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt. James F. Barlow	0752544
<b>N</b>	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt. Joe B. Vogel	0676182
<b>AEG</b>	Sgt. Angelo P. Petix	13107303
<b>ROG</b>	S/Sgt. Richard A. Davis, Jr.	18118979
<b>AAEG</b>	Sgt. Charles C. Finch	34393652
<b>AROG</b>	Sgt. James T. Elovich	31192480
<b>AG</b>	Sgt. Joseph F. Fertitta	18190215
<b>AAG</b>	Sgt. Theodore R. Czczotka	12188200

At Molesworth it did not take long to realize that this was the place where continued training and combat came together in the realities of war.

For their first combat mission, newly assigned pilots and co-pilots often found themselves in the co-pilot seat next to a pilot who had already survived some combat flying. Thus I found myself flying as co-pilot with a crew that had been on some previous missions. The assignment came suddenly when the co-pilot of that crew was unable to answer his mission wake-up call because of a back injury sustained in a minor truck accident the night before.

I still considered myself a member of the crew with which I had trained in the States, and I did brief with them for a mission to Berlin that was scrubbed before take-off. However, my combat missions were flown with pilot Lt.

Jack Watson and his crew. My first mission was to Bremen, Germany on 20 December 1943. The second was to Kiel, Germany on 4 January 1944. Lt. Watson gave me a chance to demonstrate my ability, and between missions I was receiving additional training to be checked out as first pilot. Then came 11 January 1944. This was third mission and the day that started the chain of events which this book is about.



Right: Cadet Clayton David is dressed to go flying in the open cockpit of a PT-19.

Below: The B-17 crew that trained together. Standing left to right are Lieutenants Arundale, David, Barlow, and Vogel. Kneeling left to right are Sergeants Finch, Elovich, Petix, Davis, Fertitta and Czeczotka.

