



369TH BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON
U.S.A.A.F

MAY 17th 1944-----JUNE 1st 1944

ON MAY 17th WHEN I ARRIVED HOME FROM SCHOOL I HAD RECEIVED MY ORDERS TO REPORT TO FT. THOMAS KENTUCKY ON JUNE 1st.- I GRADUATED FROM HIGH SCHOOL ON THE 24th OF MAY-- ONE WEEK BEFORE I WAS TO REPORT FOR DUTY--WHAT A WHIRL WIND WEEK THAT WAS

IN THE MEAN TIME MY FATHER HAD FOUND AND PURCHASED A HOUSE IN DAYTON. WE WERE MAKING ARRANGEMENT TO MOVE ON THAT VERY SAME DAY I HAD TO REPORT FOR DUTY----- SO MY FAMILY HAD A DOUBLE DOSE OF EMOTIONAL FEELINGS TO DEAL WITH

#1---LEAVING A HOME AND FRIENDS MOVING INTO A LARGE CITY AND HAVING TO MAKE NEW FREINDS IN A COMPLETELY NEW INVIRONMENT

#2---MY LEAVING TO JOIN THE ARMED FORCES AND NOT KNOWING FOR SURE THAT THEY WOULD EVER SEE ME AGAIN. THIS IS WHERE YOUR FAITH IN GOD AND FAMILY IS PUT TO THE ULTIMATE TEST.

ON MAY 31th THE AFTERNOON BEFORE WE WERE TO DEPART--MY FAMILY GOING TO DAYTON AND MY CATCHING A TRAIN TO GO INTO THE ARMY---ALL AT ONCE PEOPLE BEGAN TO COME INTO OUR YARD CARRYING BASKETS AND BOXES PARKING THEIR CARS WHERE EVER THEY COULD----THERE WERE ONLY 30 HOUSES IN PORTERSVILLE AND ABOUT 110 PEOPLE LIVING THERE. PLUS MANY MANY IN THE OUTLAYING AREA. THROUGH MY FATHERS GARAGE BUSSINESS WE KNEW MANY PEOPLE. THERE WERE AT LEAST 150 PEOPLE SHOWED UP TO GIVE US A GRAND SEND OFF . THEY SET UP TABLES AND SPREAD OUT A BUFFET THAT YOU WOULD NEVER BELIEVE.. OUR FRONT YARD FORTUNATELY WAS A VERY LARGE OPEN AREA AND THERE WAS ROOM FOR EVERY ONE..

MANY TEARS FELL AS THEY BEGAN TO LEAVE AND BEST WISHES WERE PASS ALONG. WHAT A WONDERFYL FEELING TO KNOW THAT YOU HAVE FRIENDS THAT CARE ABOUT YOU.

I GOT UP EARLY THE NEXT MORNING AND DROVE TO MY GRANDPARENTS HOME TO TELL THEM GOODBYE. I ATE BREAKFAST WITH THEM AND SOON IT WAS TIME TO LEAVE. THEY WALKED OUT TO THE CAR WITH ME AND AS I STARTED TO LEAVE MY GRANDMOTHER TOOK MY HANDS AND SAID TO ME YOU ARE A VERY MUCH LOVED YOUNG MAN. AND ALWAYS REMEMBER THIS---WHERE EVER YOU GO---AND WHAT EVER YOU DO---PUT YOUR TRUST IN THE LORD---HE WILL CARRY YOU THROUGH.--- I HAVE NEVER FORGOTTEN THOSE WORDS AND HAVE RECALLED THEM MANY MANY TIMES.

I DROVE THE 4 MILES BACK TO PORTERSVILLE AND HAD ABOUT 2 HOURS BEFORE MY MOTHER AND FATHER TOOK ME TO NEW LEXINGTON TO CATCH THE TRAIN AT 11:00 O'CLOCK---I SAID MY GOODBYES TO MY SISTERS AND BROTHER, MY OLDEST SISTER WAS LIVING ACROSS THE ROAD SO SHE WOULD BE STAY WITH THEM. THEY THOUGHT IT BEST THAT ONLY MOM AND DAD WOULD TAKE ME TO THE TRAIN JUST AS WE WERE TO LEAVE THE MOVING VAN PULLED UP TO LOAD THEIR BELONGINGS FOR THE MOVE TO DAYTON.

THE TRAIN WAS ON TIME . WE SAID OUR GOODBYES AND MY FATHER SAID TO ME. SON-WE ARE VERY PROUD OF YOU AND HAVE TRIED TO TEACH YOU HOW TO FACE RIGHT FROM WRONG--FROM THIS DAY ON YOU WILL HAVE TO MAKE YOUR OWN DECISIONS- YOU ARE NOW YOUR OWN MAN. YOU HAVE A NEW LIFE AHEAD OF YOU ,LIVE IT AS BEST YOU CAN

MY MOTHERS PARTING WORDS WERE---SON--THIS IS NOT GOODBYE--ONLY SO LONG UNTIL YOU COME HOME AGAIN. WE LOVE YOU AND WILL PRAY FOR YOUR RETURN.



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JUNE 1, 1944 UNTIL-----NOVEMBER 29th, 1944

THE NEXT NINE MONTHS WAS WENT BY VERY FAST. AFTER REPORTING FOR DUTY IN FT THOMAS. I WAS ISSUED A NEW WARDROBE OF CLOTHING IDENTIFYING ME AS A SOLDIER OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. I WAS ONE OF 106 NEW RECRUITS TO BE SENT TO AMARILLO AIR FORCE BASE IN AMARILLO TEXAS. WE BOARDED THE TRAIN ON JUNE 7th AND ARRIVED THERE ON JUNE 9th. WE WERE ASSIGNED TO OUR BARRACKS THAT WAS TO BE OUR HOME FOR THE NEXT 13 WEEKS. OUR TRAINING STARTED IMMEDIATELY. WE WERE THERE TO BE SELECTED FOR FLIGHT TRAINING---PILOTS --NAVIGATORS OR BOMBRIDIERS---WE WERE TESTED TO SEE WHICH WE WERE BEST QUALIFIED FOR.

THER WAS TO BE A VERY DISSAPOINTED BUNCH OF YOUNG BIRDMEN WITH THE FOLLOWING ANNOUNCEMENT AFTER WE WERE THERE FOR ABOUT SIX WEEKS.DUE TO THE LOSS OF MANY AIRPLANES AND CREW MEMBERS DURING THE D-DAY INVASIONS OF FRANCE AND GERMANY ON JUNE 6th THERE WAS A CRITICAL NEED FOR REPLACEMENT GUNNERS. SO NOW OUR DESTINY WAS TO BE SENT TO GUNNERY SCHOOL. WE FINISHED OUR BASIC TRAINING WHICH CONSISTED MOSTLY OF TEACHING YOU DISCIPLINE--- AND HOW TO FOLLOW ORDERS---..BUILDING YOUR PHYSICAL STAMINA. HOW SURVIVE IN THE WORST OF CONDITIONS.

ON SEPTEMBER 17th AFTER COMPLETEING BASIC TRAINING WE BOARDED THE TRAIN AND WAS SENT TO KINGMAN ARMY AIR BASE IN KINGMAN ARIZONA TO BE TRAINED AS AERIAL GUNNERS ON THE B-17 4 ENGINE FLYING FORTRESS BOMBERS TRAINING BEGAN IMMEDIATELY.. WE TOOK TRAIING CLASSES HOW TO IDENTIFY ENEMY AIR CRAFT--WERE TAUGHT HOW TO TAKE A FIFTY CALIBER MACHINE GUN APART BLINDFOLDED AND PUT IT BACK TOGETHER. THEY TOOK UP OUT ON THE FIRING RANGE AND TAUGHT US HOW TO FIRE THE MACHINE GUN AT A MOVING TARGET THAT RAN AROUND A N OVAL TRACK. IT WAS OVER A THOUSAND YARDS ACROSS THE BACKSIDE AND ABOUT THREE HUNDRED ACROSS THE FRONT SIDE MOVING VERY FAST, THIS TAUGHT YOU HOW TO LEAD YOUR TARGET SO THAT WHEN YOUR BULLETS WERE FIRED AT THE TARGET THEY WOULD ARRIVE TO GETHER AT THE SAME TIME I WAS ASSIGNED TO BECOME THE GUNNER IN THE BALL TURRET. IT WAS LOCATED ON THE BOTTOM OF THE PLANE. IT CONTAINED TWO MACHINE GUNS. MY JOB WAS TO DEFEND THE UNDERSIDE OF THE PLANE FROM ENEMY AIRCRAFT THAT WOULD ATTACK FROM BENEATH THE PLANE. THE TURRET WOULD REVOLVE 360 DEGREES--AND ELEVATE THE GUNS 45 DEGREES UP AND DOWN.

I GRADUATED FROM GUNNERY SCHOOL ON THE 11th OF NOVEMBER .I RECEIVED MY CREW MEMBER WINGS TO PIN ON MY UNIFORM AND WAS PROMOTED TO PRIVATE FIRST CLASS. I NOW WORE A STRIPE ON EACH SLEEVE OF MY UNIFORM..

I WAS GIVEN UNTIL NOV.30th TO REPORT FROM KINGMAN ARMY AIR BASE IN KINGMAN ARIZONA TO THE AVON PARK ARMY AIR BASE IN AVON PARK FLORIDA. THIS GAVE ME TIME TO STOP IN DAYTON TO VISIT MY FAMILY

I ARRIVED IN DAYTON ON THE MORNING OF NOVEMBER 14. I CAUGHT A TAXI FROM THE TRAIN STATION TO MY NEW HOME. THEY KNEW I WAS COMING BUT NOT THE EXACT TIME. I ARRIVED AT THE HOUSE AND MY BROTHER WAS JUST COMING FROM THE CORNER GROCERY STORE. HE CAME RUNNING DOWN THE SIDEWALK YELLING AT THE TOP OF HIS VOICE. WE WENT INTO THE HOUSE AND GREETED THE REST OF THE FAMILY.IT WAS A HAPPY REUNION



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GAILARD T. KETCHAM---CALENDER OF EVENTS AS A SOLDIER IN THE ARMY AIR CORPS JUNE 1st ,1944--- UNTIL--- JUNE 20 th, 1946

JUNE 1st 1944---MY FAMILY MOVED TO DAYTON OHIO. MY PARENTS TOOK ME TO NEW LEXINGTON AND I BOARDED THE TRAIN FOR FT. THOMAS KY.

JUNE 7th---BOARDED A TRAIN HEADED FOR AMARILLO TEXAS ARMY AIR BASE--ARRIVED-ON THE 9th--STARTED 13 WEEKS OF BASIC TRAINING
BASIC TRAINING---

SEPTEMBER 17th BOARDED A TRAIN HEADED FOR KINGMAN ARMY AIR BASE IN KINGMAN ARIZONA--[COMPLETED A 10 WEEK TRAINING COURSE IN AREIAL GUNNERY ABOARD A B-17 FLYING FORTRESS AS A BALL TURRET GUNNER AND ASSISTANT RADIO OPERATOR

NOVEMBER 11 1944 --GRADUATED FROM GUNNERY SCHOOL AND WAS PROMOTED TO PRIVATE FIRST CLASS--[PFC] AND WAS GIVEN UNTIL NOVEMBER 30th TO REPORT INTO AVON PARK ARMY AIR BASE LOCATED IN AVON PARK FLORIDA---WITH A STOPOVER IN DAYTON OHIO TO VISIT WITH MY FAMILY

NOVEMBER 14th UNTIL NOVEMBER 30th

OUR FAMILY RETURNED TO PORTERSVILLE FOR VISITATION OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS FOR 7 DAYS--RETURNING TO DAYTON AND ON THE MORNING OF

NOV 29th I BOARDED A TRAIN FOR AVON PARK FLA. VIA WAY OF TAMPA FLA

DECEMBER 1st UNTI DECEMBER 23rd WE RECEIVED SOME SPECIAL TRAINING AT DREW FIELD NEAR TAMPA

DECEMBER23 rd WE MOVED TO AVON PARK ARMY AIR BASE AND WAS ASSIGNED TO A CREW TO TRAIN FOR COMBAT TRAINING ALONG WITH 51 OTHER CREWS--

[JAN 1945.]

OUR COMBAT TRAINING WAS COMPLETED ON