

**Walter Franklin (Frank) Hohl** interviewed September 4, 2007

A5, US Army, February 1943 – December 1945

When WWII began, Frank was working as a wood and metal pattern maker for Stanley G. Flagg Company. For the first few years of the war, Frank received a deferment because of his job classification. In early 1943, however, Frank received his draft notice and in February of 1943 he went to New Cumberland, PA for induction. The draftees were given a series of tests and two out of the group were chosen to enter the Air Corp, Frank was one of them.



Basic training took place in Miami Beach, FL where the Air Corp held their training. Training consisted of physical fitness and learning to use a rifle. In addition, parachute training was given by jumping off of a tower. One of the duties in basic was to guard the beach. With the threat of German submarines, there was the real possibility of seeing the enemy. One night, Frank saw the outline of a person along the beach and ordered him to halt and throw down his credentials. In the meanwhile, the water came in up to the stranger's knees. It turns out that the stranger was his Lieutenant who proceeded to compliment Frank for following procedure.

When basic ended after ten weeks, Frank was assigned to aircraft mechanics school on Long Island in New York.

Because he was experienced in some of the areas being taught in the school, he ended up helping the trainers. Next, it was on to Tyndall Field in Panama City, FL to learn ariel gunnery. Practice would consist of firing a machine gun from one plane at a target towed by another plane. Firing from the plane to the water was also practiced.

#### A Sudden Drop...

It was during this training that Frank experienced his scariest moment. He was in the top turret of the plane with spent shells at his feet. Suddenly, the plane dropped and Frank was thrown against the top of the turret with the spent shells knocking all around. One of the plane's two engines had stopped and the pilot had made a sudden drop in order to get the engine re-started. This type of plane was well known for being difficult to land with only one engine. Fortunately, the plane was able to land safely.

After two months, Frank was promoted to Sergeant and was assigned to a B-25 in Columbia, SC as an ariel gunner and aircraft mechanic crew chief. This meant Frank was responsible for the mechanical operation of the aircraft and had the authority to call off a mission (red-line) if he did not feel the plane was mechanically sound. Should a problem arise with the electrical system in the air, Frank would make the repair.

One day, Frank saw a notice on a bulletin board for cadet training and he decided to apply. Cadet training was for pilots, bombardiers or navigators. The application process was rigorous and applicants

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could not apply for a specific job. There were physical and mental tests to take as well as the gathering of recommendations from school, church and work. In addition, applicants needed an IQ of at least 110. Testing took place in Miami Beach, FL and consisted of eight hours each of physical, mental and psychological testing. In the end, Frank qualified for pilot and bombardier, and just missed qualifying for navigator.

Because Frank had now qualified for Cadet training, he never flew with his B-25 crew. A good friend of his, Frank Hoffman, ended up taking his place on the crew. Sadly, the plane crashed one week after leaving for Europe and Frank Hoffman was killed.

A Memorable Time in Chattanooga...

As part of the Cadet program, the next assignment was to attend the University of Chattanooga in Tennessee. Here, he attended regular college classes (coed) such as history and geography and also aeronautics. Frank was attending school just like any other student and was even on the track team as a miler. In addition, Frank learned to fly in an Aeronca training plane (similar to a Piper Cub). The most notable event, however, was the wedding of Frank and Betty in Chattanooga on May 20, 1944. From this point on, Betty was able to move from assignment to assignment with Frank.



Frank and Betty Hohl on their wedding day. May 20, 1944 in Chattanooga, TN

Now, there was an overflow of cadets and no room in flight school so Frank was assigned to Valdosta, GA along with a group of 18 other cadets who would stay together for the next few assignments. Because Frank was a Sergeant, he was in charge of his own little unit. His job was almost like that of a Drill Instructor enforcing regulations such as the proper making of a bed and making sure the men attended mandatory training. One day, the cadets had to go to a lecture. Frank stayed back and walked through the barracks and found that one cadet hadn't left. It was up to Frank to "explain" to him the importance of attending lectures.

Meanwhile, Betty went to the base personnel office and was hired as a secretary. Part of her job was to interview civilians who wanted to work on the base. Later, in San Antonio, TX, she took dictation at the hearings for Cadets who had "washed out" of the program, but were appealing their expulsion. Most of these cases were due to discipline problems. Later, in Enid, OK, she worked for the officer in charge of supplies who spoke with a thick southern accent. He would dictate to her which was difficult because he didn't pronounce his "r's."

One of Frank's fellow cadets was one of the "Doolittle Raiders." The Raiders were the first Americans to bomb the Japanese mainland early in the war. All of the planes involved in the mission had to crash land and not all of them were able to escape from enemy held territory.

The next assignment was Dothan, AL for gunnery school. Here, Frank trained other cadets to fire a .45 caliber pistol and to shoot skeet with a shotgun. This assignment lasted for about four months and then

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Frank Hohl in flight gear. 1945 in Amarillo, Texas.

he was transferred to the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center (SAACC) in Texas. Here, Frank had training as a radio operator and in aircraft identification and Morse code. In addition, he helped to train Chinese and Brazilian Cadets in small arms firing.

Training in the Cadet program was tough and the instructors were always looking to wash Cadets out of the program. Failures in certain areas were grounds for expulsion.

Because Frank had qualified as a Flight Engineer, he was assigned to a new B-29 in Amarillo, TX. The B-29's were the newest bombers. They were pressurized to enable them to fly at higher altitudes. After receiving training on the B-29, Frank took a one week furlough to go home. During the week at home, the rest of his class was commissioned to continue with their training, but not Frank. He was given the choice to re-enlist or stop the Cadet training. Frank elected to stop the training. By this time, the war had come to an end. While disappointed that he didn't get to use his training, he was glad the war was over. Frank received his discharge on December 12, 1945 in Greensboro, NC.

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