

Colin D. Storey
Lt. Col.
USAFR, Retired

Colin was born in South Bend, Indiana in August of 1921. His family moved to Syracuse, NY several years later. He was attending the Syracuse University School of Journalism when World War II started. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps in July of 1942. He was sent to Atlantic City, NJ for initial training. After that he was sent to a civilian flying training detachment at Norwich University in Northfield, VT. It was here that he first got a chance to fly in an Aeronca Defender, a tandem trainer version of the Chief with a higher rear seat for the instructor pilot. This was the initial aptitude evaluation, taking approximately 10-15 hours of flight time. Having successfully completed this initial phase, he was sent to Nashville, TN for pilot training classification and then on to Maxwell AAF, AL for basic training.

His next orders were to primary flight training base in Douglas, GA (class 44D, squadron #6) flying the Stearman PT-17. He recalled two stories about his stay in Douglas. He remembered going out for a dual, acrobatic lesson one day. Just prior to starting a loop, the instructor asked him to check his seat belt to make sure it was fastened – it wasn't! On another occasion, he was practicing touch and go landings at a nearby auxiliary airfield late in the afternoon. An instructor pilot was always assigned to fly to this airfield and watch/grade the students while they were practicing. Students were not allowed to use this auxiliary airfield unless an instructor was present on the ground. Colin made his last landing and takeoff and headed, he thought, back toward Douglas. He was somewhat puzzled, however, when he saw the instructor pilot's airplane heading in the opposite direction from the direction he was going. After flying for a period of time and not seeing the Douglas airport, he realized that he had gone in the wrong direction. He turned around and was able to find the auxiliary field again. He landed (although no instructor was present) to get his bearings. Once oriented, he took off again and this time correctly headed back to the airfield at Douglas. On the way back he noticed several aircraft heading in the opposite direction – toward the auxiliary base. When he landed in Douglas, he was met by several officers who wanted to know where he had been. He mentioned something about losing track of the time, which seemed to placate them. Those other aircraft that he saw were a group of instructor pilots going out to search for him, thinking perhaps he has crashed. Of course, landing at an unattended airfield and/or getting lost were both infractions that would earn one an immediate "evaluation/elimination" checkride!

From Douglas it was on to basic flight training in Macon, GA flying the Vultee BT-13 (a.k.a. the Vultee Vibrator). Advanced training was next at Columbus, MS in the Beech AT-11, which is where he received his pilot wings and was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant. Assigned to B-17s, his next stop was Sebring, FL to learn that aircraft. His crew was formed and trained together at Drew Field, FL (what is now Tampa International Airport) in October of 1944. Once crew training was completed, a new B-17G was picked up at Hunter AAF in Savannah, GA. The crew departed November 7, 1944 and then proceeded to Europe via Bangor, ME; Goose Bay, Labrador, Canada; Meeks Field, Iceland; and on the RAF Valley, Wales (in western England), arriving on November 18th. A train ride on November 27th took Colin and his crew to the 94th

Bomb Group, 331st Squadron located at Bury St. Edmunds (station 468), northeast of Cambridge.

From Rougham AAF he flew thirty-five combat missions, primarily over Germany, from December 11, 1944 through April 9, 1945 accumulating 295 hours in combat. The first mission with his crew was to Kaiserslautern, Germany on December 23, 1944. The aircraft was badly damaged from flak and fighter attacks. Colin's ball turret gunner kept calling him on the intercom on the leg back to England insisting that there was a huge hole in the bottom of the right wing – a hole big enough that a man could pass through it without touching the sides. Colin thought that, since this was the gunner's first combat mission, he was overly excited and exaggerating somewhat. Upon landing at Rougham Field, however, the ground crew all ran over to the right wing after the aircraft was parked. Upon exiting the B-17, Colin saw that huge, gaping hole that the ball turret gunner had been describing – accurately! The flak burst had miraculously missed the fuel tanks but had hit the wing spar, cracking but not breaking it. That aircraft never flew again...

Colin also encountered severe battle damage from flak on this 27th mission to Zwickau, Germany on March 19, 1945. The number four engine was rendered inoperative coming off the target. Enroute back to England over western Germany, the number three engine caught fire and had to be shut down. The prospect of an English Channel crossing on two engines and a possible ditching in the frigid waters was not encouraging. The weather enroute home was not good either – a thick cloud deck ending approximately 500 feet above the ground. The decision was made to attempt an emergency landing on the Continent. A gradual descent was made through the clouds hoping to breakout with enough ceiling and visibility to make a successful crash landing. Breaking out of the clouds around 500 feet, an abandoned fighter airfield was spotted ahead. Unfortunately, the aircraft was too high and too close to the grass airfield to land at a speed that would keep the B-17 on the short runway. A two-engine go-around was initiated and a circling, descending approach was made that resulted in the aircraft coming to a stop off the end of that short runway in the mud, almost up-ending the aircraft on its nose. Everyone got out of the airplane without any injuries. It turned out that the fighter airfield had been an old Luftwaffe base near Brussels, abandoned as the Allies pushed the Germans back toward Germany. The crew started walking down a nearby road and few hours later a truck drove by and transported the crew into Brussels. Several days later they were back at their base, flying the remainder of their missions. It took three different B-17s to complete all their missions. "Round Trip Ticket" was the name of the plane they flew the longest (and left in Belgium). Fortunately for them, that turned out to be an appropriate name.

Colin separated from military service in December, 1945 and was assigned to the inactive Reserves. He was recalled to the active Reserves during the Korean Conflict and assigned to the Pentagon's Psychological Warfare Division. He retired from the Air Force Reserve in 1981 after thirty years of service. His service awards include the Air Medal with five oak leaf clusters, the World War II Victory Medal, the European Campaign Medal, the Presidential Unit Citation, the American Campaign Medal, the Armed Forces Reserve Medal, and Air Force Reserve 20-year Service ribbon.

After the war, Colin returned to Syracuse, got married, and completed his college degree in journalism. He worked in the newspaper business for his entire career, primarily in Rochester, NY for the Gannett Newspaper company. He and his wife raised six children – three boys and three girls – and managed to put them all through college. He was one of the first members of the 94th Bomb Group Association and was an active participant with that group for over twenty years, at one point serving as its president. To this day, he continues to keep in touch with the remaining members of his crew.

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