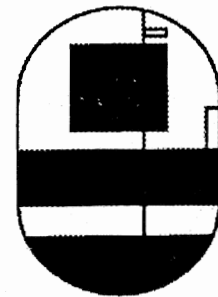




PANTANELLA NEWS



OCTOBER 1998

Published by 781st Bomb Squadron Association ©

NUMBER 54

Aviation Career of R.T. (Russ) Maynard 1942—1982 A Limited Autobiography

Prologue: *Contents of the pages that follow are in no way an effort at a biography. Very little of my personal life is included here. Be it known that I feel my personal life is of importance and interest only to myself, my family, and perhaps a close circle of friends. Further, I've more pride and satisfaction from the personal part of my life than that of my professional aviation activities. So, to my devoted wife, Caroline, and my seven children, who have provided so much love and support through most of my professional life, they were not left out of these accounts to minimize their significance to me personally. Furthermore, the enclosed accounts of my aviation activities are deliberately sketchy. No attempt was made to relate all details of the events described nor to include all activities. Purely, this is an over-view. Since writing stories is not a developed art for me, I hope the accounts described herein are somewhat informative and/or interesting to the reader.*

R. T. "Russ" Maynard
March 1996

My first student pilot log book entry was signed by "Smokey" Szmagay as my first flight instructor on November 3, 1941. This initial flight (I had never been aloft before) was in a Piper J-2C belonging to Jim Fite and myself. It was manufactured in 1937 and had a 50 horsepower continental engine with 3700 hours on the airframe, a tail "skid" (no wheel). and only one magneto (single ignition) on the engine. We paid \$800 for it. My first flight was from a farm field converted to landing strip use at Mound Road and Eighteen Mile Road, which is now a part of the city of Troy, Michigan (Detroit's suburban

north side). Back then it was very rural and twelve miles north of Detroit City Airport.

The largest aircraft operating at the terminal at that time was the DC-3 by American and Pennsylvania Central Airlines. On that first "instructional flight", "Smokey" insisted that I land the airplane. I did, about four times from the one approach. I assure

you all my landings since were better executed!

I had gone to Detroit to seek work after finishing high school (Class of '39) in my native West Virginia. I knew not what I wished to do with my life for certain. However, it had been a long Depression throughout the '30's and in the Ohio River Valley we were recovering from the worst flooding (January 1937) of the river since 1913. Water was 4" into the second story of our home in Kenova, West Virginia. In the spring of '39, a friend of mine to this day, Captain James C. Waugh and I were in front of our high school one day eating our "brown bag" lunch and watching the huge "Euclids" (earth-moving machines) hauling dirt to build a flood wall between the river and the city. This inspired us both to declare that we wanted to be engineers and "move the earth", as was the motto of the Myers Com-



Charles F. McKenna III, Col. USAF (Ret), 1917–1998
At McCook, Nebraska–October 1943; See Page 7

pany, the contractors building the flood wall. Jim is a retired line captain and senior vice-president of Pan American Airways. He also holds the distinction of being the first "line" pilot to be issued the certificate/rating by the FAA to fly the Boeing 747.

The flight test and rating issuance was conducted by another friend of mine and former associate in the FAA, Ralph Noltemeir, who lives on Lake Anna, twenty-five miles south of my residence. So, two "wannabe" engineers who studied business administration in college ended up in aviation careers. Now, To return to my pre-military flying in Detroit. Jim Fite and I moved our plane back to Detroit City Airport where better professional instruction was available. In the meantime,

the Imperial Japanese fleet had attacked Pearl Harbor.

I recall that on that December 7th I was driving my '37 Chevy coupe from Ferndale, Michigan

E-W runway and the huge 240-ft. high gas tank that was a landmark for many years. At about 100 feet altitude, the engine stopped, so I landed straight ahead just short of

B

Form AGA 340 (Rev. 9-13-41)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
CIVIL AERONAUTICS ADMINISTRATION
WASHINGTON

THIS CERTIFICATE MUST BE CARRIED AT ALL TIMES WHILE PILOTING AIRCRAFT

STUDENT PILOT CERTIFICATE NO. 5385627

This certifies that **Russell Taylor Maynard** (First Name) (Middle) (Surname) is properly qualified and is physically able to perform the duties of a Student Pilot.

Address **23424 Easterline Hazel Park, Mich.**

DATE OF BIRTH **1/8/22** WEIGHT **148** HEIGHT **69** HAIR **Brn** EYES **Brn** SEX **M**

The certificate is of 60 days' duration unless the holder hereof is otherwise notified while being valid. It continues in effect indefinitely thereafter, unless suspended or revoked except that it shall immediately expire (1) at the end of each 12-month period after the date of issuance hereof if the holder of this certificate fails to secure an endorsement by an authorized Civil Aeronautics Inspector within the last 45 days of each such period, or (2) at any time as authorized Civil Aeronautics Inspector may determine. This certificate after inspection or examination by the holder hereof is now physically qualified for no higher grade of pilot certificate than that of **Commercial**.

Date of Issuance: **March 23, 1942**
By direction of the Administrator: *J. L. De Rosier, M.D.*
Authorized Medical Examiner.

Any alteration of this certificate is punishable by a fine of not exceeding \$100.

CERTIFICATE ENDORSEMENTS OR REFUSALS TO ENDORSE

SIGNATURE OF CIVIL AERONAUTICS INSPECTOR	Physically Qualified	DATE
<i>Arthur J. DeRosier</i>		

LIMITATIONS

R. Taylor Maynard
Pilot
- or both (over)

Student Pilot Certificate issued to Russell Taylor Maynard on March 23, 1942.

781st Bomb Squadron Association
2 Mount Vernon Lane
Atherton, CA 94027-3037
(650) 325-8356

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781st BOMB SQUADRON

as part of the 465th Bomb Group, Fifteenth Air Force, flew B-24 Liberators from Pantanella Airfield located near Canosa, Italy, during WWII (1944-1955). During its 191 missions over Southern Europe it dropped thousands of tons of bombs, shot down 23 enemy aircraft (German) and received two Distinguished Unit Citations.

where I had finished a midnight to 8:00 a.m. shift as a "tool steel straightener" in an aircraft engine parts manufacturing plant. En route to the Mound Road airstrip, I tuned in my "coffee grinder" AM radio to hear the news that Pearl Harbor was hit!

I drove on to the airfield and found there were no propellers on any of the half dozen small airplanes tied down there. The propellers were removed overnight by the FBI at all unsecured airstrips in the United States. Our propellers lay in a bundle with others bound in heavy chain & locks and had been placed in a large barn located adjacent to the airstrip.

My student pilot log book shows my first solo flight was on May 18, 1942, at Detroit City Airport. I remember it well! I took off westerly on the grass alongside the

cemetery at the west end of the airport. My first forced landing due to a not uncommon mechanical failure on early aircraft - magneto failure!

On August 8, 1942, I took the entrance examination (written) and enlisted in the Army Air Corps Reserve to await a call to active duty as an aviation cadet. My employer offered to document the importance of the skills of my job needed in the defense industry if I would request a deferment from my draft board. However, I now knew what I wanted to do with my life and that dream centered around the operation of aircraft.

In the meantime, I joined the Civil Air Patrol of the Michigan Wing and participated in other local flying activities while working the midnight shift and awaiting a call to military duty.

1943 soon replaced the year of '42. Shortly thereafter I received orders to report for pre-flight training in San Antonio. Meanwhile, Jim Fite (my partner in the Piper J-2C) and I had formed a flying club of twelve members and traded the

route to Paris, Texas from Wichita Falls. I neglected to secure my navigational chart and lost it overboard. This was no great problem as I had placed all radio frequencies

hp conked out at about 400 feet. This scared me! I had selected reserve fuel in accordance with Standard Operating Procedures for take-off since the fuel feed standpipe extended to a lower point in the tank. By the time I realized this, I had to do something to restart the P & W or else I would have to land the aircraft in whatever surface conditions existed below in the pitch black darkness ahead. I was already below 300 ft. altitude. So I did two things: I turned the fuel selector to both tanks, turned on the landing light, and pumped the fuel pressure "wobble" pump as fast as I could!

The P & W coughed a couple of times, spit out a flaring flame from the exhaust, and produced power. I eased the throttle to increase power and climbed to 6500 ft. before easing the throttle back to cruise RPM. For some reason, cockpit engine failures during the next forty years did not seem to be such a challenge in flight!

The second incident occurred in the last phase of advanced training flying an AT-6 at Aloe Army



Aviation Cadet Russell T. Maynard on wing of AT-6 at Victoria, Texas in December, 1943.

J-2 to Barr Aviation Company for a brand-new Piper J-3 with a Franklin 65 hp engine (two magnetos and a tail wheel).

By agreement Jim operated our J-3 with others in a CPT program of Richter Flying Service which he bought shortly after I left for the Air Corps training. After a train trip to San Antonio via Chicago, I began Pre-Flight Training with the Class of '43-K in February of 1943. From Pre-Flight I went to Ballinger, Texas for Primary Flight Training in Fairchild PT-19s. Then I proceeded to Basic Flight Training at Perrin Field in Sherman, Texas, in BT-13s.

I wish to relate two incidents which occurred during Basic Flight Training. One took place during a night X-C (solo) to Wichita Falls, Texas and Paris, Texas, and return to Perrin Field. I opened my cockpit canopy halfway for ventilation on a hot and humid evening at 3500 ft. En

and airway light codes onto my flight plan secured on my flight pla board. However, after landing at Paris, Texas and on the ensuing take-off to return to Perrin, the P & W 450



Army Air Corps Medical Exam—By Tom Arthur

Airfield, Victoria, Texas. My instructor detested aerobatics, so the only instruction I received in the T-6 was a demonstration of each maneuver by the instructor. So, in my solo practice period of 'slow' rolls I split out of each attempt and induced several "Gs" on my recovery. This resulted in a bad case of hemorrhoids for a constipated Cadet. The flight surgeon snipped off the bloody protrusions, put a Kotex on me and sent me back to flight training. The Flight Commander then took me up and gave me an hour of quality instruction in aerobatic maneuvers. I had no further problems with aerobatics afterward. I was also selected for and received transition flight training

had attached overriding orders to my graduation orders for surgical treatment (a "reaming out") of my hemorrhoids! Twenty-eight days later I was released from my "hospital rest" with my flight surgeon's explanation that he did not release airmen to combat unit orders before they are "completely healed" from surgery. Base headquarters elected not to issue new orders but told me to go home for a ten-day "delay En route" and report to my assigned unit.

In mid-January 1944 I reported to a colonel in charge of personnel for the Westover Air Force Base. In the meantime, my assigned unit had shipped out "lock, stock, and barrel" to North Africa. The colonel

train movement to Langley Field in Virginia, where I would be assigned to an RTU (Replacement Training Unit) for overseas duty. We made it to Langley with 94 of 97 troops. Three had gone AWOL when the train was stopped in Washington, D. C. Within a few days I was assigned as co-pilot on the crew of Lt. William Soderquist and to an RTU of B-24s at Chatham Field, Savannah, Georgia. So, I was going to crew a 4-engine aircraft even though I had never been in the cockpit of any aircraft with more than one engine!

Training for Combat

During the first ten days at Chatham Field I became acquainted with other crew members, attended Ground School classes, drove the Norden Bomb Sight Simulator for Lt. McGonigle to practice bomb runs, and rode the flight deck during flight training periods while an instructor rode right seat in the cockpit. It rained most every day and during this period Lt. Soderquist developed a back problem. Lt. Jack Frazier took over the crew.

Ten days prior to RTU completion date our unit had nearly half of our training requirements remaining and had lost more aircraft/crews than a combat squadron due to crashes. The Pentagon had apparently been tracking our progress, for a Colonel Bridges arrived at Chatham, called an assembly and announced that prior to leaving the Pentagon he had arranged to take the entire unit to Batista Field in Havana, Cuba and that we would complete our training requirements by the scheduled date!



Jack Frazier Crew with Flamin' Mamie

(solo) in the P-40N "Warhawk" at Aloe.

Graduation for 43-K and commissioning at Aloe occurred on December 5, 1943. My orders were to a Dive Bomber attack unit at Westover AFB, Massachusetts. This unit flew Douglas A-20s and A-36s (a dive bomber version of the P-51).

However, the Flight Surgeon

told me to get a hotel room in Springfield, Massachusetts and to call him each morning. My request to communicate with the Gulf Coast Training Command for a new assignment fell on deaf ears. The colonel said that when he gets trained personnel he finds a way to get them into combat.

A few days later he told me I was to assist Lt. Graves on a troop

Our departure in formation flight to Cuba was somewhat significant. It was our first flight under the command of Lt. Frazier instead of an instructor pilot and the first time I had flown in the cockpit. I was not a qualified co-pilot. The flight was otherwise uneventful as we had good weather. We were in Cuba nine days. We flew two missions per day (practice formation, gunnery, bombing, etc.)! We completed our requirements without a single crash! On our return flight (not in formation), Lt. Frazier felt confident enough (or perhaps "reckless" is the better word!) to leave me at the controls long enough for him to "check out" all the crew stations. The Sperry Ball Turret was his last "check-out." When he got it extended and wanted to retract it back into the tail section, an electro-mechanical malfunction occurred. The crew was not able to retract the ball.

Jack had only two options: 1) jump out through the turret escape hatch, or 2) remain in the extended turret through landing. Since he had not taken a chute into the turret with him, he opted to remain where he was. Now, all those aboard knew I had never landed a B-24 before, but with Jack coaching me via intercom and cockpit assistance from Sergeant Davis (flight engineer), I made a near three-point landing without scraping the ball turret. We shipped out from Chatham back to Langley Field to await a new airplane to take into combat in late April of 1944. *(We will continue this article in future issues of PANTANELLA NEWS.)*

History of the 781st Bomb Squadron Association

I've had questions raised numerous times about how the 781st Bomb Squadron Association and the Pantanella News got started. Since we are approaching reunion number eight and many members may not know about the beginning I'll give my best recollections.

On June 7, 1984 a television program had a dramatic effect on me and I took a course I never expected. I happened to be at home and Agnes had the TV on for her normal soaps, but instead it was interrupted for the lead news item of the day, the 40th Anniversary of the D-Day Landing in Europe.

I became interested in seeing some of the ceremonies attended by President Ronald Reagan, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher etc. The ceremonies brought back memories of WWII and the men I served with during that time. I wondered where they all were.

I had heard of some WWII units having reunions and wondered if the 781st squadron had an association. If not I thought I would try to locate a few of my old comrades and have a get-together.

Shortly after, I began to look up my crew and located three of the men. I was very busy the rest of the year, but in early 1985 I was invited to attend a 783rd Bomb Squadron reunion at Dayton Ohio to be held in August, 1985. One of their members, Don Kay, lived in my area at

the time, and had invited me. I had to pick up a new motor home in Ohio about the same time, so I made plans to pick up the motor home and attend their reunion on my way back to California.

One of the events of the 783rd reunion, their 2nd, was a visit to the Air Force Museum. While Agnes and I were standing in line to board the B-24 "Strawberry Bitch" I began talking to the man next to me and mentioned I did not belong to this squadron. He said, "Neither do I." It was Marcel Snyder with his wife Dollie. We talked about the 781st and by the time our line moved up to the B-24 we shook



Marcel Snyder and Jim Althoff at Colorado Springs Reunion.

hands and decided to start the 781st Bomb Squadron Association.

I returned home the first week of September, 1985 and made my first call on Labor Day. In my old records I found a list of 135 Officers in the squadron as of March 1945. I was amazed at how many I could find from their WWII addresses.

I contacted Marcel and we began our planning—he would head up membership in the Eastern half

and I would do the Western half of the U. S.

We were now on our way and I realized we needed a means of communication and prepared the first newsletter. It was simply titled, "781st Bomb Squadron Association Newsletter" and dated October 1985, Number One. Marcel came up with the art work and helped in the editing. We hadn't wasted much time in getting this out just over a month after the search began.

I had an old typewriter and not too swift at operating it. At the same time I became involved in a new start-up airline with offices nearby. I discussed my new hobby and how I was trying to get out a readable newsletter. Since their office was small and there was free time during fund raising they offered their secretary to do the typing. She had been the personal secretary of Gov. Ronald Reagan.

As flying officers from my list sent in their crew names and some ground echelon names appeared I entered them in a three ring binder organized by alphabet.

One of the ground echelon I located was O. J. Cowart. Jr., and early on he sent me a computer list of members I had listed in the newsletter and offered to keep the list on his computer as more men were located. I said no, I was keeping them OK in my three ring binder.

O.J. kept offering to help and thought the newsletter should have a name. He thought since we were stationed at Pantanella Army Air Base, Italy, it should be called the PANTANELLA NEWS!. At the time we had four directors; Ben L. Donahue, Pierre J. J. Kennedy,

James Marcel Snyder and myself. A quick check with them and the name became very popular very soon.

I realized we needed an official organization and I went to the California state authorities to learn what was needed and then prepared the legal documentation to make our association a legal non-profit organization. And Russ Maynard "volunteered" to be the first treasurer.

In early January of 1996 I found Harry Carl. And on January 26 Harry sent to me the most important item the squadron ever received, a computer printout of a roster of 1100 men from the 781st Squadron with their WWII addresses, army serial numbers, crew or unit, job assignment; and military specialty. He had an additional 50 names but no other information on them.

Harry had the roster data because, when the Squadron was being deactivated at Trinidad in July of 1945, he had several men hand copy all this information from the Squadron's Daily Duty Roster. So it included the name of every man who had ever been assigned to the Squadron. At that time he hoped to write a history of the Squadron and, when I located him, he volunteered to make that hope a reality. There is no doubt that we would never have been nearly as successful in our search for members if we had not received this roster.

Pantanella News #3, was mailed in Feb., 1986, only a short five months after it all began, and we had 156 members. We soon began to find members by the hun-

dreds. By then I knew I needed computer help from O. J. Cowart. O. J. began to maintain the roster and took over all accounting for the association. Later, when Russ Maynard became too busy with his personal business the treasurer position was taken over by O.J.

The first reunion, promised in Newsletter #1, was held at Colorado Springs, Colorado on Sept 11-15 of 1986. There were 167 Squadron Veterans, plus wives, other family members, and guests, for a total of 335 in attendance. A phenomenal start after so many years had gone by. It was an emo-



Jim Althoff with Motor Home at Colorado Springs Reunion

tional experience beyond belief for everyone who was there.

And that is the story of the start and development of the 781st Bomb Squadron Association. We have now identified 1199 men who were members of the 781st Bomb Squadron. Of these, 397 have been located and are active with the Association, 134 have been located but apparently are not interested, 146 have not been located, and 522 are folded wings (including KIA.)

In addition we have identified 130 men who were in 465th Bomb Group Headquarters and there are 97 people affiliated with the Squadron Association as associates.

FOLDED WINGS

Charles F. McKenna III passed away August 18, 1998.



Charles F. McKenna III, Col. USAF
(Ret), 1917-1998
At Colorado Springs-1986

In preparations for the Dayton reunion I called Col. McKenna's home to see how he was and to carry his message back to the reunion. Virginia, his wife, answered the phone and, after my inquiry about Col. Mac, she informed me that he had passed away the week before. She said they were in Las Vegas the week before he passed away and the day before he died he played poker with his friends. He had a heart attack and was gone in 15 minutes.

The following was excerpted

from the 781st Bomb Squadron History Book:

"Major Charles F. McKenna, III was appointed commanding officer of the 781st and he assumed command on 16 August, 1943. Under his leadership the Squadron was to achieve an enviable record for flying, maintenance, and administration, due in large part to the intense loyalty he instilled in those who served with him.

Major McKenna graduated from Fordham University, class of 1938 with a B.A. degree. He was a member of the National Guard and of ROTC and was commissioned a 2nd Lt. in the Coast Artillery Corps (Anti-Aircraft) on 15 June 1938. A year later he was graduated from the Advanced Flying School at Kelly Field, Texas and was transferred to the Army Air Corps.

His first Air Corps assignment was as an instructor in Advanced Flying at Kelly Field. Other positions held before joining the 781st included Supervisor of the Primary Flying School, Hicks Field, Ft. Worth, Texas and Squadron Commander and Director of Flying at the Bombardier's School, Midland, Texas.

After his assignment to the 781st the squadron trained at

McCook, Nebraska and then transferred with the 465th Bomb Group to Pantanella, Italy. On 11 May 1944 Major McKenna was promoted to Lt. Col.

On 2 June Lt. Col. McKenna received orders transferring him to the 464th Bomb Group as Deputy Group Commander. His loss to the Squadron was keenly felt by every man who served under him.

Through his leadership, the Squadron had received numerous commendations and had achieved a record of which every man could be proud. Though everyone regretted his leaving, it was recognized that he was moving a notch higher in his military career and he departed with the best wishes of the Squadron for a great future."

Once again, he will be greatly missed.

Albert J. Toomey (Engineering) passed away in 1996.

Charles C. Harding (Group Armament Officer) passed away sometime before Aug. 1998. Mail returned and noted deceased.

James H. O'Neal (Engineering) passed away Feb. 21, 1998. I missed reporting this in the past NEWS. George Soroka recently called to report it.

William P. Wood,
by Walter Sutton

A tribute in memory of our late squadron navigator and friend, William P. Wood. I feel that Woody did not get enough credit for the success of the 781st Bomb Squadron's bombing record.

He was a very unassuming person with a very wry sense of humor. He had mischievous turn of mind quite often and I usually went along with his mischief. Poor Doc Rapoport,

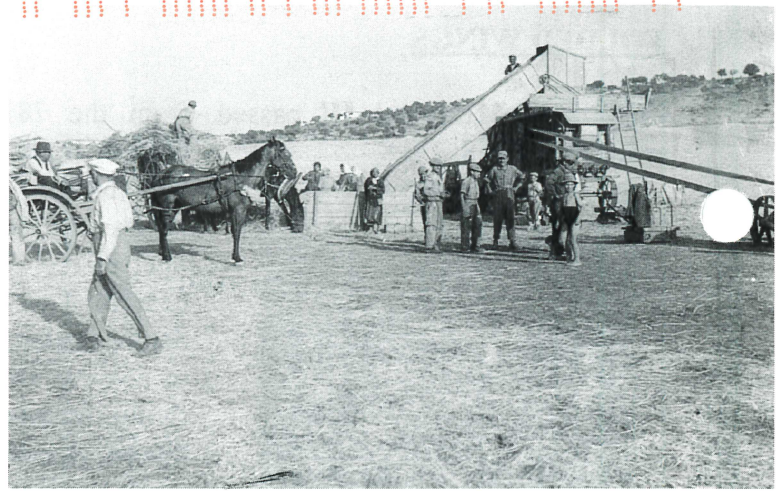
whom we loved and appreciated, was frequently the butt of Woody's brainchilds at Pantanella.

In combat, I never knew him to make a mistake and when we hit the I. P. for our bomb run, he was always helpful to me in identifying our targets. His help had a lot to do with the 781st's excellent bombing record.

When we flew Wing or Air Force lead, the crew roster called for two navigators in the lead plane. Woody always pulled rank

on our guest navigator and flew in the nose turret. He loved it up there and once shot down a ME-109. I don't think he ever turned it in.

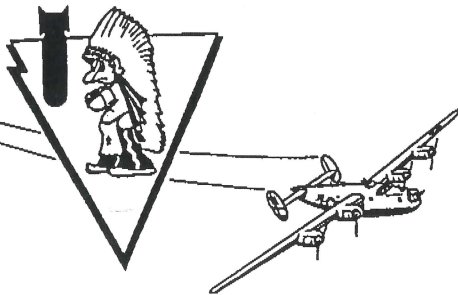
Our "model" crew was a great team and they knew how good a navigator and person Woody was and I'm sure they all were shocked and saddened by Woody's passing. Hank Willett and I bunked with him all our Pantanella time and came home together.



SIoux FALLS SD 571 11-27 10-02 #2

Flavors of Italy. Upper left; Barletta, Vino on donkey cart. Note the tufa block construction of bldgs. and the bam on GI vehicle. Lower left; Assistance in loading full water keg on head. Upper Right. Threshing grain. Buildings on hill in background are 465th Bomb Group. Lower Right; Girl driving ox cart near Naples.

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