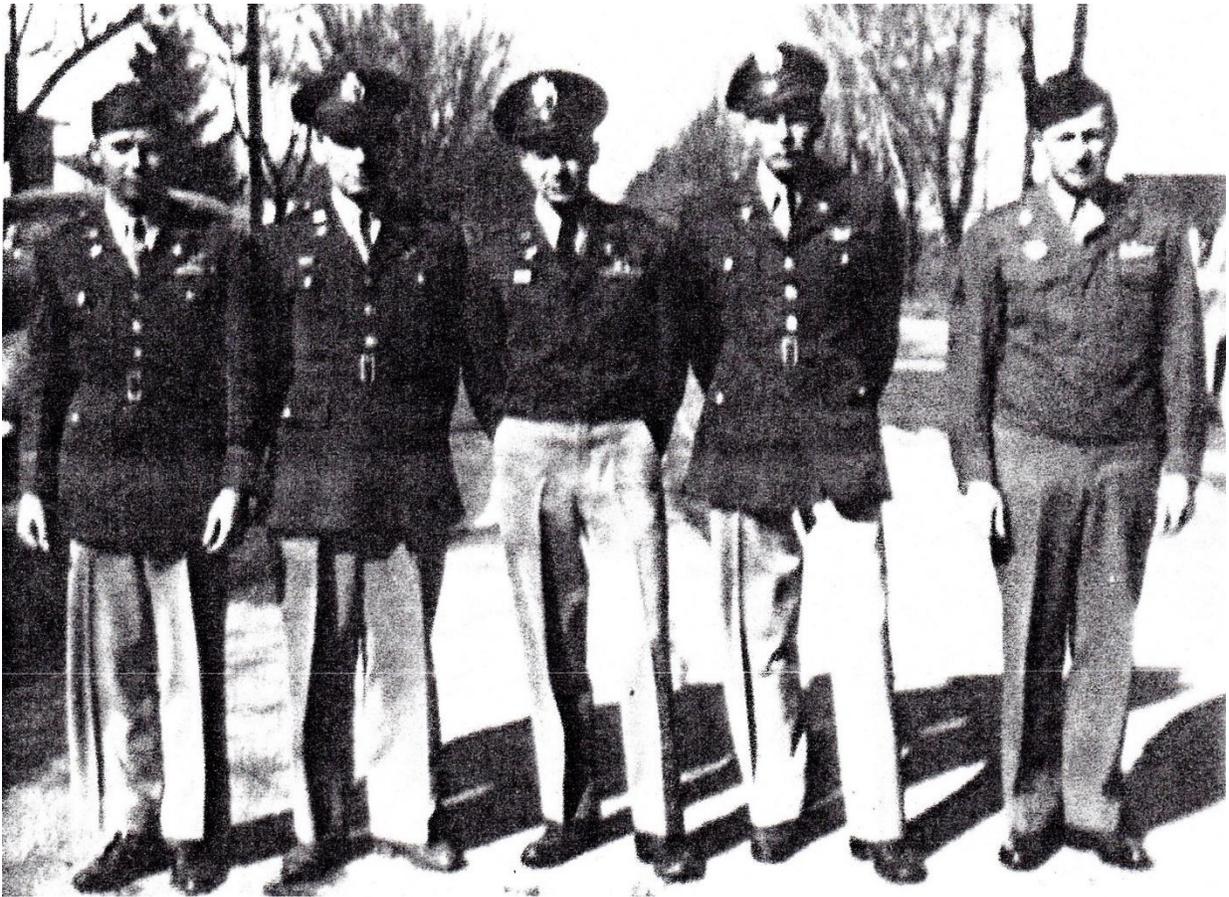


**The
Coffield Brothers
In
World War II**



Pete, Floyd, Paul, Leo, Alford

INTRODUCTION

They were all born on the farm, the five sons of James and Sarah Grace Coffield, Alford, Peter, Paul, Floyd and Leo.

They went to one-room country schools. They grew up, working hard in the fields and at odd jobs. They learned to be thrifty, to save when they could and to do without. Sometimes, they didn't get enough to eat. They liked motor bikes, cars and airplanes...and girls.

They lived through the depression and were old enough to serve during World War II. The War came when they were in their late teens and early twenties. Here was a chance for them to make something of themselves. Here was a chance to fly airplanes.

They all became pilots except Alford who became an expert airplane mechanic. They served in WWII in Europe and Asia and they all came back alive. We believe Grace Coffield was the only Five-Star mother in Durand, Michigan.

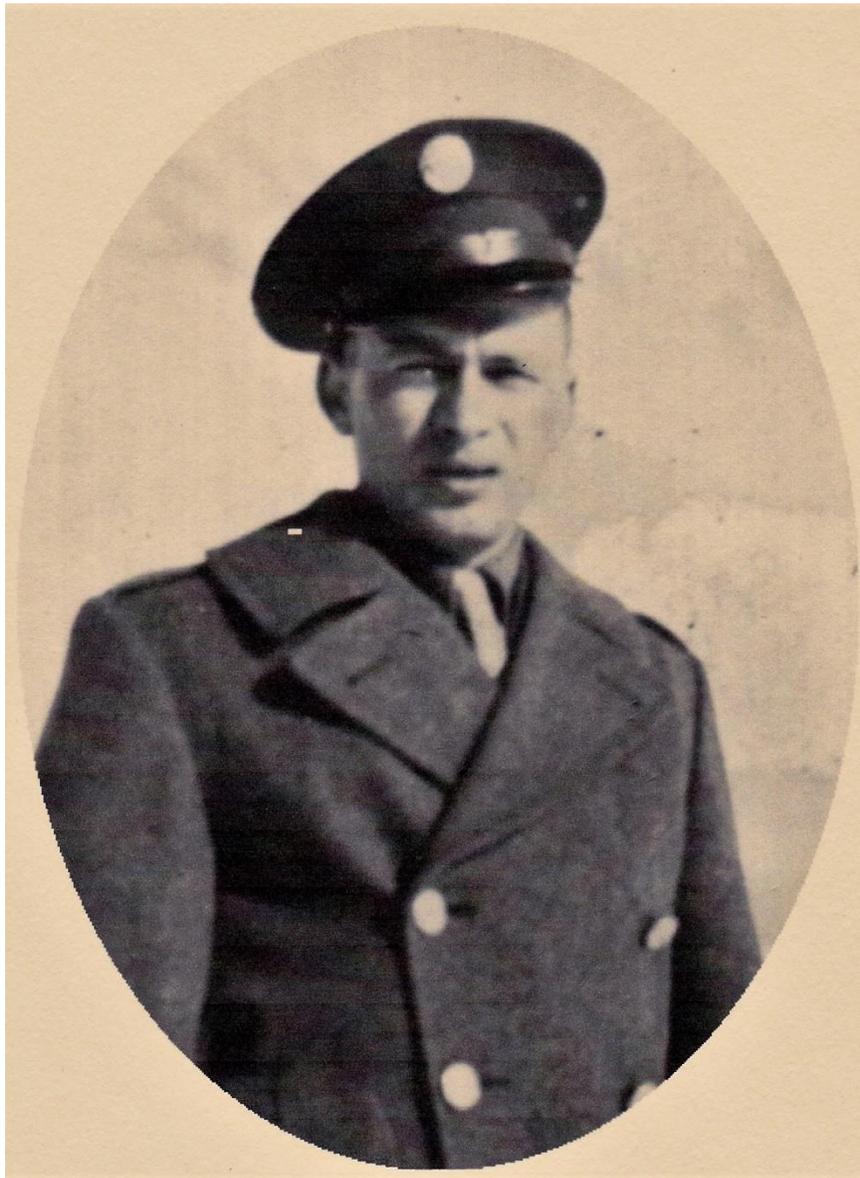
In the years after the War, they didn't talk much about their experiences, but recently, they have shared more openly.

This book is an attempt to chronicle their experiences for the family to enjoy. It is also about the important women in their lives who waited and helped the war effort in any way they could.

Many thanks to Alford, Jean, Marge, Izetta, Kay, Floyd, Leo and Verneal for writing their stories. Thank you also to my mother Barbara who saved pictures, letters and newspaper clippings from the war. Thank you to my husband, Ken for scanning the pictures and improving them in the process.

Joanne Coffield Parker, Lowell, Michigan, August 1999

Alford C. Coffield
January 14, 1914



Written at Owosso, Michigan – 1999

Alford C. Coffield

May 12, 1942, when I was 28 years old, I reported to the Draft Board in Owosso, picked up paperwork and went to the Armory. They were gathering men from all over the county. We had dinner together, and boarded an Indian Trails bus for Detroit about 5:00 PM. We spent the night in the Shelby Hotel. After breakfast, we went over to the McMillen Induction Center for paperwork and physicals, which took all day. About 5:00 PM we boarded a train for Fort Custer in Battle Creek, Michigan, arriving in the pouring rain about 9:00 PM. There were about 200 in the group, and we were assigned 50 men to a barracks with 25 sleeping on the floor.

The next morning, we were up at 6:00 AM for our first training. Out came the mops and buckets, and we were shown how to make a bed and clean up. We were marched over to the medical building for shots and then drew uniforms (2 of everything) and personal items. We were assigned jobs around the base, and I got my first taste of KP - up at 5:30 AM to work in the bakery. Eventually, I was included with a group to ship out in Class A uniform. We boarded a train for St. Louis, Missouri, arriving about 9:00 AM. Trucks took us to Jefferson Barracks along the Mississippi River about 10 miles south of St. Louis. We slept 6 men to a tent. We had lectures and drills for most of the day. We were there for a month.

One day, my brother Floyd arrived for a visit and I asked for the day off to spend with him. They only gave me two hours. He was stationed in Louisiana at the time and had to hitchhike back to his base that night.

A month later, we were transferred to the Fairgrounds in Indianapolis for more basic training and guard duty. We stayed 50 men to a room. I joined a group of volunteers doing guard duty at a little airfield south of Fort Benjamin Harrison. There I did 8 hours of guard duty a day for 6 months. I got a 10 day leave to go home and when I got back all of our men had been transferred to Patterson Field in Dayton, Ohio. I got a train ticket and joined them the next day. This was in December and they were getting ready for Christmas. I was on KP duty on Christmas Day.

January 1, 1943, we were transferred again, some to Biloxi, Mississippi, but I went to Selfridge Field at Mount Clemens, Michigan, where the 6th Airdrome Squadron was being formed. There were 276 men and 7 officers. By February 1 we were in good shape and learned we were going to the West Coast. I thought we would be sent to the South Pacific. We spent 3 days on the train with all of our motorized equipment- jeeps, trucks, etc. The train went by way of Lincoln, Nebraska, north

through Montana to Seattle and finally to the base at Ephrata, Washington south of Spokane.

There were only seven B-17s (the Flying Fortress) on the field and a few light planes. This was a transition time for pilots graduating from advanced training to their assignments as fighter and bomber pilots. Ephrata was a bombing training base. There was a bombing range north in the mountains, which were blocked off except for target markers. The planes would fly over and drop their practice bombs, which smoked a lot, but tested the pilots' accuracy and coordination in flying.

We were there until the end of April 1943 and then we went on to Camp Douglas in Wisconsin. There was more training in chemical warfare wearing gas masks, instruction in identifying booby traps and how to construct an underground pit for machine gun nests. It was about this time that I was promoted from Private to Private First Class (PFC) and got a raise from \$50 to \$54 a month. This was for 1 year of service. When I first went in, I only got \$21 a month until July 1, 1943 when Congress gave us the raise to \$50.

May 29, 1943, we were on our way to our port of embarkation, New York City. Going by way of Buffalo, Albany and West Point to Camp Shanks, New York, arriving on a cold, soggy morning. After a week we took the train to Cunard Wharf in Brooklyn and there was the Queen Mary being refueled. We boarded and were assigned to an area where the dining room had been converted to troop quarters with bunks four high. This room would probably have seated 150 people when it was a passenger liner. The upper part was assigned to the military police and the lower assigned to the 6th Airdrome Squadron. Two days later it was fully loaded, and it was rumored that there were 15,000 men on board. The late comers didn't even have a bunk area; they had to lay their blankets on the open deck with a narrow space between for people to walk about. We sailed June 1.

Our squadron was assigned to ship defense and that included all the anti-aircraft guns. I was in a group of 25 men for watches on the stern, manning a 6-inch Naval gun defending the ship from submarines. We were put in charge of an English Gunner's Mate, and he was pretty good with us. Since he was friendly with the cooks, whenever we were on duty, he would bring us a big pot of hot coffee, which we needed especially on cold nights. Being on the stern we got spray from the 4 propellers turning, kicking up quite a fog on the fantail at the rear of the ship.

We were split up into red, white and blue watches, four hours at a time, for 6 days. The first 2 days we had an airship above for observation. The next 2 days we

didn't have an escort at all. At daybreak on the fifth day, a couple of Spitfires, probably based in Ireland, came out on patrol and were relieved every 2 hours, except for 4 short hours of darkness. On the sixth day, we had a 6-engine Sunderland flying boat from the British Navy. As they patrolled above us, we came along the coast of Northern Ireland on our way to Scotland. We anchored on the coast about a mile out from Glasgow. As we came in and dropped anchor, the Queen Elizabeth was sitting over there at anchor, loaded with German POWs on their way to the States and Canada.

Launches came out and took about 150 men at a time to land at the little village of Greenoch outside Glasgow. I got off at 2:00 the next day. The WVS had a kitchen set up on the dock and had hot soup for everybody. After being on board for 6 days with only 2 meals a day, the hot soup was pretty appetizing. We then boarded a train to Edinburgh, crossing the southern part of Scotland, and on to London, England. From there it was on to Reading and Aldermaston in the Thames Valley where I disembarked.

We didn't have any planes there at all. We were assigned to quonset huts in the woods, 15 men to a hut. Finally, the bombers came in from the States. They were B-26s, 2-engine bombers, which the English called Marauders. They had all the fuel they could carry to get them across the Atlantic, including 2 big tanks in the bomb bay. We removed these 2 tanks, and they took off for various bases in England.

In England the 6th Airdrome Squadron became a part of the 9th Tactical Air Command. At Aldermaston, I was the welder in the outfit because of previous training at G.M. Tech in Flint. After a while, we left Aldermaston and went to an active bomber base at Wellingale. We had about 30 B-26s, Marauders, and we had to stand guard over them when they were on the ground. They had a range of 1000 miles and carried out some missions over northern France as far as Paris. They were not concerned with breaking down defenses on the French coast because they had big, long gun placements along the coast. On return, the bombers had to be refueled, and somebody had to be there in case the gas pumps would ignite. I did a few stints of that, but most of the time I worked in the hangar, welding with acetylene torches.

Occasionally we would get a pass to go out, and in August I went out with my buddy Sherman Ball to Reading. He was meeting a WAAF, Doris Higgs and she had a friend with her, Jean, the girl I later married. On some of our passes we would catch a train to London and go sightseeing. One time Jean and I saw "Gone with the Wind" for the first time, standing at the back of the theatre because all the

seats were taken. We could stay overnight at small hotels leased by the Red Cross for a small fee. They usually had a restaurant where we could eat at a very reasonable cost.

After a month at Wellingale, I went back to Aldermaston where I was assigned to a Welders School at the British Oxygen Company in Cricklewood, NW London for 12 weeks. I boarded with a civilian couple Alec and Betty Atwell. He was exempt from military service because he worked for the gas company, but was in the Home Guard and did a lot of night duty. I turned over my food coupons to Betty and it was a pretty good deal. My engineering officer was well pleased with my welding grades, and I was assigned to an engineering section under the command of Captain Wolbe. Our organization had the personnel and equipment to take over the airstrip with complete flying control, engine mechanics, instrument men, bombsite mechanics and a full communications section of radio and teletype operators.

Then we went to Witham, which is about 50 miles north of London. There on March 1, 1944 I was promoted to Sergeant with a pay raise to \$96.00 a month including overseas pay. I held that rank for the balance of my service. The aircraft there were P-47s, which the English called the "Thunderbolt". They were single engine fighters with 8 machine guns under each wing, capable of 4 ½ hours of flying time at cruising speed. They escorted bombers over the Continent as far as Paris or Belgium or Holland's eastern border. In combat they had only a half-hour of flying time before needing to refuel.

The aircraft would return with shrapnel from anti-aircraft fire, and if there were bullet holes, we would patch them up and use metal screws to secure the wings. We would examine the guns to see how much they had fired.

Each gun held 250 cartridges making a total of 2000 rounds for the group of 8 guns. Pilots turned in a report to the crew chief when they landed, then we corrected whatever was wrong while the pilots were debriefed. While in England, the fighters flew only 2 missions a day.

Our next transfer was to Hadley where they had P-51s, called the Mustang. They had a single engine which carried only 6 machine guns, 3 in each wing, with a bomb under each wing. Three weeks later, we were transferred to Andover 80 miles SW of London near the southeast coast. There we worked on B-58s, which had 4 50-caliber guns and 1 20-mm cannon. A couple of days before D-Day (June 6, 1944), we painted white stripes under the wings, about 4 of them with black

stripes between, so the gunners on the ground would not mistake them for enemy aircraft.

Before shipping out, Captain Wolbe, who was married to an English girl, drew a driver from the motor pool and asked me to go with him to Reading. That was the last time I saw Jean until the war was over. After about 4 days, we packed up and left for the Channel. We knew we were on our way to France but didn't know when. We stayed in a holding area at Dartmouth near Plymouth.

When we moved down the coast, we had all our motor equipment with us – five 6 by 6 trucks, 6 wheel drive, 3 weapons carriers, 14 jeeps, 5 bomb trucks and frailer, landing ship tanks and 1 command car. All was loaded aboard an LST, and we followed. We had a barrage balloon above about 100 feet with wires hanging down along the sides. The wires were to stop aircraft coming in, as we knew we would be under attack from fighters out of Europe. The balloon headed into the wind and pretty well covered the ship.

The convoy consisted of 2 mine sweepers on ahead with 5 LSTs, one behind the other. Barely moving, we got out into the Channel and made a kind of horseshoe. Then we went on to Omaha Beach. The tide was quite high and we waited until low tide, about 2:00 PM, before landing and running up along the beach as far as we could. While we had been waiting for the low tide, 2 German Foch-Wolfe 190 fighters strafed us, and everybody hit the deck. We could hear the bullets pinging off the steel. We had 2 turrets on board with machine guns, but it was a total surprise when they swooped in, fired on us and were gone. By the time our gunners got their sights on them, they were out of range.

We went ashore at 11:30 PM with the water knee deep, filling our shoes. We marched a mile to Ste. Mere Eglise. There were artillery firing from just off the beach, and the Germans were firing back. We got down behind the church in a little field and changed into clothes we had in our backpacks, poured the water out of our shoes and changed our socks. The cooks fired up their field range and made instant coffee. We had breakfast of K-rations before boarding frocks and heading for our first airstrip near Magneburg, France. After unloading, we set up our tents along the hedgerows and each dug a foxhole. We could hear artillery and planes going over and the chatter of machine guns. Our planes were after machine gun nests out in the woods and orchards. One truck left to go to the beach and get some fresh food because we only had a couple of day's supply of K-rations. One of the bridges must have had a time bomb on it, and there were engineers putting a pontoon across the canal, so the truck had to wait. It finally got down to a quartermaster's depot, got fresh food and came back to us.

We didn't get much sleep that night with three 90-mm guns firing all night. The Germans got our range, and they were firing their 88s, sending us diving for our foxholes. After that died down, we recouped, took down our tents, reloaded the trucks and went back to Airstrip 8. We were there for several days. Fighters from England were escorting bombers and doing what they could for our ground troops. They were fighting for St. Lo and Cherbourg. The planes would land, and we would gas them up, reload their guns, and away they would go. This went on all day until dark when they would go off to England for the night. They would be back at daybreak until they finally secured the area around Magneburg. We went to that base, and our planes would stay out all night and go out on missions. We had to provide guard duty at night. I was on armed guard duty every other night. We were never challenged, and nobody came around. The civilians had gone off somewhere, but started coming back to their homes to repair damage from artillery fire.

One night I was going to the medical tent, having made friends with one of the Sergeants in First Aid who was from Oregon. Since I had spent a few years there, I knew quite a bit about it. While I was walking, a Frenchman came along sputtering French, petty excited, so I took him over to the medical tent where someone spoke French. He said his wife was having a baby, so our medical officer, Captain Cochran threw some things in a black bag and went with him. The next day we heard the wife had had a baby girl.

After about a month Paris was captured, and the Germans were on the run, back toward the Belgian border. Orders came up, and away we went to Montdidier, 90 miles north of Paris. We didn't have any planes there, but we stayed until we were assigned to St. Truden in Belgium, about 100 miles away. We were kept pretty busy servicing Canadian Air Force planes, and we got along good with the people. Some of the aircraft were Spitfires. Then we were assigned to the area where the Battle of the Bulge was being fought at Florens. When we got there, the fog settled in and our planes couldn't fly. We would get them ready in the morning, then just sit there because of the fog. However, we could hear the guns going off in the Battle of the Bulge. Gradually the fog lifted, and they could fly; they even flew at night. We became a round the clock operation - split into day and night shifts. If the planes were put out of commission, we fixed them, and then guarded them during the night. I drew guard duty - walking around - doing my duty.

Finally, they pushed the Germans back, and we went about 70 miles SW of Brussels. We were assigned P-51s (Mustangs) which flew every day. We had good weather most of the time, except for some snow, but we had a snowplow on one of the trucks. We cleared the runway so they could fly their missions of

escorting bombers out across the border of Belgium to the edge of Germany. Sometimes they flew missions of opportunity - railways, train stations, moving trains, disrupting their supply lines.

Pilots would come back with stories of what they had done, sometimes pretty excited. They stayed on the ground just long enough to refuel, be debriefed and ready to go again. Finally, they went somewhere else to be serviced, and we moved into Germany near Archen to Julich. Here we continued to service airplanes during the day, guard them at night and prepare them the next day. The Germans were pretty well back toward the Rhine River, and we didn't have far to go. We just harassed the Germans by day, while the English bombers continued at night. The war was winding down.

Finally, we moved to Kassel 90 miles north of Frankfurt where we serviced C-47s like Paul flew, but they were used for hospital evacuation. There was a Battalion Aid station there where they would bring the wounded that the First Aid stations couldn't handle. If the soldiers required surgery, they were put on stretchers, strapped in the C-47s and taken to a big battalion hospital down by Paris. We would service the planes when they returned.

Then we moved to Langen Salza near Berlin to do the same thing, servicing and gassing planes. Soon the planes would take off and return without even firing a gun. Pilots were saying, "Don't know what happened - guess they just gave up." After a week or so, we were moved to Fritzlar south of Kassel until it was time to go home in late September. September 25 we took the train through southern Germany to Metz and on to Paris where we were assigned to a chateau in the Boulogne section.

After a week we went to Camp Twenty-grand near Rheims, which was a staging area for troops going home. Everybody could hardly wait to be on their way. I got a pass into Paris while there by pulling extra duty - KP or guard - so I took guard duty. I carried a sub-machine gun for that duty. Some of the men had quite a lot of money from Germany, legally obtained or not, which they were converting to francs to spend in Paris or money orders to send home.

After a week or so we boarded the liberty ship James Whitcomb Riley. Some of the 600 men aboard were from our squadron, but most were fighter pilots; all young guys just like us. Backing out of the pier, we hit a chunk of concrete, which sprung a propeller out of balance, causing a big vibration as we moved out. We went across the English Channel to Southampton where they tried to repair the ship. After a couple of repairs and a couple of trial runs, we were on our way. We

traveled down the Azores and went across to nearly Bermuda to avoid a storm at sea. We did hit the edge of the storm, which slowed us down to 2 or 3 knots an hour at full-steam. Later, it calmed down, and we could see Bermuda on our left. The sun came out, and it was warm.

During the night, we turned toward New York City. It took us eleven days from Southampton and another 1 ½ to Brooklyn. As we were coming down by the East River, the fireboats came out spraying water, with bands of small-fired boats along. When we docked in Brooklyn, the Red Cross was there with kettles of soup like we had when we landed in Scotland. Everybody was anxious for something homemade; it was good!!

We were loaded into trucks and taken to Fort Kilmer, New Jersey where they had a big steak dinner ready for us. After eating all that soup, we had to leave some of the steak on our plates. After a night in the barracks, we boarded a train to Indiantown Gap, Pa, north of Harrisburg. I was discharged the next day, November 21, 1945.

From Harrisburg, I took the train to Detroit and became acquainted with a serviceman from Detroit and one from Port Huron. From Detroit, I sent a telegram to Floyd, who was working at Smith-Buick as a mechanic. He was there to meet my train with our brother Leo who had been out of the service since August. We had a supper of bacon and eggs at the house Floyd and Barbara were renting from John Teichman, then we went to the hospital to see Barbara who was recuperating from giving birth to Joanne (two days old). Ma & Pa had an upstairs apartment in Durand, and I dumped my luggage there. Leo and I bached it until they got home from their railroad work on Friday. Ma was cooking for the bridge and building gang, and Dad was working with the gang repairing depots and bridges. It was quite hard work for them, but they wanted to do their part in the war effort. The next day, Barbara and Joanne came home from the hospital, and we were a family again.

Pete and Paul were still in the service. Paul was on the way home, but didn't get there until just before Christmas of 1945. Peter was out in the Pacific and got home about March 1, 1946. He was home for two weeks, and went to San Antonio where he married Marge. They spent their honeymoon on a dude ranch, and I remember Marge saying that when they got on the horses, they were told "Don't let the horses sweat". They came home to Durand about a week later, and I met Marge for the first time.

I was working on the railroad, firing a steam shovel, in Pontiac most of the time. I quit that job about June 1 since I was getting up early, going to Pontiac and getting back to Durand about 7:00 PM. I was also trying to work on Ma & Pa's farm on New Lothrop Road. Paul, Dad and I went into partnership and bought a used hay baler. There weren't many around the country at that time doing custom work and we found it quite profitable. I was satisfied.

For my military service, I received four Battle Stars:

- 1 - American Theatre of Operations;
- 2- European Theatre Service Medal with 4 bronze stars;
- 3- Good Conduct Medal;
- 4- Victory Medal.

I still have my uniform, but at 210lbs., I can't get in to it.

Germany
March 9, 1945

Dear Floyd & Barbara:

I just received your letter of Feb 22 and was surprised to hear of you being married already.

Well congratulations anyway even if I am a little late in doing so.

It begins to look as if Jean and I will never be married the way things are going.

We have been engaged for 17 months, so maybe we'll have to wait until after the war is over.

She is now in an R.A.F. hospital getting over the flu and seems to be getting along O.K., as her last letter said she was about well enough to go back on duty at Bomber Command Hdqs. Where she is stationed.

I guess I told you of her being a W.A.A.F. with nearly two and a half years' service.

If I am lucky enough to have my name drawn out of the hat at the next drawing, I shall get a furlough back to the U.K., which I'll spend with Jean and her family sometime in the near future.

Well, tomorrow I'll draw three overseas chevrons out of supply, so I'll have some decorations to wear, although it begins to look like we shall have earned four or more, before we leave this theatre.

So far from what I have seen of this country, Hitler hasn't a damned thing to be proud of, as it averages six days out of every seven, rain or snow, so you can see, that the mind is really getting deep by now.

As usual I keep pretty busy at my job of welding, blacksmith, etc. work of repairing and building equipment.

At present I am building a boom for one of the Cletrace, which when done will lift practically anything we have to move. And it's all of my design and construction of scrap steel.

I think when this is all over, I will put up a shop somewhere in the U.S., (like Leland has in Durand) and do that kind of work.

I am sure getting all kinds of experience, and had ought to make a go at it.

Thanks a million for sending me cigarettes and pen. I can hardly wait for the pen, as this one is about finis, as the French say.

When I get back to the States, I don't know just how I shall act where things are plentiful.

It has been 21 months since we left, and it seems 21 years.

Well, "Kids", I must close and write Jean & Paul, before the light goes out.

Good luck,

Boo Al.

P.S. Here is a handkerchief souvenir for you.

Elsie Jean Jones



Women's Auxiliary Air Force
England

Jean's Story
by Alford Coffield

Jean was living in London, working as a secretary in the City when war was declared in September 1939. She survived the heavy bombing in 1940/41 referred to as the London Blitz, then for a year had a desk job with Air Transport Auxiliary at White Waltham Areodrome, NR Maidenhead. This organization was the British forerunner and equivalent of American WASPs (Women Air Force Service Pilots) or Flygirls, as you may know them.

Jean was in a reserved occupation, but in December 1942 volunteered to join the WAAF (Women's Auxiliary Air Force) and after six weeks of training at Compton Bassett, Wiltshire, was posted to H.Q. Flying Training Command at Shinfield Park, NR Reading, Berkshire. It was while she was there, and I was at Aldermaston that Jean and I got to know each other. She was on the staff of Brigadier General Michael Greene whose area of responsibility was airfield attack and/or defense. He was Commander of the 2nd Tactical Air Force on D-Day. She served until September 1945 after Germany and Japan had capitulated.

Then she went to work for the Ministry of Food as food was still being rationed. After food stamps were no longer issued, she transferred to the Royal Berkshire Hospital in Reading, recording Board meetings at that hospital and two others in the area.

Jean and I maintained correspondence after I returned to the States. She sailed to the States on the Queen Elizabeth I after it was restored to a luxury liner. We were married in the Congregational Church in Durand.



Alford & Jean, October 18, 1950

Peter L. Coffield
July 20, 1917 – January 10, 1998



Written by his widow, Margorie Coffield
At North Little Rock, Arkansas, July 1999

Peter Lewis Coffield

July 20, 1917 – January 10, 1998

His love of flight began in his early days. The memory of his grandmother flying with a barnstormer in Traverse City, Michigan, in 1930 made an impact on him. Also, stories of World War I, exploits of early US Army pilots, and the round the world flight of three Army planes in 1924, three years before Charles Lindberg flew from New York to Paris, France in 1927. This also had an impact on him. As a young teenager, every Saturday he would walk from the family home, 3 miles from Durand, Michigan, to a filling station in town to get a free copy of “How To Fly An Airplane”. This he read over and over – until the next Saturday.

Peters' actual-flight instruction began after High School Graduation, and his first job at Simplicity Engineering Company in Durand as an Apprentice Tool and Die Maker, and attending General Motors Institute of Technology in Flint, Michigan at night.

At nearby Bishop Field Michigan, on the 3rd of April 1937, Peter began his long love affair with flying. First in an Aeronca, and Taylor Craft Cub, receiving his private pilot's license in March 1941. In October 1941, he was accepted into the US Army Air Corp and appointed to the aviation cadet program.

In March of 1942, he reported to the USAAC Cadet Training Center in Santa Ana, California. Other tours of duty followed. In May of 1942, he went to Thunderbird #1 Flying School. And in July of 1942, he transferred to Minter Field in Bakersfield, California where he completed Basic flight training on 25 August 1942 in the USAAC. He then transferred to Victorville Fling School in California in September of 1942, where he received his much-coveted silver wings upon graduation on 27 October 1942, and became a brand-new Second Lieutenant in the USAAC.

And so began 29 years of Base assignments. First to Long Beach Sacramento, and San Bernardino in California. Then on to Ogden, Utah, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma then on to Kelly Field in San Antonio, Texas in March 1944. San Antonio was an exciting, different city then others he had been in and much warmer, in culture as well as climate for a young Officer from Michigan.

A friend of Peters', Joe, convinced Peter that he should go to a formal dinner-dance to be held at the Kelly Field Officers Club. Peter had a car and Joe and his girlfriend Eileen, wanted to go with him. Eileen was my close friend, and she asked me if I would go on a blind date with Peter. I said, “No, I don't do blind

dates.” For two weeks, she kept asking me “Please.” I finally said I would go. On the night of the dance, Peter, Joe and Eileen came to my home, met my family, then went to the dance.

And so it was, that I, Mariorie Catherine Hefner, met Peter. We dated awhile then Peter received orders to go to Seattle, Washington for B-29 Engineering School. In December 1944 he received orders to transfer to Guam in the Pacific, and on to Saipan and Tinian, and Iwo Jima. He flew 45 combat missions and 348 combat hours, from January 1945 to August 1945. Peter was the pilot of the first plane to land at Hiroshima following the atomic blast, transporting a group of newsmen and VIPs.

Peter returned to the USA in February 1946, and we were married in San Antonio on 23 March 1946. Eileen was my Maid of Honor. Peter was assigned to Wright-Patterson Field in Dayton, Ohio, where he was Officer in Charge of Aircraft Maintenance Flying Safety Officer, and Test Pilot for the P-51, P-47 and P-38. One minor accident he investigated was piloted by Major Chuck Yeager, who smilingly pushed back his canopy and stepped out of the cockpit just as the photographers arrived. Peter had been promoted to Captain while he was overseas.

Two daughters were born while we were in Dayton, Catherine Louise and Peggy Leah. We bought our first house, and in September of 1947, Peter was accepted into the regular Air Force.

He was sent to Nagoya, Japan in November 1949 as OIC Aircraft Maintenance, and on Special Assignment as Pilot to General Partridge, Commander of the Fifth Air Force. He was joined by his family in April 1950. Peter met our Ship in Yokohama, and we traveled by train to Takaraska, a small village in the hills, halfway between Osaka and Kobe. Beautiful homes, owned by the well-to-do and business leaders of the two cities which had been confiscated for the American families to live in until they were assigned quarters at their respective bases. A plane would fly the men into Itama Air Base on Friday afternoon and pick them up on Sunday afternoon. Peter came in on two weekends – then was sent back to the States for six weeks!! Then he came home! That Sunday we went to Kyoto, in his 1949 Ford, which he had sent over when he first left the States. We had a great day. Beautiful historic city. First Capitol city of Japan which our bombers had orders not to destroy. We headed back to Takaraska in time for Peter to get on the plane going back to Nagoya.

He drove into pandemonium!! The plane had come and gone - the maids were crying; the phone was ringing - North Korea had invaded South Korea - 1 June

1950 - The Korean War had started! Peter and other men drove back to Nagoya - 12 hours on unpaved roads. The next day, Peter flew into Teague, South Korea.

I did not hear from Peter for three months. I didn't know where he was - or IF he was except in Korea - no mail system - no phone system. Occasionally someone would call and say that they had seen him - somewhere.

After a week or so, I needed to go to the commissary in Osaka for groceries and baby food. Cathy was three years old and Peggy 15 months. I had good neighbors, and they took me where ever I needed to go, but after a while, that became troublesome. There was the car, safely locked in the garage and a chauffeur assigned to the house - but not allowed to drive American cars! He just polished and dusted it every day!! So, knowing very little about the clutch, the gears, or driving a car, I drove to Osaka! What an experience!! Later one of my friends told me I was supposed to drive on the left side of the road!!

About three months later, I was notified that we had a house in Nagoya. The Air Force packed us, put the car on a flatbed of the train, put us on a train, met us in Nagoya and toot us to our house in the American Village - assuring me that Peter would know where to find us when he came in.

One day the maid, Sumiko, received a card through the Japanese mail system saying peters' car was at the train station ready to be picked up. I had her call a taxi, tell him where I needed to go to get the car, and for him to return to the house and I would follow him in the car and pay him then. The car was on the ramp at the station, the taxi waited, and when I drove down the ramp, he left - fast!! I knew I couldn't lose him! I didn't know the city, and though the roads were clear, there were great piles of rubble all over and many damaged buildings still standing. Nagoya had been heavily damaged by numerous bombing raids. I kept the taxi in sight and arrived back at our house just fine. Paid the driver - thanked him profusely in my few words of his language - and have been driving ever since.

Soon, Base Operations called and said Peter was flying into Nagoya and they would bring him home. He was tired and hungry and would be there two days, then fly back to Korea. This happened several times. When a plane needed to be repaired or worked on, he would fly it in, wait a day or so, then fly it back. One time he came in with walking pneumonia and was 'sick in quarters' because there was no space in the Base Hospital as it was full of Korean casualties. He didn't mind staying at home, we all catered to his every wish. But all too soon, he returned to Korea, in time for the Inchon Landing.

During the next ten months he flew 133 combat missions - 242 combat hours. During the evacuation of Soule, he landed behind enemy lines to rescue stranded soldiers and dropped paratroopers (spies) from an unarmed and unlighted aircraft at night. For this, he received the Air Medal with two Oak Leaf Clusters.

A son was born in Nagoya, Patrick Lewis. Again, there was no room in the Base Hospital - nor nurses for an ordinary childbirth - so any wife having a child had to hire her own nurse from among the wives who were registered nurses. I had a friend who was my nurse and as we walked into the Hospital, even the corridors were filled with double decker beds of the Korean casualties Medication was also critical - at the last minute I was given a whiff of gas. My nurse took me home and she, herself, had a baby four months later! About that time, Peter was promoted to Major.

We all returned to the USA in March 1952, and moved to Reese Air Force base in Lubbock, Texas. We could not get quarters on the base, so we bought a home in town. Peter was OIC of Aircraft Maintenance and Sr. Test Pilot, flying the B-25 and T-33. It was at Reese that he chased a UFO in a T-33 jet at night as high as his plane would go, with the UFO switching form right, then to the left side of the plane, in the blink of an eye. After a while, and at dangerously high altitude for the plane, he ceased his chase and returned to a lower altitude. His experience was related to officials - and filled along with other UFO sightings.

A son, Michael Lewis was born in Lubbock. This happy event was followed by the unexpected event of Peters' orders to return to Korea for one year. On 27 August 1957 he returned as Squadron Commander of the 58th Field Maintenance Squadron at Osan Air Base. Flying transport planes and jet fighter planes for one year.

In August 1958 he returned to the USA and was assigned to Lincoln Air Force Base and the Strategic Air Command. We did not mind leaving the sand storms of Lubbock, which basically had been a good assignment, many good friends and lots of activities, but we wondered about the cold, hard winters of Nebraska.

His assignment was in the 98th Bomb Wing as Field Maintenance Squadron Commander for the B-47. We could not get quarters on the base and we were fortunate to be able to rent a beautiful big house across the street from the Lincoln Country Club. New houses were being built on the base and about a year later, we moved into the first house ready. Our first time to live in Base Housing. It was nice and convenient, and the boys loved it, especially in the winter when they could build igloos into the piles of snow that Peter had to clean off the driveway

and sidewalks before he went to work. This was required of all men living on the base, and though they did not like it - they did it. The Base Commander drove around with his six-inch ruler to measure the snow and if it was not done, a letter was put in his file. This was also the policy of keeping your grass cut. About this time Peter was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel.

A friend at SAC Headquarters in Omaha, told Peter that a new Missile Wing was being organized in Little Rock Arkansas, and anyone asking for a transfer would be sent there. We had vacationed in Northern Arkansas and it was beautiful. So Peter asked for, and received, assignment to Headquarters 825th Air Division in Little Rock.

We were packed and moved to Little Rock in January 1962. There were no vacancies in Base Housing and nothing to rent, so we bought a house being built. Two weeks later we moved in. Enrolled the children in school and Peter went to Sheppard AFB in Wichita Falls, Texas, as a Student Missile Officer for 3 months. Upon return he was assigned as OIC Maintenance Control, 308th Strategic Missile Wing. There were 32 underground Titan II Missile sights in central Arkansas, and Peter would go to them often. He also was allowed to take visitors into the silos, and family and friends loved that experience. During the Cuban missile crisis, all 32 were on Alert and ready if needed. Later Peter was Missile Operations Staff Officer in Headquarters 825th Strategic Aerospace Division, in charge of the War Plans for the missile wing and the two bomb wings on the base. He was on orders to go to Vietnam twice but was stopped by USAF Headquarters in Washington because of the information he knew concerning the War Plans, and if shot down or captured, could have been impelled to give comfort or aid to the enemy. Even after he retired, he was not allowed to travel overseas for a year - for the same reason.

In April 1968 Peter was transferred to the First Strategic Aerospace Division, at Vandenberg Air Force Base, in California. He was assigned to the job of Asst. Director Command Control. There in the Command Post, 51 minute man missiles were launched under his command as Chief Launch Control Officer.

In California we did as much sightseeing as possible. We had a lovely home on the base. Beach not far away. Golf course nearby. Pat and Mike loved it! Cathy and Peggy had returned to College in Arkansas. I worked as a volunteer Gray Lady in the base hospital as I had done at the former air bases. Patrick finished high school there and then flew to Michigan that summer to work for his uncle Paul in the Victory Machine and Tool Company in Durad.

Upon his retirement from the Air Force on 30 September 1969, Peter was presented with the Air Force Commendation Medal. This he added to his other medals (list on separate page).

And so closed his Air Force career - but NOT his flying.

We moved back to our home in North Little Rock and in February of 1970, Peter was employed as Executive Pilot for Worthen Bank, now Bank of America in Little Rock. In that capacity, he flew a Beach-18, then a King Aire, 12 passenger, and Lear Jet, and literally flew all over the United States, a part of Canada, and a part of Mexico. He loved his job and his associates. (Sometimes I was invited to go along!!!) Among his many elite passengers, probably his most elite, was President Carter's Attorney General of the United States, Mr. Griffin Bell.

On 14 September 1980 Peter was promoted to Assistant Vice President, supervising the operations of company owned transportation in the Banks Properties Management Division.

On 30 June 1982, the Bank sold the airplane and again, Peter retired. (But not for long!) Soon he became a partner in Aerial Ads of Arkansas, Inc. A group of flying enthusiasts for the purpose of pleasure and towing banners for advertising special occasions. They owned a Cesena 172 and a Stearman PT-17. For 10 years he flew the plane with and without the banner, over most of Arkansas. The PT-17 Stearman can be seen in a 30-minute film, "Over Arkansas" at the Arkansas Aerospace Education Center Imax Theater. Peter also helped in the reproduction of the two aircraft hanging in the ceiling of the theater Lobby, a Sopwith Camel and a Wright Flyer.

Over the years, when time permitted, he would become a passenger, and we would fly Commercially to exotic, far-away places; England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, France, Monaco, Spain, Portugal, Gibraltar, Italy, Sicily, Germany, Austria, Egypt, Mexico, Yucatan, Canada, Alaska, Hawaii and the Bahamas. Our last big trip and tour was to China with the Experimental Aircraft Association in September 1997.

Peter had been a member of the EAA for 16 years, and every year in late June he would drive in his motor home to Oshkosh to be a volunteer worker, and to see the EAA World Famous Airshow in August. He worked in the Maintenance Shop, helped put an airplane on a pedestal, and when the show started, he was on the runway, flagging the planes to proper runways and parking places. In recent years, he was a Tour Guide in the Aircraft Museum. He loved seeing and telling about and answering the questions of all the visitors. Many of the aircraft types he had

flown. In all, he probably had 10,000 hours of flying time, in about 60 different types of aircraft - and loving every minute of it!!!

When he was not flying he enjoyed being with his four children, four grandchildren and one great-grandchild. He also enjoyed duck hunting; deer hunting, boating and fishing.

Peter passed his FAA medical exam for the renewal of his flying license in early November 1997 at the age of 80 years. His last flight was in mid-November, in the PT-17 Stearman, one of the first planes in which he had learned to fly.

Peter had a heart attack on 22 December 1997, and following complications passed away on 11 January 1998. He was interred with full military Honors in Rest Hills Memorial Park in North Little Rock, Arkansas. His name was engraved on a Memorial wall near the Chapel of the Experimental Aircraft Association in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. His name will also be listed in the Registry of Remembrances at the National World War II Memorial on the Mall in Washington, D.C.

Medals, Ribbons and Decorations

USAF Pilots Wings, Senior Pilots Wings, Command Pilots Wings
Second Lieutenant, First Lieutenant, Captain, Major, Lieutenant Colonel
Air Medal with 1 Silver Oak Leaf Cluster and 1 Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster
Air Force Commendation
American Campaign 1941-1945
Asiatic-Pacific Campaign 1941-1945 with 2 Bronze Stars
World War II Victory 1941-1945
Army of Occupation – Japan
National Defense
Presidential Unit Citation – Korea
Air Force Longevity
Korean Service
United Nations Service – Korea
Cartridge from 21-gun salute 16 January 1998
Missile Badge, Senior Missileman, Command Missileman Badge

Paul L. Coffield
July 20, 1917 – July 2, 1985



Written by his widow, Izetta Coffield
and his daughter, Kathleen Harden
at Durand, Michigan – June 1999

Paul Leroy Coffield
July 20, 1917 - July 2, 1985

Paul Leroy Coffield and his identical twin brother Peter were born July 20, 1917 on the family homestead in Traverse City, Michigan. They grew up in Durand, Michigan with their 3 brothers and 2 sisters. On June 18, 1936 Paul graduated from Linden High School. At the time, Paul had been living with and working for Elmer and Ethel Smith on their farm. After graduation, he went to work for Simplicity Engineering Company in Durand as a welder and later a foreman. In 1940 he was married to Anne, and they had a daughter Kathleen.

In 1942 he enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corp and applied to the Flying Cadet Program. He was turned down after his physical because of a spot on his lung and told to try again in a month. He was 25 at the time and knew he would be ineligible for the Cadet Program after he turned 26. Fortunately he passed his next physical and enlisted December 10, 1942. He had to wait until February 20, 1943 for an opening in his program. At the time he was called to active duty he was 5' 9" and weighed 140 lbs. soaking wet.

By February 22, he was in Miami's basic training center and starting pre-aviation cadet basic training. It was very rough with a high "wash-out" rate. Although he was in the Army not the Navy, he still got to see a lot of the country. After Miami, he was sent to college at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio, University of North Dakota at Grand Forks, North Dakota and spent some time in Nashville, Tennessee.

Paul took his ten-hour flight schooling at Tri-state Aviation Corporation in Cincinnati June 16 through July 1, 1943. Here is an excerpt from his flight diary:

"I experienced quite a set-back after my first time in the air because I thought flying would be a cinch. I had taken a few flying lessons five years ago, and it wasn't hard for me then, but now it seems so much different. I took off the first time thinking I would show the instructor how to fly, but he soon showed me how little I knew, and how much I had to learn."

Paul graduated on February 11, 1944 from his primary flight school, Lafayette School of Aeronautics in Lafayette, Louisiana. On March 20, 1944 he graduated from his basic flight school at Aviation Cadet Detachment, Walnut Ridge, Arkansas with a rank of Corporal. Then he went to Blytheville Army Air Field in Blytheville, Arkansas for his advanced flight schooling. He graduated June 27,

1944, and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the United States Army Air Corp. His mother, Sarah Grace Coffield attended this ceremony and watched him get his wings, a very proud moment.

On July 16, 1944, Paul was sent to Randolph Field in Texas for training in flying AT-10s. From there, he was sent on August 23 to Greenville, Mississippi for flying the BT-13A. September 7 - 18 found him at Shaw Field in Sumpter, South Carolina, and September 20 found him in Greensboro, North Carolina.

On November 1, 1944, Paul left the United States for Europe and the War. He was first stationed at Le Bourget Air Base in France. On November 11, he was transferred to Metz Air Base in France where he continued to be stationed until May 1945. From this air base he flew the C-47 (troop carrier) and C-47Bs. He was a part of the 479th Fighter Group and the 43rd Fighter Squadron. His responsibility was to fly twin engine aircraft. He also had his Instrument Pilot Certificate.

A memorable part of Paul's training and responsibilities was his role as a glider pilot. There was a need for more glider pilots who could sneak behind enemy lines with troops and equipment. On March 24, 1944, he was sent on such a mission into Holland. He and his co-pilot flew a glider with two men, one jeep and a trailer into Nijmegen, Holland at night and behind German lines. Upon landing safely, a sniper shot the co-pilot, killing him instantly. The two men took off with the jeep, and Paul went into a ditch to hide from the sniper. (See extract#Z)

He remembered hiding behind bushes and in the muddy ditch for two days, existing on K-rations, which were dropped from planes at night. After two days, he was rescued by the right flank of a spearhead of American troops. He remembers being very happy to see them! For this mission, he received the Awards of the Air Medal.

Nature of Sorties:

Glider - Wesel, Germany - March 24, 1945:

Resupply - Germany - April 6, 1945:

Resupply - Ferry, Germany - April 10, 1945:

Resupply - Germany - April 13, 1945.

He also received a Certificate of Service, American Theatre Ribbon:

EAME Theatre Ribbon with two Bronze Battle Stars:

Two Overseas Service Bars:

Victory Medal:

According to a letter to his mother on October 2, 1945, Paul was in Munich, Germany, ready to come home. On October 29 he wrote her another letter from France expressing some impatience to get home. A point system was used to determine the order in which officers were sent home. His rating on this Officers' Adjusted Service Rating Form was:

1. Service credit -	# of months in Army x 1 =	31 ;
2. Overseas credit -	# of months overseas x 1 =	10;
3. Combat credit -	# of decorations x 5 =	15;
4. Parenthood credit -	# of children x 12 =	24.
	Total credits =	80

The higher the credits, the sooner you came home.

A November 17, 1945 letter to his mother from Wattisham, England, indicated the he was still waiting and "really ready" to come home. In November he entered extended duty. Finally, on December 9, 1945 he departed Europe aboard the Queen Mary and arrived in the United States December 14. He was honorably discharged January 19, 1946 from Fort Sheridan, Illinois.

After discharge, he went into the U.S. Air Force Reserves, 94th Squadron, 439th Troop Carrier Wing and was in the Reserves until July 1957.

Paul went back to work for Simplicity Engineering, and on November 6, 1948 he married Izetta McKay, a widow with four children, Dorothy, Donald, Patsy and Duncan. Together they raised these children and his daughter Kathleen.

Paul continued his love of flying, and he was repairing his Ultra-light aircraft when he had his heart attack. He died July 2, 1985.

Paul Coffield

I would like to tell something about Paul's career that you may, or may not know, which can be verified in part by Alford.

While our ground forces were in a stalemate in upper Belgium, General Montgomery proposed a plan of action to get the ground forces moving and possibly shorten the war. He proposed dropping British and American paratroopers and gliders into Holland with the objective of securing a series of bridges and holding them until relieved by ground troops.

The American 82nd and 101st paratroop Divisions were flown in by American aircraft and crews. Heavy equipment, such as jeeps and light artillery were flown in by gliders. Paul flew a glider that carried a jeep and a trailer and, I believe, four men.

After the glider was landed and unloaded it was the pilot's choice to either stay with the paratroops or make their way back through enemy lines to American positions, which Paul did.

This operation was called "Market Garden", and it inspired a book and a movie called, "A Bridge Too Far".

Joann --

What I remember from what Paul told me --

He and a co-pilot flew a glider into Nijmegen that was loaded with a jeep and trailer and telephone equipment. Paul was the pilot sitting on the right and his co-pilot sitting on the left.

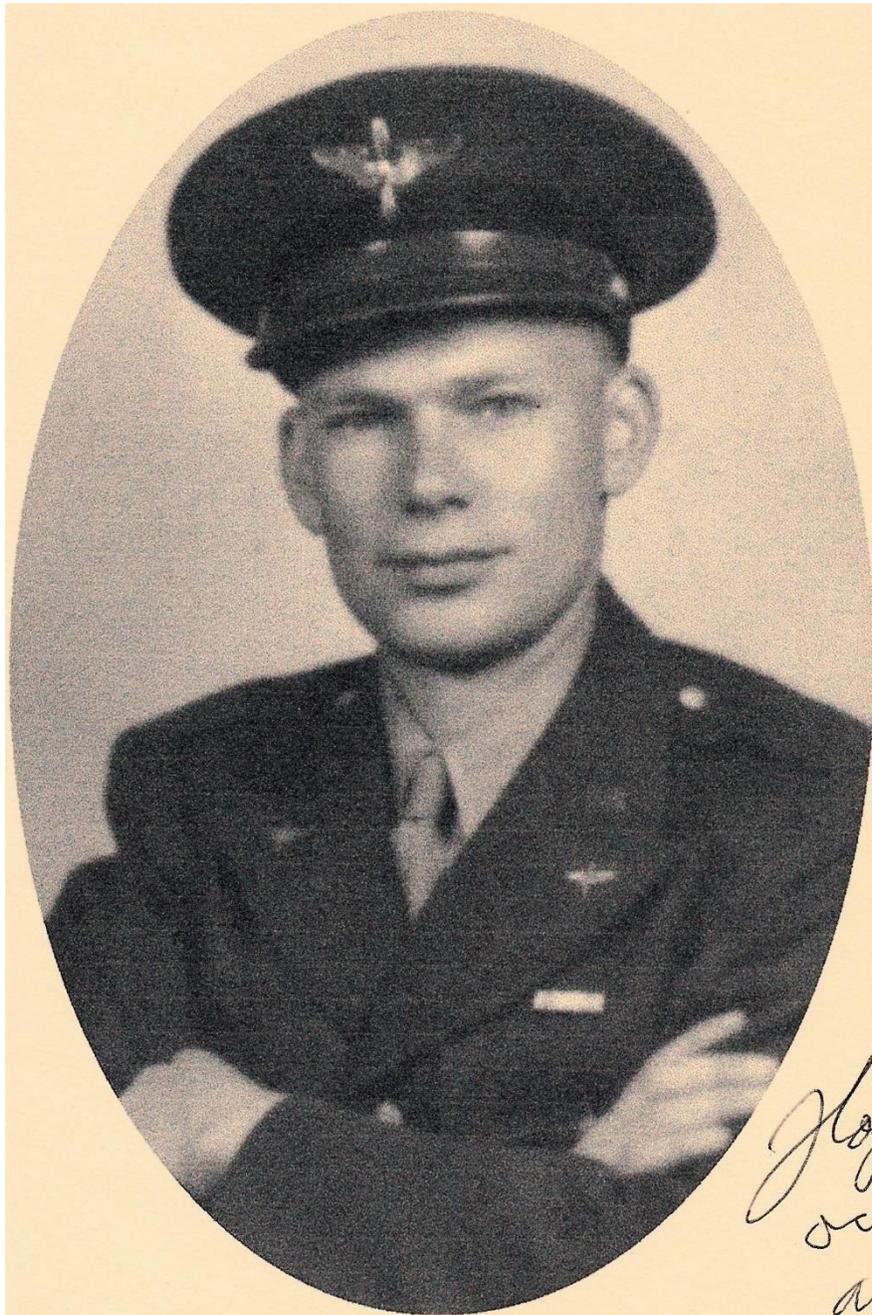
There was a sniper on the left side up in a tree. They had gotten the nose of the glider up and the Jeep driver and his assistant dashed out with the jeep and went down a canal bank where there was a road.

The sniper had a clear shot at Paul's co-pilot and he was shot dead.

Paul dove in the ditch on his side of the glider and held out for two days until the ground forces came in and secured the area - and then he went for medical attention and a bath because he was pretty dirty after laying in a muddy old ditch for two days.

And that's all Paul told me.

Floyd V. Coffield
September 7, 1919



Written at Punta Gorda, Florida – January 1999

Floyd V. Coffield

My first interest in armed services was in 1939 when my brother, Pete, a friend and I drove to Chanute Field, Illinois, arriving early in the morning. We talked to an NCO about the aircraft mechanics course taught at the field. In the course of the conversation, he asked us if we had had breakfast, and we said "Yes." He asked if we could eat more, and again we said, "Yes," so we fell in with a group of recruits he was taking to breakfast. We had a good meal and were very much impressed by the school.

As the war clouds began to form in 1940, the draft was set up. I turned 21 September 7, 1940, and in October, I had to register for the draft. I was classified 1-A and scheduled for induction in March 1941.

I did not like the idea of being drafted, so I enlisted and asked for aircraft mechanics school at Chanute Field. The recruiting sergeant said he could arrange everything. I reported for service February 3, 1941. At Detroit a group was sworn in, and when I got my orders, it was to Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. I immediately protested that this was not what I signed up for. They told me that Chanute Field was quarantined because of measles and mumps, and I had to go someplace and that was Jefferson Barracks.

I took basic training at Jefferson and during the interviews, I said I wanted to go to Chanute Field. Again, I was assured this was no problem. I looked forward to it. After basic training, one morning they read a list of those going to Scott Field, Illinois to radio school. When I heard my name called, I objected, but then I was in the Army and didn't have any say about where I was going.

Radio school wasn't too bad. We had school 5 days a week, inspection on Saturday morning and then we had the rest of Saturday and Sunday off. It was still peacetime, and we could wear civilian clothes off the base. Night school wasn't too good because it was hot in the classrooms.

After graduating as a radio operator and mechanic, I was sent to Barksdale Field, Shreveport, Louisiana. This was an old air base with brick barracks, a good mess hall and day rooms. But it was still the Army with bugle calls and all. This was also a twin-engine pilot training field. Our airplanes were Cessnas and old B-10 bombers. As Christmas time approached, we were told that half of us would have Christmas off and the other half would have New Years, each with 10 days leave. This was all cancelled when the Japanese struck Pearl Harbor.

During the winter, I was put into a Cadre which was transferred to Columbus, Mississippi in the spring. Columbus was also a twin engine pilot training field. Our planes were Cessnas, AT-9 and Lockheed Hudson bombers. Late in the summer, I applied for aviation cadets and was accepted. I reported to the cadet center in Nashville, Tennessee, and was sent to preflight training at Maxwell Field, Alabama. This was followed by primary training at Bennettsville, South Carolina. Primary training is where they keep the good and discard the rest. We flew open cockpit Stearmans. It was cold that December and January, even in South Carolina, but the training had to go on. We had to show progress or we were out. I soloed before 8 hours, but we were always on probation. It was fun being alone and on my own. It was a real sense of accomplishment.

At 60 hours, it was off to basic training at Macon, Georgia. Here we flew B-13s (Vultee Vibrators), so named because it vibrated in a spin. With 400 horsepower, it performed well and was fun to fly. I made good progress and soloed early. Again, we were on probation as they kept only the best.

After 60 hours of basic, it was off to advanced training at Valdosta, Georgia to fly AT-10. These were twin engine aircraft and fun to fly. By this time, we were treated better and things looked promising as far as being able to complete the program. Flying twin engines, we were never alone. If we didn't have an instructor with us, it was another cadet as co-pilot. At other times, I was the co-pilot. As graduation approached, we were measured for tailor fitted officer's uniforms. Graduation was the big day, and my mother traveled from Michigan to Valdosta to pin my wings on the new uniform. Finally, I was a Second Lieutenant with a rating of pilot.

Upon graduation May 28, 1943, I was rated a twin pilot and commissioned a Second Lieutenant. All through the flying was fun and gave me a sense of accomplishment, but after graduation, it was off to Smyrna, Tennessee to start the big stuff - the B-24. This was where the work began. The B-24 was much harder to fly and more complex with 4 engines and 4,800 horsepower. I received forty hours of instruction and forty hours as an observer and was then a first pilot. This was a big contrast from December 7, 1941 when the Air Force had only (15) B-24s and you had to be a Major to fly one.

It was then on to more training at Cloves, New Mexico, Denver and Pueblo, Colorado, Tuscan, Arizona and McCook, Nebraska. B-24 training is ongoing, never ending, life or death. It is no longer one person, but a combat crew. The progress measured was not only our own, but every member of the crew. It was here that I joined the newly formed 783rd Bomb Squadron of the 465th Bomb

Group. I had a crew of 9 men besides myself. We put the final touches on training as a crew, practicing bombing, flying in formation, etc. We had to get used to the old "Flying Coffin", high altitude formation flying and bomb runs. On the bomb run, the pilot is guided by the bomb sight. Bombing accuracy depended on how closely we followed the P.D.I. (Pilot Direction Indicator) and how smooth we flew. All these phases take time, patience and talent.

On February 5, 1944, we took off with our new planes and headed to Lincoln, Nebraska for final processing before going overseas. Our equipment was checked and brought up to date, and the planes were thoroughly checked as well. From there it was non-stop to Morrison Field, Florida. It was 12 degrees when we left Lincoln and 75 degrees at Morrison Field. What a change! Here the very last things were checked before we left for overseas. They even loaded 500 pounds of mail on each plane with all the personal gear we had.

Very early in the morning, we departed with sealed orders for Port of Spain, Trinidad, then Belem, Brazil on to Fortelega, Brazil. We thoroughly checked the planes before we left for Africa. We took off at night for the 12 hour flight across the Atlantic, arriving late the next day. We landed at Dakar and then went on to Marrakesh. Bad weather forced us down at Tinduf, an outpost of the French Foreign Legion and Camel Corp.

We were delayed there for 2 months before going on to Italy. In Italy, the runway had just been laid and tents put up in the squadron area. It was up to us to make it livable, and we did. On one of our first missions we dropped incendiary bombs, which came in a nice wood box made of one by twelve lumber about 4 feet long. I salvaged enough to put a wood floor in our tent. I also found a piece of plywood to make a door and some canvas for a hammock.

Living conditions were good for a combat area. We had made the tent very comfortable. Outside, there were two shade trees which were a blessing in the hot weather. The Squadron started out with a tent for a mess hall, but we soon started construction on a new building to use as mess hall and Officer's Club.

Our everyday life can be put into two categories, "flying" and "not flying". When we were not flying, we could do as we pleased. I broke the monotony by having a motorcycle, which I rode all over.

Our first mission came on May 5, 1944. I didn't get to fly this one, but I did the next day. Our first rough mission was the Ploesti oil fields and refineries, which represented a third of Germany's oil output, and so was very heavily protected.

There was lots of flak and a smoke screen. I had a fire in the number 3 engine which I was able to put out, and I returned to base on (3) engines. I was later awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for this mission.

When scheduled for a mission, our day started the night before. After the evening meal, we would check the bulletin board, and if scheduled, we went to the Flight Surgeon's tent to get a sleeping pill. Then it was to bed early because that sleeping pill would take over. We were awakened between 2:30 and 4:00 AM, sent to breakfast and to group briefing. After the briefing, the chaplain gave a prayer, and then we went down to the flight line. By this time, it was daylight, and the ground crew had checked the airplane.

After loading our gear, we waited for the flare to start engines, followed by the flare to taxi, and then the flare to take off. Take off was at 30 second intervals. We then moved to our assigned position in the formation, and at the proper time, headed for the target.

Our take off was with Mae West and parachute. At 10,000 feet, we had to put on our oxygen masks, and later more clothing as it could be as much as 20 degrees below zero. Before we reached our target, we had to put on our flack vests, which restricted movement, but was necessary. As a rule, we could avoid known flack areas, but we had to be ready for an attack by fighters. When we were over the target, we had to fly straight and level regardless of the flack. After bomb's away, the formation would turn and head for home.

By the time we were down to 10,000 feet, we could take off the oxygen masks. Now it would be between 10 and 14 hours since breakfast with nothing to eat or drink. I used to take a can of beer and stow it under the flight deck; by this time it was cold. The beer and a cigarette were refreshing. After landing, we checked the plane for damage, and then went to group headquarters for interrogation. The Red Cross girls would be there with coffee and doughnuts. We were also allowed a ration of 2 oz. of whiskey, but on an empty stomach, most of the men would decline and let the ration accumulate to draw later. This was the end of a day of combat, we were tired, sleepy, but still alive and ready for another day.

We hit targets from Lyons, France to Munich, Vienna, Bucharest to Ploesti and points in between, including northern Italy. Missions were from 5 to 9 hours long and bombed at from 21,000 to 23,000 feet.

During this time, I was promoted to First Lt., and flew my last mission on August 28. This was a big relief almost like being pardoned from death. I really

celebrated after we landed on this last mission. Next came a trip to the Isle of Capri to rest camp, and then we were moved to Naples for the trip back to the United States. This took two weeks. We landed in New York City on September 26 and were soon processed and given a 30-day pass.

It was great to be home! I was probably the first bomber pilot to return to Durand and was well received by the town and everyone around. Pete had a short leave at the same time. During this time, I met a very attractive young lady, Barbara Pierce, whom I later spent 51 years of married life with.

My next assignment was Courtland, Alabama. From there, I was sent on temporary duty to Smyrna, Tennessee to B-24 Instructors' School. I completed the course okay, but refused to take my test ride because I did not want to be an instructor pilot in B-24s.

Then I was sent to Harington, Texas to fly gunners at gunnery school. When I had the chance, I took an assignment at Romulus Air Force Base outside Detroit. It was from there that I ferried airplanes all over until the end of the war.

All through my military years, I kept contact with home. I would try to write at least once a week, and I always received a reply from Ma.

While I was at Barksdale Field, Paul, Ann, Pa, Ma and Alford drove down to see me at Christmas time in 1941. I was able to see Pete twice at home when we were both on leave, and visited Paul at Nashville, TN and Alford at Jefferson Barracks, MO. On a ferry flight to England, I just missed seeing Paul.

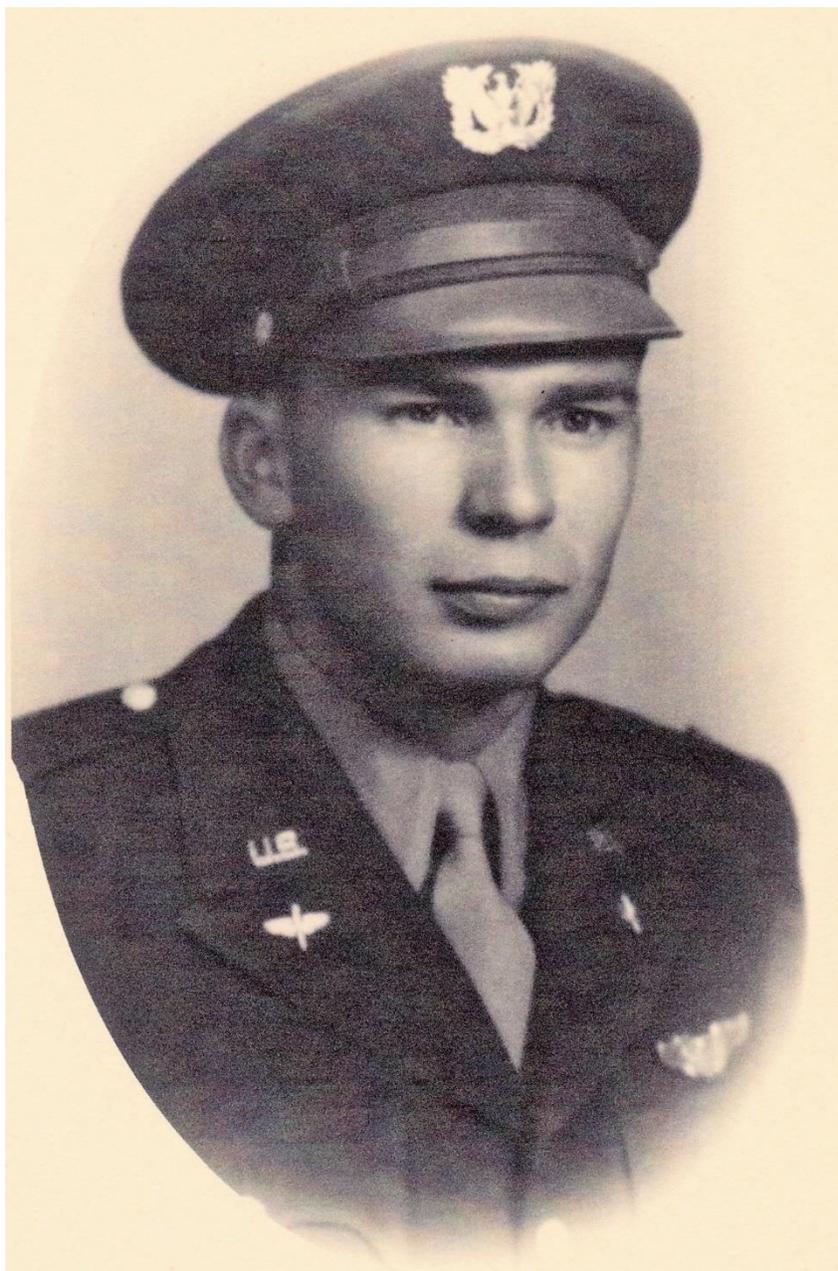
Military pay started at \$21 a month, going as high as \$379.50. This doesn't sound like much by today's standard but was good for the time. Even so, I always sent money home, which Ma put in the bank in my name. This accumulated even after our marriage February 5, 1945, to about \$5,500.00. When I was discharged, this was not only spending money, it paid for most of our new home built in 1946.

I was never wounded in all the close calls I had in combat, but the strain on the nerves left permanent damage which I still have to cope with today.

I was only a civilian in uniform. I shall always be proud of my accomplishments, and I apologize to no one.

I was discharged from the Army Air Corps effective October 18, 1945, bringing a colorful Air Corps career to a finish. I never looked back.

Leo J. Coffield
March 16, 1925



Written at Quitman, Arkansas – March 1999

Leo J. Coffield

My military experience began on March 16, 1943 when, having reached the age of 18, I registered for the draft. I expected to be drafted almost immediately, but this did not occur until the day of my high school graduation. It was only then that I learned that Dad had gone to the Draft Board and secured a deferment for me so that I might finish school. On June 17, 1943, three days after graduation, I was sworn in as a private in the Army Air Corps, earning \$50.00 a month and sent to Lincoln, Nebraska for basic training. We lived in barracks that were heated by one big stove in the middle of the room. There was nothing to do during off duty hours but read, play cards, listen to the radio and try to stay warm.

During basic training, we were encouraged to apply for Officers' Training School and Aviation Cadet Training. After testing, physicals and interviews, I was selected as a candidate for Aviation Cadet Training, and my pay was increased to \$75.00 a month. We were sent to Shepherd Field at Wichita Falls, Texas for more tests and interviews. From there we were sent to the University of North Dakota at Grand Forks. We remained there during the winter of 1943-44 for refresher courses and other courses in science and chemistry that were not taught in high school. After a half dozen blizzards and 6 months of schooling, we were sent to preflight school at Santa Ana, California. (Three days on a troop train was an experience I hope never to repeat.) Here we were taught theory of flight, bombing and navigation. More decisions to make. More tests and selections as to future training (pilot, navigator, and bombardier) were made. It was here at Santa Ana that I first saw an orange still on the tree. Our exercise field was right beside an orange grove. Was it any wonder that the owner of the grove was on hand every time we were there?

In mid-August 1944 I arrived at War Eagle Field, Lancaster, California for primary flight training. (This facility is now part of California's penal system.) Training was provided by civilians, with checks (tests) rides by military pilots. My instructor was quite a guy! I silently questioned some of his unbelievable tales of his exploits along the Mexican border, until one day he said, "You don't believe me, do you?" All I could think of to say was, "It's too incredible!" at which time he pulled up his shirt revealing such scars that I was convinced whatever he had been involved in, he was lucky to be alive!

At each step of training, our class became smaller as attrition took its toll. After primary training was over and the final check ride completed, I was sent to Gardner Field at Taft, California and the BT-13 Vultee Vibrator. About halfway through basic training, the lower half of California was engulfed in fog, and we got

so far behind in training that we couldn't meet our graduation date of 15 February 1945. Eventually, the fog cleared and training continued. It was here that I met the only hometown person I had seen since I left Durand. I met Kenny Powlison one day as I was walking down the street in Taft. So you can see how glad I was that Ma wrote quite often.

I was sent to Luke Field in Arizona, February 1945 for advanced training in AT-6s. Fun had changed to reality as we learned pursuit tactics, gunnery, the limits of the aircraft, navigation by instrument and aircraft identification. (Not many medals are given for shooting down the wrong plane!)

Finally, on 15 April 1945 I received my wings and my Instrument card and a 10-day leave, most of which was spent, going to Michigan and back to Arizona. I was promoted to Flight Officer and my pay was increased to \$225.00 a month. By Special Order #224 DTD, 12 August 1945 I was assigned the primary duty of transition training in P-38 aircraft. 15 August 1945 Japan surrendered and P-38 school was closed. I had looked forward eagerly to going overseas and getting in to the thick of things, so the end of the war was hard to take.

From August to November I guarded German prisoners as they worked at clearing sagebrush from the perimeter of Luke Field. I also taught gunnery with one of the few enlisted pilots in the Air Corps.

In November 1945, I was discharged and headed home to Michigan. I went to work on the railroad and later at a Chevrolet factory. Neither of these jobs was satisfying, so in 1947, I reentered the Air Corp, which almost immediately became the U.S. Air Force. If I had chosen to remain in the service in 1945, I would have been given the rank of Master Sergeant and remained on flying status. Now however, I re-entered as a Corporal and was sent to Selfridge Field in Detroit, Michigan where I worked in the welding and machine shop.

In 1948 I went to Tullin A.F.B. in Vienna, Austria as an engineering clerk. Tullin was a training base for the German Air Force during the war, and there were still a lot of destroyed barracks and aircraft on the field. During the Berlin Airlift we were blockaded for 3 days. Vienna was divided into 4 zones; American, British, French and Russian. There were lots of things to see and do in our off-duty time. (Concerts, opera, movie houses, statues and beautiful parks) We could ride all over Vienna on the trolleys, at no cost, as long as we stayed in the American zone. And by the way, the blue Danube is really green.

I came back to the United States in 1949 on one of our returning airlift planes. After a short furlough, I went to Sheppard A.F.B., Texas to aircraft mechanics school. Two weeks before graduation, the Korean War began. The Air Force decided to expand the school to accommodate more students. My enlistment was extended, and I became an Instructor.

In 1950, I met Neal (Verneal Troxel), and on April 20, 1951 we were married. In August 1954 when our son David was 3 months old, I was sent to Korea. I was assigned to the 8th Bomb Squadron, 3rd Bomb Wing as an Instructor and Aircraft Inspector. Three months later, the whole 3rd Bomb Wing was moved to Johnson A.F.B., Japan where my duties remained the same. We could still see a lot of damaged streets and houses from World War II bombing, however the Japanese people were the most courteous I had ever seen. When we went sightseeing, we had to ride bikes and motorbikes because the roads were so narrow.

November 1955 found me at Harlingen A.F.B., Texas. My duty there was Aircraft Maintenance Instructor. It was there that Cindy was born on October 25, 1956. We bought and remodeled a house on 5 acres of grapefruit, orange, tangerine and lemon trees.

By this time, I was ready for a change from aircraft mechanics, so I signed up for electronics, specializing in navigational aids and was sent to Keesler A.F.B. in Biloxi, Mississippi in January 1958. When my training was completed, I was given a 3-year assignment to Tachikawa, Japan, and Neal and the kids went with me. While we were still in the guesthouse, looking for place to live, I was given temporary duty at another air base. While I was gone, both David and Cindy came down with chickenpox. I think Neal was glad to see me when I got back. While I was assigned at Tachikawa, I helped install instrument landing systems, markers, beacons, omni ranges and tachar navigation and distance measuring systems and support for "Operation Blue Straw". (Atomic test sites) As a family, we visited the sites of Buddha, Shinto shrines, the cherry Blossom Festival and many more, including climbing Mount Fuji.

In the summer of 1963, we were back in Texas at James Connely A.F.B., near Waco. Here I supervised the maintenance of instrument landing systems, tachan, ground-to-air communications, the communication center and ground control approach radar.

In August 1965, we went to Elgin A.F.B., Fort Walton Beach, Florida where I was to help test the Loran-D navigational system.

I was there until I retired in 1966 completing 21 ½ years of military service. I retired as a Master sergeant and 6 years later, regained the highest rank I had held, which was Flight officer.