



Homer “H. G.” White
Corporal, U.S. Army Air Corps
World War II
July 1944 - 1945

My birth certificate reads, “H (initials only) G (initials only) White”, but my daddy’s name was Homer Garnet White. When I enlisted in the Aviation Cadet Program in Tyler in 1943, my name was published in the paper as Homer Garnet White. That didn’t mean a thing to my old schoolmates in New London, Texas. They only knew H.G.

I was raised in New London, and was going to school there when the school building blew up and killed 297 children. My room held 32 children. Five boys and three girls left that room alive. I call myself a survivor because of that and my good luck during World War II.

The war in Europe ended while I was in gunnery school in Panama City, Florida, at Tendall Field. I had been reassigned from pilot training to a tail gunner. The actor Clark Gable was attending the same school and graduated as a major. I graduated as a private. I never did understand that. He was about to make a movie called “The 8th Air Force” in England, so they were giving him some flying time with us poor boys.

I left Florida and went to Tennessee to flight engineer school. As a B24 tail gunner, I rode in the back end looking at where we had been. In Tennessee, we were trained on B29 aircraft. It had basically the same electrical system as the smaller B24.

Raised as a Christian, I thought it was interesting when I heard that a hard-shelled preacher in Murfreesboro (a little town south of Nashville) had predicted the end of the world was coming on a particular day. When that day came, I was on a B24 as flight engineer. I was asleep on a couch on the flight deck when the pilot woke me up and said he could smell gasoline. He told me to check the bomb bay and see if I could find anything. In the bomb bay, I grabbed the bomb racks on either side of the catwalk. They were wet with gasoline. I cut off the main power switch and looked out the windows in the aft section of the plane. A gasoline cap was open, though it was supposed to have been safety-wired shut. Gasoline was siphoning out, coming over the wing, crossing in front of the turbo exhaust of the engine and blowing right inside the bomb bay. One spark would have blown us out of the sky. The first thing I thought about was that old preacher’s prediction.

Needless to say, I hurried back to the flight deck. The captain had already pulled the curtains down because he didn't know I had killed the power. He had just come back from Europe, where he had been bombing the Pulaski Oilfields. So when he heard what had happened, he turned that plane up on its wing and we went in for a landing. He set that B24 down flat on an emergency runway. I was out on deck before we stopped rolling. We found out that the gas cap had been closed, jammed down and safety-wired. But the gasket had folded in half and kept it from sealing shut. After checking everything out, we took off again and returned to the base. It had been a close call but turned out all right.

While I was in Tennessee, the Japanese decided they didn't want any more atomic bombs and threw in the towel. Of course, I started looking at how many points I had earned. When I reached the 24-point state, I went home. My military career had lasted two years. I entered Kilgore College in 1946 along with veterans who had served in the Big War.

I joined the Army Air Corps because I wanted to serve my country like the older boys I had watched go off to war. Also, I wanted to learn to fly. Patriotism was very strong in America at the time. Over the last 20 years, that sense of patriotism has relaxed a lot. Many people decided they didn't need to serve in Korea or Vietnam.

When I left the service and was going to school with all those veterans, they told some great war tales (some true and some not so true). I was bewildered by the things they had survived. Some of those men wore their uniform for 40 days until it finally was cut off of them at the hospital. They were my heroes.