



1<sup>st</sup> Lt. William "W.M." Stack  
21<sup>st</sup> Squadron  
Pilot

Bill Stack was born on a small farm about ten miles from the Greensboro, NC airport on April 28, 1923. "I spent a lot of my youth staring at airplanes as they took off and flew over."

When he graduated from high school Bill took a job at a hosiery mill but after a couple of months he quit. "I had aspirations of being a pilot, but I also knew that it probably wouldn't happen because I didn't have the wherewithal to learn to fly. It seemed like one of those things that was so far away that I would never accomplish it."

Soon after the war began Bill was drafted and his physical was rated A1. However, he wasn't inducted immediately and when he heard that a flying cadet test was going to be administered in Winston Salem, Bill signed up. When he took the three and a half hour test, all the other men taking it were college students. After the tests were graded Bill was told that he had the highest score. "I was on cloud nine. It made me feel that even though I came from a small town I could compete."

As part of the first college detachment training program, Bill received an initial three month training program at Dickenson College in PA. From there cadets went to Nashville, TN for classification as either a pilot, navigator or bombardier.

Bill's pilot training started with "Preflight" at Maxwell field, "Primary" at Avon Park FL and "Basic" at Macon GA. He graduated from flight training at Dothan AL.

As part of his Primary training Bill flew a variety of trainer aircraft such as the BT17 Stearman. His last 10 hours were spent flying a P40. "That was the first fighter you got in. That was a

thrill that I'll always remember. The first take off in that thing... the torque was just tremendous compared to the airplanes I'd been flying. It was very impressive and I fell in love with fighters after that."

After his graduation from flight training, Bill was sent to Goldsboro, NC where he would fly P-47s. Eventually he was assigned to the 413<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group, eventually based at Bluethenthal Field.

"I was close to home. Flew a BT13 home once one weekend. The county I lived in had no electricity when I had left. I had a younger brother still at home and in order to get picked up by my dad I flew down over his farm circled it a couple of times, a little low I guess. When they came to pick me up my brother said 'hey, that was something to see you do that. That one time you came over I thought you were going to hit those wires' and my answer was 'what wires?' I didn't see 'em!"

"We always have close ones like that but most of them we never know about. They happen and you're not aware of it"

"The pilots of the 413<sup>th</sup> were trained for long missions. The P-47Ns they would fly in the Pacific Theater were designed to fly up to 2,000 miles. During one training mission a group of P-47s including new "N"s and "old worn out" "C"s and "D"s were to fly from Bluethenthal to Key West and back. Only the "N"s could make the round trip and the pilots in the older planes had to stop in Florida for fuel. Due to overcast skies over Florida, Bill remembers planes were scattered all over, but everyone managed to find fuel and return home.

When it was time to go overseas, Bill was among the pilots who would go with their planes on the escort carrier Kwajalein. Their first stop was to be Guam and along the way a Navy catapult officer gave them a briefing on catapulting off the ship. "This carrier travels at 18 knots. Our catapult can generate 80 knots and I understand your P-47 needs about 115 knots in order to fly. We're going to have to find at least a 15 to 20 knot headwind or else you'll drop into the water." Bill recalls, "That kind of opened our eyes a little bit."

"About a week after the invasion of Iwo Jima they told us we would be catapulted off the carrier." They were to fly to Iwo Jima where a landing strip was to be in place. However, the Iwo Jima strip wasn't ready when they arrived in Guam and their airplanes were unceremoniously taken off the carrier by crane and given to the 318<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group that had been on Guam and Saipan during the Iwo Jima campaign. The 413<sup>th</sup> pilots then spent weeks ferrying new P-47s from Hawaii.

In addition to bringing planes in from Hawaii, they flew some practice missions to Truk. They also ferried planes to Eniwetok where the Air

Corps had modification centers. "They had to put rocket rails on some of the wings and different things to different airplanes."

Eventually the 413<sup>th</sup> went on to Ie Shima. "The 318<sup>th</sup> went about two weeks before we did and they had all the fun. All The kamikazes were just demolishing the ships in the harbor and all around and they (318<sup>th</sup> pilots) shot down quite a few airplanes. By the time we got there about two weeks later most of that was over and our missions were kind of quiet."

The pilots lived in one area, four to a tent. "Kind of crowded and not a lot of fun." No bathrooms. Wing tank supported by 2x4s with a pull handle served as a shower. "There was a sign on it that said '21<sup>st</sup> Officers Only' for the shower". I asked if the sign was abided by. Bill laughed and said; "Not really. Nobody minded anyway. It's amazing how well people got along because in such close quarters... Tent's were touching each other almost." The only entertainment Bill remembers was playing cards. "There was really nothing to do."

"Missions were long", every third day a pilot would fly. As a double strength squadron with two pilots for each plane, it allowed for the planes to go up more often than the pilots. "I don't know how they picked the second Lt.s who got airplanes but I happened to be one of them. "[Maybe it was] that I was the wingman of flight leader George Jones. Anyway I was allowed to pick my own airplane."

"We could choose the letter used on the plane for identification. I was too late to get 'S' as the squadron I.D. was 'B' for the 21<sup>st</sup>. Instead of my initials I had 'BX'."

"Missions were long." "[You were] taught to keep your neck on a swivel, and you're trying to stay alert, look around and fly a decent formation also and stay in position where you're supposed to be. And quite a few missions were six to eight hours."

Bill remembered his first dive bombing mission. "The P-47 is not a dive bomber so we had to figure out how to do it ourselves. They had this one bridge in Kyushu that they wanted taken out. The 21<sup>st</sup> was given the job. Each [plane] had two 500 lb. bombs. We all took a shot at it. There were 16 of us... not one bomb hit the bridge." "We did improve," Bill noted.

"They'd try new stuff like that which hadn't been done before and you just had to learn as you went."

Flight Leader Jones, Bill and two others were sent out to find a PBY "Dumbo" flying boat which picked up shot down pilots. It had picked up a couple pilots the night before and lost an engine on take off. The four pilots escorted the Dumbo as it taxied on the water back to Ie Shima.

"We did quite a few mapping [missions] escorting B-24 photo plans. Also strafing and dive bombing [missions] as the Japanese couldn't put planes up in the air any longer."

Bill flew three or four napalm missions. "Amazing. 12 or 16 planes abreast. Fly above 1500 feet and not too fast. Upon command all would drop it. Completely burn up a little town. "That wasn't too pleasant because you knew there weren't that many soldiers down there. I don't know how else to put it. Civilians. To me it wasn't too pleasant."

"We lost more planes on take off than any other way. One pilot, two days in succession, he crashed and burned the plane up and got out without a scratch both times." After that the pilot was sent for assignment elsewhere.

"[We] were limited to the length of the runway because the island was so small. It was crushed coral and if it was damp, and there'd been a little rain the night before it would be a little soft and that slowed you down a little bit. It was a problem.

Col. Thyng called a meeting with all the pilots to discuss how you got the fully loaded [plane] up in the air. [We] didn't come to any conclusion so it was up to the individual pilot what he did.

Some liked to use little flaps. I didn't like to use flaps on take off. I had an air speed in my mind. 150mph. I would never try to fly the airplane off until I saw 150 on the airspeed indicator. And I knew at that speed it would fly.

The airplane was about 14,000 lbs. and they were loaded sometimes up to 20 and 21,000 lbs. and the answer was not to load them that heavy. [laughter]. They never considered that because number one you had to have so much fuel to get to Japan and back... and then how much ordnance can you carry. The powers that be that scheduled the missions, they looked at it I think in a different way. 'How many points on this airplane can we hang something?'. They were just overloaded. Period."

"I remember I was flying an airplane once and I did a roll and I was on my back, and the controls just locked up, the stick, I couldn't move it. And I skidded around with the rudders and finally got the airplane right side up and shook the stick and all at once it broke loose. Well there was a stone, a rock and nobody knows how it got in there. And they found it later because the same thing happened to another pilot. He was lucky enough to get out of it too. The bottom of the control stick was in a 'V' and where the cable was attached and it ran back and forth as you moved the stick. The stone, when you rolled the airplane on its back... just gravity... it fell up a little bit, which was down if you were upside down and it would wedge the stick into this 'V'."

"I used to say it had a lot of two by sixes in it."

"[The] day before the war ended, I was on a mission, in fact it lasted eight hours, [Colonel] Thyng was leading it and I was one of the pilots and he took the whole group, 48 airplanes. Thyng told us that 'They think the war is going to be over.' [We] flew to Kyushu, flew around, turned around and landed."

Of Col. Thyng "He was quite a guy. His bark was worse than his bite. Most missions were led by one of the senior officers of the Fighter Group, flying with different squadrons on different missions. I flew his wing on a couple of missions."

It was six months before he was shipped home after the war. After the war they flew at least four hours a month to get flight pay. "You could fly if you wanted to."

When he enlisted, Bill had to have his parents sign when he went into the cadets. He doesn't remember why since he could have been drafted.

Bill's mother didn't like airplanes. She told him, "I don't want to sign this because I'm afraid that when the war is over you'll still want to fly." "So I didn't fly for a couple years." Eventually Bill told his mother that he was going to fly again. He joined the Air Force Reserve and started flying.

Bill Stack made a career of flying, starting with Eastern Airlines flying DC-3s. The last plane he flew, in 1982, was an A300 Airbus.

