



## **VICTORY**

*A World War II Bomber Pilot Memoir*

Douglas Coulter Richards

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# VICTORY

A WORLD WAR II  
BOMBER PILOT MEMOIR



**DOUGLAS COULTER  
RICHARDS**

15TH AIR FORCE  
304TH WING  
456TH BOMB GROUP H  
746TH BOMB SQUADRON



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## FOREWORD

I grew up with my grandfather Doug Richards telling tales of his time in World War II. On a few occasions, I traveled to some of the bomb group reunions he mentioned and got to explore some of the last surviving flyable B-24s with him as my tour guide. I am very grateful that he had the foresight to record his memories and thankful for the work his daughter, my mother, Beth Godfrey, put into getting his memoirs into book form in 1988. With the advent of geographic information system mapping, the research power of the internet, easy document editing, and so forth, I thought a new updated and improved version was due lest we forget the great aviators of yesteryear. For this version, I have created a number of new maps to help illustrate my grandfather's exploits, and many more pictures from his collection are also included, mixed into the narrative.

There is one tale that my grandfather told me that he did not include in this text, which is largely derived from my grandmother Mina Richards typing my grandfather's recollections in the early 1980s while he was looking through his documents. Many people have wondered what the B-24 aircrew did on long missions over hostile territory when it comes to using the bathroom. One time on a camping trip my grandfather, unprompted, told me they would take care of their business into glass jars and then chuck them out the window onto the enemy territory below.

I would also like to thank Gail Elliott Downs for her interview with Captain Wes Hyde regarding the Blechhammer mission. His additional perspective fleshes out the events and provides

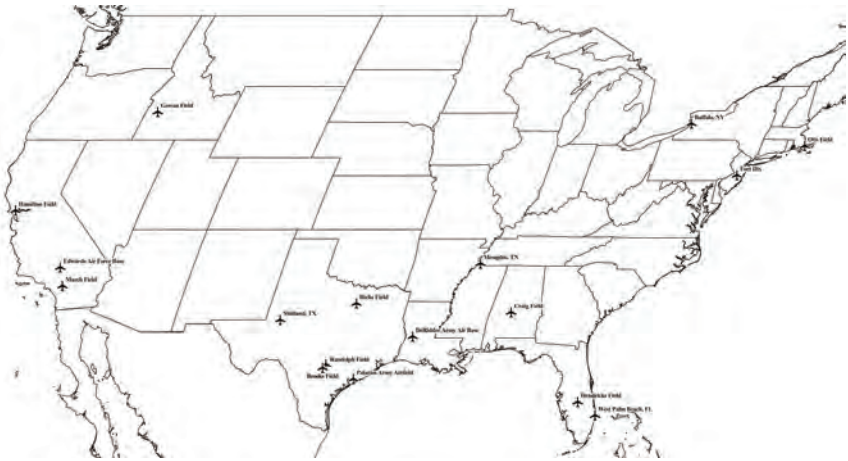
additional poignancy to what happened. Readers of this book will also likely enjoy her book *The Black Suitcase Mystery: A World War II Remembrance* which is about one of my grandfather's crew members, top turret gunner and radio operator George Rich. My grandfather, the rest of his crew, and the 456th Bomb Group as a whole are also all prominently featured. George Rich was her great-aunt's son, so her book has the same personal family connection as this book does for me.

— *David Godfrey*





# CHAPTER I: JOINING THE MILITARY



*Map of bases Douglas Richards visited.  
Map by grandson David Godfrey.*

After graduating from high school in Lockport, New York, I worked on my father's farm a year before going to college. In 1936 through 1940 I was at Syracuse University in New York State, and while there was taking political science, which included international relations. At this time, there were many events that were happening in Europe with Hitler, and I realized at that particular time that war was inevitable and the United States would be drawn into it. We had an international relations professor who was also a colonel in the army, and by taking his course, I was able to verify this in a hurry. I graduated from Syracuse in 1940 with a bachelor's degree in business administration and started

work in the fall in Buffalo, New York, making shock absorbers for Houdaille Manufacturing Company. We kept getting nearer to the conflict which had started between England, France, and Germany in 1939 when Germany invaded Poland. So, I knew it was just a matter of time.

I was classified 1-A, and in March of 1941, with the draft board breathing down my neck, I enlisted in the Army Air Force as a private. I was inducted and sworn in in Buffalo and took the train to Fort Dix, New Jersey, where I first experienced army life. There we learned how to drill and also do KP [kitchen police] and things like that. We were issued army clothes and after two, three, or four weeks, I don't know how long, we entrained for Selma, Alabama, where I was supposed to go into Research & Development (whatever that was!). I remember taking the train to Atlanta, and we had to change trains there, and I had my first Southern breakfast of grits, bacon, and eggs. This was a new experience for me.



*Leaving Fort Dix for Selma*

Selma, Alabama was a small, rural town about 60 miles from Maxwell Field, or I should say, Montgomery, Alabama. The Air Force base at Selma was brand new, so I was part of the work detail in getting that base ready. We had nice barracks to stay in; they were clean and so was everything else, and there I continued to learn about army life, but as far as the Research & Development, I never did see any part of that. I was soon in a work detail helping to clear a swamp area, which was between our barracks area and the flying field. They were going to make this into a lake. I soon found out, after I'd been there maybe two or three months, that this life was not for me, and since I had my college education I immediately started looking into the flying cadets as a way to change my work and my lifestyle. I was underweight, so I used to try to eat a lot, like bananas, and get my weight up. Finally, I was able to pass the physical. I believe it was around the first part of November that I was able to report to Hicks Field, Fort Worth, Texas.

Selma, Alabama was a typical southern country town, where people went to church on Sunday, and so we did that. It was a place where we could go into town and see the movies, and I believe that we were even invited out to dinner on a Sunday. We also used to hitchhike from Selma over to Montgomery and spend the weekend there. As I was only making \$21.00 a month, and then got a raise to \$30.00 a month, I didn't have a lot of money at the end of the month. But we still didn't have transportation or money for it. We would stay in a YMCA in Montgomery as we couldn't afford a hotel. I don't remember where we ate, but this wasn't any big problem. So, this was a chance to see a bigger city and relax a little bit.



*Warrens Corners, NY, Stone Road. Douglas Richards and his Irish Setter pheasant hunting. DCR was on his way from Selma, AL to Ft. Worth, TX for Flight School. Reported to Ft. Worth Nov. 15, 1941. It was great hunting.*



*Barracks at Selma*



*The author at the dynamite shed in Selma*



*Selma, AL, 1941. Barracks, Pvt Douglas C Richards (back row, left).*



*Selma, AL, 1941. Barracks, Pvt Douglas C Richards.*



*BT-13 Valiant*

Hicks Field was a small grass field outside of Fort Worth, Texas. It was run by civilians, and the instructors were civilians who were hired under contract, I suppose by the Air Force, to teach primary training to the cadets. This was a new lifestyle while at Hicks Field. We worked much harder, getting up early in the morning and working until late at night, taking much instruction. I see by the flight record that I flew 60 hours, and during that period of time I would have soloed. The record also tells about crashing the airplane on the first solo landing. We studied all kinds of things like aerodynamics, military rules and regulations, and just how to live as an officer in the Air Force. This was a good life; we ate well, we had good barracks, and it was an enjoyable period of time.

We used to spend our weekends at a good hotel in Fort Worth. We were there in Fort Worth on Sunday, December 7th, 1941, when Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. We hadn't necessarily expected this, but we did, of course, continue to expect to be drawn into the war in Europe. I don't remember anything particularly exciting or anything else at Hicks. Of course, the solo flight was the big thing, and then you were able to wear an identification bracelet around your wrist. This was an honor, and everyone looked forward to being able to wear that as your solo bracelet.

I was at Hicks Field from approximately November 15 to January 15 for two months of intensive training, and then I was assigned to Randolph Field in San Antonio, which was a very famous place at the time. I believe that it dated back to World War I, at least Brooks Field did. But Randolph was the showplace of the Air Force as far as training was concerned. It was modeled after the academies—West Point, etc. There were beautiful barracks and marching in formation.





Training certificate

They had drill every day, and we would pass in review. Everything was very military. We were reprimanded and trained by the upperclassmen. They would make you stand in what we called a brace, which would be with our heads back and our chin in, our shoulders back, and just stand stiff. They'd make you stand that way for a considerable period of time. They called that "racking back" or something like that, but this was just part of the hazing that went on.



*Randolph Field, San Antonio, TX, 1942. Douglas C Richards on parade ground with barracks in rear.*

We would march to the mess hall for our food. Early in the morning, say 6:00, we would be eating breakfast and we'd have to get out in formation. They would have a signal to tell us what kind of dress to wear. If it was raining, we'd wear a raincoat so all of the cadets would look alike every day, and we'd wear whatever the weather called for. We would march in formation into the big mess hall, and the underclassmen would have to sit on the edge

of the chair, very erect, and very square. You'd pick up your knife and fork and you'd come up straight and then go straight into your mouth, and all that kind of stuff. Of course, your haircut was you might say almost bald—you were really clipped.



*Randolph Field, San Antonio, TX, 1942. Douglas C. Richards on parade ground with barracks in back, cannon for reveille.*

When talking about Randolph Field, we need to discuss the airplanes. The BT-13 was considerably larger than the PT-19. It was heavier and a lot more powerful. The biggest disadvantage of the BT-13 was that it would ground loop. When you landed the plane in a crosswind, if you didn't keep the airplane going down the runway correctly, the wind would catch it and swirl it around and would tip it up on one wheel and would drag a wing. Of course, this was a no-no in the service.



*Randolph Field, San Antonio, TX, March 14, 1942.  
BT-13 airplane, Douglas C Richards.*

We graduated from Randolph March 15, 1942, and all I had to do was go across town to Brooks Field, which is on the south side of San Antonio. Brooks Field was an old WWI Air Force training base. It had the old barracks from WWI, and all the other facilities were of that date. It was still a good field with a lot of character. We had gravel runways but it was a good place to be. We enjoyed as cadets, San Antonio. It was strictly a military town with many retired military there, and Fort Sam Houston was a big infantry

fort. That was in the center of the city. San Antonio had everything for the military. We got our taste of Mexican food, and we went to a rodeo, which was my first opportunity to witness one.



*Brooks Field, San Antonio, TX, 1942. Parade grounds.*

At Brooks we had our first retractable landing gear airplane, which would be an AT-6, which was the most famous and best-known trainer plane. It was a dandy airplane. It flew well and had great stability on landing and was enjoyable to fly. We could get up in the air when the cumulus clouds formed over Texas and play around in those clouds at 7,000 to 10,000 feet. It was enjoyable and likened to the hawks flying in the sky.

I contracted hepatitis while at Brooks Field. There were several of us in the hospital for a month, and that set me back in my graduation and obtaining my wings. That was the highlight of my career, obtaining my wings, and becoming a Second Lieutenant, an officer in the US Air Force.



*Brooks Field, San Antonio, TX, 1942. AT-6 (Advanced Training) airplane.*



*Brooks Field, San Antonio, TX, 1942. Picture taken in an O-52 by one of the observers while we were flying around. Douglas C Richards.*



*Brooks Field, San Antonio, TX, July 1942. Douglas C Richards.*

My folks came down to Texas, along with my aunt and Grandfather and Grandmother Coulter. My aunt was Elizabeth Smith. This was a big occasion for them, because they had never been to Texas before. They thoroughly enjoyed it. Dad drove an old Plymouth automobile down. We toured the city and had a great time.

