

# ATTACK ON OIL !!

## *I wanted to fly Spifires, but ended up in a B-24*

**By Stan Hutchins 824 Sq.**

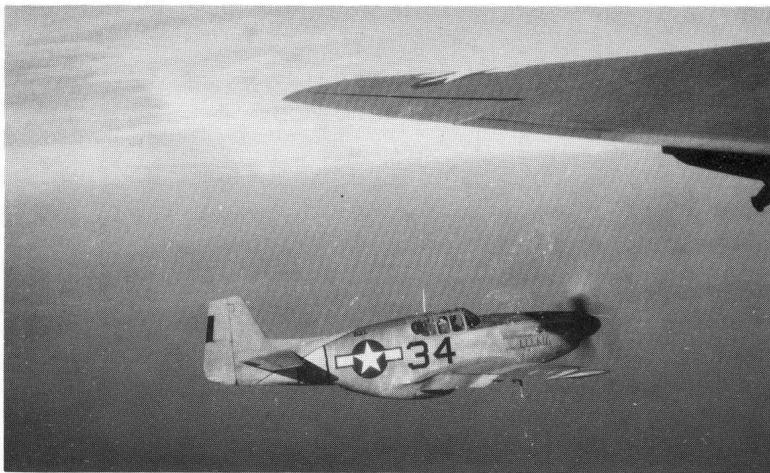
None of us who graduated from Alamo Heights High School in May of 1941 expected the Japanese to attack Pearl Harbor in December of that year or to be plunged into World War II after war was declared between the United States and Germany shortly afterwards.

To fly a "Spitfire" against the Abbeville based ME-109's of the Richtofen Wing, filled my mind while I sat in Miss Brigham's homeroom, played my sax at Friday assemblies, and made limeaids and choc shakes at Patt's Drugstore. That fall I became seventeen and applied to the RCAF for pilot training with the Commonwealth Training Center in Ottawa, since the US Army Air Corps had rules about age and college I could not meet. Soon after Pearl Harbor, I received a message from RCAF Group Captain Crabb, advising me that the US would not allow me to join Canada's pilot program.

With my friend Sparkie from Brady, Texas I took the Air Corps flying cadet tests in June of 1942 and waited until my eighteenth birthday to be sworn in. In the meantime the war was heating up, Hitler was stopped at the gates of Moscow, British and American forces were counterattacking Rommel in North Africa and the Doolittle raiders alarmed the Japanese in a surprise attack that did more psychologically, than actual bomb damage. The battles of Midway and Coral Sea stopped the westward advance of the Japanese naval forces. In my youthful eagerness to fight, I wondered if the war would last long enough for me to win those wings, now that the Air Corps, loaded with volunteers, placed me on hold with the 28th Infantry in Louisiana until

training facilities could be expanded.

I entered the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center in late spring of 1943 for pilot training. I soloed at Hicks Field, went on to Perrin for basic flying, and advanced pilot training at Ellington Field. My flight training took six months from August 43 to February 44, accumulating 220 hours total time in the interim. Crew training commenced then and was completed in May of 1944.



Shortly after the Normandy Invasion, I was on the USS Santa Maria bound for Naples via Oran, along with 50 other air crews assigned to the 484th Bomb Group. My squadron the 824th was based at Torretta, Italy, south of Foggia, where the Italian Air Force had been based at Foggia up until the invasion of German forces that then occupied the airfield complex. Now it was the Americans turn to take over this soft rolling countryside in southern Italy, the only flat region with enough land to base the entire 15th Air Force.

Our mission was to strike oil targets from Germany to the Black Sea. The biggest oil refinery complex was in Rumania at Ploesti. It was there that we struck, twenty one raids, and my introduction to combat. When the Russians over ran Ploesti in late September of 1944, we moved our priority to synthetic oil plants scattered all over central Europe, taking time out to bomb German positions on the beaches of Southern France to support Operation Anvil, the invasion of Southern France on August 15, 1944.

The winter of 1944 was bitter cold. The Battle of the Bulge underscored the German's ability to increase the price of Allied victory. It was during this time after seven months of bombing missions that we got shot up badly on a raid to bomb the oil storage facilities at Floresdorf, near Vienna, Austria. Coming off the target one of our engines quit, and the aileron controls