
Saga of Toggle Annie continues

Serial Number 42-52705 826th Squadron 484th Bomb Group 15th Air Force. Webster defines saga as "a long heroic story"; so I guess the title fits. This story probably won't be as long as I would like, but I have no doubts about the heroic part.

Toggle Annie first saw the light of day on or about the ninth day of January, 1944, when she rolled off the assembly line at Ford's Willow Run Plant near Ypsilanti, MI. (That name alone, is enough to make one deny their birthplace). This plant was built on land that, three scant years before, had been quiet Michigan farmland where about the only things with wings were chickens and honeybees.

To explain how I determined Toggle Annie's date of "birth"; a couple of years ago, I drove over to Willow Run (about 100 miles) and visited the Yankee Air Force Museum there, with that mission in mind. On display there, I saw a picture of the 1000th plane completed by Ford there, 3 November 1943, with the serial number 42-52283, which is 422 less than Toggle Annie's 42-52705. I also purchased there, a copy of "Willow Run Colossus of American Industry" written by Warren Benjamin Kidder. (Incidentally, his family's farm property was included in the construction of Willow Run. Appendix A of his book, is Chronological Data 1 Jan 1941 through 3 December 1944, covering the inception, construction and the majority of production of Willow Run. From this appendix, I learned that the 1400th plane was completed 6 Jan 1944 and the 1500th plane was completed 21 Jan 1944. Assuming that the planes were built in the order of their serial numbers, and more or less even production; a little arithmetic shows me that Toggle Annie rolled off the final assembly line on or about 9 Jan 1944. Close enough for me! This sounds about right since O'Shea's crew received Toggle Annie on 14 February 1944. This would leave time for compass adjustment, turret and gun testing, fueling, flight testing, and Army acceptance, etc.. I would be remiss if I didn't, at this time, give you a little of Toggle Annie's pedigree. The B-24 airplane was designed and first built by the Consolidated Aircraft Company in San Diego, CA. The first B-24 flew on 29 Dec 1939. When the Army Air Force decided to rely heavily on the B-24 for their strategic air force, Consolidated's goal of one plane per day was totally insufficient to meet their needs. Consolidated opened a second plant in Fort Worth, TX, Douglas began building the aircraft in Tulsa, OK, as did North American Aircraft in Dallas, Texas. But, still not enough!

In January of 1941, Ford got into the act by request and/or choice. Under the guidance of Charles E. Sorenson, Ford's Director of Production, a plan was devised to build a facility to produce B-24's using the mass production techniques so successful in the automobile industry, a la River Rouge. Only bigger. The story goes that the Willow Run plant was built in an "L" shape to avoid crossing the county line; and I guess it's true. Not to imply that it takes up a whole county, but it does give you some insight into the immensity of the place.

The Army's original plan was for Ford to mass produce sub-assemblies of B-24s for Consolidated and Douglas, but Sorenson persevered and convinced the Defense Dept. that Ford could produce the entire B-24 better, faster, and cheaper than anyone else. And for a time, Ford did produce subassemblies for others as well as complete planes. Of all the stories in Kidder's book, I believe the part about the center wing, intrigued me the most. As you know, the center wing section, which includes the four engine mounts, the landing gear, etc., is the backbone of the B-24 every thing else fastens onto it. In San Diego, Consolidated built the center wing outdoors on pipe racks. Two factors came into play which produced unacceptable tolerances, and required an inordinate number of shims to assemble the aircraft. First, was the temperature difference between the sunny side and the shady side of the work in progress. Anyone who has picked up-or should I say, attempted

to pick up a piece of metal that has lain out in the Southern California sunshine, can appreciate that. Secondly, (and surprisingly, to me, anyway) the rise and fall of the alluvial plain where the factory sits, with the tide. To cure these (and other) problems, inside the Willow Run plant, Ford poured a massive concrete block. They also designed and had built a gigantic machine tool costing \$168,000 (in 1941 dollars), that could perform all the necessary machining operations on a center wing section using only six men and thirty-five minutes. It was estimated that this machine tool alone saved over ten million dollars in its three and a half years of use. All told, Ford produced 8685 B-24s more than any other company. And not only did they have to build a factory, in which to do so; they also had to recruit and train and maintain a work force of about 30,000 souls to do the job. Enough pedigree! For the next part of my story, I would like to quote, in its entirety, a letter I received from Ellsworth Goodell, dated 14 January 1995:

"Dear Allan, Just a word to let you know who I am. I'm Ellsworth Goodell, the radio operator on the original Toggle Annie crew. Chickie (O'Shea) sent your letter to me. She intends to answer it, but feels that I have more information than she could give you.

We got our new plane February 14, 1944. We flew it to Lincoln, Nebraska, March 16th. I guess you know our Group was formed Jan 1st at Harvard, Neb. Our crew formed in Salt Lake City November 28, 1943. We trained together for a month at Colorado Springs, until the 484th was activated Jan 1, 1944.

Anyway, March 21st we flew it to Morrison Field, Florida, that's at West Palm Beach. We left there on the 23rd and flew to Trinidad. Next day to Belem, Brazil and then to Fortaleza, Brazil. These were all one night stands. Left March 26th for Dakar, North Africa, then to Marrakech in French Morocco. Then flew to Djedeida, Tunis. We arrived there March 29th. Stayed there until April 14th as our field wasn't ready yet. We arrived in Italy the 14th. We trained for a couple of weeks and flew our first mission April 29th. Toggle Annie flew on the first and second missions that our group went on. We were off to a good start. Incidentally, two of our flying crew had to come over by boat, as we took other airmen over with us. One was a Lt. Col, who didn't have his own plane. We were supposed to begin operations April 26th, but we were grounded because of the weather. Some missions were easy and some weren't. You know how it was. July 16th we went to the Vienna area. We lost one and a half engines on the way back and had to drop out of formation; threw out everything that we could to lighten the plane. Anyway, we made it back. July 19th we went to Munich.

Our co-pilot got hit in the thigh by anti-aircraft fire. He was hospitalized and didn't fly any more missions. During the month of July we went to Capri for a week's rest. Two of our crew members finished their missions July 25th. I was the third one to finish. My last mission was to France August 6th. Our fuel lines were hit and we were forced to land on Corsica. That was the last time I saw Toggle Annie. Another plane in our squadron landed on Corsica, with a badly wounded upper turret gunner, so we hitched a ride back to base on it. I got back to the States in September. Had to go back by boat. I don't know what NAITCH is or was. It wasn't on the plane the last time I saw it. I think Toggle Annie was salvaged in New Mexico or Arizona I may have some more information on it but I can't find it right now. The engineer on the crew, Johnnie Barber, is still living and we both went to Dayton. The co-pilot and the assistant engineer have died, as has the pilot, Vincent O'Shea. I think the bombardier is still living but doesn't belong to the Association. These are the only ones I know about. It says in "the Flyer" that McMurtre was on our crew but he wasn't. Sorry to hear your wife died. Mine did too, April 1, 1993, and I miss her terribly. Hope this filled you in a little. Best regards, Ellsworth Goodell"