



Luther Bailey

September 21, 1919 - June 22, 2019

I was born September 20, 1919, at Bee Log in Yancey County, the second of eight children born to Matt and Mamie Johnson Bailey; I was the only son in the family.

I grew up on a small hillside farm where I worked and played with my neighboring friends and cousins.

My sister Valerie, two years younger than me, was burned to death from playing too near the fireplace. This happened in January, 1923. She is buried in the Smith Bailey cemetery at the old home place.

While growing up I spent a lot of time roaming the fields and woods, sometimes squirrel hunting or rabbit hunting; at other times fishing in Cane River or Bald Mountain Creek. I liked going to school at Bee Log and I remember all my teachers by name. In 1935, the night before we were to begin Christmas holidays, the school house burned to the ground. In January the high school students had to go to the Presbyterian Community at Higgins. I was in the ninth grade at that time. In March, 1936, a snow storm shut down school from Wednesday until the next Monday by dumping 24 to 36 inches of snow.

When school began in the fall of 1936, we had a new rock school house built by the W.P.A.

My mother died December 26, 1936, and is buried in the Smith Bailey cemetery. I went on to school and graduated in 1938.

After my mother died, we stayed on at the home place until about 1940. I registered for the draft at Bee Log School. At about that time my father sold the home place and we moved to Hampton Branch, near Wolf Laurel in Madison County.

In June of 1942, I received a notice to appear at the draft board in Burnsville. I stayed all night in a boarding house near the town square. I believe it was called the Bryant House. The next day the Yancey County draftees boarded a bus and headed for Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

I don't remember how many days I stayed at Fort Jackson - maybe three or four - but one day soon we were called out, lined up in two or three lines, and given our shipping orders. The non-coms in charge told us that when we had boarded the train and started on our way, we could open up the orders and see our destination.

The person carrying the orders opened the package and announced that we were

assigned to the Army Air Corps at Keesler Field, Biloxi, Mississippi, for basic training. I spent about two weeks at Keesler Field, picking up cigarette butts, learning to march, going over obstacle courses, doing calisthenics, and doing K.P. I may have taken psychological and aptitude tests too. I don't remember.

One day about mid-July, 1942, I was on K.P. when a private ran into the mess hall saying, "Anderson and Bailey, report to the orderly room. You're on shipping orders." Well, we stopped what we were doing and went to the orderly room. It turned out that two people who were on the original shipping list had not shown up - we were super-numera.

We hurried up our packing and waited, boarding the train at about 6:00 p.m. When the orders were opened, we learned that we were going to Aero Industries Technical Institute(A.I.T.I.) in Glendale, California. Some of us would be in an airplane engine overhaul class and others in a sheet metal class. It was engine overhaul for me.

The worst part of being at A.I.T.I. was having to fall out for exercise very early in the morning before breakfast.

Instructors at the Institute were mostly retired pilots, engineers, and airplane mechanics. One of the things the class was required to do was to take a twelve-cylinder in-line engine apart and put it back together.

I had a good time at A.I.T.I. There were always free tickets to a lot of events - circuses, parties, theaters, the Hollywood USO, etc. The San Fernando Highway passed right through town and it was here that I first saw big diesel semi's rolling down the highway. Upon graduation in December 1942, I was shipped to Hill Field, Ogden, Utah. Most of the other men were sent to Fort Ord in Stockton, California.

At Hill Field, I worked alongside other GI's and civilians. Mostly we were preparing P-39 airplanes to be sent to Russia on the Lend-Lease Program. Also we cleaned and repaired oil bypass valves.

One evening in March 1943, a GI came into my barracks and announced that there was a notice on the bulletin board in the orderly room asking for volunteers for a class in airplane mechanics at Seymour Johnson Field in Goldsboro, N.C. I went straightaway and put my name on the list. A few days later the class shipped out.

The summer at Goldsboro in 1943 was a hot one. The hangars and classrooms where we worked were made of metal and daytime temperatures inside often reached 110 degrees. One day, while out in the field for two weeks, a severe thunderstorm came up. There was a class working on an A-20 . They took shelter in and underneath the airplane. I saw lightning strike the plane. To the best of my memory, all of the men underneath the plane were killed, but none of those in the plane were seriously injured..

After graduation, I was returned to Hill Field. There I was assigned to the 324th Repair Squadron and readied for overseas assignment. When I found out that the squadron was going to New Guinea, I applied for aerial gunnery school. My application was approved and I was removed from the 324th.

During the time that I waited to be sent to gunnery school, I did mostly guard duty and sometimes worked in the orderly room. At that time I was a Pfc.

After about two weeks, I was told one day to pack my bags because I was going to Las Vegas Gunnery School. I wound up shipping out alone late in the day.

When I got to Las Vegas, the class was about ready to begin. I missed the usual two weeks that each class had to serve before beginning instruction. All the other fellows called me lucky.

We learned a lot of things in gunnery school. My first plane ride was in the nose of a B-17. It wasn't quite as thrilling as I had expected. We were instructed in the mechanics of .50 caliber machine guns: take apart, clean, put back together; fire in short bursts, fire at targets in motion; operate turrets; use a parachute; use a gas mask in a gas chamber; spend time in a pressure chamber; test in the night vision room; and skeet shooting, just to name a few things we did. The last thing anyone wanted to do was to "wash out" but some did..

Upon graduation from gunnery school, we were granted a furlough of 21 days and asked to report back to Hammer Field in Fresno, California. We were told that this would be our last chance to get home before going to combat and each gunnery graduate was promoted to Sergeant. It was while on this furlough that I met Paris Porche of Puncheon Fork in Madison County.

I reported to Hammer Field after Christmas in 1943. There the air crews were put together- four officers and six enlisted men in each crew. From there we were sent to Lake Muroc Army Air Base in California for combat training. This training was finished around March 1, 1944.

One thing I remember from the time spent at Muroc Air Base. We were scheduled for a 3:00 p.m. flight. During pre-flight inspection it was discovered that one supercharger did not turn freely. Lt. Hubbard, the pilot, looked at me and asked: "What do you think about it, Bailey?" I replied, "Let's cancel the flight," and so we did. When the next crew accepted the flight later in the day, the plane crashed on take-off.

At the end of training, all gunners were promoted to Staff Sergeant; the First Engineer and Radioman were made Tech/Sergeant.

From Muroc, we were sent to Hamilton Field, San Francisco. There we were outfitted with the equipment we needed for combat. About March 20th, 1944, we were given a new B-24 and told to proceed to West Palm Beach, Florida. Stops along the way were Phoenix, Arizona; Midland, Texas; and Memphis, Tennessee. At Memphis, we were given a pass to town . Just as we got off the bus in Memphis, a hailstorm hit. The hailstones were reported to be as large as grapefruits. Our plane was damaged and we had to wait there a week for repairs to be made.

At West Palm Beach we waited about a week, going through final preparations for the overseas flight. Finally, we left West Palm Beach on Easter Sunday, April 9, 1944.

When we were off the ground and out to sea, Lt. Hubbard opened the orders. We were going to join the 15th Air Force in Italy. Our first stop would be Dakar , Senegal, in West Africa. Other stops were Marrakesh, Morocco, and Tunis, Tunisia. Our last stop was Manduria, Italy. There we had to give up our plane and we were sent to the 98th Bomb Group, 3 Squadron, in Lecce, Italy. Lecce is in the heel of the boot of Italy. The date is now April 21, 1944.

At Lecce, the enlisted men were housed in tents, six men in a tent. Officers were housed in buildings. The water supply for enlisted men was stored in a trailer-tank. We had to go to the officers' quarters for a shower.

Combat missions for my crew began a few days after our arrival in Italy. Our first few missions were flown with at least one experienced crew member aboard. Mission assignments were posted on the bulletin board the evening before.

On the date of an assigned mission, a messenger from the squadron orderly room came around at about 3:00 a.m. and woke the affected crews (7). First, after being awakened, the crews went to the chow hall. From there everyone went to the briefing. There we learned of the designated target, what to expect in the way of enemy resistance, the altitude for approaching the target, what the weather would be like, and what the alternate target would be.

From the briefing room, we went to the parachute department for the supplies we would need: parachute, electric underwear(top and bottom), electric gloves and shoes, life vest, and a box of C-rations. I can't remember if there was anything else that we needed that we didn't already have.

After receiving supplies, we were shuttled to the area where the B-24's were parked. The first thing to do was a pre-flight inspection - checking controls, checking instruments, warming up engines, etc. When all was ready, we waited for instructions from the control tower. There were four squadrons in the 98th Bomb Group: 343, 344, 345, and 415. Each squadron put up seven B-24's, making a flight of 28 planes.

Once the planes were aloft, they continued to circle and maneuver until all were in formation. Then we headed north and across the Adriatic Sea, and usually when we were out over the sea, the pilot asked the gunners to test their guns. My position was ball turret gunner with two .50 caliber machine guns and a Sperry gun-sight. Once in a while my guns would not fire; I would have to take them apart and put them back together, with gloves on. It was about 60 degrees below zero at about 24,000 to 26,000 feet above the earth.

Our targets included such places as factories, railroad yards, bridges, and oil refineries. These might be located in such places as Munich, Germany; Ploiesti, Romania; Budapest, Hungary; Constanta, Romania, on the Black Sea; Southern France; Northern Italy; and Wiener-Neustadt, Austria. Total flight time was usually about nine or ten hours.

Sometimes we would have problems such as engine failure or a battery explosion that hindered us from maintaining air speed. If we had to drop from formation and return to base, this was called an aborted mission and did not count toward our total of 50 missions. One time we had combat damage to the plane to such an extent that we had to land in Rome where we spent the night and took a flight with another crew going south to Lecce the next day. This routine continued until about mid-October, 1944, with missions about twice a week.

While I was in Italy, my crew got to go to the Isle of Capri for a week of rest and relaxation. This was a fun time. We stayed in a small hotel up the hill from the piazza and had our meals in an outdoor café down on the piazza.

To get to Capri we took a ferry from Naples. When we landed at the beach we had to take the funicular(cable car) up to the piazza.

Fred Bellah and I spent most of our time sightseeing. There was a small beach on the other side of the island where we went swimming. We went to a church on Anacapri. The guide said Michelangelo decorated the inside of the church, but I doubted that. We hired an Italian man to row us around the island, but we got only as far as the Blue Grotto. There is also a cave on one side of Capri. We went inside the cave and could hear the rumble of Mt. Vesuvius. That side of the island was a steep cliff down to the sea. We were told that Mussolini's son-in-law jumped from the cliff.

Back in Lecce, Fred Bellah and I used to go to a small produce stand near our tent area. There we traded for such things as cherries or watermelons. Sometimes we bought potatoes. We got cooking grease from the chow hall and maybe a gallon can. We used to make potato chips.

On the day of the invasion of Southern France, in August, I was awakened by loud explosions about 3:00 a.m. I told myself I had slept through an air raid alarm. When things quieted, I went back to sleep, only to be awakened again a little while later. In the morning, I was told that two B-24's had crashed on take-off. It was the bomb load that I had heard. After having completed our 50 missions sometime in late October or early November, 1944, our crew was sent to Naples to board a ship to return to the States. We spent about a week there before we boarded a ship - a freighter converted to a troop ship. A group of German prisoners was aboard the ship and I heard rumors that Jimmy Stewart was also on board.

We joined a convoy in the Atlantic. It took fourteen days to reach Staten Island. There we disembarked to the tune of a band, were loaded on a train, and sent to Fort Dix, New Jersey. We got furloughed home and I was told to report to Miami Beach at the end of my furlough.

At Miami Beach, I was quartered in the Atlantic Towers Hotel. There I spent a couple of weeks going through physical exams and taking psychological tests. One day I was called into an office and told that I had done well on the tests and that I could have my choice of

a place to go. I asked what the choices were. They were Corpus Christi, Texas or Keesler Field, Biloxi, Mississippi. I chose Keesler Field.

At Keesler Field I was placed in a month special course about C-47's. At the end of the course, we took a ride out over Biloxi Bay. After that I taught C-47 fuel systems for a while. Then I was made day crew chief on a PBY-Catalina being used for training for air-sea rescue. This position I held until the end of the war with Japan.

On January 8th, 1945, I was married to Paris Porche in Biloxi, Mississippi. Her home at that time was in Faust, Madison County, North Carolina.

When the war with Japan was over, I had enough points to be discharged. I was given a physical exam at Keesler Field and sent to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. There I was discharged on September 8, 1945.

Upon returning home, I found it difficult to obtain satisfactory employment. Paris and I made hooked rugs for a while. We then had a son and named him Maurice Owen.

While in service, I received the following medals and honors: Good Conduct Medal; Air Medal with three oak-leaf clusters; Victory Medal; Europe-Mediterranean-Mideast Campaign Medal with (6) battle stars; and the American Campaign Medal. I finished Airplane Engine Overhaul School at A.I.T.I. in Glendale, California; Airplane Mechanics School at Seymour Johnson Field, Goldsboro, North Carolina, and Aerial Gunnery School in Las Vegas, Nevada.

In January, 1946, I enrolled at Western Carolina Teachers College. My family lived in a veterans' village called Boodleville. I attended classes almost year round, graduating with a Bachelor of Science in Education - with High Honors - in July, 1948. I went through the graduation ceremony with the Class of 1949. In the summers of 1951-1953, I earned a Master of Arts in Education degree from Western Carolina University. All this through the G.I. Bill of Rights.

I taught the middle grades for 34 years: 1 year at Micaville, Yancey County; 3 years at Bethel, Haywood County; 1 year at Red Oak School, Buncombe County; 8 years in Fletcher, Henderson County; and 21 years at Old Fort, McDowell County. I taught in North Carolina my entire career and retired in 1982.

Our youngest son, Kim Arthur, was born in 1961.

Beginning in 1956, I worked summer months for the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, measuring allotment crops, mostly tobacco and soil bank. I began as a reporter, later a supervisor, and even later as a County Compliance Supervisor. I worked with some good people for 14 years until tobacco allotment changed to poundage. Retirement has been good for the last 27 years. I have done some of the things that I like to do. I have belonged to the North Asheville Tailgate Market for 15 years - met a lot of good friends, spent a lot of time talking. I've done a lot of trout fishing - gone to a lot of school reunions and church homecomings - visited a lot of old cemeteries looking for graves of friends and acquaintances - walked my dog, Santee, for 11 years - but in the

meantime a lot of friends have passed away. My wife, Paris, passed June 16, 2008, and is buried in Lewis Memorial Park, at Beaverdam Baptist Church.

This article was written June 22, 2009. Luther Bailey

P.S. I forgot to say that my crew flew the "Rowdy Anne" on its 100th mission. They took our picture and said they would send the picture and write-up to our hometown newspaper. I've never talked to anyone who remembered seeing such an article.

A graveside service will be held at 3:00pm on Friday, June 28, 2019 at Lewis Memorial Park, 415 Beaverdam Road. The family will receive friends from 1:30pm to 2:30pm at Morris Funeral Home, 304 Merrimon Ave., prior to the service.

Cemetery Details

Lewis Memorial Park

415 Beaverdam Road
Asheville, NC 28804

Previous Events

Family will Receive Friends

JUN 28. 1:30 PM - 2:30 PM (ET)

Morris Funeral & Cremation Care
304 Merrimon Ave.
Asheville, NC 28801
info@morrisfamilyfuneralhome.com
<https://www.morrisfamilyfuneralhome.com>

Graveside Service

JUN 28. 3:00 PM (ET)

Lewis Memorial Park
415 Beaverdam Road
Asheville, NC 28804

Tribute Wall

MM

“ Please forgive me for reaching out in this manner. I've just discovered Mr. Bailey's story while studying some photos of my dad's that I finally enhanced and colorized. I have a couple of photos of an airplane with the nose art of The Rowdy Anne. I want to post here or wherever the family would like. I'm in Pearland Texas and my dad was Staff Sgt Billy Moser. He was an aircraft mechanic in Agra & Panargh India for the duration of World War II. It is more familiar as "The Hump" where pilots had to reach high altitudes quickly to get over the Himalayas. My number is 281-910-4757
Martha Anne "Marti" Moser

Martha Anne Moser - May 31, 2021 at 12:44 AM

MO

I have finally identified the correct airplane and got the nose art enhanced. Sending asap.
Thank you,
Marti Moser

Martha M Ousley - August 13 at 04:15 AM

ME

“ So sorry for your loss.



Melisa - October 17, 2020 at 01:06 AM

BR

“ Brenda Russell lit a candle in memory of Luther Bailey



Brenda russell - October 16, 2020 at 09:49 PM

MB

“ 1 file added to the album Family Photos



maurice bailey - July 06, 2019 at 02:54 PM



“ 1 file added to the album Family Photos



Morris Funeral Home - July 01, 2019 at 05:04 PM

TE

“ As a rookie teacher, I had the great opportunity to work with Luther, "Mr. Bailey", for several years at Old Fort Elementary. He was a pros pro in every sense of the word. His example of professionalism was second to none; both his students and his coworkers benefitted from his time at Old Fort Elementary. Well done good and faithful servant!

Terry Wilson

terry - June 27, 2019 at 06:35 PM

PM

“ Maurice, I would like to send my deepest sympathy. He touched everyone lives with the gift of sharing. I will miss our long talks on the phone about our family history. Even though he and mom Chloe Johnson were cousins we were closer. I was hoping to get back east one more time to see him.

Patti Michael, Swilley, Johnson



Patti Michael - June 27, 2019 at 10:36 AM

J?

“ *Judie Bailey - Miller ?? lit a candle in memory of Luther Bailey*



Judie Bailey - Miller ?? - June 26, 2019 at 11:05 PM

MH

“ *I want to express my deepest sympathies to Luther's family. I am the daughter of Anza Bailey Hall. I've seen him at some family reunions in Johnson City but sadly I never got to interact with him. I wish I had since I'm really interested in our family history. I've had some health issues and not sure if I can make it over there for the visitation, but hope that I can. Did he wear a hat? If so, I have picture of him somewhere and will try to find it.*

Marcella "Marcie" Hall - June 26, 2019 at 10:17 PM

FE

“ *Flora Faye Wheeler Edwards lit a candle in memory of Luther Bailey*



Flora Faye Wheeler Edwards - June 26, 2019 at 09:50 PM

WG

“ *with much love, Veronica and Katie Glynn purchased the Beautiful in Blue for the family of Luther Bailey.*



with much love, Veronica and Katie Glynn - June 26, 2019 at 04:31 PM

RB

“ It was always a joy to visit Luther and listen to him tell me about our Bailey ancestor, he was a remarkable man and a memory that was unreal. He was from BEE LOG the same area as a lot of my folks were from. His career as a veteran and as a teacher were great.
Maurice I hope you and family find comfort in knowing how great your dad was. He is at peace now.

Ray Bailey

Ray Bailey - June 25, 2019 at 01:34 PM

JH

“ I have really enjoyed getting to know Luther these past few years. I have learned a lot about our Bailey ancestors, some that Luther knew personally and several others that Luther knew their history. I will miss visiting Luther and listening to him recite an amazing amount of genealogy of multi generations of families. Luther was a kind and generous man who loved sharing his stories with people.

June Honeycutt - June 24, 2019 at 05:18 PM