

Wade Dupree Barnes
Born October 17, 1924
Wilson, North Carolina

World War Two Memories

I attended grammar and high school in Wilson - Maplewood, Kenan Street (later Woodard) and Charles L. Coon. I played football and baseball in high school. I played on the 1943 State Championship Baseball Team. I was scheduled to graduate in 1943 but deliberately failed my high school English exam in order to be able to go back to school and play one more year of football. This was not an uncommon practice at that time.

Not wanting to be drafted as a "ground pounder", I volunteered for the Army Air Corps feeling sure that I would not be called to duty until I had graduated. Surprise, surprise - I was called to duty in July 1943 and sent south to Gulfport, Mississippi for basic training. From Gulfport I went to Houghton, Michigan which is situated 90 miles north of Chicago on the Keenenaw Peninsula. There I attended C. T. D., College Training Detachment. I flew piper cubs with skis instead of wheels, taking off and landing on frozen lakes. We received heavy physical training and ran a four mile cross country on frozen ice and snow every Saturday morning. I was flying airplanes before I had a North Carolina drivers license. At this time the air corps had more cadets in training than they could use and not enough crew members. Most of my class, myself included, was washed out of cadet training "for the convenience of the government".

From Houghton I was sent to Denver, Colorado for armament school to learn about machine guns, bombs, bomb fuses and how to repair minor problems. After five months we shipped out to Santa Anna, California. From Santa Anna we went to Boise, Idaho for crew training for flying in B24 Bombers. I stayed there about 2 months and then went to Topeka, Kansas to pick up an airplane which took me to Lincoln, Nebraska for further training.

From there we went to Greenier Field, Manchester, New Hampshire to be shipped overseas. On our flight overseas we landed in Iceland, Prestwick, Scotland, Valley Wales and finally in Norwich, England which is 90 miles north of London. I was stationed at Horsham St. Faith with the 458th bomb group of the 8th Air Force. From Horsham we were transferred to Rackheath Manor and joined the 467th Bomb Group. The 467th flew missions from Rackheath to Germany, France, Belgium, Holland and one mission to Salzburg, Austria.

As an armorer gunner I could fly any gunnery position in a B24 or B17. I started flying in the ball turret, which was lowered below the plane after takeoff and I would have to climb down into it. The turret had a round Plexiglas or glass panel between my feet and featured

a Sperry computing sight and two 50 caliber machine guns. I later moved to the nose turret and dropped bombs using a toggle switch. The lead and deputy lead planes with bombardiers would release a smoke marker with their bombs and I would release on their markers. In the nose turret I had a grand stand seat for everything that was going on around us which included seeing our planes, in many instances carrying boys I knew well, shot down by flak and exploding in the air with no survivors.

At altitude the temperature in the turrets could easily reach 30 below zero. We wore multiple layers of clothes and gloves. For example we wore silk gloves next to our skin and then layers of , wool and kid. Over all were leather gauntlets that looked like boxing gloves and had to be removed for firing machine guns. We also had electrically heated suits which I quickly learned to turn off and on as after constant use a wire was likely to burn through and all heat was lost. We gunners had no other source of heat. My fingers still turn white in cold weather as a result of frost bite while flying.

One morning we were briefed to bomb approximately 50,000 German troops who had refused to surrender. We flew the mission with no tail or waist gunners because the fumes were so strong from our bomb load. Our bombs were fighter gasoline drop tanks filled with Napalm, which is jellied gasoline. We were briefed not to fire machine guns until the load was dropped for fear of blowing up our own plane. We approached target from 8,500 feet. We normally dropped from 22 to 25,000 feet. Bombs were released and fell all over with no guidance system, some hitting ground and others exploding in the air. At debriefing we were told that the mission had not been particularly successful but we left one hell of a blaze behind.

Finally the war in Europe ended and we were asked if we would like to volunteer for combat duty in the Pacific. I said that I wasn't particularly excited about volunteering because I had realized that they were playing "for keeps". I did say that I would volunteer to go if needed. With the European conflict over, combat crews were flown back to the states to be refitted for the Pacific. I was then sent to Biggs Field at El Paso, Texas.

The war in the Pacific ended! We had the option of discharge or joining the regular air force. I opted for discharge and was sent close by to Fort Bliss Separation Center. Many troops were coming to Bliss from the Pacific and most of them had been overseas at least 18 months. They were given priority, which they should have been. I asked if I could be sent to Fort Bragg in North Carolina for my discharge. The answer was "NO".

I was offered a ten day leave but would have had to return to El Paso for discharge. I said "No thank you" because the expense would have been too much and it would have taken several days of my time just for travel unless I could bum a ride on a military plane and there was no assurance that I could do that. So - I waited my turn.

I was discharged in January 1946. Another sergeant from Jackson, Mississippi and I started hitch hiking. We caught some good rides but when he got home I was on my own. I caught a ride with a salesman who was going to Birmingham, Alabama. We rode all night. The next morning he pulled off the main highway onto a secondary road. I told

him that the sign to Birmingham pointed straight from where we turned off. He said that he had an early appointment and needed to change clothes. He got out of the car on a wooded path and said he had something he wanted to show me. This made me very apprehensive. I walked around the car with a flashlight in my hand to use as a weapon if needed. He pulled a pistol out from under the seat and said, "This is a mean looking little thing. Isn't it?"

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Realizing that no one knew I was headed home, I called my parents and then bought an air line ticket to Greensboro. I had had enough of hitch hiking. I called a friend, Bill Cavan, who was one of my room mates in Houghton, Michigan and lived in Greensboro. Bill picked me up at the airport and I spent the night at his home. Bill was state wrestling champion in high school. He flew combat missions on B29s and was in the 20th Air Force. He later visited me in Wilson.

I rode a bus from Greensboro to Wilson and was happy to be home!

EPILOGUE

After a short stay at home, I went to UNC Chapel Hill. I wasn't the best student in the world but was doing alright. Then I met Windy and decided to get married which was the best thing that ever happened to me. February will be my 59th year of marriage. Windy has retired from a career in banking and later real estate. I spent my working years as an interior designer and am also retired. We are both in reasonably good health and hope to have more good years. We have a home on my father's family farm in Wilson and also a house on the Neuse River where we enjoy beautiful views and being on the river on our 22' pontoon boat.

Our daughter, Martha Wrenn, also lives on the farm. We feel very fortunate to have her so close by. She is pursuing a very successful career with The Wilson County School System. Her two daughters, Katherine and Martha Wade are scattered but come home at every opportunity.

Katherine lives in Arnold, Maryland. Arnold is just across the Severn River from The Naval Academy. She is the "stay at home" mother of two children. Robbie, age five, is a much loved special needs child. Ellie, three, is a real "fire ball" and great fun to be

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around. Katherine's husband, Steve Shurman, is head master at a private Catholic school and also their soccer coach.

Martha Wade lives in Greensboro, North Carolina and is currently teaching special needs children. She is getting ready to launch a career as owner of a Kinder Dance franchise. She will be teaching dance to children in day care facilities and eventually will have other teachers working under her. Needless to say, Windy and I are very proud of both girls.

Our son, Joe, died of a massive brain hemorrhage when he was only 49 years old. He left behind a step daughter, Emily, who was only two when Joe met her mother, Molly. We have always been very close to Emily who is now married to Todd Eubanks and lives in Redding, Connecticut. Todd is an environmental engineer with General Electric and Emily, like Katherine is a "stay at home" mom. Her two children are Henry, a precocious five year old and Wade, named for me, recently celebrated his first birthday.

~~Houston~~
My other room mate in ~~Houston~~ was Dewey Bell who is from Myrtle Beach and now lives in Richmond, Virginia. Dewey was a navigator on B24s in Italy. He became a dentist after the war. He was a weight lifter in college. We have kept in touch and see each other from time to time. Two other former crew members have also visited me in Wilson. They were Robert C. Ruffcorn, a radio operator from Mondamin, Iowa and William H. "Willie" Gritton our tail gunner from Harrodsburg, Kentucky.

The only survivor of our crew besides myself is B. R. "Barney" Jones our pilot from Duluth, Minnesota. We exchange Christmas cards and notes but haven't been able to get together in person.