

Lt. Col. William Herbert North, Sr., USAF (ret.) b. 1922-d. 1988

William H. "Bill" North, Sr. was the son of Frank Ray and Kathryn Johnson North. He was born in Atlanta, GA on August 5, 1922. North's father was involved in the automobile business throughout his career with a variety of manufacturers including Willys-Overland, REO, Nash and Packard. (Frank Ray North also served in the Michigan National Guard, saw service in France as a Lieutenant/Captain in the U.S. Army during WW I and as a Lt. Colonel during WW II.)

Because of his father's frequent moves necessitated by the fast-growing automobile business, North attended grade schools in Michigan, Alabama, North Carolina, Florida, Georgia and New York and graduated from Boy's High School in Atlanta, Georgia in 1939.

He entered the Citadel Military College in Savannah September 9, 1940. His entire graduating class of 1944 was inducted into the U.S. armed forces during World War II, and only two members graduated. All 549 members of the class of 1944 left the school during their junior year, entering military service. He left the Citadel on February 4, 1942.

After commissioning as a second lieutenant, he went on to complete flight training at Kelly Field, Texas, from June to December 1942, and Randolph Field, Texas. As pilot of a B-26 Martin Marauder medium bomber, he flew 65 bombing missions over Europe as part of the 9th Air Force, 397th Bomb Group, 598th Bombardment Squadron. (The emblem of the 598th was a black fire bomb lighted at the fuse, highlighted in white, to form the nose and eye of a caricatured head, resting on an outlined collar base. It supported a red, white and blue top hat, all in front of an irregular white cloud formation outlined in light blue. It was approved Feb. 5, 1944.)

Constituted as 397th Bombardment Group (Medium) on 20 Mar 1943, it was activated on 20 Apr 1943. The group flew their new B-26 Marauders from Hunter Field, Savannah, GA to England via the Ascension Islands in February 1944. The group moved to the Royal Air Force base in Gosfield, England in Mar-Apr 1944, and assigned to Ninth Air Force. They moved to the Royal Air Force base in Rivenhall. North named his plane the *Billie Willie V*, after his name, Willie and his girlfriend left behind in Tampa, FL, Billie Webb. (North and Billie Webb were married after his return from Europe.) His B-26B was Serial Number 42-96160, Squadron Code "U2," Aircraft Letter, "L." North flew in the first mission group of the 397th on June 6, 1944 in support of the Allied invasion of France. He was in the "Loading List/First Box" of B-26s to depart Rivenhall at 6:19 a.m. to their targets in France. Their target was Les Dunes de Verneville, France. He did NOT fly the *Billie Willie V* on that morning mission but rather he flew B-26 serial number 42-96148, Squadron Code X2, Aircraft Letter "H." His Combat Crew Loading List (the regular crew of the *Billie Willie V*) included:

- Pilot - North, William H., 1st Lt
- Co-Pilot - J. R. "Dick" Jernigan, 2nd Lt.
- Bombardier - H. J. Plunkett, 2nd Lt.
- Radio Operator/Gunner - R. R. Hoit, Sgt.
- Engineer/Gunner - J. L. Downs, Corporal
- Gunner - G. W. Watermolen, Sgt.

During their time at Rivenhall the 397th undertook 56 bombing missions, 32 of them attacks on bridges. Other targets were enemy airfields, rail junctions, fuel and ammunition stores, V-weapon sites and various military installations in France and the Low Countries. On August 5th, the 397th transferred from Rivenhall to RAF Hurn in Hampshire. After the

move from Rivenhall to Hurn, the group flew 72 missions before moving to the Advanced Landing Ground at Gorges, France on August 19th, with the last departures on the 30th and 31st of August. On the continent, the 397th struck enemy positions at St. Malo and Brest and bombed targets in the Rouen area as Allied armies swept across the Seine and advanced to the Siegfried Line. (Although rebuilt after WWII, damage to the *Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Rouen*, the cathedral in Rouen, France, is still very evident today.) The group began flying missions into Germany in September, attacking such targets as bridges, defended areas, and storage depots. The 397th struck the enemy's communications during the Battle of the Bulge (Dec 1944-Jan 1945). North was stationed at the following bases with his B-26 bomb group:

- MacDill Field, FL - 20 April 1943
- Avon Park Bombing Range, FL - 12 October 1943
- Hunter Field, GA - 1 November 1943-13 March 1944
- Gosfield, England - 5 April 1944
- Rivenhall, England - 15 April 1944
- Hurn, England - 5 August 1944
- Gorges, France - Aug. 1944
- Dreux, France - 11 September 1944
- Peronne, France - 6 October 1944

[INFO on Billie Willie v aircraft **AFTER** North left Europe: 42-96160 "Billie Willie V", coded U2-L, 397th BG / 598th BS. Lost on March 18, 1945. Shot down by flak around Stadecken, Germany. MACR#13140. The pilot, 1st Lt. Ronald F Shepard and crew were killed.

Here is some additional information regarding 42-96160 "Billie Willie V" U2-L. Original pilot in 397th BG was North. The information below comes from nephew of Pilot 1st Lt. Ronald F. Shepard, who was KIA. He's buried at Lorraine Cemetery, near St. Avold in France. The crew bailed out after the plane was hit by flak near Stadecken, Germany. There were two pilots in the formation witnessing the flak hit. After the flak hit 1st Lt. Shepard ordered the crew to bail out, which they did safely. The ship was smoking but pilot was in control and was 4 minutes from IP. He probably trailed the squadron and made the bomb run. He was later found in the crashed plane, location unknown.

Crew of 42-96169 "Billie Willie V" that was shot down on March 18, 1945 (POW-info from NARA):

- PILOT 1st Lt. Ronald F. Shepard (KIA)
- CO-PILOT F/O William R. Littlehale (POW)
- TOGGLIER S/Sgt. Harold E. Wilson (POW)
- RADIO-GUNNER Hoyt B. Willingham (did not find POW-record at NARA, just enlistment record)
- ENGINEER-GUNNER Sgt. James H. Tamplin (POW)
- ARMOURER-GUNNER Sgt. Herbert Brodsky (POW)
- OBSERVER J.C. Mc Guire (POW)

Upon his return from the European Theater of Operations, Lt. "Bill" North married Marjorie Billie Webb, a native of Tampa, Florida, on January 29, 1945. They had met in Tampa while he was undergoing B-26 pilot training at MacDill Army Air Field. (Immediately before their marriage, Billie was working as a Clerk-Typist for the Director of Operations and training, 327th Army Air Force Base Unit, Drew Field, [Tampa,] Florida. She resigned her job on

January 20.) As a photographic officer following WWII, he received Aerial Photography training at Lowry AFB, Colorado from April 1945 until May 1946 and TAC at Tyndall AFB, Florida from August to December 1947. He was a Liaison Officer, Motion Picture Industry, Los Angeles, CA, Staff Officer, Photographic, Hdqrs., USAF. He was stationed at several USAF bases in the United States including Little Rock (Officer in Charge, Target Intelligence Section, Recon Technical Squadron, U.S. Strategic Air Command, 1956-1957, RB47 wing), Barksdale (Chief, Retention Branch, Headquarters, 2nd Air Force, U.S. Strategic Air Command, 2nd Air Force – 1957-1959) Offutt AFB, Nebraska, the Pentagon and Shaw AFB, Sumter, SC. Tours of duty also included bases in foreign countries including Japan (Base Commander, Showa Air Base, Squadron Commander, Photographic Squadron (Korea and Japan). Immediately following WWII, and technical schools in Colorado and Florida, North was Adjutant and Pilot for a Geodetic Control Squadron [7th GCS, 311th RECON Wing] where they established control data for a future missile range. In March 1950, he was assigned to the 1151st USAF, S/A Squadron, Hdqrs. Command, USAF, Naval Quarters K, Arlington, VA, but duty-stationed at the Apex Film Corporation, 971 North La Cienega Blvd., Los Angeles, (that produced films for the U.S. government) He was ordered on TDY (Temporary Duty) outside the continental United States to monitor a High Altitude Film Project.

He was Assistant Chief of Production of the USAAC First Motion Picture Unit. The First Motion Picture Unit (FMPU) was the unofficial name for the 18th Air Force Base Unit of the United States Army Air Forces at Astoria Motion Picture Studio in Queens, Long Island, NY. They lived in Great Neck, Long Island, NY. In operation from 1942 to 1970, the APC was one of the world's largest film production facilities.

Following a station as Chief, Audio Visual Division, Directorate of Information, SAC, at headquarters of the USAF Strategic Air Command, Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska (1959-1961), North was transferred in 1961 to the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, Office of Information at the Pentagon as Deputy Chief, Radio, Television, Newsfilm Branch (1961-1963). He served as the prime project officer of national and international radio and television programs pertaining to the Department of Defense and supervised all DOD motion pictures and television camera crews.

In May 1962, he lead a multi-service photo team to South Viet Nam to secure combat footage – both 35mm and 2 ¼ x 2 ¼ black and white, plus 35mm black and white and color motion picture film – primarily for the United States Information Agency on “detached service to the U.S. Military Assistance Command” in South Viet Nam. The immediate need for still and motion pictures of the military's involvement in South Viet Nam and the presence of U.S. military personnel in the countries of Southeast Asia was felt by both military as well as civilian sources. The team of navy, army and air force cameramen flew a C-54 from Andrews Air Force Base outside Washington to the assignment. The team was made up Lt. Col. North, USAF, Captain P.A. Atroichin, USA, Senior Master Sgt. A.C. “Pappy” Noel, USAF, Sgt. G.J. Lepage, PHC. R.D. Mowrey, Master Sgt. Ted T. Tucker and ALC J. A. Hathcox. USAF. Part of North's multi-service team's assignment was to document Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's meeting in Saigon with Ngo Dinh Diem, president of the Republic of Vietnam. On May 18, 1962, North and his team photographed the landing in Thailand of some of the nearly 6,500 U.S. Marines, infantrymen and airmen from the aircraft carrier *Valley Forge*. It was the first overt deployment of American combat soldiers in Southeast Asia since World War II, and the first time foreign combat troops had entered Thailand for a purpose other than invasion or occupation of the country.

In 1963, North was transferred to the Los Angeles Office of Information as Chief, Television and Motion Pictures Division (1963-1965). He was the liaison between Hdqrs., USAF and the

television and motion picture industry. His assignment was to coordinate the production of television and motion pictures, which were directly related to the USAF, and their presentation to the public. North's last military assignment was as Chief, Requirements Division, Tactical Air Reconnaissance Center, Tactical Air Command, Shaw Air Force Base, Sumter, SC (1965-1966), where he was a world-wide photo interpretation officer and earlier, Chief, Ground Systems Division, accomplishing testing of new aerial and ground reconnaissance systems, (TDY, Nellis AFB, Las Vegas) on RF-4 Phantom jets for deployment as reconnaissance aircraft in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War. The 363rd Tactical Reconnaissance Wing flew photographic, electronic and electronic intelligence missions to support both air and ground operations by American or Allied ground forces. In addition, the 363rd provided combat crew training for reconnaissance aircrews.

At his retirement on September 12, 1966, he had served 24 years, 6 months and 17 days, almost four years in foreign assignments and stations. He retired with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. His last "AF specialty / title" was "Audio-Visual Photographic Staff Officer (or a "producer" in a civilian equivalent occupation.) Along with The Citadel, North also attended the University of the Philippines.

Col. North was a Command Pilot and received the following military decorations and awards: Army Commendation Medal (USAAC); European/African/Middle Eastern Campaign Medal; World War II Victory Medal; Korean Service Medal; Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation; Air Force Longevity Service with (1 Silver Oak Leaf Cluster) 3 oak leaf clusters; Air Medal with 2 Oak Leaf Clusters; National Defense Service Medal with One Bronze Service Star; Air Force Commendation Medal (GO-28, 2nd AF, 59); United Nations Service Medal; and in 1961 was authorized to wear the Office of the Secretary of Defense Identification Badge issued to members of the armed forces permanently assigned to the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

North died in Miami Shores, FL on February 23, 1988. He was buried with full military honors beside his father (Lt. Col. Frank Ray North, USA, ret.) and mother (Katherine Johnson North) just outside the gates of Fort Myers, near the post chapel, in Section 1 of Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, VA.