

My Father in World War II

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My Father was William Henry Bulpitt, born in Winchester, England on March 13, 1907. He died in Cold Spring Harbor, NY on April 24, 1960 at the age of 53 of a heart attack, when I was 12 years old. I heard very little about his wartime service at that age, but have pieced together a few details from relatives since then. In fact, I failed to get further details from my mother who outlived him by 16 years, but then when you are in your teens and twenties you are not very interested in family history and experiences.

My Father came to America as a second class passenger in January 1930 aboard the RMS Olympic (sister ship of Titanic) which at that point was almost 20 years old and probably past its prime. I believe when he got to the U.S. he went to stay with cousins from England in Darien, Connecticut, and may have actually worked with them for a while in their nursery business. He did, in fact, establish a career as a gardener/estate superintendent and spent the rest of his civilian life in the employ of various private estates in Connecticut and New York.

He became an American citizen in 1939. He registered for the US draft in 1940 while employed by the Coe estate "Planting Fields" on Long Island. He married my mother (Isabella Elizabeth Stephen born in Catterline, Scotland in 1914) in Cold Spring Harbor, NY in September 1942. The reception was held in the garden of my Aunt (the former Catherine Stephen) and Uncle's home in Cold Spring Harbor. In early 1943 my father enlisted in the American Army. At the age of 35 he was one of the older conscripts in the Army and was assigned to the Eighth Air Force and sent to "boot camp" in Sioux City, Iowa. I believe my newlywed mother was able to visit him briefly out there before he was sent to England.

The unit he was assigned to what would become the 448th Bomb Group (Heavy) to be stationed in England. I have only found out these details over the last couple of years, with the help of some war letters to my mother and an all-encompassing book written by Jeffrey Brett about his Group 20 years ago which I discovered at the Eighth Air Force Museum in Savannah, GA in 2021. The airplanes (B-24s) of the group were flown by the aircrews to England, but the ground support personnel (of which my father was a member) apparently left New York City aboard the RMS Queen Elizabeth outfitted as a troop ship. They landed after a six day voyage in Glasgow. They were then transported by rail to the new airbase at Seething, southwest of Great Yarmouth in East Anglia. They would have arrived in November 1943, and that base would be my Father's home for the next two years.

During his time at Seething he was able to get liberty on several occasions and visited with my mother's family in Catterline and Stonehaven, Scotland, as chronicled in several letters written to my mother. By that time my fisherman Grandfather (James Stephen) had already died in 1939. From the letters it appears that he had a good time visiting the Stephen clan and stayed with my Grandmother in Catterline. Other than that, I have few details of his time at Seething, although I can imagine his wartime duties could be very difficult at times since the airplanes were in the open on hardstands (no hangars) and would have to be serviced in all kinds of weather. As a member of the ordnance group his typical duties would have involved arming and loading the bombs in the middle of the night for early morning takeoff. I imagine after the planes left he was able to get some rest but would have to be prepared to receive the planes upon their return from bombing runs in the afternoon, and help out as needed to repair damaged aircraft etc. The base was subject to attack by the Luftwaffe on occasion, and

he had some near misses during those raids. The base at Seething still exists today, and the control tower has been restored as a monument to the 448th Bomb Group.

In 1945 my Grandmother was in ill health in Scotland, and my Mother (who had been working in a defense plant in Bridgeport, CT) was actually able to book passage back to England. She sailed from New York aboard the Nieuw Amsterdam as a First Class passenger and arrived at Southampton on August 30, 1945. She was with her mother in Scotland when she died in September. By that time World War II was over, and she found herself in the middle of a conundrum. As a non-USA citizen who was a dependent of a USA citizen she had very low priority for return to the US. Thus, she had to wait until 1946 to return, and came back to New York aboard the RMS Queen Mary, still fitted out in troop ship configuration, with the "G.I. Brides" even though she had been married in New York in 1942. It was the only way she could return, and I have a Bible signed by the Queen Mary chaplain given to her in March 1946.

Meanwhile, my father had been able to return to the US on October 16, 1945, also aboard the Queen Mary. I only found that out about 10 years ago through the help of a friend who obtained some ship's manifests. He was able to obtain employment at a large private estate in Connecticut and he was working there when I was born in 1947.

Thus ends the saga of my Father's wartime experience. Maybe not unique, but certainly unusual for a blue collar man born in England, coming to America for presumably a better opportunity, and then sent back to England to serve in the American AAF. Certainly to me he was a part of "The Greatest Generation."