

# Heroes Among Us:

## Waist Gunner Remembers Air Combat



Dave Stanfield, Raleigh, NC; June 1943



### Dave Stanfield

Born: 1924

US Army Air Corps –

Waist Gunner, Eighth Air Force

1943-1945

Oct. 6, 1944 Norwich UK– “We flew our first combat mission today. Didn’t sleep much last night but I guess no one on our crew did. Primary target was an airfield 17 miles south of Hamburg (Germany) but it was covered with a smoke screen so we bombed the secondary target, an airfield at Stade. This was between Bremen and Hamburg. Encountered no flak or enemy fighters, very lucky. Temperature was minus -27° C. I am alerted tonight to fly again tomorrow. Time: 5 hrs. 50 min.”

The above journal entry and the subsequent ones which follow was written by Tonawanda’s Dave Stanfield, an 86 year-old retired AT&T worker, who kept meticulous notes during his WWII service. Dave flew in 35 missions across enemy territory, narrowly escaping death on several occasions. He was one of nine crew members in a B24 Liberator Bomber, a 4-engine heavy bomber that is the cousin of the B-17<sup>1</sup>. It was the crew’s second mission which would test their resolve and become the first of several near death missions:

“Oct. 7, 1944 – Flew to Magdeburg today and bombed an oil refinery just outside the city. Carried 6-1000# general purpose bombs whereas yesterday we carried 12- 500 pound clusters of incendiaries. Flak was heavy on the bomb run and we got hit in No. 3 engine just as bombs away. Feathered the engine and couldn’t keep up with the formation. Lost too much gas and couldn’t make it back. Headed for allied lines, losing altitude from 23,000 to 13,000 ft. Had to dodge cities all the way but still ran into flak about 8 times. It was a miracle the Jerries didn’t jump us but there were P-51’s and P-47’s and Spitfires (friendly fighters) intermittently all along. What with flak, fighters and low gasoline, we really sweated it out. Finally landed at Lille, France on a bombed out runway. You can’t realize how I felt when I stepped from that ship. Quite a few flak holes and one right through the No. 3 engine. Ate some C-rations and flew back to Norwich in another B-24 about two hours later. There are no atheists in our crew tonight. Time: 6 hrs. 45 min.”

The crew’s quota of missions to fulfill was 35. Thankfully, they made it through all of them. Dave’s last journal entry reads: “#35 was on 4-7-45. Target “Krummel.” Too excited to write it up. D.S.”

Many years later, Dave wrote to his pilot, Ed Sealy, to thank him for his superb flying skills. The two had a mini-reunion when a travelling B24 came to visit Cleveland. Sealy wrote about the reunion in his book, “The Air War

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<sup>1</sup> A B-24 normally carried a crew of ten, including a pilot, co-pilot, bombardier, nose gunner, navigator, radio operator, ball turret gunner, two waist gunners, and tail gunner. (Sealy, 2009)

(continued on other side)



*Dave and Marjorie Stanfield were married 56 years.*

Remembered: Letters to Chris” - “Being together reminded us of the days when we were part of a well-trained team pulling together in life and death situations – there are few stronger bonds.”

Today, Dave continues to live in his home with the help of Hospice care. He was enrolled in Hospice Buffalo in May, 2011 with congestive heart failure. He and his late wife were married for 56 years and had two sons, one of whom died of a brain tumor at age 40, and was cared for at home by the Stanfields and Hospice Buffalo.

Despite his setbacks in life, Dave has a great attitude. “Many things you don’t have control over,” he reflected. “The big question is ‘how do you handle it?’”

Hospice Buffalo salutes Dave Stanfield and the many veterans who gave their all for our country’s freedoms. Through his personal story, and others like his, we can better understand the unique life experiences of veterans.

## *Heroes Among Us:*

### Personalized Care for Veterans

Hospice Buffalo is honored to provide the highest quality end-of-life care to veterans. Military service affects how veterans live and how they die.

Through the *Heroes Among Us* initiative, Hospice is focusing on increasing awareness to staff and the veterans community to provide extraordinary care for veterans unique needs when they are nearing the end of their lives.

### Services for Veterans’ Unique Life Experiences

- ★ Palliative (comfort) care for pain and symptom management
- ★ Music and massage therapy
- ★ Spiritual care and counseling for veterans’ needs
- ★ Advance care planning (health care decision-making)
- ★ Resources for benefits for veterans and dependents
- ★ Excellent relationship with the VA



*Dave Stanfield with his air crew. Dave is the third from the right in the bottom row.*



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