

Colonel Richard "Dick" Benjamin Bushong

**U.S. Army Air Force, 390th Bomb Group (H), 13th Combat Wing - 3rd Air Division of the Eighth Air Force
- World War II**

**U.S. Air Force, 366th Fighter Wing, Air Force Reserve
- Vietnam War**



Medals: Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal with 3 Oak Leaf Clusters, European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal, World War II Victory Medal, Air Force Meritorious Service Medal



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Museum pays tribute



Dick's MHS Senior picture.

When Richard "Dick" Bushong referred to himself "Lucky" in 1942 after surviving a combat mission in a B-17 "Flying Fortress" bomber, he had no idea just how lucky he was or how long his luck would last. Dick, a retired Colonel who served 32 years in the U.S. Army Air Corps, the U.S. Air Force, and the Air Force Reserves, celebrated his 102nd birthday on March 21, 2025, surrounded by his friends from the 390th Memorial Museum in Tucson, Arizona.

Dick's story began in St. Marys, Ohio, on March 21, 1923, the third son of B.H. Bushong and the only child of Clara Kellermeyer Bushong. After graduating from St. Marys Memorial High School in 1941, where he was the Senior Class President, Dick worked at Wright Field in Dayton, Ohio. There, an aide suggested that he apply to the Aviation Cadet program, so Richard took the test, passed his exams, and was sworn in as a Private in the Army Air Corps on April 23, 1942. In September 1942, he reported to Kelly Field in San Antonio for pilot training. After completing Preflight, he was transferred to Goodfellow Field in San Angelo, Class of 43G. The washout rate during Primary Training was roughly 40-50%. Many of the men washed out of the program because they suffered

Dick Bushong

from air sickness, they could not handle the PT-19, nicknamed the Bamboo Bomber, because the wings were made of plywood, or they could not pass their solo flight test. Dick wrote in his memoir, "My Wars, B-17s to F-4s, WWII to Vietnam," that he did not want to fail because washouts were sent to the Infantry.

Luckily, Dick passed and was selected to fly AT-9 and AT-10 planes at Ellington Field. He received his silver pilot wings on July 29, 1943, when he was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant. After

graduation, Dick took the train from Texas to St. Marys, Ohio, proudly displaying his wings and bars to friends and family in his hometown.

Dick was assigned to B-17 Combat Crew Phase Training at Ephrata, Washington. The B-17 was a heavy bomber, nicknamed the "Flying Fortress," and dropped more bombs in World War II than any other type of aircraft. The B-17 had a flying range of 2,000 miles, so it was used for long-distance bombing raids over enemy territory in Europe. The B-17 had an aluminum frame: four engines, and it could carry up to 17,600 pounds of bombs. It was manned by a crew of ten – the Pilot, Co-Pilot, Navigator, Bombardier, Radio Operator, Flight Engineer, two Waist Gunners, the Belly or Ball Gun Turret Gunner, and Tail Gunner. The Gunners manned 13 M2 Browning .50 caliber machine guns in nine positions around the plane. Crewman had just a 20% chance of surviving to complete their tour of duty because of the danger they encountered on every bombing mission.

Dick trained on the B-17 bomber in Ephrata, Washington, for three months with his crew learning to operate as a unit. They received orders along with 34 other B-17 crews to board a train heading east, not knowing where they were going. They slept sitting in their seat for a week before arriving at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. One night, without warning, they were routed out of



Dick flew a total of 28 combat missions.



Dick Bushong



Dick as a young boy and his Army Air Corps portraits.

their barracks and boarded onto the RMS Queen Elizabeth. They bunked 18 men to a cabin and considered themselves lucky, because there were almost 17,000 troops onboard. Dick wrote that they “zigged and zagged” their way across the Atlantic, unescorted, changing course every three minutes to avoid German U-boats. They arrived in Glasgow, Scotland and from there, they were transported to Framlingham Army Air Force Base in England and assigned to the 390th Bomb Group (H).

Dick’s first combat mission was scheduled for December 16, 1943, over Bremen, Germany, in the B-17 named “Royal Flush.” Unfortunately, Dick became very sick and was hospitalized with Hepatitis so he missed his first assigned mission. His crew went without him, borrowing a co-pilot from Norman Palmer’s B-17 crew. When Dick arrived back at his barracks, he saw that 11 of the 12 mattresses were rolled up and the personal effects of the 11 crewmen were missing. Dick found his Squadron Operations Office and was in shock when he learned that the Royal Flush had been shot down. In fact, all three B-17 crews that were staying in his barracks had been shot down while Dick



Dick (see arrow) is pictured with other crews from the 390th meeting actor James Cagney who is standing in the center.

crew to replace the co-pilot who had taken his spot on the Royal Flush. He flew his first combat mission on the B-17 “Dolly” on December 30, 1943, to bomb a chemical plant at Ludwigshaven, Germany. Over the next seven months, he flew a total of 28 combat missions targeting enemy infrastructure and war supply structures such as a rocket installation in France, an airfield near Paris, a German aircraft factory, a shipyard and the Heinkel assembly plant. Some missions were what he called “a milk run,” meaning there was a lot of enemy flak but no enemy fighters. Other missions were more difficult, encountering heavy enemy anti-aircraft fire and the loss of numerous B-17’s. Dick kept a diary of his missions, recording the date, the bombing target and location, and information about the flight. On one flight, he noted in his diary that it “was a thrill for me, a kid from a small town in Ohio,” to fly over Paris and see Notre Dame Cathedral. (“My Wars,” p. 35) In fact, the B-17 he flew that day – “Johnny Walker” – was the only B-17 that

LT. RICHARD B. BUSHONG WINS DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS

21-YEAR OLD PILOT FROM ST. MARYS WON HONORS ON 28TH MISSION—HIS GROUP PREVIOUSLY WON THE PRESIDENTIAL CITATION.

Lieut. Richard Bushong, pilot of a B-17, has won the Distinguished Flying Cross, his parents, Mr. and Mrs. B. H. Bushong have been notified. He received it on his 28th bombing mission over Europe, according to word they received, in recognition of some particular achievement.

The 21-year old pilot recently wrote them concerning the 28th mission, “It was some ride but I can’t tell you any more about it until I get home.”

Dick’s group has received the presidential citation in recognition of its work.

Before winning the Distinguished Flying Cross, Lieut. Bushong won an air medal and three oak leaf clusters. The medal has been presented to him.

Lieut. Bushong has been overseas since last October. He served as co-pilot of a bomber until recently when he was made pilot.

was in the hospital. Dick found out later that parachutes were spotted leaving the Royal Flush when it went down. He eventually learned that the crew had been captured as Prisoners of War and would spend the rest of the war at Stalag Luft III and Stalag VIIA.

Dick was reassigned to the Norman Palmer B-17

Dick Bushong

he flew that made it back to the states in 1945. Dick also met James Cagney, an actor who won an Academy Award for Best Actor for the film, "Yankee Doodle Dandy." Dick is in a famous picture where Cagney christened the B-17 bomber "Yankee Doodle Dandy." Dick flew on his ninth mission on Yankee Doodle Dandy to bomb a German airfield at Villacoublay, France. Several months later, the Yankee Doodle Dandy was shot down, killing four crewmen.

Dick "Lucky" Bushong definitely beat the odds in surviving 28 combat missions over Europe. He did, however, have several close calls. There were several times when their B-17 would have to abort a mission because of bad weather or equipment failure and return to base without dropping their bombs. Dick noted that it was nerve wracking to land the B-17 with twelve 500-pound bombs still on board. On other combat missions, he described seeing B-17s shot down by German fighter planes, losing 31 heavy bombers on his 10th mission to Brunswick, and losing 60 planes that were shot down on his third mission or approximately 40% of their bombers. He wrote in his journal for

that mission that he was "Lucky to still be alive." ("My Wars," p. 31)

Dick noted that during one week in February 1944, they were "alerted" to fly for seven straight days. This meant that the crew would arise anywhere from 1:45 a.m. – 4 a.m. to be briefed on their assignment and prepare the plane with parachutes, oxygen tanks, and equipment for a take-off time of 6-7 a.m. On three of the seven days, the mission was scrubbed either just before take-



Dick with the Norman Palmer crew. He is in the back row, second from left.

off or shortly thereafter, usually because of bad weather. They completed combat missions on the other four days that week. Dick wrote that his commander said they were wearing the German Luftwaffe down, but Dick thought to himself, "Sure we are. We have been awakened in the middle of the night seven days in a row, flown like crazy, and all the work getting ready to fly and *we are wearing them down?* ... I know that I was worn out after that week." (emphasis in original) ("My Wars," p. 40)

On what turned out to be his last combat mission on April 13, 1944, Dick had his narrowest escape from disaster when he flew the B-17 "Belle of the Brawl" through one of the worst flak storms ever raised by German gunners. It was his 28th combat mission and the target was the Messerschmitt plane factories at Augsburg, Germany. In an interview Dick did with The Evening Leader paper in St. Marys, he said, "I knew it was going to be a rough ride across the bomb run, but I didn't know exactly how rough. Just before the bombs went down, I felt the concussion of several bursts near us and heard flying steel ripping through our fuselage." ("Bushong Describes Narrowest Escape From Disaster In 27 Missions," The Evening Leader, May 9, 1944) He looked out to see oil streaming out

of the number one engine. As they headed for home base, their number two and three engines were hit by flak, and their B-17 was knocked out of formation. He wrote, "From then on in, the cabin of our bomber became a chapel. We all did plenty of praying ... and we made it home." (The Evening Leader, May 9, 1944) They didn't know it until they landed, but the B-17 had also lost its brakes, and it was only "thanks to good old English mud" that they landed safely. Dick was promoted to 1st Lieutenant and awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross after this mission. Dick was also awarded the Air Medal for outstanding service after completing his first five combat missions, along with three Oak Leaf Clusters. Each Oak Leaf Cluster represents the completion of



Army Air Corp
Wings



Colonel Rank
Insignia



USAF Command
Pilot



USAF-PUC Badge

five combat missions.

Dick returned to the United States in June 1944. He called his parents from an Army base in Indiana, and they drove to pick him up. He noted, "There was a lot of rejoicing and hugging in that meeting." ("My Wars," p. 58) He spent a couple weeks of leave in St. Marys. He was finally old enough to buy a drink legally but said that "proved hard to do in my hometown" since he was treated as a war hero. ("My Wars," p. 58) He eventually received orders for Wright Field in Dayton where he was assigned to the Flight Test Section. During his time there, Dick's mother, Clara Kellermeyer Bushong, visited him and was thrilled when Dick took her up on a B-17. She had to stand the whole flight because there were no seats or seat belts. He flew them over St. Marys and the paper mill where his dad was working. He recalled that his dad and lots of employees came out to watch them.

One of his commanding officers suggested that Dick attend Test Pilot School in San Antonio. Lucky for him, there was one open spot available, and Dick took it. He spent the next three and a half months in intensive training before being assigned to the Mid-West Procurement District, headquartered in Wichita, Kansas, in November 1944. There, he was a test pilot for the B-29 plane. He met Tina Gilliland at a dance, and they were married on May 4, 1945. They were married 60 years and raised two children – Richard Jr. and Rebecca. Tina passed away in 2004 and is buried at Arlington National Cemetery, where Dick will be buried alongside her when he passes.



Dick Bushong

years in the Reserve Forces between wars. One day in 1988, Dick walked into the 390th Memorial Museum in Tucson, Arizona, looked up at the tail of a B-17, and said, "Well, I'll be damned, that's the outfit I was in in WW II." ("WWII Vet celebrates his 98th birthday after beating COVID," Tucson Weekly, Mar. 29, 2021) He has volunteered as a Senior Docent at the 390th Memorial Museum ever since, enlightening and enthralling visitors with his personal stories of piloting B-17 planes in WW II. He told a reporter covering his 98th birthday that, "I never got back without holes in the airplane, but I got back and survived and went again" (Tucson Weekly, Mar. 29, 2021) He said he loved every minute of it and called it a "great, great career." (Tucson Weekly, Mar. 29, 2021) He memorialized his military career in a book, "My Wars, B-17s to F-4s, WWII to Vietnam," which is a best seller at the 390th Memorial Museum. His memories of service are also immortalized in the Library of Congress in the Richard B. Bushong Collection. His oral history was collected by Thomas M. Bohan, Pima Air Museum, on November 20, 2014, and in subsequent videos. It can be found at: <https://www.loc.gov/item/afc2001001.98223/>

In 2025, Colonel Richard B. Bushong, 102 years old, was inducted into the St. Marys Memorial High School Alumni Foundation's Hall of Fame for Military Service to Country.

Over the next three decades, Dick remained in the U.S. Air Force and the Reserve Forces, rising to the rank of Colonel. He returned to active duty during the Korean War, performed air defense during the Cold War, and completed a one-year tour of duty in the Vietnam War where he flew F-4 Phantoms. He was attached to the 366th Fight Wing in Alaska, Da Nang, Vietnam, and Japan. He retired from the Air Force in 1974 after 32 years of service, all on active duty except for five and half

Dick became a Senior Docent at the 390th Memorial Museum in 1988..



Scan for Dick Bushong's Oral History

