

Mitchell Woods Bacon:
A Biographical Sketch

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Ever since the United States of America declared independence from Great Britain, her citizens have laid down their lives to protect our country and the values established within its Constitution. Of those citizens, Mitchell Woods Bacon, a native West Virginian, gave his life in service to the United States in order to preserve the rights of every American citizen and to release the people of Europe from the hands of tyranny. General Douglas MacArthur once stated that, “Old soldiers never die, they just fade away.” It is our responsibility as historians to ensure that future generations know and understand the sacrifices that were made for them so many years ago.

Birth and Family



Staff Sergeant Mitchell Woods Bacon was born on April 10, 1910 in Martinsburg, West Virginia. He was the son of Edwin and Helen Bacon. Edwin and Helen were married in October

of 1908. Bacon's parents were married for six short years before his mother passed away. His younger brother, Edwin, named for his father, was two at the time of her death. SSG Bacon's father had been married prior to his marriage to Helen Tabb. Edwin fathered a child with his former wife, Josephine. Bacon's half-sister, Dorsett, was two years his senior and resided in Georgia. It is likely that Bacon never met her or even knew she existed. From the record search, Bacon and his father had an estranged relationship. During his high school years, Mitchell was sent to live with his uncle, John Mitchell Woods, who was a judge in Charleston. He moved to Charleston, WV, around 1940 according to the 1940 census, where he resided with his uncle John and his wife, Eleanor and his cousin John Woods, Jr.

Education

His education began in the public school system of West Virginia at Martinsburg High School, but he transferred to Charleston High School, where he graduated in 1928. After he graduated from high school, he went on to study law at the University of Virginia. He was part of the Phi Kappa Psi fraternity while he was there. Once he completed his studies, Bacon returned to Charleston, West Virginia, passed the Bar Exam, and worked for his uncle at his law firm until 1942, when he enlisted.

Enlistment

With the arrival of arguably one of the infamous days in history, December 7, 1941 and the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor came a flurry of enlistments of men eager to serve their country. This attack set a fire ablaze in the hearts of Americans and entering the war became inevitable. In the months following the attack, many men enlisted and among them was Mitchell Woods Bacon. His sense of service lead him to complete his Selective Service forms in October

of 1940 to be drafted, if necessary; however, instead of waiting to be drafted, Mitchell volunteered to be a part of the United States Army Air Corps. He was sent to Florida for basic training. He returned from basic training as a radio operator on a Douglas C-47. As a radio operator, SSG Bacon kept communication lines open, relaying information from his aircraft to those around him.

His Unit



Staff Sergeant Mitchell Woods Bacon's unit was activated in March of 1942, but was not officially named the 314th Troop Carrier Group (TCG) until July 6, 1942. When training with his unit, the focus was mainly on successfully dropping paratroopers. Eight months after activation, the 314th TCG was assigned to the 50th Troop Carrier Squadron. After a year of training, the group had "progressed to such a degree that the Group could now change from its permanent station to a temporary location for final preparation for overseas duty." In May of 1943, the 314th was sent overseas to North Africa for training on foreign soil. They later went on to participate in the Sicilian Campaign where the 314th dropped paratroopers from the 82nd

Airborne Division. In February of 1944, the 314th TCG left Sicily to arrive at Saltby Army Air Base in England. From March to June, the 314th went through rigorous training in England in preparation for D-Day. They were dropping paratroopers and working with gliders in training exercises almost daily.

D-Day

The men of the 314th Troop Carrier Group had worked endlessly to prepare for D-Day, and on June 3, 1944, they were briefed on the events of the coming hours. On June 5th, just before midnight, the C-47s and C-53s took off for Normandy, troops and all. Once they got to the coastline, the planes were met with anti-aircraft fire and the clouds blocked vision. On several of the aircraft, paratroopers refused to jump or had an excuse ready to go when they hit the door, so four of the aircrafts returned to Saltby Airbase with soldiers who were meant to be on the ground in Normandy. When all was said and done for Neptune #1, only one aircraft was missing and sixteen were damaged. Of the sixteen damaged, nine were still flyable. As for SSG Bacon, he was the radio operator on A/C No. 42-93065 which was piloted by Captain Howard W. Sass. As far as the records show, their D-Day mission was successful with little to no difficulties. However, the same can not be said for the second Neptune mission.

D-Day+1

June 7, 1944, proved to be a fateful day for the crew of A/C No. 42-93065, but it was also a day that showed how brave these men really were. SSG Bacon and the men he served with had already flown into Normandy once and managed to get out without any major losses, but it would have been terrifying to fly in and not know for sure if you were going to fly back out.

There had to have been some fear, despite all the training, and yet SSG Bacon and his crew went back the next day to resupply the troops on the ground. This time, however, they would not make it home. Their mission began at 0325 hours and, if successful, was scheduled to end at 1035 hours. As Bacon and the other men on his aircraft flew back into Normandy, they were again met with intense and accurate anti-aircraft fire, as well as small arms fire. Most pilots dropped their loads where they were meant to but there was still the question of whether or not it was the Allies that received them. By the conclusion of the D-Day+1 mission, one aircraft had been lost, two were missing, and twenty-four were damaged. Of those listed, only thirteen remained flyable. The casualties of this mission included four wounded and fourteen missing in action (MIA) from the 314th Troop Carrier Group. SSG Mitchell Bacon was one of the fourteen listed as missing in action.

There were several different documents that described the events of D-Day+1 for Captain Sass and his crew. Only two of the sources agree as to what happened to C-47 No. 42-93065. In the mission report by Major Richard Egan, he states that the “A/C piloted by Capt Howard W. Sass was seen to crash in flames and explode shortly after bundles had been thrown from the burning plane over the drop zone.” He also included that “none of the crew were seen to bail out.” In an eyewitness account, Staff Sergeant Robert E. Callahan claimed to have seen “the plane piloted by Captain Howard W. Sass set on fire by anti-aircraft fire.” He also said that the aircraft caught fire beneath the fuselage just before reaching the drop zone, then continued to tell about how another radio operator who witnessed the crash saw a “sheet of fire” in the crew compartment of the aircraft. SSG Callahan later mentioned that Captain Sass had been the only survivor of the crash and sent a letter to his squadron commander, Major Joseph McClure,

detailing how he could no longer remember the events leading up to the crash or how he managed to escape. However, despite details in the mission report and a witness of the crash, Staff Sergeant Mitchell Bacon's death report stated that his casualty agent was an "airplane crash without fire", when there was, in fact, fire during the crash. SSG Bacon was only thirty-four years old when his plane went down over Ste-Mere-Eglise, France.

The Aftermath

On June 7th, 1944, SSG Mitchell Bacon was declared missing in action along with the co-pilot, the crew chief, and the navigator of the plane they were on. The co-pilot was 2nd Lieutenant Menees, the navigator was 2nd Lieutenant Lyons, and crew chief was Staff Sergeant Daley. Each of them died in the crash as well. However, Bacon was considered missing in action until September 4th of 1944 when the "evidence was considered sufficient to establish the fact of death." The evidence that was considered was the identification on his remains and a marker, as well as the remains themselves. In the Disinterment Directive, it states that the remains identified as SSgt Bacon's were in an advanced state of decomposition and there were fractures on the left humerus and femur. He was then reconsidered to be killed in action (KIA).

Family Reactions

After SSG Bacon was declared KIA, his brother and uncle were notified. They were both contacted by the Quartermaster General's Office of the War Department. His brother, Edwin Bacon, reacted by asking for Mitchell's remains to be buried in France and asked for his remaining personal effects. With his remains, they found SSG Bacon's keepsake knife, fingernail clippers, and two British pennies. Officials later found the rest of his effects including nearly everything he had been issued. SSG Bacon's uncle, John Mitchell Woods, reacted to the

news of his nephew's death by asking for the War Department to double check that he was actually deceased. He held on to a sliver of hope that the report could have been a mistake, but unfortunately, it was not. His uncle later asked about the circumstances of his nephew's death. Both relatives were given the exact location of SSG Bacon's grave.

Burial

Staff Sergeant Bacon is buried in the Normandy American Cemetery of Colleville. His grave is located in Plot F, on Row 11, and is Grave 43. There is also a headstone located in Martinsburg, West Virginia, to honor his memory. His memorial is in Green Hill Cemetery, the same cemetery where his mother, Helen Virginia Tabb Bacon, is buried. For his sacrifice, Staff Sergeant Bacon was awarded the Air Medal with an Oak Leaf Cluster, meaning he was given this honor multiple times, as well as the Purple Heart. He also qualified for the World War II Victory Medal, American Campaign Medal, Distinguished Unit Citation, Good Conduct Medal, and the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal. He was awarded most of them posthumously.

"Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty."

John F. Kennedy

"Bravery is the capacity to perform properly even when scared half to death."

General Omar Bradley

