

U. S. ARMY AIR CORPS

VETERAN: *GEORGE A. TOLLESON*
HIGHEST RANK/GRADE: *STAFF SERGEANT*
INTERVIEWED BY: *BRENT CARLISLE*

At the age of 19, George Tolleson left Lodi, Texas, for basic training at Wichita Falls after being drafted by the Army. George was transferred to the Air Corps after completing his basic training and flew to Harlingen in South Texas for gunner training, then to March Field at Riverside, California for overseas training. At Mayther Field in Sacramento, California, the crew was put together for a brand new B-24 heavy bomber. The pilot was the only other person from Texas and the oldest crewmember at age 24. He had already been a trainer for fighter pilots. The crew began training at night in California. During one training exercise, George noticed an engine was on fire due to pilot error. The pilot adjusted the fuel mixture and the fire dispersed. George felt that this was the best training he received. He was then assigned to be a nose gunner, meaning he was in charge of guarding the nose of the plane with two .50 caliber rifles.

The training was completed and the bomb bays were filled half with guns and ammunition and half with beer and whiskey. From Sacramento they flew to Honolulu, which was the last paved airstrip the crew would see for 25 months. Canton Island was their next destination. The island was so small that the runway went the full length of the island. It took three passes before they made a successful landing. They refueled and left for the island of Tarawa. Here they were loaded with bombs, given coordinates, and aerial photographs of their destination. New Guinea was their target--a jungle area with a bridge target in the middle of it. There were rumors that "head hunters" were in the target area, and they were told to be prepared in case they crashed.

New Guinea was the place of his most memorable moment of the war. There were no flight laws overseas, so when a pilot flew in, stunts were expected. A P-38 Lightning came in doing some of the most impressive aerial acrobatics he had seen. When he pulled up next to George's plane, they noticed the word "Tex" on the side of his plane. Tex crawled out of his fighter wearing boots, cowboy hat, and to top it off, two pearl handled .45 pistols in side holsters.

After completing their campaign in New Guinea and Las Negroes, they flew to the Samoan naval base in the Philippines. They consistently bombed the oilfields of Borneo and Balikpapan (sic) that was heavily fortified. Normally 25-100 bombers flew each mission. Here they faced the "ak-ak" guns of the opposition, and at least one bomber was lost on every mission. They flew every other day and sometimes at night. Occasionally, they would fool the "ak-ak" guns by using foil to confuse the opposition's radar. They flew several missions to Borneo and Formosa (Taiwan). These took 15-17 hours round trip. Rubber tanks were used in two of the four bomb bays for the extended trips.

George flew a mission to Formosa the day after Hiroshima was bombed. They dropped no bombs, but took pictures and were instructed to neutralize the ground troop movement. They flew three more missions before Japan surrendered.

At the end of the war, George was put on an A-20 twin engine plane that was smaller, faster, and more maneuverable. He later boarded a ship in Japan, and 15 days later landed in Seattle, then went by train to El Paso where he was discharged at the age of 22 with 6 bronze stars and a rank of staff sergeant.