

Bristol Beaufighter Pilot Captain Emil A. Sztanyo

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A Family Legacy

Many times people ask me, “Darcy, how did you get involved in aviation?” Of course there are several reasons why I decided to pursue my dream of flying. But there is one person that planted the “Aviation Seed” in me at a young age. I tell them a grand story about a Captain of a Bristol Beaufighter who flew for the Army Air Corps during WWII, my Grandfather, Captain Emil A. Sztanyo.

He is a very humble man, who is not one to boast about the past. Emil is responsible for his son, and four of his grandchildren

including myself, for becoming pilots and we have a true love and respect for aviation. His story is what started a true legacy in our family that my husband and I only hope to continue to pass down to our children one day. I wish to share part of his story with you not only because of the impact it had on my life but because time is getting shorter and shorter for our WWII Veterans. It truly hit home when I was recently informed that Grandpa and his R/O (Radar Operator) are currently the oldest

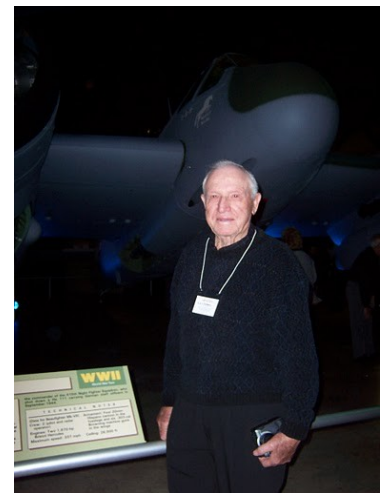
living Nightfighter crew. Here is one of the countless stories, of those that fought for our country during WWII.

- It came to be known to the Italian Armed Forces as “il flagello di Dio” the “Scourge of God.”

Applying For the Job

The war had been going on in Europe for a few years. Emil thought it was time to do his part for his country. He initially applied for the Marines. He went through all of the appropriate testing and failed one part of his medical exam because of a small fever. The nurse told him to head home, get some rest and come back the next day to re-take his

temperature. Upon returning home to rest, he found out that he could now enlist with the Army Air Corps because of a change in their requirements. Before, they required all those who applied to have 2 years of college. The military changed the requirement to pass an equivalent 2 year college written exam. So the next day, he went



Emil Sztanyo in front of the restored Beaufighter at the National Museum of the US Air Force in Dayton, OH.

back to the same building, but instead of the Marine Office, he went to the Army Air Corps Office right across the hall. He took the medical exam, and passed with flying colors. But the hard part was next. He sat down to take his written exam. It was a multiple question test that was quite difficult.

Kissimmee Advanced Training (Multi-Engine) Fighter Class



Emil after Cadet Graduation

"...over 17 pounds of explosive and lead was being thrown from this fighter every second."



Transfer

After a couple of hours working on the test, he still had not finished. He watched as some of his friends handed in the test, and heard "Fail" after "Fail" being called after the grading had been completed. Emil was quite certain that he would not pass, considering most of his buddies who took the exam had 2 years of college and failed. He had no college experience, and believed there was no way he would be able to pass. So he just handed in the test. He truly believed that there was no point to continue. As he was about to leave, the instructor said,

"Hold on and wait a minute. You might as well wait to see if you passed." Come to find out, the entire last section he

left blank was not counted against him. He was only graded on what

was completed. He passed. Thus the start of his aviation career had begun at that moment.

Training

Grandpa felt very privileged that he was given the opportunity to fly. He was called in on March 19, 1942 to begin basic flight training. The first aircraft he was taught to fly in was the PT-17 Stearman. The second phase of basic training was in the Vultee BT-13. During basic training 60%-70% pilots washed out. Then when he began the advance training in a Multi-engine another 10% washed out. He obviously did very well with his flight training in his class because he was then selected for special training. In special training, they focused on instrument flying and aerobatics. The final wash out rate was only 2%! He graduated in July of 1943 and was then selected for the first night-fighter class. This was

quite a rarity considering out of the 91,000 WWII Aviators, only 452 were trained as night fighters! One week later, he left the states to join the 414th squadron for training in Africa. The 414th trained them to fly British planes in Algiers. Many people ask the question as to why the 414th and 415th Squadrons flew British Aircraft and not our own? The Americans did not have the P-61 Black Widow ready for service but The Brits had already been in the war for several years and had a bombers that had already proven effective. At the end of July, they started training in the Bristol Blenheim Bomber that had dual cockpit controls. After completion of training (only in one week) it was time to learn to fly the Bristol Beaufighter.



Emil and 3 of his squadron buddies in Africa.



415th Squadron Logo

Flying the Beau

The 414th, 415th and 417th Night Fighter Squadrons received approximately 100 lend-lease Beaufighters. They arrived in the Mediterranean during the summer of '43. The purpose of the Beaufighter was to be very heavily armed, fast and able to take many hits, including losing an

engine to enemy fire and continue flying. The Beaufighter was big and very tough. The early Beaufighters carried four 20-mm cannons in the lower nose, six .303-calibre machine guns in the wings and four more .303-calibre machine guns beside the nose section forward firing. With all guns blazing, over 17

pounds of explosive and lead was being thrown from this fighter every second.

Training in the Bristol Beaufighter was completed in 2 weeks. It was quite a difficult aircraft to fly. [Click here to see interview on why.](#) Emil joined the 415th squadron on the 1st of August in 1943. The purpose of the

415th Squadron in Italy was to protect the Allies' Harbors and to do intruder work. The 1st combat he saw was patrolling convoys that bring in supplies for the Allies. But his most important tasks were protecting the Allied force from bomb raids.

The squadron almost always flew over water because they did not want the equipment to get into enemy hands. The special equipment that was used by the 415th was radar, which was the first to ever be used in aircraft.

*The Nightfighters:
This pilot category
suffered the highest
fatality rate during
WWII.*



Emil on a Mission over Italy.

General Characteristics of the Beaufighter Mk VI:

- ◆ Crew: Two (Pilot and Radar Operator)
- ◆ Engines: Two 1,670 H.P. Hercules
- ◆ Length: 41 feet 4 inches
- ◆ Wingspan: 57 feet 10 inches
- ◆ Height: 15 feet 10 inches
- ◆ Max Speed: 337 miles per hour
- ◆ Ceiling: 26,500 feet



Emil in flight. Photo taken by his wing man.

There are dozens of stories my Grandfather has told about his missions. I thought I would share with you a couple of highlights filmed by Mark Sztanyo several years ago:

[View Interview on Importance of Safety Belts](#)

[View Interview on Beaufighter Accident](#)

[View Interview on Engine Lost on Takeoff and Reconnaissance Mission](#)

After the war, Emil Sztanyo continued to fly and own some general aviation aircraft for many years. He currently lives in Michigan with his wife Iris. For fun, he plays golf on a league, watches any and all sports on television and loves talking airplanes. We salute you for your service Grandpa! Your story will never be forgotten.

