

## MILITARY SERVICE RECORD

Russell John Sandhoefner  
Born: July 14, 1923

AAF Serial No: 37557819

Entered Military Service at Fort Snelling, Minneapolis, Minnesota on April 6, 1943.

Assigned to Army Air Forces on or about April 20, 1943.

Rank: Private

Traveled by troop train to Sheppard Air Force Base, Wichita Falls, Texas.

Completed Basic Military training.

Played trumpet in Base Band waiting travel orders.

Traveled by troop train to Army Air Force Base Technical Radio School in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Rank: Private First Class

Completed five month course in Morse Code and Radio Theory.

Played trumpet in unofficial military band during free time.

Traveled by troop train to Army Air Force Base Gunnery School in Yuma, Arizona.

Learned all about the Browning .50 Caliber Machine Gun in ground school.

Was able to dismantle and reassemble the gun in 18 seconds...blindfolded.

Practiced firing on gunnery range at moving targets on rails.

Flew in B-17 Heavy Bombers practicing aerial gunnery, firing at towed sleeves and strafing targets on the ground in low level flights.

Practiced high altitude gunnery.

Completed course on approx. February 7, 1944.

Received 10 day furlough, traveled by train to New Ulm, Minnesota

Rank: Corporal

Traveled by train to Salt Lake City Army Air Base for air crew assignment.

Worked in Base Post Office while awaiting assignment.

Was assigned to B-17 Bomber Crew, but got sick with the flu before departure.

Spent unknown time in the Base Hospital.

Upon discharge from the hospital, I found the entire base personnel had been moved to Lincoln, Nebraska. Spent the next four weeks with nothing to do until my records caught up with me.

Traveled by train to Lincoln, Nebraska to await air crew assignment.

Was assigned to Air Crew No. 6028 to prepare to train on B-24 Bombers.

Crew 6028 members were as follows:

Pilot	Don C. Hutton	Casey, Illinois
Co-Pilot	Maurice W Colbert	New Rochelle, NY
Navigator	Lyle H. McCarty	Indiana
Bombardier	Robert C. Sneed	Austin, Texas
Engineer	Donald D. Fagan	Texas
Radio Op	Russell J. Sandhoefner	New Ulm, Minnesota
Gunner	Kevin J. Bowers	Unknown
Gunner	Clayton S. Ginnard	Cleveland, Ohio
Gunner	Clifford G. Hanson	Reedley, California
Gunner	Colbert W. Luckham	Unknown

Traveled on June 1, 1944, to Lincoln, Nebraska, then to New Ulm, Minnesota, and finally to Mountain Home Army Air Field, Mountain Home, Idaho.

Training at Mountain Home included:

Firing caliber .45 Pistol

Firing caliber .30 Carbine

Completed 141.40 Hours of flying time in B-24 bombers practicing radio communications, and aerial gunnery.

Traveled by train to Army Air Base, Topeka, Kansas on August 9, 1944.

Crew issued brand new B-24J Bomber, serial No. 251911.

Plane was built at the Ford Motor Co. Willow Run assembly plant.

(Plane was later shot down over Vienna, Austria with another crew in it.)

Over 18,000 B-24 Bombers were built during WW2.

Flew in a new B-24J from Topeka, Kansas to Grenier Army Air Field in Manchester, New Hampshire.

Aircraft was modified for overseas flight, by temporarily installing extra gas tanks in the

Bomb bay area, for the 1,200 nautical mile flight over open water from Newfoundland to the Azores.

Left Grenier Field on September 3, 1944, assigned to 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force, 459<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, 757<sup>th</sup> Squadron, Cerrignola, Italy.

Overseas flight: Grenier Field to St. Johns, Newfoundland. Weather closed; had to stay there 10 days.

Next flight was to Azore Islands off coast of Africa. Stayed there three days and slept in plane because the Azores were part of Portugal, a neutral country.

Next flight was to Marrakech, Morocco. Stayed two days. Very hot on the desert.

Next flight was to Tunis, Tunisia. There, we overshot the end of the runway on landing, and damaged the nose wheel on the plane.

Stayed there about four days for repairs.

Next flight was to Toranto, Italy. Aircraft was modified again, removed bomb bay gas tanks.

We slept in plane, and crew members were allowed to go to town for the first time. Caution was observed while waiting in the area, as German land mines were not yet removed.

Next flight was to Guilia Field, 459<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, Cerrignola, Italy. We arrived near the end of September, 1944, and were taken there by another pilot, familiar with the area.

On our arrival, no extra GI tents were available, and crew members were placed in whatever tents that had empty bunk space. I was placed with a crew that had completed their missions, and were waiting orders to return to the States. Our four Commissioned officers were placed in officers row, in an old tent with big holes in it. Since it rained almost every day and night at that time, they had a rough time of it. There was mud everywhere. Latrines were placed about a hundred yards behind tent row, and one had to walk through deep mud to get to them. There were no showers available. A few weeks after our arrival, the "old crew" in my tent left for the states, and the other members of our enlisted crew moved in the tent with me. In due time, we scrounged for materials, and built a wood floor, a front door, and a metal drum and smoke stack for a stove, hazardously burning 100 octane aviation gasoline for fuel. We built chairs and a table, and made our new home quite comfortable. We each had been issued one GI blanket and a folding wood cot. Since no supplies were available, we added extra blankets and clothing by watching the planes return from the daily missions. When one or more planes failed to return, we would rush to the crew's tent, and help ourselves to what we

needed. Usually the missing crew's personal effects were collected by friends to be returned to their families back home.

Our tents were spaced some distance apart with deep "fox holes" cut alongside each tent, since the Germans would strafe the area occasionally when the original group located there. Actually, the air base was built by the Germans and was used as a ME-109 fighter base. As the American 5<sup>th</sup> Army fought their way up the boot of Italy, the Germans left the base in a hurry, leaving gasoline and other supplies they were unable to take with them. Our planes and trucks used their gasoline while available. As the Infantry battle front moved farther to the north, the strafing stopped, and we were ordered to fill in the fox holes, and move the tents in a straight line.

As the days moved on, we were being prepared for our combat flying duty. Gunners receive additional training, and on the first mission, the crew was separated and each man flew with an experienced crew on his first mission.

The following pages are a record of my combat missions.  
Rank: Technical Sergeant

#### COMBAT MISSION RECORD

TOTAL MISSIONS	MISSION NUMBER	DATE OF MISSION	TARGET CITY	COUNTRY	TYPE OF TARGET	FLYING TIME hrs
1	124	10 10 44	Trieste	Italy	RR Bldg	5:40
2	127	10 13 44	Bleckhammer	Germany	Oil Ref	8:40
3	129	10 14 44	Odertal	Germany	Oil Ref	5:50
4	132	10 20 44	Munich	Germany	Air Drome	8:00
5	135	10 23 44	Regensburg	Germany	Oil Depot	8:30
6	136	11 1 44	Graz	Austria	Indust	7:30
7	139	11 5 44	Vienna	Austria	Oil Ref	7:20
8	141	11 6 44	Vienna	Austria	Oil Ref	7:45
9	145	11 16 44	Munich	Germany	Marsh Yd	8:05
10	148	11 17 44	Kapfenburg	Austria	Marsh Yd	7:05
11	151	11 19 44	Vienna	Austria	Oil Depot	7:30
12	153	11 22 44	Munich	Germany	Marsh Yd	8:25
12	160	12 9 44	Non Effective Sortie			5:30
13	161	12 11 44	Graz	Austria	Marsh Yd	7:40

14	162	12 12 44	Bleckhammer	Germany	Marsh Yd	8:30
15	164	12 16 44	Brux	Germany	Oil Ref	8:50
16	166	12 18 44	Oswescim	Poland	Oil Ref	8:45
17	170	12 26 44	Oswescim	Poland	Oil Ref	7:05
18	173	12 29 44	Landshut	Germany	Marsh Yd	8:00
19	179	1 31 44	Moosbierbaum	Austria	Oil Ref	7:50
20	181	2 1 45	Graz	Austria	Marsh Yd	7:15
21	182	2 5 45	Regensburg	Germany	Oil Storage	8:30
22	184	2 7 45	Moosbierbaum	Austria	Oil Ref	7:45
23	185	2 8 45	Vienna	Austria	Marsh Yd	7:30
24	186	2 9 45	Moosbierbaum	Austria	Oil Ref	6:20
25	187	2 13 45	Maribor	Yugoslavia	Marsh Yd	6:10
26	189R	2 15 45	Vienna	Austria	Marsh Yd	7:20
27	191	2 17 45	Amstetten	Germany	Marsh Yd	7:15
28	192	2 18 45	No Target Reached			4:25
29	197	2 23 45	Knittelfeld	Austria	Marsh Yd	8:00
30	205	3 1 45	Maribor	Yugoslavia	Marsh Yd	6:15
31	205	3 8 45	No Target Reached			8:00
32	219R	3 25 45	Prague	Czech	Tank Wks	8:15
33	220	3 26 45	Szombathely	Hungary	Marsh Yd	7:30
34	225	4 5 45	Alessandria	Italy	Loco Depo	7:40
35	226	4 6 45	Verona	Italy	Bridges	7:30

Total Combat Flying Time: 274.20 Hours.

Target Code: Marsh Yd = Marshalling Yard (Railroad)  
Oil Ref = Oil Refinery

In late April, 1945, I was flown to a Replacement Depot in Naples, Italy. That was my last ride in a B-24 Bomber. At the Replacement Depot, I was housed in tents and waited for a ship to become available for return to the States. On May 9, 1945, I boarded the ship USS Mariposa, of the Matson Line, a converted luxury passenger liner, to return to the states. There were over 5,000 US Servicemen on board. One whole upper deck was full of men with arms or legs missing. On board, I volunteered to play trumpet in a pick up band to entertain the troops on the voyage home. My bunk was in what was formerly the grand ballroom, and was made up of pipe rack canvas cots stacked way to the ceiling. I had a lower bunk.

We sailed through the Mediterranean Sea, when the German surrender was announced. A tremendous roar came from the men on board. We were escorted through the Straights of Gibraltar by an American Destroyer. The ocean crossing took ten days, as the ship zig zagged for safety the whole time.

We landed in Boston Harbor on May 19, 1945, and were the first shipload of combat veterans to return to the States after the German surrender. We were taken by train to Camp Miles Standish, and received orders to report to Fort Snelling in Minneapolis for processing.

I was authorized a 30 day delay en route to report to the Santa Ana Army Air Base. I requested and received a ten day extension.

Around the first of July, 1945, I arrived by train and bus at the Santa Ana Air Base. On July 24, 1945 I was assigned to the Air Force Band in San Antonio, Texas. I remained on duty there, playing mostly in the dance band until my Honorable Discharge on September 29, 1945. I traveled by train and bus to my home in New Ulm, Minnesota to resume my civilian life.

Military Awards received:

- E.A.M.E. Theater Ribbon with six Bronze Stars.
- Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters.
- Presidential Unit Citation
- Good Conduct Medal
- Rome-Arno battle star