

## **Jesse Ledbetter**

April 20, 2003

Summary: World War II Experiences of Jesse Ingram Ledbetter, Born 12/22/22, Now living in Asheville, North Carolina

(See enclosed memoirs written by Mr. Ledbetter)

Ledbetter was born Avery's Creek area near Arden, North Carolina. He grew up in that community working on his father's dairy farm and attending local schools. While at Brevard College in Brevard, NC, Ledbetter received his private pilot's license.

At the age of 19, he joined the air force. Since he was under age, his mother had to sign for him, giving permission.

Ledbetter received Aviation Cadet training at the following assignments:

- 1 - Aviation Cadet Classification Center at Nashville, TN
- 2- Pre-flight at Maxwell Field, AL
- 3- Primary Flight Training with PT-17 aircraft at Dorr Field Arcadia, FL
- 4- Basic Flight Training with BT-13 aircraft at Bainbridge, GA
- 5- Single Engine Advanced Flight Training with AT-6 and P-40 aircraft at Marianna, FL

June 30, 1943, at age 20, received pilots wings and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant's commission. Family members and fiancée, Marie Ensley, attending. She was from Asheville, the Woodfin section, where her parents owned a grocery store.

While Ledbetter was at Pocatello, ID receiving training on a B- 24 (he had thought he was to be a fighter pilot, but was assigned to bombers) when he received leave before going over seas. Marie had taken a job in Washington, so Ledbetter traveled to Washington and the two were married..

Returning to base, instead of being sent overseas, Ledbetter was transferred to Fairmont Army Air Force Base to be a Flight Commander Crew in the newly formed 485<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group and 831 Bombardment Squadron.

(See details of events that occurred during this period in Ledbetter's memoirs. Also note the complicated route Ledbetter followed on route to overseas deployment.)

Ledbetter finally landed at a recently captured German Airdrome at Oudna, Tunisia at about April 2, 1944. Here he received his first experience with the actual realities of war. He received news of the entire 831 Squadron Ground Component, totaling 154 men, were lost when their U. S. Navel Ship, the S. S. Paul Hamilton, had been attacked and sunk by a German Torpedo Bomber in the Mediterranean Sea. There were no survivors.

From Oudna Ledbetter received orders to fly to their permanent overseas base at Venosa, Italy.

This base had been set up for their 485<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. At this time German forces still occupied Rome and the U.S. Ground Forces were still surrounded by German Army Forces at Anzio Beachhead.

(See the Ledbetter memoirs for the crew member list.)

Ledbetter had been flying a bomber named "The Traveler" but this airplane had been badly damaged while been flown by another crew. He then started flying a plane named "The Character.

Ledbetter says in his memoirs: "Just 23 months after leaving the farm, I had attained the rank of 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. In the Army Air Force." In being assigned to a bomber instead of his original thought of becoming a fighter pilot, Ledbetter now had more responsibility in the war than he had ever sought or wanted.

(Please see the memoirs for his thoughts on his assignment to the bomber and upon going on his first missions.)

All in all, Ledbetter flew 51 missions. (Some missions, because of the danger involved, received a rating of 2 missions.)

Other than suffering a back problem and being in the hospital in the states for awhile, Ledbetter did not suffer any injuries in his was service. Remaining in the service for awhile after the war, he was reclassified as a Weather Forecaster at Chanute, IL. He was grounded January 15, 1950. After being grounded he resigned from the Air Force. Ledbetter then spent three and a half years working on his family's dairy farm. At the beginning of the Korean war, Ledbetter went back into the air force where he continued to serve as a pilot until 1956.

As a result of war service Ledbetter received a number of awards and medals for distinguish acts of bravery. (See the memoirs for a details list of the Ledbetter medals and awards.)

Ledbetter retired from service with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and has been involved in real estate in the Asheville area and has served in several prestigious civic offices.

We are very fortunate to have his memoirs written with the aide of several of his crew members.