



1<sup>st</sup> Lt. George Oden  
34<sup>th</sup> Squadron  
Pilot

George was born on June 19, 1923 in Huntington, IN. "Flying was my boyhood dream. I lived close to a little airport, watched planes land, made models."

As an adult, George took a job as a draftsman in Ft. Wayne, IN. When his boss enlisted to become a pilot, George did too. On December 10, 1942 George enlisted as a flight cadet. As it turned out, two other men from Huntington enlisted on the same day.

After George passed the initial flight training, he was given the opportunity to be a fighter pilot or a bomber pilot. "Since I wasn't easy going, I decided to become a fighter pilot."

"Military life had a zero tolerance for failure." Those that didn't pass the test to become pilots would typically become flight officers and perhaps become bombardiers or navigator.

Eventually, George was sent to Mariana, FL for advanced training, where he met Rollie Weeks. "I graduated the same day as Rollie."

When George and Rollie reported to the 413<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group, they both brought their wives to Wilmington, NC and all of them lived in the same house. (As pilots, they had the privileges of bringing their wives and living off base.)

George and Rollie were pilots in the 34<sup>th</sup> Squadron. (The cowling of the 34<sup>th</sup>'s planes was gray with a black strip at the back of it.)

When it was time to go overseas, George and some of the other pilots travelled by train to San Francisco where they stayed at Camp Stillman. They went to sea on the USS Kwajalein (CVE-98), an escort carrier. "We stayed with our planes and slept under our planes."

"The ship had a sling." They had told them that they could take off from the ship in an emergency, even though they'd never trained to do it. "We were like robots." If asked to do it, George would have done it without a second thought. However, when the ship arrived in Guam, the planes were taken off the ship by crane.

Eventually they arrived on Ie Shima.

George remembers that his living conditions kept getting better over time. He started out in a two man tent with Rollie and a Typhoon blew it away.

Eventually he ended up in a four man tent where one of his bunkmates was Archie Gratz, who shared Rollie's plane and eventually crashed it in the sea and was rescued.

George shared his plane with Honeycutt. The plane had George's wife's name "Nicky" on the cowl.

On Ie Shima; "We had so little, we scrounged, we made do." "We got one warm beer a week, while the Navy had cold beer. I buddied up to a Navy guy who would pick me up and take me to a place where I could enjoy a cold beer."

Ie Shima was 3 miles long and 2 miles wide. Because of the wind the coral rock runways were built parallel to the 2 mile width. On either end of the runways was a 60' cliff with a down draft which made for a tricky takeoff and landing. In addition, "the pilots took heavier loads all the time".

The P-47N had an electric propeller that "had to be tuned a lot". Its normal speed was 2000 RPM and when it went "out of pitch", it would go too fast. "We lost two or three guys with a runaway propeller."

George remembers one mission from Ie Shima vividly. The P-47Ns were fitted with ten 5" rockets, five on each wing. They were sent to Kyushu "to put these missiles into ships in the harbor. I was flying on the wing of a Major."

"I got hit in the top cylinder and headed for the sea." At that point, George was 400 miles from home, plane leaking oil, with his canopy open for visibility. George was led back to Ie Shima by the Major.

When the plane left Ie Shima, it "started with 47 gallons of oil. There were 4 left when I landed." George has a piece of shrapnel taken from his engine.

"When you're that age you're like a robot. You don't get scared until the night, when you think about it."

