

George Earl Emmett

Bomber Pilot – B-17 Flying Fortress
World War II Service 1943-1945
487th Bomb Group (H)
839th Bomb Squadron
AAF Station 137 – Lavenham, England

In June 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic was fully underway and shut-downs brought normal daily activities to a screeching halt for just about everyone world-wide, mandated closures and stay-at-home orders forced people to slow down.

It was during this time that one of our sons discovered a World War II crew photo of his Grandfather Emmett (George Earl Emmett) online and sent it to the rest of the family. That photo is posted on the 487th Bomb Group site. That sparked an interest in finally getting to that genealogical research that had been on my own back burner. I had researched my own father’s World War II service and kept meaning to get to my father-in-law’s. The task had always seemed too enormous, so I kept putting it off. Oddly, the pandemic provided the opportunity and time to dive in, and so I did.

As I began to gather information, I was put in touch with some members of the 487th Bomb Group (SallyAnn McChesney, Ivo de Jong, Lee Hauenstein, and Paul Webber), who were an immeasurable help in discovering WWII details about Lt. Emmett (which I will respectfully call him in this story) that even my husband never knew about his dad, as his dad never talked about his military service.

I was recently asked if I’d like to share some of Lt. Emmett’s experiences. We have learned so much from others who have shared stories of their family members’ experiences during the war, so here are a few things my husband and I are happy to share as well.

Veda Emmett
Daughter-In-Law
August 11, 2021

George Earl Emmett enlisted in the Army Air Forces in February 1943. He originally wanted to be a navigator, but for whatever reason, he became a pilot. He went through training at facilities in Florida, South Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, Arkansas, Nebraska and Texas through most of 1943-44. He was classified as a pilot in August 1943 and commissioned as 2nd Lieutenant in May 1944. He left Boston for Gourcock, Scotland on January 8, 1945 on the ship *Ile de France*, eventually arriving at the flight missions base of operations at Lavenham, England on January 20, where he and his crew were assigned to the 487th Bomb Group, 839th Bomb Squadron.



Emmett Crew # 279
 March 16, 1945

The photo our son found. The only crew members that have positively been identified in this photo are Norman S. Wikler (left, standing), Charles G. Harr (next to Wikler, standing) and George E. Emmett (right, standing). Would love to put names and faces with the rest of the crew, but have been unable to locate information or family members that might be able to help as of this writing (August 2021).

Lt. Emmett was very proud of his crew and kept up with them for years after the war. On a handwritten list I found of his crew, he had scrawled “Best crew in the ETO” – underlined 10 times! Here is a listing of crew members and their nicknames with their positions and updated rankings (to the best of my knowledge) by the end of deployment:

1 st Lt	George E. Emmett (“George”)	pilot
1 st Lt	Charles G. Harr (“Gene”)	co-pilot
1 st Lt	Norman S. Wikler (“Wick”)	navigator
T Sgt	Edward H. Bellinger (“Eddie”)	radio-operator
T Sgt	Francis P. McGregor (“Mac”)	engineer
S Sgt	Dominick P. Pettinelli (“Pett”)	armorer gunner
S Sgt	Charles B. Davis Jr. (“C.B.”)	tail gunner
S Sgt	Howard L. Pippin (“Huck”)	waist gunner
S Sgt	Frank L. Wales (“Frankie”)	ball turret gunner

Some of the planes which the Emmett crew flew while on missions between February 15, 1945 and April 16, 1945 were *Paddlefoot*, *Miss Bea Havin*, *Just F/O 20%*, *The Big Drip Jr*, *Gravel Gertie*, *Oklahoma*, *Bonnie Lassie*, *Gus’ Pup*, and *Notion in Motion*.

I learned that the latter plane, *Notion in Motion*, did not have nose art on it and the name was an unofficial reference (nickname), so does not show up officially as a named aircraft. Further research led me to understand that the nickname ***Notion in Motion*** was given to plane #43-38278 by Ray Dorman’s crew whose tour ended in December 1944. The Emmett crew first flew that plane on a mission in March 1945. But apparently, there has been some confusion as to the true numerical identification of the *Notion in Motion* plane over the years, so I dug deeper to try to find out why.

In research with Ivo de Jong, Lee Hauenstein and Paul Webber, I learned the significance of the tail numbering system: the first two numbers indicated the fiscal year in which a plane was ordered and built (i.e. "43" for 1943). The "4" was dropped when the full serial number was painted on the tail, so 43-38278 would show up as 338278 on the tail. Apparently, reference to a plane's tail number (most notably in logs) was also frequently shortened to the last three numbers ("278" in this case). However, there was a plane numbered **44-83278**, also unnamed, that became confused with **43-38278** since they both ended in 278, so only the full tail number on the plane would definitively identify it.

Reference to the *Notion in Motion* aircraft is made here because it was the plane that the Emmett crew was flying on April 10, 1945 when it encountered enemy fire from an Me 262 jet fighter over Brandenburg, Germany. It sustained severe damage, but managed to return to base and land successfully in a field nearby. I found two photos of the wreckage in a scrapbook my mother-in-law kept, and the tail number was clearly visible: **338278** – the *Notion in Motion!*



The Emmett crew tail gunner, Charles Davis, was credited with destroying the Me 262, and engineer Francis MacGregor repaired cables even though he was cut by flying glass. Lt. Emmett was credited with safely landing the plane with no loss of life. But the entire crew working together is what really brought the aircraft safely home.

I found a letter that Lt. Emmett had sent to his father shortly after the incident, describing what happened:

"..... I had quite an experience a couple of days ago. We got shot up both by fighters and flak and the crew chief said there were 136 holes in our plane and some were big enough to put your fist through too. They also shot out my controls and tail wheel but we patched up the cables with some rope and got our controls back ok. Then our tail wheel was gone and I landed it on the tail and put it down without even breaking the tail light glass. We were the last ship in and so everyone was out to see us and expecting it to be

torn up beyond repair but I really made the best landing I ever tried and I hit so easy that I didn't even scrape the paint off the belly. The colonel himself ran out to see it and congratulated me. Coming from him it meant a lot. But dad the most amazing thing was that we had our bomb load when hit and it didn't blow up. God must have been with us for each time the flak burst under us the plane was knocked up 15 or 20 feet and these bombs are pretty sensitive, some have blown up simply by rough handling and actually a bomber is a big bomb itself. I've seen them blow up and I know what it is like. Dad please don't forget us in your prayers for I can't describe the hell war is. It's my hope and prayer to come home to all of you but I'll need more help and protection than man can give. Germany may be licked but she's putting up a last effort as never before and it only takes that one shot to end it all, so don't forget us dad....."

After that harrowing mission, the crew was given seven-day Rest & Relaxation orders and sent to a "flak house." I learned that this was typical after a certain number of combat missions or specific harrowing events. These flak houses were run by the American Red Cross and were intended as a time of refreshment and mental/emotional re-set. Officers Emmett, Harr and Wikler were sent to Eynsham Hall (AAF Sta 567) in Hanborough, Oxfordshire, Oxon, England, while the enlisted men in the crew were sent to Southport Flak House (AAF Sta 524), Lancashire, England.



In a letter to his parents (on American Red Cross stationery), Lt. Emmett described Eynsham Hall:

"Really this is wonderful for it's an old mansion of stone as you see movies of with great glass chandeliers inside, oil paintings, marble fireplaces with inlaid carvings of nymphs and angels, etc. Throughout will be some of the most beautiful woodwork, and the big library is gorgeous. Deep rugs cover the floor and the floors are highly polished hardwood. In one hallway is a large mirror that faces so as to reveal a long corridor of splendor and beauty. The ceilings for example are all engraved, etc. But the amazing thing is that it all looks new as if it were just built and just polished...."

“Of course it has the gardens about and all that would go with such a place, and the butler brings us breakfast to bed if you want it. There are about 30 fellows here so it’s not crowded at all....”

“Life is so sweet in quietness and beauty and human love. I don’t suppose one appreciates it till he sees a few experiences in war....”

For his achievements and bravery, Lt. Emmett ended his overseas service with a promotion to 1st Lieutenant, and was awarded the Air Medal and 3 Oak Clusters. He was also awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for the April 10 mission.

He expected to fly back to the United States soon after V-E Day (May 8, 1945). However, there were repeated, disappointing delays that kept him overseas for months. He was very good about writing letters to his wife and to his parents throughout the war. Here are some brief excerpts from some of those letters about his pending return home starting in April 1945:

- Apr 28 -- Looking forward to coming home soon...
- May 1 -- Hitler's death [suicide] just announced on radio [as he was writing the letter].
- May 7 -- In a little bit will be on my way home. Already had mail forwarded back home. Japan concerns in back of mind. Concern about being sent to Pacific [where war was still going on] instead of home. Expect V-E day tomorrow.
- May 21 -- Just waiting around. Seems like we're on the end of the list for everything.
- May 29 -- Don't know when I'll be leaving. PW's and wounded getting priority, as should. May be ferrying them before it's over. Also think I'll fly when I do go home.
- June 30 --Waiting around due to transportation. Once I leave, should only take ~ 30 hours. Sometimes wonder if I'll ever make it back to the US.
- July 9 -- Hope I soon leave. Should be reasonably quick trip. Russia declared war on Japan last night and maybe new atomic bomb will shorten the war by some. Has been about 3 weeks since left Lavenham.
- July 26 -- Moved a step nearer home. At Chorley near Liverpool. Next move will be trip home but don't know when that will be - probably when least expect it.
- July 28 -- Edith [his wife] wrote George E's parents saying he was supposed to have left on July 21, but if canceled, would be the 25th or 28th. Neither happened.
- Aug 15 -- V-J Day! [Victory in Japan]. Very happy. Hope I can come home soon.
- Aug 19 -- Sunday Thanksgiving service at base chapel. Sent church bulletin to parents with note "Hopes of starting for home pretty soon...."
- Aug 26 -- Told mother about plans to get to medical school as fast as he could when he got home. [Which he did -- discharged Sept 28, 1945 and started pre-med Oct 22]

He finally left Gourock, Scotland on the Clyde River via the *Queen Mary* ship on September 5, 1945 to return to the States. It arrived on September 10 at New York Port of Embarkation, Camp Kilmer, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

After the war, Lt. Emmett went on to become Dr. Emmett – an anesthesiologist. After completing his education and then an internship at Baylor University Hospital in Dallas, Texas in 1951, he returned to Mississippi where he grew up. He served on the medical staff of a rural hospital in DeKalb for two years, fulfilling a scholarship commitment. Afterward, he returned to Dallas for his Residency in Anesthesiology at Baylor University Hospital, where he then had a private practice for the rest of his career – almost 30 years – before his sudden death of a heart attack in 1982. He left a wife, two married children and four grandchildren at the time of his death. And he left a big hole in all of our hearts. We still miss him very much and are so proud of the person he was, the service he gave to his country, and the legacy he quietly left for all of us.