

## Rainer AMERICA 250 Transcript

**Biographical Sketch:** Young Rainer (1925-2017) served as a tail gunner in a B-17 who saw action during World War 2 in the ETO. Rainer was inducted into service in December 1943, and honorably discharged in October 1945. He received the Euro-African-Mid East Campaign medal, and the Air Medal with multiple oak leaf clusters. After WW2, Rainer returned to Alabama, and graduated from the API School of Forestry. In 1957, he and Mary Ann Brogden married and had three children. His relative, Gordon Rainer, was the Capt. of the *USS Dolphin*.

### 00:00:00 Marty Olliff

Dale County native Young Rainer served in World War II as a B-17 tail gunner in the 457th Bomber Group of the 8th Air Force over Germany. In his 2009 interview with Hayden McDaniel, Mr. Rainer describes his enlistment and training, his deployment to Europe, being a gunner on the flying fortress, the B-17, and his discharge in 1945. He won the air medal with oak leaf clusters.

Young Rainer returned to Alabama, where he graduated from the Alabama Polytechnic Institute School of Forestry, worked for the TVA, then worked as a district forester in the Alabama Wiregrass. He went on from there to other forestry work until retiring in 1985.

In this first clip, Mr. Rainer was called to enlistment, as he says, to the Army Air Corps just two months after his 18th birthday in 1943. He washed out of pilot school, but became a gunner in B-17 Flying Fortress bombers.

### 00:01:10 Young Rainer

I was 18 in October, and then they called me to enlist me at Fort McClellan in December. We got back home Christmas Eve of 1943. And then we were to be inducted to take the active duty to about 493 in Atlanta on January the 8th of '44. They sent me to Miami Beach, and I'd get down there and they sent 30,000 people that volunteered from the Army Air Corps.

But I had really worked hard to get into the Miami. But they washed all of us out and sent us to country school. I was lucky to say that, well, I don't know that lucky unless I did survive. But some of the people never left the States that I trained with, because that's the way war is.

### 00:02:00 Marty Olliff

Assigned to the 457th Bomber Group of the 8th Air Force, he deployed to the south of England and from there flew 35 bombing missions into German-occupied Europe.

## 00:02:13 Young Rainer

You know, I was in the 457th, 8th Air Force was **first piece.**

That crew then **went to Corning, Nebraska** to pick up our ship. We got over there and the weather had already socked in in the north of Miami. And so they put us on another troop train and sent us to Langley Field, Virginia. We got over there and the hurricane came up. They had to evacuate the planes that we trained while we were at Langley Field **at North**. We moved all of the ships inland, you know, over to Lynchburg and that storm go on by, and it went all the way to Canada. And I mean, it kept doing damage right on up the coast.

That was in fall of '44. So **we could get on another** troop from **Camp Hilmer**, New Jersey. I was in 18 different bases during my 22 months of that.

**And Camp Tilma**, they got us all packed up and got our overseas uniforms, all ODs, you know, were. And we knew then we was probably going to England or somewhere, you know, Germany or something.

And so we get on this convoy, you couldn't even see the end of the thing in New York harbor. I mean, just hundreds of ships. And I went up the gangplane two days after my 19th birthday. So we got on that and five days later we went England. This ship that we went over on, there were 12,000 troops on it. We landed at Plymouth, England. That's right inside the channel.

We finally crawled out of there and then went to Stone, England, by rail, that was over now **hanging up**. And we were there five days being processed to be assigned to the group and to the squadron. There were five crews off of that ship. They replaced five crews that were shot down on one mission.

North **of Marysburg, I lived at one of** them.

And the Germans, they had the ME-109s really out in force. But it was right after that, though, that all of the bombers, the oil fields, the German oil fields started showing up. And so they were short of fuel, that's the only way we were going to win it.

**They had a few.**

You know, they'd been training for 100 years or something.

**And you had a fight and everything soon.**

**And we were just done this.**

We hadn't even been in the service long enough.

## 00:04:40 Marty Olliff

Mr. Rainer served most of his tour as a tail gunner that could operate all the gunnery stations on the B-17. They were all vulnerable, as he discovered on his very first flying mission.

#### **00:04:53 Young Rainer**

The first mission I went on, it blew up some kind of the vertical stabilizer.

Almost any time you'd get into real severe flight like that, there'd just be a dark flight you'd go through. I'd say a little prayer and then I'd, a lot of times we'd get alert from the pilot or navigator or one of the officers up front would speak up and say, "well, get ready to abandon the ship." See, it was getting that bad. They were seeing these other planes go down and everything.

See, I had to crawl back along a platform along the bottom of the plane. There was an escape door under the horizontal stabilizers.

I was as tall as I am now, I only weighed 160 pounds. I could fit in the ball turret, any position of the top turret, even. And that tail back there had a door about that big for me to get out of there. You just have to put your head out and you have a chest chute. And so I often wondered if I could have ever gotten out of that, but fortunately, I didn't have to.

#### **00:06:02 Marty Olliff**

After 35 missions, Rainer rotated home, transported on a hospital ship. He was assigned as an MP at Keesler Field, Biloxi, Mississippi, and skedaddled as soon as he acquired his 74 points toward discharge.

#### **00:06:18 Young Rainer**

They put me on orders right then, and within just a few days, I shipped out back to Stone, you know, where we'd been processed to come in. And then we left Birmingham [England], and I was on the hospital ship, bringing the wounded from Patton's on the division.

Everybody on there was a sergeant or higher in rank, and we all attended to those patients there. That was in April of '45. We had a lot of help. That was our only duty, coming back.

And then reported to Greensboro, North Carolina for reassignment. And there they processed us and gave us some choices of where we're going. So I signed up to work on a PT crew out of Biloxi, Mississippi, Keeson Field.

I was never put into that duty. We got down there and then VJ Day came. So they assigned me to the main gate issuing passes to the civilian employees. It was military police. I told them, I never was an MP. I didn't want to go to this place.

I got my orders, I had 74 points -- you got so many for each month, stateside or well, you know, service, and then you got so much for flying and so much for this and that.

So in six months, I'd earned 74 points. This year, I'll go right to Maxwell and get discharged in October 30th, 1945.