

Daugherty recalls service stateside and in N. Africa

Eugene Daugherty – U.S. Armed Forces – 1942-1946 (European Theatre Medal, Good Conduct Medal and a Decoration from the Govt. of French Morocco presented by Col. O'Keefe in Washington, DC)

By EUGENE DAUGHERTY

At the age of 22, I volunteered for the Armed Forces of the United States of America in February 1942. I was sent to Fort Oglethorpe, GA for indoctrination, processing and examination. Upon completion of those procedures, I was transferred to Keesler Field, Biloxi, Mississippi for basic training. There were several other soldiers that made the trip with me and I remember thinking along with some of them I should have brought my swim trunks. We didn't realize that in February it got cold in Southern Mississippi.

Our first quarters in Keesler Field was a tent, with a sand floor that slept four. I was surprised when we were issued our bedding. We received a GI wool blanket and a heavy comforter, but before the night was over I understood, because it got cold. The next morning when I rubbed my hand over the comforter, it was wet. When I rolled off of my cot and put my feet on the sand floor, I discovered there was a puddle of water present. So was my introduction to the first night at Keesler Field. This was one of many surprises I had coming to me while in the military service.

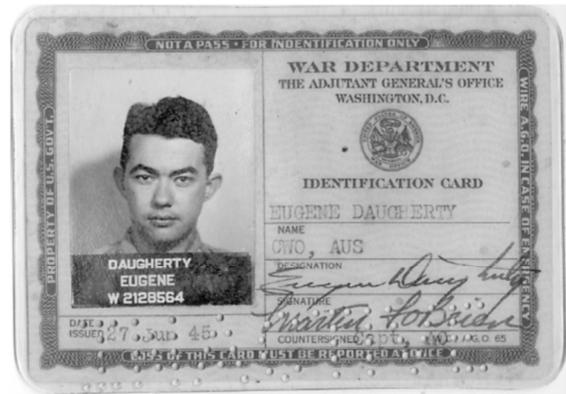


Figure 1 Eugene Daugherty's Military Identification Card from World War II

We had many grueling days on the drill fields before we finished our basic training. I learned many things that stuck with me throughout my time in the military service. One early lesson was to never volunteer for a special duty when I volunteered to work in the commanding officers office. When I arrived at this office, a corporal gave me a broom and a mop.

When my basic training was over I was transferred to Morrison Field, West Palm Beach, Florida, and when I arrived along with other soldiers my first quarters was a tent but the weather was much more pleasant. My duty at Morrison Field was much more enjoyable after they completed barracks for our quarters.

I was assigned to duty in the office when it was discovered I could type. The office that I was assigned to was being organized for the Headquarters of the Caribbean Wing Air Transport Command. I performed my assigned duties in the Headquarters Caribbean Wing for a few months and all the time they were enlarging the building and adding more personnel.

The Air Transport Command was responsible for transferring personnel and equipment, etc. to the front lines. The equipment included airplanes and parts. Airplanes were flown through the

routes of the Caribbean Wing in tremendous numbers. The routes extended from Morrison Field through Southern Florida, the Caribbean Sea and into South America and from there to Africa and wherever needed. The Caribbean Wing was responsible for the logistics of this mission.

Later I was assigned the duty of organizing and setting up the classified section in the Headquarters Caribbean Wing. I remained in this position until being transferred later to another location.

After passing a written examination and appearing before the Warrant Officer Examining Board, I was appointed a Warrant Officer Junior Grade, effective September 15, 1943. On November 4, 1943, I was transferred to the Headquarters North African Wing, Air Transport Command. On November 6, 1943, I left Morrison Field along with 15 others, including the crew in a C-54 transport headed for North Africa. Some of the persons in the group were to be part of the General Staff of the North African Wing. Brig. General Vincent J. Meloy was to be the Commanding General, but he was already in North Africa. Aboard with the group was Col. John A. O'Keefe who was to be the Adjutant General. We proceeded to Algiers, Algeria, where it was believed, by the General Staff, would be the ideal place to establish the Headquarters.

We landed at the Algiers Air Base with damaged German aircraft on both sides of the landing strip. The German military aircraft had been bombed or shot down before they could take off. The airstrip had been cleared of the German planes by our American dozers.

It was later decided that Casablanca, French Morocco would be the best location for our headquarters.

My duty assignment was Assistant Adjutant General. I was responsible, along with others, for all the communications and correspondence (coming in and leaving) our headquarters including filing of same and routing to offices most concerned. Our headquarters expanded in space and the number of personnel in an orderly fashion.

Our Wing stretched from Casablanca south into the Sahara Desert, and north to Naples, Italy, and east to Karachi, India (now Pakistan), through the Red Sea Area and Persian Gulf to Tehran, Iran. Our Wing was charged with the shipment of personnel and supplies to China, Burma, India, and the Far East Theater. We were responsible for the return of personnel, and injured from these areas to the U.S.

I traveled to all of these bases on official assignments which, of course, were very interesting. On one flight over Southern Italy in a passenger plane with no weapons for protection, our pilot sighted a German fighter plane bearing



Figure 2 Eugene Daugherty in 2004

down on our plane. The pilot spotted a nearby thunderhead and dived into it and in so doing saved our lives.

Another assignment took me into the Sahara Desert. I was the only passenger on board and we flew through one of the numerous sand storms that they have in the desert. Upon landing, I noticed the crash crew trucks were running right along side the plane and rushed to get us off the plane. When asked if I was scared, I replied, "Of what?" I didn't know that one of the motors was on fire when we landed.

On March 24, 1944, I was promoted to the grade of Chief Warrant Officer. I was returned to the U.S. in February, 1946, after a very interesting tour of duty.

I was returned to Oneida and was placed on inactive duty on April 7, 1946. I was employed by Jellico Grocery Company in Oneida for sixteen years. From that employment, I was hired by Stearns Coal and Lumber Company in Stearns, KY for eleven years. I was manager of R. L. Stearns Wholesale Grocer before being assigned as Assistant to President Dr. Frank Thomas. I will always be grateful to Dr. Thomas and Robert E. Gable for the opportunity they gave me while in their employment.

I was owner and operator of the Lazy Suzan Restaurant in Gatlinburg, TN for seven years before retiring to my home in Oneida.