

1st Lt. Roland "Rollie" Weeks
34th Squadron
Pilot

Roland "Rollie" Weeks was born on August 1, 1922. "I had a real bug for the air planes and got a big kick out of the air shows at Wright Airfield in grade and high school."

After high school, Rollie attended Wittenberg College for a year. "My Dad got his Masters in Education [at Wittenberg] that year too." The Dean that administrated the Masters program offered Rollie a cigarette. "That was the first time I smoked in front of my father." Rollie quit smoking "cold turkey" on April 10, 1980.

"I had a cousin at Paterson Airfield, a weather forecaster, who introduced me to the meteorologist." The meteorologist advised Rollie that if he wanted such a job he should go back to College to get the math he'd need.

Rollie went to NCR to get a job. At that time NCR was making gun magazines for the Orlikon 20mm cannon. Because of the war effort he was able to work a tremendous number of hours for good pay.

In February 1942 Rollie enlisted as an Air Corps Cadet and was placed on a hold status. While he waited, he quit his job and used his money to enroll at University of Dayton as a sophomore. When he got the call to report for duty he was taking Calculus. "I couldn't understand that damned math anyway."

Rollie's service in the Air Corps began in Miami, FL, with his 'physical' basic training. He stayed at hotels that had been taken over by the army.

He then moved on to Cuttstown State Teachers College where he received one month of introductory pilot training which included 10 hours of flying a Piper Cub. "They had a test for chickens." The flight leaders would take cadets up in a Cub and they "spent some time fooling around [performing] acrobatics. A number of guys came back and threw up."

From Cuttstown, the cadets were sent to Nashville while the Army decided where to assign them. Rollie went on to Maxwell AFB in Montgomery, AL for one month for some training in Morse Code, meteorology and basic navigation. From there he moved on to Ocala, FL for primary flight school.

At Ocala, the cadets spent two months flying the PT-17 Stearman, an open cockpit bi-plane. "It was just a ball to fly that thing."

Rollie: I have a note that you had to fly the PT-17 below 4000 feet. With 'fighters cause spin air plane 4 turns'. What does that mean?

From Ocala to Bainbridge, GA where he flew the BT-13, which Rollie describes as "a pile of junk as far as I was concerned". "On one cross country trip I figured out the compass was way off; 20 degrees." Rollie got lost and "buzzed off a water tower" to read the name of the town where he was. "I hated those airplanes."

Then on to Mariana, FL to fly AT-6's, a plane with one machine gun. "I fell in love with that airplane." Rollie went briefly to Richmond for reassignment and was sent to Goldsboro for two months and then Wilmington, training on P-47s at both bases. "A lot of my class went to Europe." In Wilmington, Rollie and his wife were able to have a home together.

"At Wilmington, they had a test deal to see the affect on pilots when they were cooped up on that airplane for a long period of time." From Wilmington, the pilots flew to the southern tip of the U.S.. They landed, gassed up, but couldn't get out of the plane. Then it was up to Maine, and then back to Wilmington. The whole trip took about 18 hours. When they finished the mission, "in order to get us out, a GI had to help pull us out. They took us into an area of cots, gave you booze to get drunk and massaged us."

The 413th was assembled at Goldsboro and quickly moved to Blumenthal Field, where there was more space available.

"Your letter came as a real surprise as I knew your father. In fact, I flew him to Wright Field close to Dayton two times. My squadron commander Maj. Carl Payne gave me the job since this was my home town. The trips were made in a BT-13 a basic trainer which I considered a pile of junk but was the standard plane used at an basic training locations."

At the time the 413th was created, Wright (& Patterson) Field was the home of Air Technical Service Command where the Air Corps material & supply functions were headquartered.

The 413th was shipped to the Pacific on four Carrier Escorts (CVEs) which were small aircraft carriers. "The flight and hangar decks were loaded with planes."

The 318th Fighter Group had catapulted off their CVEs and the 413th pilots were expected to do the same. "The 413th kept circling Guam looking for winds." Because the winds didn't cooperate the aircraft were lifted from the ship by crane and ferried to shore.

From Guam, a B-24 navigated them to Saipan, a big B-29 base, for missions. Rollie recalls one mission in particular.

"The Japanese had a big navy base on Truk. The ships they had in there all got bombed and sunk and were on the bottom. The Japanese people that were there were starving (in some cases resorting to cannibalism) and their submarines were sent to bring food. We went to strafe the docks and any submarines. "You didn't want to draw the 'long strip'. If you ended up there you might be dinner."

"I was the wingman to our flight leader and on one of the strafing runs he went through a tree and came up with limbs through his engine. He got back to Saipan. The P-47N was a tough plane. The plane was a total loss. In a P-51 he would have lost his wings going through the trees."

"I believe we were kept on Tinian for a couple of weeks waiting for Ie Shima to be taken." They were sent in as quickly as possible and upon arrival on Ie, were bivouacked away from mined areas which hadn't yet been cleared.

On Ie Shima, their living quarters were tents with dirt floors.. Rollie had taken a few bottles of Southern Comfort with him, so he took some liquor to the Navy seaman and they brought them lumber on a 'Duck' so they could put wood floors down.

"If you walked down to the water you went across a bunch of coal. We washed ourselves in salt water." The Japanese soldiers were held up in that area so they were told to be careful. "One night the Japs camp up to the mess hall because of hunger. They were fed and housed."

Rollie was in the 34th Squadron and recalls a large blue spade, like in a deck of cards, on the tail to distinguish the squadron. As for the large letters on the side of the planes, he believes they were part of the identification of aircraft to keep track of flight, not markings that were useful to the pilots.

All of the 413th's missions were over Southern Japan. They were told that the Japanese had put 900,000 soldiers in that area. "Save one [bullet] for yourself, if you bail out", was advice they received.

As for the P-47; "if you hit another airplane with those eight 50s, they were dead. You could kill a lot of people."

On one occasion, when they had a 500 lb. bomb for a dive mission, "the Japs were blanketing [flak] at our altitude. Right on my tail. I thought, 'they'll get us'. The flight leader said

"we're going down right now" and they went below the flak and dropped their bombs. "I could taste blood on that thing."

On the way back from one mission, Rollie saw a Japanese train stop, and when he went down to strafe, the machine guns on one of the wings weren't working which pulled the plane to one side. "I needed to use the rudder to compensate."

The missions took six and a half to seven hours. So during the flight out, and on the return, the pilots put on the autopilot, leaned back and smoked. "Cigarettes were five cents a pack".

"That plane was noisy as hell."

For urination, there was a 'pilot relief tube' under the seat. However, on one occasion, he needed to defecate. "I have a personal emergency", he radioded to his flight leader. "I shit in a map, folded it up, and threw it out."

Tent mate Jack Miller and he jumped on a plane two weeks after the war ended in order to visit Tokyo. "We were walking to Tokyo and came upon a book store. When we went in we were greeted by a professor of English who introduced us to the owner of the shop." This led to Rollie and Jack being taken to the store owner's home in a charcoal driven truck. During their visit they were given gifts. Rollie received a glass encased model of the Emperor's horse, a sake container and a sake glass with a picture of a geisha girl in the bottom.

"My wife had our daughter while I was on Ie Shima. The Red Cross notified me. She was born at Wright Patterson for a fee of \$12.00". Rollie received extra points toward his discharge.

When Rollie's ship landed at Portland, OR, he wanted to drink real milk as soon as he could. He and another guy found a dairy bar.

Once home, he saw an ad in the paper that the Air National Guard needed four pilots for the 162 Fighter Squadron. He joined the Guard as one of its first pilots and served for three and a half years at Vandalia AFB leaving when the Guard began switching to jet aircraft.

Rollie worked at Standard Register as an engineer for 38 years, retiring in 2002.