

Biography of Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Robert (Bob) Vaucher (Ret.)

A decorated WWII Veteran of the Panama, China-Burma-India, and Central Pacific Theaters, Lt Col Thomas Robert (Bob) Vaucher (Ret.) has made a unique contribution to the development of military aviation and the course of history while serving as a pilot and commander in the Army Air Corp from 1940 to 1946. Chronological highlights of his Army Air Corp firsts and achievements are as follows:



- Flew as observer pilot in first B-17 dusk-to-dawn flight, promoting its long-range capabilities and garnering national news coverage; departed Westover Field, MA at dusk, “bombed” Pittsburgh, Savannah, and NYC, and then returned to Westover at dawn, September 1941.
- Introduced first radar equipped U.S. Bomber (LB-30) into combat April, 1942, subsequently flying upwards of 1,000 hours of combat patrols to protect the Panama Canal in LB-30s, B17s and B18s in a wide range of weather, including a hurricane, without incident.
- Piloted the first B-29 Superfortress Heavy Bomber accepted from Boeing, delivering the aircraft to the United States Air Corp 40th Bombardment Group (VH) at Pratt, Kansas, July 1943.
- Piloted the first B-29 at 38,000 ft., successfully testing bomb bay door opening speed and pressurization modifications, July 1943. Personally commended by General H.H. Arnold, Commanding General of the Army Air Force, in a telephone call following the test.
- Flew as aircraft commander on first B-29 strategic combat mission against mainland Japan, 15 June 1944 and on longest non-stop WWII combat mission (4,030 nautical miles roundtrip, 18 hrs., 50 min., India to Sumatra), flying the aircraft beyond official max. range, 10 Aug 1944.
- Developed and implemented improved cruise control for the B-29, which increased bomb load by nearly 50%, resulting in fewer sorties to accomplish the same results, 14 Jan 1945.
- Selected as Mission Commander (#186) to Yokohama, largest and most destructive (8.9 sq. mi., 2,590 tons of bombs) single in-trail assembly of B-29s (454) over a target, 29 May 1945.
- Selected as Mission Commander (#332) for the Show of Force Fly Over of 525 B-29s over the Japanese surrender ceremony aboard the USS Battleship Missouri, 2 September 1945.

Born 3 December 1918 on a citrus ranch in Mission Texas, Vaucher’s aviation interest began at age 17 when he attended Citizens Military Training Camp (CMTC) at Camp Bullis, Texas. At age 21, he earned his civilian pilot license and, shortly thereafter, enlisted in the Army Air Corp. He was commissioned as an officer with a pilot rating from the Class of 41C on 25 Apr 1941. On 16 December 1941, Vaucher piloted his first combat patrol mission from Westover Field, MA, in a B-18 searching for German ships and submarines off the east coast, nine days after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

During 46 months of active Army Air Corp service, Lt Col Vaucher flew nearly 40 different aircraft types for a total of 117 combat patrol, bombing, mining, and photography missions in Panama, Guatemala, Ecuador, Peru, Galapagos, India, China, and Tinian. His military awards include two Distinguished Flying Crosses, five Air Medals, eight Battle Stars and thirteen War Time Commendations and Citations.

Lt Col Vaucher was discharged from active duty in June 1946 and remained in the reserves until 1962. Bob’s lifetime passion for aviation included owning a general aviation aircraft, maintaining a pilot’s license for 62 years, and serving as a member of the N.J. Dept. of Transportation Aviation Advisory Board. He was an innovative leader for 42 years in the metal working industry and has continuously served as a civic leader for 70 years in state, county, and municipal affairs. Bob was married 53 years to Eleanor Hooey and raised three children in Bridgewater, N.J., where he still resides and, at age 97, continues to be an active leader in his community, dynamic speaker on WWII aviation, and a true inspiration to his family and friends.

In 2013, Lt Col Vaucher was inducted into the New Jersey Aviation Hall of Fame and was recognized for this achievement on 3 October 2013 by Representative Leonard Lance during proceedings of The 113th Congress, House of Representatives (Congressional Record). In 2014, Lt Col Vaucher was formally accepted as an eligible nominee for enshrinement into the National Aviation Hall of Fame.

For more information: Donna Lazartic, dlazartic@verizon.net, (908)432-2068

