

Charles “Chuck” E. Hoffman (1916-1999)

Hometown: Ripon, Wisconsin

US Army Air Corps WWII, 451st Bombardment Group (Heavy)

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Written by Pat Grahn, US Army Veteran, volunteer at the Ripon Historical Society, riponhistsoc@gmail.com.

In America Veterans Day is celebrated each November 11. First called Armistice Day it marked a truce on the eleventh month, the eleventh day and the eleventh hour of 1918 ending World War I.

In 1938 Congress made Armistice Day a legal federal holiday. In 1954 the holiday's name was changed to Veterans Day. Unlike Memorial Day which honors those who have lost their lives in service to their country, Veterans Day honors all those that served in the many branches of the American military.

For this Veterans Day we honor Charles “Chuck” E. Hoffman (1916-1999) who served during World War II. Roughly 320,000 to 333,000 Wisconsin residents served in the United States military during World War II (1941-1945), this is more than any other American conflict.

Hoffman's family moved to 521 Liberty Street in 1919 and he was the youngest of seven siblings. He graduated from Ripon High School in 1935 and attended Ripon College from 1938 until 1941. Hoffman enlisted in the US Army Air Corps on May 11, 1942, (the US Air Force was not officially established as an independent military branch until 1947).

Military enlistment paperwork shows that Hoffman was 5'8" and 151 pounds. This paperwork stated that he worked at Barlow & Seelig (today known as Alliance Laundry Systems) with his civil occupation listed as “skilled in mechanics and repairmen, n.e.c.”, (Not Elsewhere Classified). What this paperwork did not mention is that in the fall of 1941 Hoffman had enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and began training to become a pilot.

Canada entered WWII on September 10, 1939 one week after Britain and France declared war on Germany. Over one million Canadians served in their countries military during WWII. Approximately 9,000 Americans served in the RCAF early in the war, most who enlisted before the December 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor causing America to join the war.

Tom Walsh author of *American RCAF Warriors* noted that “The catalyst for many young men who yearned to fly was the Battle of Britain. That monumental struggle for air supremacy raged over the English countryside beginning in the summer of 1940...The intrepid Spitfire and Hurricane pilots became known as ‘The Brylcreem Boys’. Their heroic deeds were featured weekly on newsreel clips shown in every local movie theatre across the North American continent. Also, widespread daily newspaper and weekly magazine coverage of these dashing young airmen flying high-performance fighters in combat had a tremendous impact on Canadian and American youth of the day.

To quickly build up its air force, the RCAF began taking applications from would-be pilots from all across North America. The Americans flocked to Canada in droves in 1940-41 to enlist. One month after America’s entry into the war on Monday, December 8, 1941, negotiations began in earnest between the two neighboring countries to voluntarily repatriate those Americans who were serving in the RCAF.

From May, 1942 to May, 1945 some 3,797 personnel transferred from the Canadian air force to an American military service of their choosing. Of those who transferred, many served in the USAAF’s 8th Air Force. The remaining 5,067 chose to stay where they were and serve out their time for the duration of the war.”

Hoffman eventually became a 2nd Lieutenant and flew with the 451st Bombardment Group (Heavy) in Europe. He was the copilot on a B-24 Liberator heavy bomber known as “Small Fry.”

The 451st Bombardment Group (Heavy) was started in April 1943 and was deployed to the Mediterranean Theater between November 1943 and January 1944. They conducted strategic bombing missions across Europe and Hoffman flew in 50 combat missions between December 1943 and August 1944. He was discharged from military service on August 22, 1945 and the 451st was inactivated in late September 1945.

After WWII ended the 451st had frequent reunions. Hoffman wrote in a 1986 memoir that he had decided not to attend the reunions because “to fight the war over again was just not my ‘cup of tea.’ I’ve noticed that I get a little antsy just writing about it...”

Hoffman returned to Ripon after the war and eventually moved to Redwood City, California and remained there for the rest of his life. In 1948 he married June S. Hoffman (1922-2010) and they had several children. A contractor and designer of commercial cabinetry and store fixtures Hoffman enjoyed river rafting, fishing, hiking, and tennis. He occasionally returned to Ripon to visit family and also attended his 50th high school class reunion.

In researching Ripon's Charles E. Hoffman it was discovered that there was also a Charles L. Hoffman who flew with the 451st Bombardment Group (Heavy) and married to a woman named June. There was also a second Charles E. Hoffman who lived in Redwood City, California at the same time as Ripon's Hoffman. The Hoffman family file found the archives of the Ripon Historical Society was invaluable in writing the story of the Charles Hoffman who called Ripon, Wisconsin his hometown.

THE BELOW WILL BE MADE INTO A LITTLE COLUMN IN A BOX OR ITALICS SO IT IS A BIT DIFFERENT THAN THE ABOVE STORY:

In a memoir dated December 1986 which is found in the archives of the Ripon Historical Society Ripon native Charles E. Hoffman wrote about one of his combat missions during WWII. He stated, *"One mission was to hit an aircraft factory in Munich, Germany. We had a complete undercast, which covered the target so we bombed by radar. Unfortunately, the Germans were shooting at us by radar and theirs was better than ours. A piece of flak broke off an oil line in our #4 engine, and we just had time to feather it (stop the engine and turn the propeller blades into the wind.)*

We couldn't keep our place in the formation so we dropped back and started losing altitude. The #3 engine was running very rough, so we were afraid to use it to compensate. By now we were down to about 16,000 feet, with the Alps looming up ahead. I asked the navigator to give me a heading for Switzerland, in case we couldn't clear the Alps.

We were lucky that no enemy fighters were around . We cleared the Alps by about fifty feet, though it seemed like ten. Our attention was diverted by this and we came out over Balzano, Italy at 8,000 feet.

Of course they had an 88 anti-aircraft battery there, and their first shots gave us a wake-up call. No straight-line flying after that. We zig-zagged all the way to Adriatic, at which time we were at 2,000 feet. The #3 engine was really bad now, at only half power. Over the water we lighted the plane...threw overboard the guns, ammo, flak jackets and anything that was loose.

We then contacted an R.A.F. (Royal Air Force) bomber base right on the coast. They had a runway long enough and gave us a straight-in approach, just as old #3 engine quit, so it was a two-engine landing. Our home base sent a repair crew up, they fixed it and we flew it home.”

THREE PHOTOS BELOW



Charles E. Hoffman (1916-1999) graduated from Ripon High School and attended Ripon College. He is shown here in his Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) uniform after he enlisted in 1941. Canada had joined World War II in September of 1939 and approximately 9,000 Americans enlisted in the RCAF before America became involved in the war on December 8, 1941.



This 1944 photograph shows Ripon native Charles E. Hoffman (1916-1999) who served as 2nd Lieutenant in the US Army Air Corps. During WWII he was a co-pilot on the B-24 Liberator named “Small Fry” conducting bombing missions over Europe in the 451st Bombardment Group (Heavy).



Charles E. Hoffman (1916-1999) is pictured in the back row on the right of this photograph of the United States Army Air Corps B-24 Liberator heavy bomber “Small Fry”. This Hoffman was a 2nd Lieutenant and flew 50 missions with the 451st Bombardment Group (Heavy) in Europe during World War II.

