

Captain Mark Frieda Hill's Life during World War II

World War II was arguably the most critical war in the history of humankind. At a time of chaos and dehumanization, World War II was an international conflict pitting two opposing military coalitions against each other: the Axis and the Allies. During World War II, recent advances in technology and transportation made a fateful impact on history. Aviation, having been mostly used for personal use prior to the war, was still fairly new to the war scene; nineteen years earlier the Navy had obtained its first aircraft carrier and eleven years before that had acquired its first airplane. This innovative development not only brought new equipment for the war but also created new positions for soldiers in war such as pilots, co-pilots, bombardiers, navigators and various other posts. One such soldier who experienced the beginnings of aviation in World War II first hand was Air Corps Captain Mark Frieda Hill. Beginning as an average soldier training in war, Captain Hill partook in many new experiences during World War II, including experiences in aviation, which many men were not fortunate enough to encounter.<sup>1</sup>

“For the first time in the nation’s history a peace time conscription was initiated in this country in order to form an Army capable of defending our land and principle. Out of a goldfish bowl numbers were drawn, numbers that soon would decide whether this man or that was to serve Uncle Sam. (Hill 1941)” Born in Montclair, NJ, Mark Frieda Hill worked as an Office Clerk before he enlisted in the army at the young age of twenty-four years. The papers he received from his Draft Board told him to leave his home in

Midland Gardens, Bronxville and report on January 23, 1941 to get ready for his induction into Army life. <sup>1</sup>

He promptly followed these orders to leave his home knowing that, as he explained it, “orders from the government are not to be disobeyed.” Neglecting to follow orders had severe consequences, which novices could not handle at this stage. Although, according to the military laws of the United States, an officer or soldier is not punishable for disobeying an unlawful order, the order is presumed to be lawful and should be obeyed, since the soldier entering the service has voluntarily submitted himself to obeying these rules. <sup>2</sup>

The first few months seem to be quite tough for a beginning soldier, and although Private Hill “hated to leave his freedom behind,” he did depart with a positive attitude “looking forward to new experiences and wider horizons...knowing that he would see and do many novel, exciting, and interesting things.” His very first day of training, Friday, January 24, 1941, Private Hill awoke bright and early to the sound of a whistle at six a.m. for breakfast. After the start of his day, Hill needed to take an intelligence exam; this consisted of counting blocks, the English language and math problems. After the successful completion of this exam, he was given an inoculation and vaccination. The men were finally interviewed for aptitude. Hill, not yet used to taking orders or even thinking of being dependent on orders for every move, hoped he would receive some creative position or photography post. Many people hear rumors where men who enter the army lose their identity in the process. Unfortunately Hill would agree with this statement as he states in his diary, “It is true we all lost our civilian identity – that

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<sup>1</sup> Hill, Mark Frieda. “A Year in the Army.” 23 January 1941

<sup>2</sup> Hill, Mark Frieda. “A Year in the Army.” 23 January 1941

somethingness [sic] that makes a man's character stand out...(Hill 1941)"<sup>3</sup> While at Fort Bragg, Mark Hill heard very interesting news on March 21, 1941. As most military bases, inspections are necessary in maintaining and updating facilities. Such an inspection was to take place soon, but this time the inspection was unlike any other. This inspection was to be conducted by none other than President and Mrs. Roosevelt as revealed in The New York Times.<sup>4</sup>

As a draftee, Mr. Hill began in the military under the title of Private First Class Hill, as most men do, and was stationed at Fort Bragg on February 2, 1941 in the 9<sup>th</sup> Division of the 47<sup>th</sup> Infantry. Fort Bragg had not always been an Army Base. The post had actually begun serving as military property less than 25 years before Private Hill's induction. This 127,000-acre region, filled with uninhabited sand hills and pine trees, was designated as a U.S. Army installation. Its water resources, rail facilities, and Carolina climate also made it an ideal military station. Camp Bragg first emerged on August 21, 1918 as an official field artillery site name in honor of Confederate General Braxton Bragg; Bragg had served as a former local artillery officer. In February of 1922, Congress decided to use all artillery sites east of the Mississippi River as permanent Army posts and on September 30, 1922 the camp was designated as Fort Bragg. Slowly but surely the fort grew to a whopping 5,400 soldiers by the summer of 1940. With the danger of World War II approaching and the recent passage of the Selective Service Act, Fort Bragg constructed a reception station with an enormous population of 67,000 soldiers simply within one year. Early on in 1942, the first airborne units, including Hill's, were trained at Fort Bragg in preparation for combat; consequently, that training was the reason Fort

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<sup>3</sup> Hill, Mark Frieda. "A Year in the Army." 23 January 1941.

<sup>4</sup> Roosevelt's to Inspect Fort Bragg." New York Times. 22 March 1941, late ed.: A1.

Bragg became widely acknowledged as “the home of the airborne.” Although Private Hill left Fort Bragg a couple years after his first joining the military, it is still in service and considered one of the largest military complexes in the world.<sup>5</sup>

At first, Hill discovered that keeping a journal was one of the most exciting parts of being involved in the military. In his scratchy script, Hill believed writing down new experiences was a way to “really keep me going, kept me wanting to see new things and have new experiences...giving me an outlet as well as making me feel that maybe someone would be interested enough in what we do in the army.” After nearly the first month of entries, Hill realized how similar his entries were becoming, given that combat doesn’t always occur in the first month and decided it was “rather laborious, difficult and just tough” to continue.<sup>6</sup>

Service records and certificates denote that following his first year in the service, Private First Class, Sp. 5<sup>th</sup> Class, Mark F. Hill was appointed Corporal Mark F. Hill of the 47<sup>th</sup> Infantry for the Army of the United States on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1942. This marked the very beginnings of several promotions in the life of Mark Hill. January 6<sup>th</sup>, 1943 was Mark’s first introduction to the aviation aspect of the Army. On this date, Corporal Hill was honorably discharged from the military of the United States, becoming Aviation Cadet Mark Hill of the Army Air Forces. Not even a full two days had passed before Aviation Cadet Hill was appointed to 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant of the Air-Reserves. This led him to one of the most influential and exciting missions of his life.

Becoming part of the Air Cadets program was not as easy as becoming part of the military and although 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Hill does not specifically describe the training for

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.bragg.army.mil/history/fortbragghistoryshort.htm>

<sup>6</sup> Hill, Mark Frieda. “A Year in the Army.” 23 January 1941.

the average man Sergeant Philip Aquila does. Sergeant Philip Aquila was an average draftee in World War II who shares details in the Army's education and training programs through letters written to his family. Although the men were tested in several areas, one vital aptitude test was the Army General Classification Test (AGCT). This 150-question test determined placement in the armed services and receiving a score greater than 109 would qualify that soldier for the Army Air Force's Air Cadet Program. Although Aquila did qualify for this program that was not enough to actually partake in the program. He needed a recommendation from superiors, which he received after some basic training. His superior wrote, "Sgt. Aquila...applies himself diligently to the task at hand. He has the ability to make quick and correct decisions, possesses good physical and mental coordination, and displays courage, initiative, and loyalty. (Aquila 41)" During his Air Cadet Training Program, Aquila went to school and trained incredibly hard and was graciously rewarded with his diploma certifying his completion of the United States Army Air Forces College Training Program.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, following graduation the Air Force had a surplus of pilot trainees and could not afford to take on any more, which makes Hill a rare breed of the Air Corps.

In August of 1941, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Hill was asked to partake in his one of his first yet most influential aviation assignments and gladly accepted his position as navigator of the airplane, especially since "The flier is universally recognized as someone daring and courageous with dash and glamour, (Stouffer 351)" during this time.<sup>8</sup> His 10-member crew named their plane the Kayo Katy II. Lieutenant Hill and his entire crew left Biggs

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<sup>7</sup> Aquila, Richard. Home Front Soldier: The Story of a GI and His Italian American Family During World War II

<sup>8</sup> Grinker and Spiegel, op. cit., p. 5. Stouffer, Samuel A. *The American Soldier: Combat and Its Aftermath*, Volume II.

Army Airfield from El Paso, Texas on August 25, 1943. <sup>9</sup>Lieutenant Hill's responsibility included several important aspects of maintaining the plane and directing the pilot.

Navigators' in the United States Air Force are responsible for any hindrances or problems in the navigational equipment while airborne along with knowledge of the aircraft's position at all times. This includes planning journeys, providing advice to the pilot of estimated times of arrival and ensuring hazards are avoided. One of the most important technological aids is a GEE, a cathode-ray receiver. Using a GEE, navigators' can determine the aircraft's location in a quick and accurate fashion. <sup>10</sup>

The crew arrived at Topeka on the same day, August 25<sup>th</sup>, absolutely exhausted and famished. The following day the crew went to several different places to test each man's competence. Once all the testing was complete, the crew was shown exactly how to tear down machine guns, Tommy guns, pistols, Springfields, Garands and carbines. Having fired those weapons the day after, Lieutenant Hill found his weakness in dealing with the rifle but regained his confidence from the crew at the pistol range.

Three days after the equipment was processed, all enlisted men were promoted in rank and promised back pay because Air corps officers were recognized as a superior type of military personnel. The entire crew was also presented with equipment operational for various types of warfare, climate and conditions including combating armies of mosquitoes, chemical agents against any of Hitler's arsenal gases, dust respirators, canteens, pup tents, galoshes for mud, sleeping bags, helmets, oxygen bottles and heated suits. <sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Mark Hill Service Records located in the New York State Military Museum Archives

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.history.navy.mil/branches/avchr5.htm>

<sup>11</sup> Mark Hill Service Records located in the New York State Military Museum Archives

A very interesting aspect of being stationed at Topeka was the remarks made by the WACs. The Women's Army Corps was a piece of legislation created and signed by President Roosevelt the year after the formation of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps. The Women's Army Auxiliary Corps was created in 1942 and was a critical step for the future enlistment of women. Lieutenant Hill, along with the rest of his crew, found it very interesting to be able to interact with women in this military environment and found it even more "peculiar to be able to look out of your barrack and see [undergarments] flapping in the Kansas wind. (Hill)" After wearing out the Kayo Katy II traveling from Topeka through to Syracuse stopping in Peoria, Akron, Pittsburgh and Albany, the crew received a new plane on September 3, 1943. This one was named the Pink Lady, which would be sending them to either Egypt or some desert country. <sup>12</sup>

Throughout Hill's many years in the service he has been accredited with a total of 50 combat missions flying throughout Italy, Greece, Hungary, France and many other countries as of September of 1944. He was also promoted to his final rank as Captain, Air Corps Mark Hill on January 15, 1945. In April of 1945, Captain Hill was entitled to numerous awards consisting of the EAME (European, African, Middle Eastern) Ribbon, several different Battle Stars and Air Medals and Distinguished Unit Badges just to name a few.

Many times war is presented in a negative manner. This is especially true in Hallin's, The Uncensored War, where he explains, "War...appears on television as senseless killing. (Hallin 109)"<sup>13</sup> Captain Hill participated in war for several years, and learned plenty about it. After this experience he explained in a personal letter to a dear

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<sup>12</sup> Mark Hill Service Records located in the New York State Military Museum Archives

<sup>13</sup> Hallin, Daniel C. The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam.

friend that he was very “proud” to be part of this war. Contrary to Hallin’s belief that the media’s portrayal of war negatively hurts public opinion, Captain Hill believed it was a privilege to take part in something as significant as war. Fighting for his country was something that he truly believed would help his country and would be a worthwhile cause for others. War was not strictly about the horror displayed in movies or terror in the eyes of the soldiers. Hill even stated, “You...should be proud of the fact that we extended ourselves to fight for our country, risk sacred things...and that you did more than most Americans by being in combat. (Hill 1941)” Captain Hill knew that every time he left the base he was risking his life but felt fighting for what he believes was well worth it.<sup>14</sup>

Soldiers play an enormous role in wars. They take on duties and responsibilities that an average person may be unable to handle. With these responsibilities and obligations often comes change that one can see through the stories and experiences of Captain Mark Hill. In his first few months, his journals display his beginning struggles in getting acquainted with army life and learning the ins and outs that come with this new life, but the repetitiveness of his average day prevented him from continuing documentation. Having a year or two of experience under his belt, Hill believed he could better serve his country in the U.S. Air Force. As Aquila displays, training was not simple but it is obvious Hill must have been an extraordinary fellow to become part of this field. This change of pace led him to several new opportunities in terms of promotions, interactions and travel. Although he personally changed, gaining years of experience and knowledge, perhaps the most enduring souvenir of his career was the pride he felt serving

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<sup>14</sup> Hill, Mark Frieda. “A Year in the Army.” 23 January 1941.

either the military or Air Force. Hill will be remembered for his impressive patriotism, his distinguished service, and his desire for the betterment of his country and humanity.

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