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# St. Johns High School

Home of the Redwings!

## Forest Swatman

Interviewed by Laura Faivor

Home

Administration

Attendance

Counseling

Activities

Clinic

Staff

Media Center

Cafeteria

Student Handbook

Map to School

School Calendar

School Profile

Forest Swatman went into the service on March 7, 1942, at the age of 21. Mr. Swatman was sent to Jefferson Barracko, Missouri for basic training. After the basic training he was then sent to Chanute Field in Illinois to receive aircraft and engine training. Following that, Mr. Swatman was then sent to McDill Field at Tampa, Florida, and was assigned to a crew as an assistant on a B-26 Bomber. Around 1942 he boarded "The Queen Elizabeth" that took him on a five and a half day trip to the Firth of Clyde, located in Scotland.

The men who came over with Mr. Swatman were now in the 450th Bomb Squadron, 322nd Bomb Group, and in the 8th Air Force. On March 6, 1943 they got their first airplanes that flew in from the U.S. Mr. Swatman and his crew started working on the airplanes, servicing and repairing them, and getting the airplanes ready for combat. His squadron flew the first mission into the Holland border-dropping bombs on submarine pins.

After a while the 450th Bomb Squadron was moved to a new air base in Braintree, England, where he was assigned a new airplane and also became crew chief. A crew chief's job was to keep the plane in repair and over see the gun repair and be on hand whenever the planes flew.

Mr. Swatman was normally awakened about 4:00 am to go out on the line to get his planes ready. He would run the planes engines, check out the propellers, check all of the gauges, put the final amount of gasoline in the tanks, and see that the bombs were loaded. Also, a lot of times he would have to go to work late at night and there was little light because of the blackout. The blackout was in case an enemy aircraft that would come over and drop bombs on lighted areas.

Whenever Mr. Swatman would hear air raid sirens he would run and hit the ditch until it was all clear. He remembers on June 6, 1944, "D-Day", he had to get up at 3:00 am and they brought paint and brushes in which they painted what they called "invasion stripes" on the wings of the body so they could tell their planes from enemies planes. He had to have his gas mask and

riles with him at all times, even when he worked on the planes along with his other duties.

In March of 1945, he moved to Belgium and he really had it nice. They took over a children's home that held about 500 of his squadron. The end of his time, even though they did not want him to go, was in October 1945. He was flown to England where he boarded a liberty ship and after 14 days he ended in Boston U.S.A, and was discharged and sent to Detroit.