



**James  
Fordyce**

*Army Air Corps*

## **James Fordyce**

**BIRTHPLACE:** Oxnard, CA

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### **SOLDIER DETAILS**

**HIGHEST RANK:** S/Sgt

**DIVISION:** Army Air Corps, 477th Bomb Squadron,  
8th Army

**THEATER OF OPERATION:** European

**SERVED:** Jan 1, 1943 - Nov 5, 1945

**HONORED BY:** Virginia Madge Fordyce, (Wife of 66  
years)

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### **BIOGRAPHY**

JAMES FRANKLIN FORDYCE enlisted in the Army Air Force in January 1943 at the age of 18. Following basic training in Fresno, California, he was trained as a gunner ' armorer in Kingman, Arizona, Denver, Colorado, and Harvard, Nebraska. He and his crew flew their own plane to England in December 1943 where they were deployed. He was a waist gunner on a B17. Their first mission was a rough one as they encountered lots of enemy fire from the ground and the air, ending up with quite a bit of damage to the plane, but had a successful bomb run. On the second mission he and the other waist gunner were frostbitten on their faces as the B17 at that time had no protection from the open windows. The fifth bombing mission started out well but before reaching their target the plane had one engine fail, then two, and then three. They turned back to base with fighter protection but kept losing altitude. Enemy aircraft spotted them and it ended with their plane on fire and going down. Two crew members were killed before being able to parachute to safety and others were injured. Frank came down without a scratch. He was taken to an interrogation room, was threatened and was scared and lonely. He never saw any of his crew again. After several days of interrogation he was sent to prison camp Stalag Luft III. He volunteered along with eleven others to accept Red Cross parcels of food and to distribute them along with any other food the Germans provided. The Germans had them puncture any canned food before issuing it, so it couldn't be kept and stored for escape purposes. Prisoners learned to seal the cans with margarine so after discovering their secret, the guards then made the crew remove all tops to the cans, with a hand can opener before they were issued. As time went on the fighting got so close that an evacuation was ordered. They left in the middle of the night with lots of snow on the ground and traveled in below zero weather for 6 days, 62 miles to Stalag X111, on the outskirts of Nuernberg . This long journey caused many cases of frostbite to the prisoners hands and feet, including Franks. Two months later in April 1945 they evacuated that camp as fighting came closer again, and again 10,000 prisoners marched to Moosberg, 30 miles from Munich to Stalag. V11A. They were there until shortly before the war ended when Patton's army

liberated them. Staff Sergeant Fordyce served with honor and courage, and was given the Purple Heart and other medals that reflected his uncompromising service. Staff Sergeant Fordyce and many other prisoners were put on Liberty ships in France and made their way back to the USA. Three weeks after arriving home on furlough he married his high school sweetheart Virginia Madge Ramsey on July 8, 1945. Frank received his discharge on November 5, 1945. A new career was started as he was employed at a Rare Plant Garden in Pasadena, California, and he went from there to other orchid nurseries where he worked for 27 years before founding a successful orchid nursery in Livermore, California. Frank owned and managed that nursery for the rest of his life along with his wife, Madge, daughter, Sue, and son, Steve. He ended his career at the age of 82 as being one of the most successful hybridizers of Cattleya Orchids of his time. Frank passed on at age 87 leaving a legacy that began as a young 19 year old POW who honored his country, and he wept each time an American flag was raised and the solemn notes of Taps floated into the air.