



8th Air Force

Willis H. Johnson
Sergeant, U.S. Army Air Corps
9 December 1942 – 28 May 1944

Willis was born circa 1924, probably in Lower Macungie Township, Pennsylvania, where his family was living in 1930 and made their permanent home. After attending grammar school, Willis worked at Mack Manufacturing Corporation in Allentown, Pennsylvania, until he enlisted in the Army Air Corps on 9 December 1942 in Philadelphia. His first assignment was at Camp Miami Beach, Florida, where he underwent basic training. He was then sent to Air Forces Technical Training Command at Seymour Johnson Field, North Carolina, for follow-on training as a Flight Engineer-Gunner and preparation for overseas duty. He left for overseas during December 1943 and was assigned to a Bomber Squadron in the 8th Air Force, which was based at airfields located throughout England. Willis flew as a Gunner on B-17 Flying Fortress missions from England across the English Channel into Germany. Their missions primarily involved daylight precision strategic bombing of German railroads and industrial targets, and complemented Royal Air Force night-time bombings in preparation for Operation Overlord at Normandy. On 28 May 1944, while flying his 25th and last mission before he was to be eligible for furlough back to the States, the Flying Fortress in which Willis was flying as a Gunner exploded in mid-air over the English Channel. He initially was reported missing in action, and it wasn't until a year later that his parents were notified that he was declared killed in action. In addition to the Purple Heart, which he was awarded posthumously, Willis was awarded the Air Medal (with 3 Oak Clusters), American Campaign Medal, European-African Middle Eastern Campaign Medal, and World War II Victory Medal. Willis's parents were **Oliver S. Johnson** (4 October 1896 – July 1963), and **Carrie E.** — (c.1901 – ?). Willis's brother, **Ralph A. Johnson**, also served in the Army during World War II.



B-17 on a Bombing Run