



APACHE NEWS



Raymond Plank Retrospective

Part One: From Humble Beginnings to Atomic Bombs

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On Nov. 8, 2018, Apache Founder Raymond Plank passed away at the age of 96. However, his legacy continues to positively impact the lives of thousands of people around the world. From the innovative, contrarian business practices that built Apache, to his selfless philanthropy, Raymond Plank left behind a world that was better for having had him in it.

In this three-part series, we look at the man, his life and his legacy. We follow Plank from a young Minnesotan farm boy to the principled, honorable and somewhat cantankerous oil tycoon who created a multi-billion-dollar company.

The Early Years

Raymond Norwood Plank was born in Eitel Hospital in Minneapolis on May 29, 1922, to Raby and Maud Ruth Howe Plank. Much like Raymond himself would prove to be, his father was a man of many talents. Raby was a farmer, coal miner, bookkeeper and printer. He taught Raymond integrity, a strong work ethic and the desire to be successful. Plank's parents helped instill in him a love of learning that would last a lifetime.



Raymond with father Raby Plank, 1925.

Raymond was the youngest of four children. Religion was important to both parents and significantly influenced the upbringing of Plank and his siblings. The family relocated from Minneapolis to a country home in Wayzata, Minnesota after his older brother died at the age of six from scarlet fever. As an action-oriented child, Plank thrived in the countryside. He rode bikes, shot BB guns and greatly enjoyed outdoor playtime.



Left: Raymond, Age 2, 1924.

Right: Raymond with mother Maud Ruth Howe Plank, 1930.

School was difficult for young Plank at first. His isolated upbringing made him a fish out of water with other children. By his own admission, he was “totally impervious to reading instruction.” He remained so until he came under the tutelage of Miss MacDonald, his first-grade teacher. Miss MacDonald encouraged Plank to read and write. With her help, he began a daily diary — a habit he would continue for the rest of his life.



Plank reading with his dog, Von.

Plank first showed his budding entrepreneurial spirit at a very young age. He began by selling eggs to neighbors, using the profits to buy more chickens so he could sell more eggs. Soon, he was selling whole chickens, digging up worms to sell to fishermen and making and selling apple cider. By high school, Plank was making and selling maple syrup with his childhood friend Chuck Arnao.

It was in high school that Plank joined the debate team. He later credited this with helping to develop his rather memorable oratory skills.

“It was first during high school debating that I found my delivery style, which was particularly appealing at the emotional level. I found that sprinkling my delivery with analogies carried my positions a long way. Possibly my memory is convenient; I do not recall losing a debate, and I do clearly recall that my style evoked interest and applause that at times befuddled my opponents.”

Raymond Plank, “A Small Difference”

In 1937, tragedy struck the Plank family. After checking into the hospital for a routine appendectomy, Maud died of a blood clot in her brain. Raymond was 15. Before passing, she wrote a message to her son on a penny postcard:

My Son,

The fifteen years of my life which you have shared have been such glorious ones. How I have loved them. You are so fine and unselfish. You have given me such love and consideration. I have known no joy which could equal that of your companionship. My pride in you will go on through the years if you keep your head up and your courage and faith high.

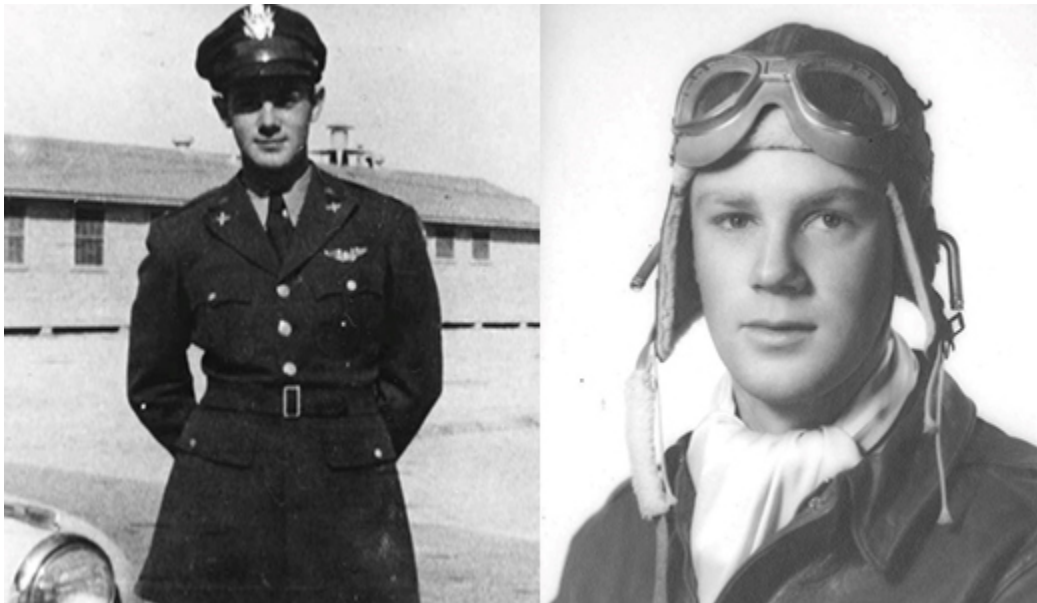
All Love,

Mother

America Goes to War

In 1940, Plank enrolled in Yale University. The transition to college life seemed smooth for Plank's friends, but he found it difficult to adjust. His isolated upbringing again caused some initial stumbling, but he soon acclimated and made many lifelong friends.

Meanwhile, America's seemingly inevitable involvement in World War II was a looming, ever-present threat for Plank's entire generation. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese Navy Air Service attacked Pearl Harbor. The following day, Congress declared war on Japan. For years, the U.S. had been gradually preparing for war, but the pace now rapidly accelerated. Along with Arnao, Plank put his education on hold and enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps.



Left: Plank in dress uniform.

Right: Plank in aviator gear, 1944.

Plank graduated in the top 10 percent in flight school at Fort Stockton, Texas. His first assignment was as an instructor for new cadets, but it wasn't long before he was sent to the pointy end of the war. For Plank, this meant flying heavy bombers in the Pacific Theater. In November 1944, Plank and his crew landed at Hickam Field in Honolulu, where they joined the 64th Bomber Squadron of the 43rd Bomb Group. The sunken husks of battleships, cruisers, and destroyers were still visible in nearby Pearl Harbor.

Plank's first run against the Japanese was almost his last, but it wasn't enemy fire that nearly resulted in his premature end. His war-weary, near wreck of a plane struggled to take off under the weight of eight 1,000-pound bombs and almost crashed into an oil derrick at the end of the runway. The crew narrowly avoided this obstacle, but the danger had not yet passed. Blinded by heavy cloud cover, the plane almost smashed into the side of a mountain that the provided maps inconveniently neglected to mention. Fortunately, the skilled crew was able to dodge the menacing mountain.

Due to the unfavorable conditions, the other planes in the formation returned to base, but Plank's crew went on to bomb their target. By the time they returned to base, they had already been reported missing in action. The soldiers at the base enthusiastically welcomed the missing airmen back to their new home.

Plank flew 40 missions throughout the Pacific, but his most frequent targets were on Formosa, now Taiwan. As the United States won costly battles and island-hopped its way to Japan, Formosa's airfields and strategic position became an increasing threat to American shipping.

Furiously defended by an extensive array of radar-controlled antiaircraft guns, Formosa proved a formidable fortress to American airmen. Of the 40 missions Plank flew, his squadron was shot up on 19. Three of the planes he flew were shot so full of holes that they never flew again. After one particularly hazardous mission, the ground crew counted 367 holes in Plank's B-24 Liberator, which was retired to spare parts.



Plank poses next to a bomber.

The Bomb and the End of the War

On August 6, 1945, all flight missions over Japan were canceled without explanation. The soldiers soon learned why. The United States had just dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Two days later, missions were again canceled. Many airmen correctly guessed that this meant another nuclear weapon was to be detonated.

On August 9, Plank was leaving Okinawa for his base at Ie Shima with close friend Joe Sharpe. The pair decided to “stray off course” to see if they could spot any evidence of the second bomb. The penalty for getting caught would be a court-martial, but history was about to happen. The two had “accidentally” strayed 200 miles north and were becoming understandably nervous when they saw a mushroom cloud obliterate the once-beautiful city of Nagasaki. They flew back to base in stunned silence.

Japan announced its surrender six days later.



Japanese planes arrive to surrender

Returning Home

With the war over, troops returned home. Plank boarded a cramped troop ship on October 6 and arrived in San Francisco on October 28. The first thing he did once he arrived back in his home country was call his father. The second was to order a hamburger and french fries.

The war was a pivotal time in the life of all those who came from the Greatest Generation. Plank was no exception. Many friends never returned home. Many were maimed in action. Arnao had been shot down by anti-aircraft fire in his first mission and spent over two years as a prisoner of war in Nazi Stalag Luft. He had since returned home and would play an important role in the next stage of Plank's life.



Plank's friends Chuck Arnao and Bob Niels return from the war.

For the first time, Plank was in charge of his own destiny. The lessons he learned in childhood, the personal values gifted to him by his parents, his education and his experiences in the war built the foundation for all that would follow. The story of Raymond Plank was only just beginning.

"The capacity of the individual is infinite. Limitations are largely of habit, convention, acceptance of things as they are, fear or lack of self-confidence."

-Raymond Plank, 1959



Plank in the cockpit of his PT-13 training aircraft.

*This story is part one of a three-part series on the life and legacy of Raymond Plank. Read parts **two** and **three**.*

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[Colson, Stephanie](#) 5/7/2019 11:45 AM

A great read and a very interesting person. Mr. Plank left a good legacy in Apache Corporation.



[Hibbert, Ted](#) 5/1/2019 5:01 AM

Fascinating story, quite humbling.



[Kilgore, Claire](#) 4/24/2019 9:06 AM

Very interesting and I am looking forward to Part II.