

## **PREFACE**

World War II is the history of ordinary Americans placed in extraordinary situations performing exceptional and heroic deeds. Several of my uncles were veterans of that war, and to say the least, they were my heroes. It was not through their tales of the war that my admiration for the "greatest generation" was born, but in the dusty corners of a cellar in Providence, RI.

Grandpa's cellar was an intriguing and mystical place for a ten-year-old boy in 1952. Although it was small, dark and dingy, in some places it held treasures to tantalize the imagination of an inquisitive child. It's safe to say that grandpa's cellar was similar to others in immigrant Italian homes in Rhode Island at that time. There was the quintessential "extra kitchen" and of course many shelves for the storage of preserves. But I can venture a guess that my grandfather's basement was one of few which held a bust of Italy's notorious dictator.

A mysterious bronze bust was among my grandfather's things. Just who was this bald man with the protruding square jaw? Grandpa answered me in his broken English, "He's a man who did a lot for Italy." Grandpa Amore came to America in 1905, long before Mussolini came into power. Years later, I speculated that he must have known Mussolini as a man who brought prosperity to Italy and tried to give the land of the Caesars another empire, a sense of national honor and world importance. Where that bust came from has always been a matter of conjecture; I never asked him or any of his ten children, including my own mother, about it. Perhaps it made its way to Grandpa Amore with the many other war mementos brought back from Europe and Asia by his sons.

Grandpa Amore had seven boys and three girls. Five of his sons served the United States during World War II, four in the Army and one in the Navy. Three served in Europe, one in the South Pacific and one in the Navy in the Atlantic after the war's end. My father's family mirrored the Amore family in that it also consisted of ten children, seven boys and three girls. Uncle Albert Capaldi (Bucky) was a bombardier on a B-26 medium bomber in the 12<sup>th</sup> Air Force and Uncle Alfred Capaldi was in the Army in Europe. All my aunts and uncles spoke fluent Italian which was really their first language but they were loyal patriotic Americans even though they still had family ties to Italy.

In fact, Uncle Tony Amore served in Italy as a cook, he was able to help feed his extended family in Grandpa Amore's hometown of Scafati, a town near Pompeii. I can see Uncle Tony taking that bust as a war trophy home to Grandpa; maybe it was given to him in exchange for food in gratitude for aiding the hungry people of Scafati. No matter how it got into Grandpa's cellar, it was one of many objects which continued to intrigue me even years later while I studied history at Providence College.

Tucked in a corner room of the cellar sat my uncles' workbench. Among the radio parts, soldering guns, wires, tubes and tools, was one of my favorite items, the cigar box. It held what seemed like hundreds of military patches in a multitude of colors. One especially, the Screaming Eagle, (101<sup>st</sup> Airborne) grabbed my attention. These patches belonged to my Uncle Joe. As a paratrooper of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne, he saw action in the jump preceding the D-Day landings, the jump of the 82<sup>nd</sup> in Holland and in the relief of Bastogne.

Uncle Joe carried many other treasures home from the battlefields of France, Belgium, Holland and Germany. Among them were the German helmet, which I have in my basement today, a German map case, neutralized M-1 bullets and the prize of prizes, a German Mauser rifle, with the menacing sound of the metal bolt sliding and clicking. That rifle occupied my attention for hours. Uncle Joe had blocked the opening of the barrel, but that rifle was real to me. Lastly, there was the symbol of NAZI power and authority, the bronze eagle with outstretched wings and a wreath in its claws which also sits in my basement. In the center of the wreath was once a penny. When I came into possession of the eagle, I removed the penny to find a swastika. Uncle Joe had glued the penny over the symbol he'd fought against.

I realized at a very early age that there was something very special about these things which had traveled with my uncles from the war. None of them spoke much about the war and I respected their privacy. These objects were my uncles' way of keeping that part of their past alive. And they succeeded through me.

So, when Captain Edouard Jacques came to my office in the fall of 2004 armed with a scrap book loaded with mission maps, orders, mission descriptions, pictures of B-24 nose art, aerial photographs of Germany and other memorabilia, I felt the old intrigue return. As when I touched the items in Grandpa Amore's basement, I was experiencing history. I never saw such a complete first hand record of one man's contribution to the defeat of Nazi Germany.

In my hands, I held the original document, simply titled, "Operational Order No. 87," dated July 9, 1944, which assigned 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Jacques and his crew to combat. He

also presented me with the original general order number 338, dated December 12, 1944, awarding him the Air Medal. Another original order, number 103 from Headquarters, 2<sup>nd</sup> Air Division, 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force awarded Ed the Oak Leaf Cluster for courage and skill displayed in the face of determined opposition.

And there was more. He had kept a Certificate of Valor, which was awarded to the men of the 458<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force, signed by Walter R. Peck, Brigadier General and Commander of the 96<sup>th</sup> Combat Bomb Wing. A brown envelope, boldly marked "Secret," included instructions, "this envelope contains secret destination orders for the above named personnel and is not to be opened until one (1) hour after departure from the continental limits of the United States..." Several *Stars and Stripes* newspapers fell on my desk; one in particular, dated Wednesday, December 27, 1944 announced that Glenn Miller, the famous big band leader of the 40's, had gone missing on a hop from the U.K. to Paris. Edouard had also kept some of the tools of the trade of a bombardier, including several computers, one which measured true air speed, another for altitude correction and a third for direct conversion of slant range. There was also a device to determine true altitude and a device that plugged into the Norden bomb site. Finally, among his treasure, Captain Jacques had his most coveted recognition, the Distinguished Flying Cross, one of the most prestigious awards given to airmen.

Immediately, I decided to do more than just enjoy these sixty-year-old artifacts. In my desire to preserve the history of these brave men, I conducted several afternoon interviews with Ed to record his remembrances. He never ceased to amaze me with his stories and personal writings about his youth and war years.

My mission was brought clearly into focus when he told me he still kept in contact with the crew of the 752<sup>nd</sup> Squadron and with the pilot of his last eighteen missions of the 755<sup>th</sup> Squadron. Ed especially held a special bond with those crewmen who flew with him on his first mission. Over the years, these men had several reunions until age and time began to curtail such meetings.

Time waits for no one. I began to plan my interviews with Ed's crew. I had the wonderful opportunity in the fall of 2004 to interview Bob Giles from South Carolina, one of the waist gunners, and in 2011, Charles Hepprich from Connecticut, the radio operator on the lead crew.

I traveled to Dayton, Ohio on March 21, 2005 and February 27, 2006 to interview Fred Eisert, pilot of the 755<sup>th</sup> Squadron, and on May 1, 2005 to interview Merlin Tebbs, pilot of the 752<sup>nd</sup> squadron in St. George, Utah. Both men were in their eighties, but doing well. Ed accompanied me for these interviews and it was a wonderful and fulfilling experience to see these comrades in arms together and to hear them relate their long-ago experiences as young airmen flying twenty-five thousand feet above Germany.

All of the interviews took at least several hours to complete. In the case of Edouard Jacques, the interviews were conducted over a three-month period consisting of at least forty hours, including at least two hours of interview with Ed's wife, Marie. During the course of research and writing, Ed was consulted frequently to clarify or explain his writings and to provide additional information. When crewmen could not be interviewed for various reasons, Ed's oral testimony, his booklets and many other of his writings brought those men to life for this work.

This book covers the air war as experienced by the crew of a B-24 heavy bomber of the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force, 96<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing, 458 Bomb Group, 752<sup>nd</sup> and 755<sup>th</sup> Squadrons from August, 1944 to May, 1945. By necessity, in order to understand the reason for each mission, the ground war is briefly described. Where possible their early life is described in an effort to find a commonality among them.

It is a remembrance of ordinary men doing extraordinary things in the quest to defeat the seemingly invincible Third Reich. Their story mirrors that of thousands of young Americans who have not had their events recorded and retold. None of them became famous like George McGovern who piloted a B-24 and was a Presidential candidate in 1972, whose experiences were recorded by Stephen Ambrose in his book, *Wild Blue*. Instead, these young heroes existed in the shadows; they came home from the war and went to work to build this great country.

This book is the story of boys from Rhode Island, Utah, South Carolina, Texas, Kentucky, New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Neumarkt, Germany. Their backgrounds are as diverse as the places from which they came. They were sons of pioneers who went west, of immigrants from Canada and Belgium, of tobacco growers from Kentucky, contractors from New Jersey, electricians from New York City, and a butcher's son from Germany. In interviewing these men, I found that while they were not similar in background or culture, they were similar in the kind of men they were then and are now.

I can never bring to these pages what they really felt or what courage it took to accomplish their missions. The hope is that these pages can preserve what they told me for others to read for generations to come, and to give the reader a view of how their

early lives contributed to making them the kind of men who courageously faced death at 25,000 feet on every mission.

When we preserve and tell the story of even one man, one crew and one plane, we honor and remember all those airmen who participated courageously in defeating NAZI Germany and were honored by a grateful nation. These are our shadow heroes!

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