

PART 1 OF 2

A hero among us

97-year-old World War II veteran shares war stories

By Guila Jackson

Daily Light correspondent

Editor's note: It's not every day that we have an opportunity to celebrate the life and sacrifices of a World War II veteran. This story was also too good to let page constraints limited its telling, so we've broken it up into two parts that will run Friday and Sunday in the Daily Light.

Hundreds of thousands of young men and women who had not even begun to live sacrificed their lives serving and protecting America during World War II. Those that survived are now well into their 90s and, as this generation of veterans passes away at a rapid pace, many stories of the hell of war, the victories in battle and the close calls may never be told.

Reid Waltman decided to not allow his war stories to go away unheard. The 97-year-old Red Oak resident also recently had a lengthy sit down with the Daily Light to share those

recounts just a few days after his birthday.

Waltman and his wife, Betty Jo, moved from East Texas a couple of years ago and currently reside with their daughter, Heather Maynard, and her family.

Waltman can vividly recall, in great detail, the atrocities that unfolded during his military service. He is still very much sharp of mind and looks much younger than three years short of 100.

Waltman was born in Lyndhurst, New Jersey on June 10, 1922. Lyndhurst is six miles north of Newark. After graduating from Lyndhurst High School in 1940, he attended Rutgers University School of Agriculture to study soil research.

This was right after the Great Depression. Rutgers was established in 1766 and Waltman spent two years there, paying \$65 a year for tuition.

When Pearl Harbor was attacked and the United States entered

WWII, many young men were drafted into the military — Waltman voluntarily enlisted.

"My mother went with me to Newark to enlist in the Army Air Corps, which later became the Army Air Force, on June 10, 1942," he recalled. "I did not want to be in the infantry. Our neighbor had been in the infantry during World War I, and he had been gassed and was in very poor health, and I didn't want to be like that. I knew I wanted to be in the flying part."

When the orders came down, Waltman was ordered to report for duty on June 1, 1943, in Atlantic City, New Jersey; so in the meantime, he worked at Valentine Brewery as a chemical tester.

"There were 25,000 troops there when we arrived in Atlantic City," Waltman remembered. "All of us new recruits were put on KP Duty (Kitchen Patrol) for 24 hours. Two meals were served each day and we

were tasked with cleaning up after the troops ate."

"Our group had enlisted as aviation cadets and were classified as private's making \$75 per month while regular private's only got \$50 per month," Waltman said.

When winter came, the group started marching down the Boardwalk.

"I had been to the Boardwalk before, but never during the winter," Waltman said. "We had on warm clothing, but as we marched, the spray from the ocean caused the right side of our uniforms to freeze and when we marched back, the other side froze."

The next stop for training was at the University of Vermont in Burlington.

"It was so cold that I saw some of the ears on the boys around me turn white from frostbite," he recalled. "We learned to march in formation. I can remember us being quarantined because of



PHOTOS BY GUILA JACKSON/DAILY LIGHT

Reid Waltman, 97, pictured inside his Red Oak home and next to the bomber's jacket he wore during his World War II deployment, recently spoke to the Daily Light about his service in the U.S. Air Force.

meningitis and pneumonia. Since we came from civilian life, we were unable to have any contact with the girls on campus. We spent three months training there. We trained for 10 hours flying in a Piper Cub airplane."

The recruits then traveled by train to Nashville, Tennessee — still carrying the rank of private — as they began training to be a pilot, co-pilot, bombardier, or navigator.

"Those who didn't make it were called a washout and they were sent to the infantry," Waltman commented. "[...] I was selected as a navigator. I was definitely not a hotshot pilot."

He added, "We were then sent to Selman Army Airfield near Monroe, Louisiana for preflight school. I was shocked. I had never been this far from Lyndhurst. There

SEE WALTMAN, A7

NEWS

POTTER

CONTINUED FROM A1

of eternal life through Jesus Christ."

For the past 10 years, Wigand and his wife Becky traveled to many churches in North Texas and beyond, presenting his unique ministry by way of the word of God and by symbolic demonstrations.

Most recently, for the last five years, Wigand expanded his Christian outreach to include being a regular vendor at "The Promise" presentation in Glen Rose. The fall event runs every year from September through October. He features his presentations before each per-

formance and during the show's intermissions.

After each of his shows, Wigand sells his beautiful pottery pieces such as jar necklaces, covenant cups, chalices, honey pots, serving trays, vases, etc. Each item has been hand-crafted on his pottery wheel, and each comes in a gift box that includes a special note inside, which gives the new owner a personal invitation to follow Christ.

If anyone is interested in a presentation at your church, please contact Wigand at 972/222-6104 or email him at treasuredvessels@sb-cglobal.net. He and his wife reside in Mesquite.

REPAIR

CONTINUED FROM A1

Hunton worked for Brook Mays Music where he began a luthier apprenticeship under Larry Thettaplace.

At the warehouse, he underwent a year of intense training and then fulfilled a three-year apprenticeship. Through his experiences, Hunton created his own tools to fix stringed instruments.

In the shop, Hunton grabbed one of 10 violins next to him and managed to find a wooden tool among his cluttered work desk.

"I made this to take tops off violins," he explained. "It's made from a tapered dowel. It was a dowel that tapered down, and I carved it so I could hold it like this."

Hunton taps a rubber mallet or uses a vibrating method on the wooden tool around the frame to remove the top.

"I use this thing for all sorts of things. It's goofy," he laughed.

He also worked with a thin safety edge file with a short handle, which made it uncomfortable to maneuver. So, he removed the awkward part and cut a dowel rod to replace it, and it was smooth sailing.

NEW SKILLS

Even with two decades of experience, Hunton encounters moments where he is unfamiliar with necessary repairs. These challenges inspire Hunton to learn new tricks of the trade.

He then noted the project that took the longest con-

sisted of three years. It was a Gibson guitar in dire need of restoration.

"I had not restored one or repaired one to that point like I did that one," Hunton elaborated. "I did one like that with an old Gibson guitar, and the top was destroyed — completely destroyed — so I made a new top for it. I'd never done that before."

Every instrument has its own story and uniqueness as to how it was assembled. For this reason, Hunton crafted tools of his own to perfect his repair tactics.

PASSION FOR STRINGS

The love for stringed instruments all started when Hunton picked up the guitar at the age of 14 and was paid to play gigs in the band, Rock Creek.

"I've been in more bands than anyone could remember. I've played all over Dallas-Fort Worth, all over Texas and several states," he elaborated.

He also played with Dallas blues musician Jimmy "Preacher" Ellis and even showed a video of them playing on FOX 4 News. A recognizable Hunton jammed to "Please Come Home For Christmas."

Hunton played music and fixed jewelry for a living 15 years before he repaired stringed instruments professionally. He realized he could incorporate those skills into his passion — music.

Jim's Guitar & Violin repair is located at 211 W. Jefferson Str. and can be reached at 972-822-3824.

WALTMAN

CONTINUED FROM A1

were swamps and mosquitoes and I was introduced to a new food — boiled okra. It was stringy and sticky and served on steel trays."

Upon completion of pre-flight training, the soldiers were officially aviation cadets. This group was also the first group of aviation cadets that was sent to gunnery school at Tyndall Air Force near Panama City, Florida.

"There was a problem there. You had to pass gunnery class or you got washed out," Waltman said. "There was a club for enlisted men and another club for the officers, where Clark Gable and Jimmy Stewart attended, but no club for the aviation cadets, so we were stuck."

To graduate from gunnery school, the cadets were required to take apart a

50-caliber machine gun and put it back together again — while blindfolded. Waltman explained that if they were unable to do that, they washed out and were sent to the infantry.

"I learned how to shoot nearly every weapon, the 45-caliber pistol, carbine rifle, 80-caliber machine gun and 50-caliber machine gun and we had to hit targets while riding in a Jeep," Waltman said.

After completing gunnery school, the cadets were sent to navigation school in San Marcos, Texas in either late 1943 or early 1944, Waltman recalled after giving the date some thought.

Navigators have to locate targets using a device called a sextant. This is used, along with the stars in the sky to pinpoint the target locations.

"On our first training mission flying from San Marcos to the Gulf of Mexico, I used a star as a point to

get the triangle which is the area to show you where you are, and the plane was shaking, and my triangle was so big," Waltman recalled. "It was a day of reckoning for me. To navigate accurately you have to consider the speed of the plane and the airspeed to get the triangle down to a small point to get an accurate reading on your position. My first practice wasn't too good, but I got better at it and achieved the title of aviation cadet navigator."

The plane they flew in was a twin-engine aircraft similar to a DC-3 that could carry more cadets in addition to the pilot, co-pilot, navigator and bombardier.

"On one training mission, the weather was bad in Texas, and we went through a valley of mountains in New Mexico, turned around in Arizona and came back to Texas," he said. "I graduated from navigation school

as a 2nd Lieutenant making \$150 a month."

Waltman then went to Lincoln, Nebraska for a short course in high-altitude training on how to use an oxygen mask when flying higher than 12,000 feet. From there he went to Casper, Wyoming where he met his new crew — pilot Charles Culpepper from Texas, co-pilot Bob Brown from California and bombardier Bill Owen, also from Texas.

The crew also included six gunners. The engineer was the top turret gunner and the assistant engineer was the nose gunner.

"While in Casper we learned many things, including practicing being together, practicing flying in formation with other planes, and practicing dropping bombs using dummy bombs in the desert," Waltman said. "I had to learn how to take

pictures of the bombs dropping from the hatch of the plane with a big camera. I had no parachute and my feet were dangling down. I didn't even think about the danger."

In July 1944, Waltman completed his training and was sent to Fort Dix, New Jersey.

"We were quarantined and I couldn't even call my family who was just 50 miles away. We were due to board ships to go overseas to an unknown destination," Waltman said. "The ship I was on had been a passenger liner. We were treated very well. I looked out the window and saw a crane loading our belongings onto the ship. We left the New York Harbor crossing the Atlantic Ocean as part of a 150 ship convoy, landing in Liverpool, England. We were taken to an airfield which reminded me of a motor court with a line

of buildings with a single opening.

"It was barely daylight when we got there. I saw an English mosquito plane, a plane made out of plywood with a twin engine. He was flying real low. I saw a telephone pole. He pulled up, but the tail of the plane hit the crossbar of the pole and the plane spiraled down, crashed and exploded killing both the pilot and co-pilot."

He added, "We were truly introduced to war when we went by truck to burned out London where 6,000 English civilians were killed in raids by the Nazi Air Force, the Luftwaffe, as they sent bombs that would crash and do damage as they ran out of fuel."

**Part two of Reid Waltman's World War II service, including details on encounters while deployed, will be in Sunday's Daily Light.*

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PART TWO OF TWO

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97-year-old World War II veteran shares war stories

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Editor's note: It's not every day that we have an opportunity to celebrate the life and sacrifices of a World War II veteran. This story was also too good to let page constraints limited its telling, so we've broken it up into two parts and this is part two. Part one ran Friday in the Daily Light. We rejoin Reid Waltman, 97, during his first combat action in World War II.

After waiting 10 days on the southwest coast of England for the weather to clear up, Reid Waltman and his U.S. Air Force crew boarded a B-24 that had been converted from a bomb bay to bucket seats and headed to Italy.

"It was a one-way ticket from London to Rome," Waltman remembered. "We flew over the coast of France and Portugal to Casablanca in North Africa to Algiers, then over the Mediterranean to Italy."

They landed in Bari, Italy and were transported to their airfield in Cerignola, Italy where the airfield was the only flat place in southern Italy.

The base between Foggia and Bari was home to the 459th Bomber Group, 758th Bomb Squadron.

"We arrived there and it was a tent city," Waltman recalled. "The locals asked where everyone was. There were only four crews left out of fifteen crews. The other crews had either been captured as POW's, killed in action or had gone home after doing the required 50 combat



Reid Waltman, 97, pictured inside his Red Oak home and next to the bomber's jacket he wore during his World War II deployment, recently spoke to the Daily Light about his service in the U.S. Air Force.

missions. I learned to fly in formation and started doing combat missions and I did 50 combat missions."

Waltman's bomb group had been awarded a Distinguished Unit Citation by Major Nathan F. Twining for their accuracy in the bombing of an airplane factory in Voslau, Austria in April 1944. Waltman was then awarded the Greek Freedom Medal for his participation in the bombing in Greece that destroyed or damaged German transport planes. This was accomplished on his second combat mission on Sept. 24, 1944.

Waltman became a part

of the 758th Bomb Squadron. With the four remaining crews, this group began bombing missions over Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Northern Italy and Athens, Greece.

Waltman spoke of how they had to improvise in the tent cities to keep warm.

"It was extremely cold and we only had a heater we made out of a 55-gallon barrel which we cut in two," he detailed. "Since the tent had a wood floor, we used mortar and bricks to make a platform for the barrel to sit on. We fed it

aviation fuel to provide heat. There were some boxes with tin in them and the area was guarded by a sentry. We stole some of the boxes and used the tin to make a chimney for our heater."

He also spoke of the Germans and Axis forces taking over Italy, which forced Italy to get out of the war.

Waltman then recalled a close call in Bologna, Italy, where 1,000 B-24s and B-17s were flying a combat mission.

"There was stream after stream of bombers in the sky and we were near the end. There had been heavy anti-aircraft bombs going on, but by the time we got there, not one shell was fired at us," Waltman said. "We nearly got out of the Adriatic Sea and when we got to the east shore of Italy everyone got out of their flak suits, there was a German ship that nearly shot us down."

On another mission, Waltman put on every stitch of clothing he had under his wool suit and bomber jacket — and it still didn't provide enough warmth.

"We had almost reached Italy and I was on the flight deck behind the pilot," Waltman said. "The engineer that was stationed on the top turret said he was cold and needed to come down. We were at 28,000 feet. I grabbed him and pulled him down. His mask had frozen up and he was dead. I put my mask on him and got a walk around

SEE WALTMAN, A10

The story behind Waxahachie's fastest mail carrier

By Patty Hullett
Daily Light correspondent

Jamila Hendricks is a postal carrier, wife, mother, and college student that delivers her load of mail with more than one purpose in mind.

And she lives the large portion of her life on the run — literally. Hendricks is often seen running, or at least jogging, her daily mail route with the United States Postal Service.

Hendricks has been with the USPS for over six years now. When she moved to the Dallas area two years ago, she weighed in at 270 pounds. Since that time as a carrier for the Waxahachie Post Office, she has dropped a ton of weight.

This vivacious young woman and her husband recently purchased their first home, and now reside in Lancaster with their three young children ages seven, six, and four. Prior to moving to Texas, Jamila and her spouse had determined that they were going to see to it that their children ate balanced and healthy foods each day, and to not become "fast food" junkies.

"I'm not saying that we don't eat cookies or snack chips some days, but for the most part I cook hot, homemade meals every evening, so we can sit down together and eat as a family," Hendricks said. "We try to stay away from red meats, and we focus on using fish, nuts, vegetables, fruit and berries as our main staples."

Hendricks, 32, explained her first reason behind running her postal route is because she wants to eat healthily and to continue to stay as fit as possible. This became even more important after her doctor recently told her that she has an enlarged heart, so she

SEE HENDRICKS, A9

WALTMAN CONTINUED FROM A1

an oxygen tank, but before I was able to use it, I passed out.

"We were still at 28,000 feet and the co-pilot saw me. He got a walkaround oxygen tank for both of us. When I woke up, I was in the co-pilot's seat. He asked me where we were. I saw we were at 12,000 feet and had passed the head of the Adriatic Sea, so I knew where we were."

He continued, "At 12,000 feet we turned across the Yugoslavia mainland and we didn't know how much fuel we had. The assistant engineer came and checked the fuel level and asked if we wanted to go to Italy or jump. I was able to give our position and we found an airfield and after going around water spouts all over the Adriatic, we got on the radio and said May Day before we landed at Ancona on the east coast of Italy. The wind was very bad, and our pilot made the most wonderful landing we'd ever seen. We were on the runway and all four engines stopped as we ran out of gas."

Waltman explained that the British forces were in control of that portion of Italy and that the general was none too pleased to have U.S. soldiers and aircraft on his runway.

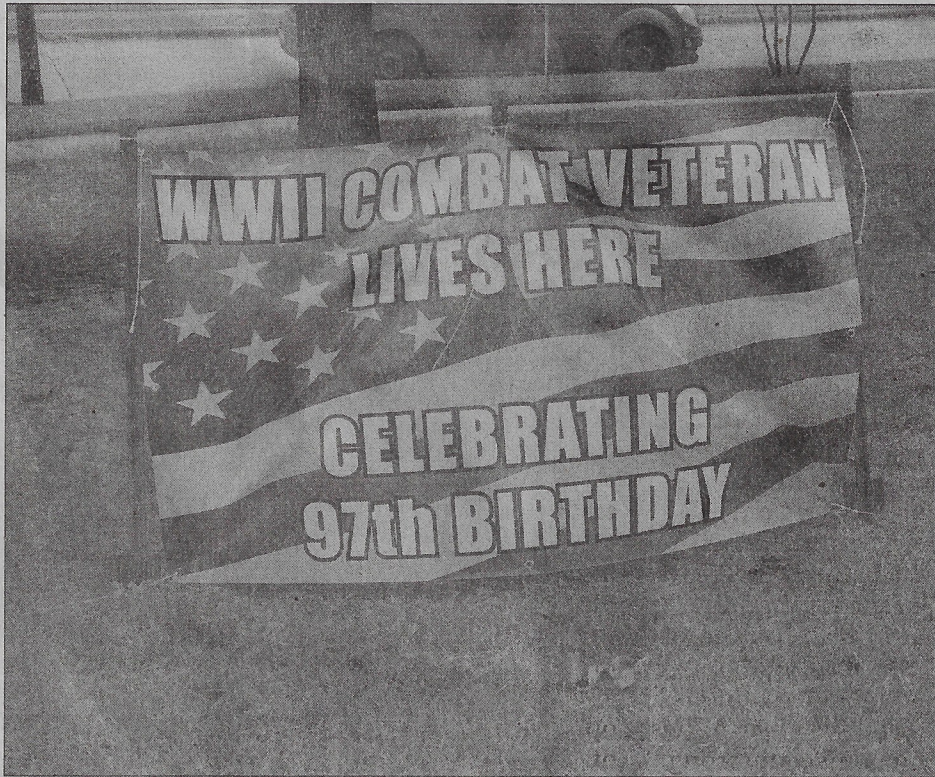
"The general wasn't too happy with us and told us to get off his runway," Waltman recalled. "A little tractor got us off his runway. We got fuel the next day and flew back to our base where we had a nice ceremony on Dec. 12, 1944, for our deceased engineer."

Waltman was never injured but remembers a piece of a German shell coming into their plane and getting stuck in his instruments.

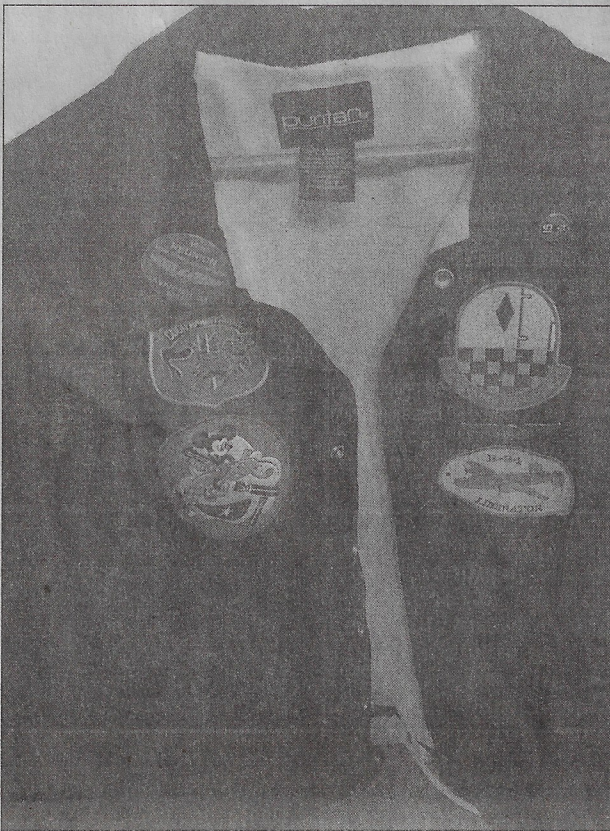
It wasn't his only close call, either.

"At the end of November I was asleep and the tent sergeant said we were needed in the briefing room," Waltman said. "We were given orders to fly at night 'lone wolf' into Munich, Germany and to keep the Germans on the ground and to drop bombs on the railroad. We had learned that the Germans had night flyers with lights on the nose of their planes.

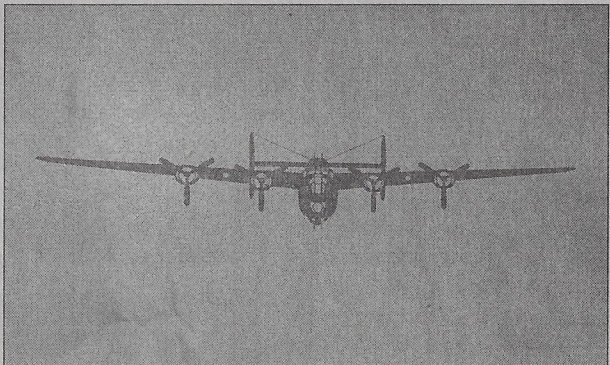
"We covered the windows on our plane. Our plane started shaking and our tail gunner said he saw a light and started firing. I uncovered our windows and saw



This sign stood outside of Reid Waltman's Red Oak home following his 97th birthday.



Reid Waltman's bomber jacket from his World War II deployment.



GUILA JACKSON/DAILY LIGHT



One of the aircraft that Reid Waltman flew missions in during World War II.

GUILA JACKSON/DAILY LIGHT

lights on the ground. The weather information we had received was wrong. We had the option of turning back or continuing. The Germans had their search light on looking for our one single plane. We hit the target, a marshaling yard or railroad yard the first time. We used our radar to get back to base in Italy because we couldn't see a thing. It was our first night mission."

He continued, "We flew another lone wolf solo mission. We had to use our radar because of the clouds at 25,000 feet. When we broke out of the clouds at 22,000 feet, there were clear blue skies. We looked out the windows and saw 12 German fighter planes. They didn't see us, but we sure saw them. We later found out we weren't the only Allied planes in the air that day."

Waltman also spoke of Lyle McCarthy, who wrote the history of his bombing group.

"He was up on a mission and he saw our plane and also another plane that was having mechanical problems and he saw 11 men parachute over Austria just as the plane blew up. As they parachuted through the clouds, five guys came in contact with Austrian partisans. The other five and one officer were captured by the Nazi soldiers. Harold Levine was the navigator and he was Jewish. The SS officer saw the H on his dog tags and immediately killed him."

Waltman then recalled yet another near miss during a night mission to Vienna after a successful day mission bombing of a Blechhammer, Germany synthetic oil refinery.

"Ice formed on our

wings. The plane became almost uncontrollable. We had to abort the mission. We weren't scared. We were young and thought we were invincible," Waltman said. "[...] We flew in formation when the weather cleared with several other units to Linz, Austria which is right on the Blue Danube. We got over the target and dropped our bombs and one, a 500-pound bomb, got hung up in the bomb bay. The bomb bay walking area is about a foot wide. Our bombardier sat out and tried to manually open the bomb bay doors and tried to kick the bomb out, but that didn't work. Coffee Tower was outcall name and we radioed that we had a live bomb on board.

"There was a single gravel runway. Everyone cleared it and we made a good landing and as we were taxiing, we hit a bump and the bomb fell out and the Italian workers saw the bomb tumbling after the plane and they were scrambling around. The bomb didn't go off.

"Another time, an idiot, someone in a high position, felt we didn't need both a bombardier and navigator on every flight, so we took turns being bombardier or navigator on the ground with the other on the plane. An order came down that we had to stand down. The crew said I was a good bombardier, but the bombardier was not a good navigator."

Waltman, after a little more thought, then recalled another near miss when their plane got shot up pretty bad.

"We lost an engine and had to do what's called 'feather the prop' and flew with just three engines," he explained. "We became stragglers and couldn't keep up. We still had our bombs and we decided as a crew to find an alternate target. We knew the Germans had an airfield in Udine in northeastern Italy so we dropped our bombs over the marshaling yards and got the hell out of there.

"On another mission, we were to bomb another city in Austria and like Linz, we had good weather. We flew in box formation through Brenner Pass which is in the Alps between Italy and Austria. We knew from intelligence that the Germans had anti-aircraft missiles, so we made a right turn.

"We saw that one of the squadrons didn't make the turn. Four of the seven planes in the

squadron were shot down and three made it. We didn't know why they didn't make the turn. I still wonder to this day why they didn't make the turn. We lost a total of 40 men that day, ten from each of the four planes. It was so tragic."

After leaving the military in May 1945 and moving to Texas in 1948, Waltman was an employee of Continental Oil, which is now Conoco Phillips. He was also a 55-year member of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists in Tyler.

Waltman speaks fondly of the Sons of Liberty Museum in Las Colinas which is run by Robert Coalter.

"This museum has 1,000 mannequins dressed in different military uniforms, mine as well as the uniforms of Clark Gable and Audie Murphy," Waltman said. "They recently had a three-day display early in June at the State Capitol in Austin. My uniform was part of that display."

In 2000, Waltman learned that his bombing group had an association and he became an active member and served as the association's vice president.

"There isn't many of us left," he said. "We went to D.C. and saw the World War II Memorial. I went to the Greek embassy and an attaché gave me a medal for the mission we flew over Athens that destroyed a German airfield."

During his military career, Waltman received the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with four clusters, with each cluster representing each additional 10 missions flown after the first five.

His first wife recently passed away, but that marriage produced three children, William, Barbara and Barry. Waltman is currently married to Betty Jo and they live with her daughter, Heather Maynard, in Red Oak.

Waltman also showed a sense of humor when he spoke of his son, William, a graduate of the United States Naval Academy. He explained that William is a helicopter pilot and once had to deliver 6,000 eggs to a ship.

The cargo was in a net on a sling when the wind caught it and dumped the eggs.

"There were a lot of scrambled eggs that day," he chuckled.