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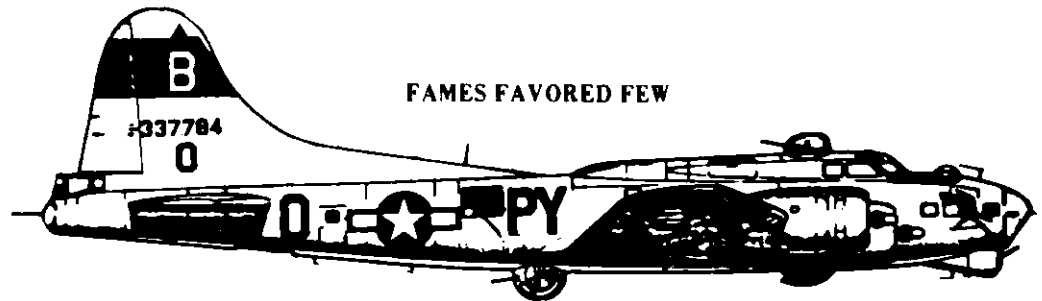
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92nd Bombardment Group NEWS



**Come On Down --- For The Reunion
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OCTOBER 1988

Only Man In World to Hold Caterpillar, Boot and Fish Awards Promoted to Full Colonel

The only man in the world to hold the Caterpillar, the Boot and the Fish Awards, was promoted to the rank of full colonel in the U.S. Air Force Reserve.

He is David C. Besbris, a supervisory contracting officer at SAMSO.

None of the new colonel's odd awards are official, but all have become aviation traditions.

Caterpillar

The Caterpillar is emblematic of membership in the Caterpillar Club which is restricted to people who have bailed out of a plane in an emergency.

The Boot and Fish are honorary awards. The Boot is given to airmen shot down over enemy territory who walked to freedom. The Fish similarly denotes those who have bailed out in the English channel.

Believe-It-Or-Not

Winning all three of these awards is so unusual that Besbris was featured a few years ago in Robert L. Ripley's "Believe -It-Or-Not" series and on the radio program based on his collection of unusual occurrences.

Canada

Besbris started his military career in the Canadian Air Force after being rejected for physical reasons by the U.S. Army. However, in 1942 he was transferred back to our own air force.

He became a B-17 navigator with the 92nd Bomb Group in England, and participated in the first American

War heroes share bond of survival

In memoriam, 1988:

It was a war on a scale that words cannot describe. An entire generation, born since then, has nothing with which to compare it. How can you grasp the enormousness of a world engulfed, vast cities bombed to rubble, armadas of war planes sweeping over Europe and the Pacific, raining bombs, and deaths in the tens of millions?

They brought Joe Musial, now a retired Miami police criminal identification officer, back to the Belgian village of Macquenoise this month. They brought him and former pilot Howard Snyder back as heroes, to honor them with speeches and a torchlight parade. The emotional impact was stunning.

And Musial, 70, a man of quiet depths, walked over the ground where he almost died. And he thought back 44 years to Feb. 8, 1944, the day of smoke and fire. That's when the German fighter planes blasted his B-17 bomber and they went spiraling down, with Joe's left leg blown off and two crewmen dead and people bailing out. He told me, Saturday, what he thought about as he walked that ground two weeks ago, an old man remembering:

"The B-17 was in a descending spiral when I jumped. I blacked out momentarily, then came to and pulled my rip cord. The plane hit and broke up. My pilot, Snyder, came down in the woods, hung up in the trees. Three Belgians came and cut him free. I landed with my mangled leg....."

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raid of the war against the German heavy water plant in Norway.

On his 12th mission he was credited with shooting down a FW-190, but his own plane was so badly damaged it had to ditch in the channel. Besbris, who cannot swim, survived 13 hours in the channel with the help of a Mae West life vest, and received his Fish award from the British.

Three missions later, in November 1943, he was shot down on another Norway raid. He bailed out to qualify for membership in the Caterpillar Club.

Long Walk

He successfully evaded capture through his knowledge of mountaineering gained as a boy in New England. After contacting the Norwegian underground, he started his long walk to freedom in Sweden.

During his flight, he traveled on skis, sleighs and by foot. Once he rode a train through a section controlled by the Germans. He bit his lip so blood in his mouth would give an excuse for his inability to speak.

Sweden

He finally made his way into Sweden where he was treated as a refugee instead of being interned, because he walked across the border.

Upon return to England he received the winged shoe "Boot" emblem to commemorate his ordeal.

For awhile he lectured to replacements on evasion techniques and then returned to the U.S. where he was surprised to be appointed WAF recruiting officer at Governor's Island, N.Y.

Reserves

Although discharged after the World War II, Besbris remained in the reserves and was called to active duty during the Korean conflict.

His current reserve mobilization assignment is with the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.

Reprinted from "Astro News" July 26, 1968 issue.

Rescue Reunion-Former Navigator reminisces with women who saved him in WWII

Back during WWII, David Besbris bailed out of his disabled B-17 bomber into a sort of classic good news/bad news story.

First the good news: Separated from his crew, the lieutenant survived the jump into the snow covered mountains of Norway. Then the bad news: He had indeed survived the jump into the snow covered mountains of Norway.

"It's a lonely feeling looking up and seeing our planes fly over on their way back to England and you're all alone in a freezing-cold, Nazi-occupied country," the Manhattan Beach resident said.

He is, however, quick to remind one that he was not then the confident, comfortably off, retired Air Force Colonel who now stands before us.

"I was just this Jewish kid from New England, so scared that the first thing I did was throw away my dog tags with the 'H' for Hebrew, on them."

The second thing he did was start walking in the direction of neutral Sweden, not an easy task in a leather flight suit with a silk parachute over his shoulder.

Besbris, now a civilian Air Force aerospace contract negotiator, dredged the old story recently because of a woman sitting beside him in his living room.

She is Tone Pytten, one of the people who, all those years ago, risked death or a trip to a concentration camp to save the downed airman.

"I've been back to Norway twice over the years and twice I missed her," he said, looking at the tiny, vivacious woman. "We exchanged letters over the years, but we haven't seen each other until this week."

Besbris story sounds like something out of a WWII movie. Handsome-American-on-the-run-meets-17-year-old-farm-girl-in-the-wilds-of-Norway.

"But unlike the movies, I behaved myself. After all, she was just a kid," said Besbris, who was 24 at the time.

After his harrowing escape from the country, he married and raised a family.

Pytten, a retired office worker, never married. But, like him, she did not forget the close friendship they developed despite the fact they couldn't speak each others language.

Thinking back on the three months they spent together, Besbris shakes his head.

"Strictly speaking, if I had known how to swim back in November 1943, I never would have met her," he said.

Having parachuted from another bomber several months earlier into the freezing English Channel (he was rescued and returned to England by French resistance fighters), he was in no mood to try it again.

"So I left as soon as the pilot gave the 'Prepare to jump' command", he said, noting that the others landed near a village, were captured and ended the war as prisoners.

In a country filled with informers, Besbris walked up to a farmhouse and surrendered himself to luck.

"I was alone, helpless. I had to trust the three men I met at the house or I was going to die," he said.

Besbris gave them his silk parachute (he later found out it was made into a wedding shirt). They gave him money, an interpreter, an English-Norwegian dictionary and placed him with a farm family in an even more isolated area of the country.

Reprinted from "The Daily Breeze" July 22, 1984 issue.

Department of the Air Force
Presents the Award
for Meritorious Civilian Service
to David C. Besbris

Citation:

In recognition of his distinguished performance as The Contracting Officer for the Aerospace Contracts Management Office, Headquarters Space Division, from 1973 to 1987. His innovative and professional skills resulted in major contributions to programs of vital national importance. Such contributions include the incorporation of government transportation requests (GTR's) in the contract with the Aerospace Corporation. Through his outstanding ability in preparing requests for proposals and negotiating contracts with terms and conditions favorable to the government interests, the

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