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Irene (Coulter) Bunting, a LaMoille graduate of 1933 and wife of Don Bunting who was a World War II veteran, made a generous memorial contribution to the LaMoille military monument and to the memory book about the community.

Don died July 11, 2001, and is buried at LaMoille Elmwood Cemetery. This is his story, along with a friend Jack Jones, as it appeared in the Times-Republican newspaper.

'It isn't just another movie'

For local veterans,
'Pearl Harbor' brings
back images of attack

By ROB MERRITT
T-R City Editor

The explosions were a little too big. The special effects were a bit over the top.

And, of course, there was that whole "romance" going on.

Even so, one thing was clear: the movie version of "Pearl Harbor" brought plenty of memories back for two local residents who were actually there.

For Don Bunting of Marshalltown and Jack Jones of LeGrand, the sight of attacking Japanese planes and American devastation is more than just a Hollywood special effect. They still remember. They still can see it as if it just happened.

"To a lot of kids who go to see this movie, it's not going to be real to them," said Bunting after a screening of the film at Marshalltown's Plaza 5 Theatres. "For them, it's just another movie. But not for me."

A different era

Bunting served in the United States Army, Jones in the Navy. Both were stationed in Hawaii when the attack came.

Both men are native Iowans; Bunting remembers how, growing up on Summit Street, many of his neighbors wound up enlisting at the same time he did. In fact, Bunting gave one local recruit, Dale Dunham, a ride to the military base to enlist. The two would cross paths again at Pearl Harbor.

Jones was young when he enlisted; in fact, he was barely 18 when he was stationed on the U.S.S. Tennessee.

It was a patriotic time, when men lined up in droves to enlist and families back home pitched in to help. Jones' wife, Julie,

was 14 when the United States entered World War II; she remembers her family recycling every piece of scrap material they used and volunteering wherever they could.

Bunting and Jones never met in Pearl Harbor. In fact, they never crossed paths until Wednesday, when they sat down to view Hollywood's take on their experiences. Yet they share a common bond: What they went through on Dec. 7, 1941.

'I'd better take some cover'

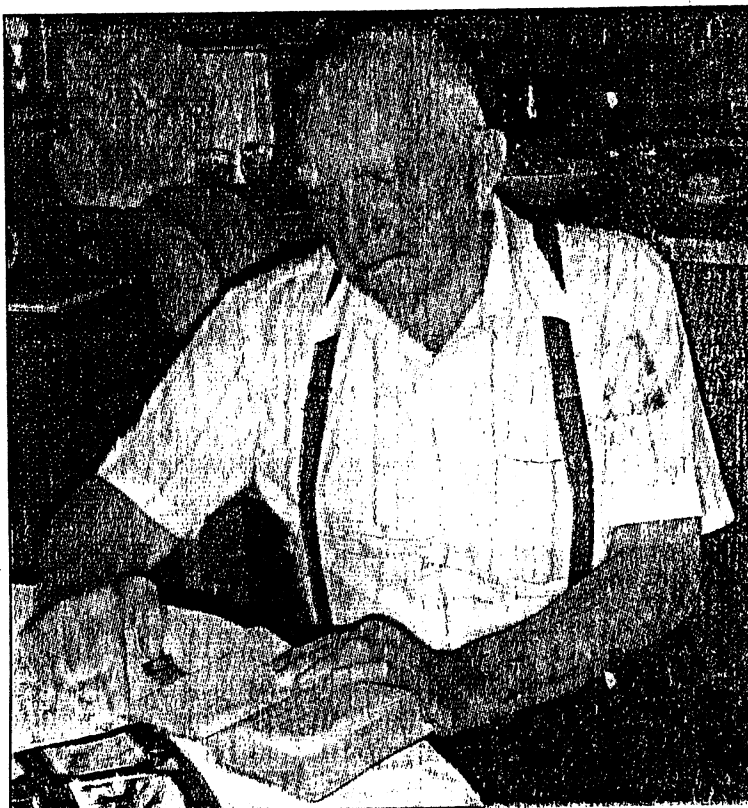
Bunting was 23 years old, stationed as a truck driver with the 35th Infantry. His barracks were close to Wheeler Field, one of

the two main airfields near Pearl Harbor.

The memories of those days are still vivid. Bunting can even remember the breakfast he was eating on Dec. 7, when the explosions began.

"I was having some pancakes, and then when the shots began, I figured it was just a 21-gun salute or something," Bunting said. "I didn't think anything more about it, so I finished my breakfast. But when I walked outside, I saw the Japanese Zero planes fly by, and I could see the tracer fire hitting Wheeler Field."

Veterans ...
Continued on Page 2A



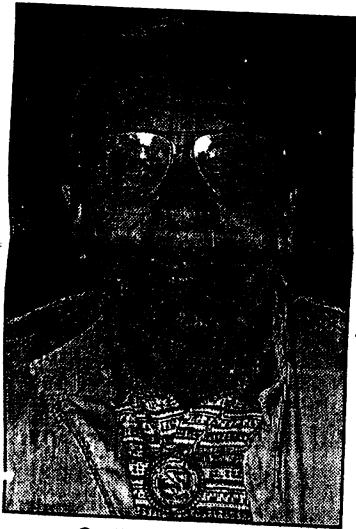
Staff photo by Rob Merritt

After viewing the film "Pearl Harbor," WWII veteran Don Bunting of Marshalltown reads over his diary entry from the day of the attack nearly 60 years ago. The fear and confusion of that day is clear in his writing; one entry reads, "Slept in own bunk last night with my rifle in my right hand, ready to go."

For local survivors of Pearl Harbor, film brings back memories of fateful morning

Veterans/From 1A

With no weapons and still not sure what was happening, Bunting got on his bicycle and headed for the airfield. When he arrived, he found that over 130 planes had already been destroyed by the Japanese. Only five brand-new P-40s remained, less than 40 feet away from Bunting.



Staff photo by Rob Merritt
Jack Jones of LeGrand wears his honorary Pearl Harbor Veterans medal. Jones was in the U.S. Navy during the Japanese attack on Dec. 7, 1941.

Then another Zero came diving in, opening fire. Just that quickly, the remaining five planes were in flames.

"When I saw that happen, I said to myself, 'I'd better take some cover,'" Bunting recalled. "I could have thrown a baseball and hit that plane. I was that close."

Bunting jumped onto his bicycle and rode as fast as he could to the barracks. He needed his gun.

'But it's Sunday'

At the same time the airfields were under attack, Jones remembers how odd things felt Sunday morning. The Navy's bugle was sounding.

"I heard that, and I thought, 'Hey, this is Sunday,'" he said. "I figured that they must have a new bugle player who didn't know what he was doing, or something like that."

Jones stepped out onto the deck of the U.S.S. Tennessee to investigate. The 18-year-old crewman saw several planes flying overhead. Nothing unusual — until he saw the big red spot on the side. Japanese Zeroes.

That was when the torpedoes hit the U.S.S. Virginia, which was docked right behind the Tennessee. "They hit the Virginia and I saw her just sort of raise up into the air and come back down," Jones said.

What happened next was utter

confusion, laced with fire and chaos. Jones couldn't go to his battle station; that was on one of the ship's 16-inch guns, which were useless against small targets like airplanes. Jones' commanding officer had been shot. And bombs were smashing onto the decks of the American fleet with terrifying force.

"We were surrounded by the other American ships, so we were safe from the torpedo attacks," Jones said. "But we did take some damage on the deck."

Jones and several of his crew mates picked up their commander and carried him below decks to the infirmary. Once they arrived, they found themselves surrounded by wounded countrymen.

"I stayed below decks after that," Jones said.

Atmosphere of shock

In the days after the attack, there was an atmosphere of shock in Pearl Harbor. Jones recalled riding around the harbor in a boat, taking in the damage. Ships were still burning. Bodies of his crew mates were being removed from the water.

Bunting went to bed expecting a second attack to come any minute. He wrote in his journal on Dec. 8, "Slept in own bunk last night with my rifle in my right hand, ready to go."

Yet there was another change as well: How people in Hawaii treated members of the military after the attack.

"On December 6, nobody who saw us in the street talked to us," Bunting said. "We were dogs. On December 8, we were heroes. People looked at us very differently."

Both men agree: The attack on Pearl Harbor stirred a desire for revenge. Jones headed for the South Pacific, and was on one of the ships that launched the invasion of North Africa. He remained at sea for the duration of the war. With him was the first letter he received from his mother after she found out he'd survived Pearl Harbor. Jones still has that letter to this day.

Bunting went to Guadalcanal. Back in Marshalltown, his sister recognized him on a newsreel about the war when she went to see a movie.

"She stood up in the theatre and said, 'That's my brother,'" Bunting recalled. "Later, the projectionist gave her a piece of the film that had me on it."

Both men came home safe. Over the years, they've become members of various Pearl Harbor veterans' organizations; Jack is a lifetime member of the National Pearl Harbor Survivors' Association.

"There's getting to be fewer every year," he notes.

In some cases, the emotions of the war are still fresh. Bunting strongly resents it when members of his family buy a Japanese car. Jones visited the U.S.S. Arizona Memorial in Hawaii on the 50-year anniversary of the attack, and is considering a second trip there for the 60th anniversary this coming winter.

"I took a lot of pictures when I was stationed there," Jones said. "When I went back, I took the same pictures again, from the same locations. To remember."

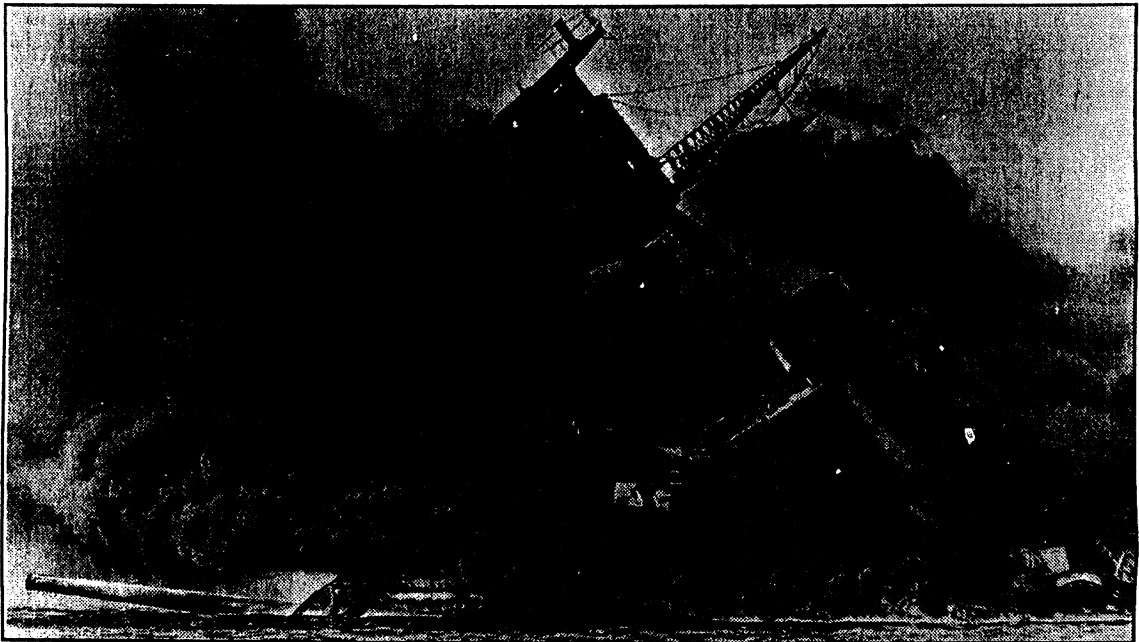
Judging the film

After the final credits rolled on "Pearl Harbor," Jones and Bunting came out with mixed feelings.

Both agreed that the special effects went over the top at times, especially the explosions. Bunting recalled that many of the U.S. planes burned to the ground, rather than exploding, and he questioned the appearance of the "tracer fire" in the film. Jones, for his part, doesn't remember the explosions in the harbor as quite so, well, explosive.



Below, Bunting relaxes on his bunk in the Hawaii barracks near Wheeler Field in 1941. The soldiers kept themselves amused by having their pictures taken with Bunting's cardboard cutout of the "Chesterfield Girl."



AP Photo

This Dec. 7, 1941 file photo shows the results of the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, as the USS Arizona went down in flames and smoke. Jack Jones of LeGrand was an 18-year-old sailor in the Navy when the attack happened. He was stationed on the U.S.S. Tennessee, which was docked between the Arizona and the U.S.S. Virginia, and witnessed much of the violence firsthand.

"I don't know about all of those fireballs," he said. "I just remember a lot of smoke."

However, other details were accurate for the two.

"The part where guys were picking up rifles off the ground and shooting at enemy planes — I saw that happen," said Jones.

The men were also impressed by details of the story, like when the military picked up enemy planes on radar before the attack but dismissed them.

The men were divided on the love story of the film, which depicts a nurse (Kate Beckinsale) torn between two best friends (Ben Affleck and Josh Hartnett) who both love her.

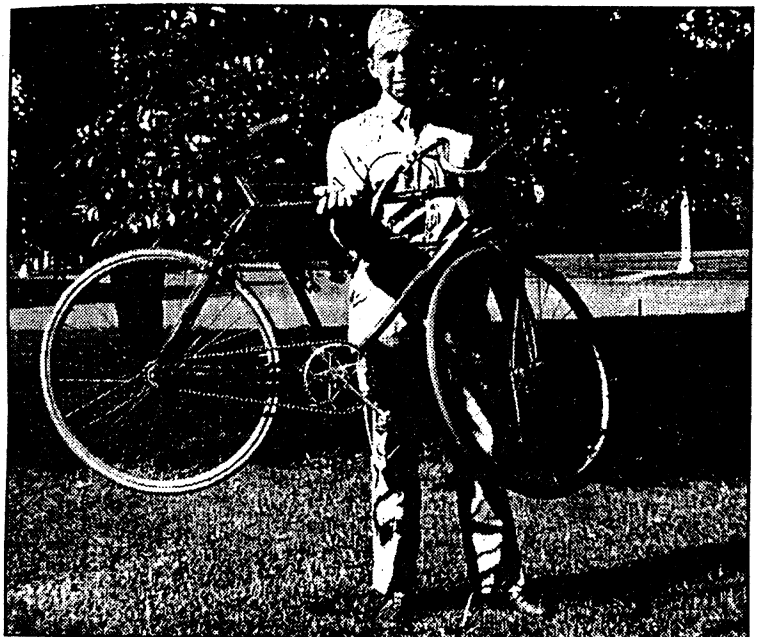
"I'd recommend the film," Jones said. "It gets the point across about what happened. The way they set up the movie, the love story kind of fit in."

Bunting disagreed, saying he wasn't fond of the dramatic

license taken in "Pearl Harbor."

"The romance didn't need to be there," he said. "I would have preferred to see it done more like a documentary. When you're sharing history, that 'love story' thing isn't really necessary."

"Besides," he adds with a laugh, "it wasn't realistic. I gave up all girls when I joined the military."



Contributed photos

Above, 23-year-old Don Bunting holds up the bicycle that he used for transportation while stationed at Pearl Harbor in 1941. A member of the U.S. Army 35th Infantry, Bunting would later ride that same bike to safety during the Japanese attack.

'They have to understand'

Both veterans did agree on one point: the movie will help younger viewers to understand what happened at Pearl Harbor 60 years ago.

Why men like Don Bunting shouldn't be forgotten

I'd just come back from lunch when I learned the news.

"Did you hear that Don Bunting died?" a colleague asked.

It took me a second to take that in. I'd seen no obituary. No one had called me. Yet there it was. Don was gone.

And the ink is still barely dry from the news story I wrote about him a month ago.

In June I took two local veterans with me to see the movie "Pearl Harbor" at the Plaza 5 Theatres. People always debate over the accuracy of a historical film, but I figured no one could judge it better than two men who had actually witnessed the attack firsthand.

I went to the film with Don and with Jack Jones of LeGrand. Don was in the barracks near Wheeler Field when the Japanese attacked; Jones was on one of the ships in the harbor. Both experienced the battle firsthand.

The men had never met before seeing the film, but even so, as fellow veterans you could sense a connection between them right away. I asked my fair share of questions, but often I was content to sit back and listen to them trade stories.

Bunting had some of the more humorous criticisms of the film. He commented that the love story of "Pearl Harbor" was unrealistic, because "I gave up all girls when I went into the service." He had some of the best

one-liners relating to foreign cars that I've heard in some time. He was a great dinner companion.

The Bottom Line

Rob
Merritt



After the film, I went over to Bunting's house to take pictures of his war memorabilia. He still had the journal that he'd kept when he was stationed in Pearl Harbor; his entry from after the attack read, "Slept in own bunk last night with my rifle in my right hand, ready to go."

He described in vivid detail what he saw that day. It painted a vivid picture for me, a curious 25-year-old who had never seen war but wanted to understand.

Bunting cracked me up with the various photos he'd taken in his barracks with the "Chesterfield Girl." He'd found a cardboard cut-out of the character during the war, and posed it on his bunk so that it would appear she was the real thing. You could tell from the photos how much fun he and his fellow servicemen were having, even in the midst of war.

I spoke with Don again a few

days later, when I returned his photos to him after scanning them into our computer. He encouraged me to come back and visit more often.

I was planning to come see him within the next week, now that our "Lest We Forget" veterans' series is running. I wanted to tell him that the article about him and Jack was more or less the prototype for how our current series would look, with the mix of current photos and classic pictures and documents. I was going to thank him for being "my guinea pig."

Sadly, Don passed on before I had the chance.

My fellow editor Andy Paugh put it well in the moments after we learned.

"At least we got to tell his story before it happened," he said after a moment. "At least people got to learn about him."

That's true. That's the whole reason why we started doing this veterans' series in the first place. When WWII veterans are dying at a rate of thousands per day — and there are still so many who haven't told their stories — there's a wealth of information we lose with each one.

We can't afford that.

Had we waited two more months, we never would have heard Don's reflections on "Pearl Harbor," or recount his experiences, or have him contribute his old journal entries and pictures. It would have been too



Don Bunting 1917-2001

late. But we spoke to him in time. Now, any time I want to revisit what Don taught me, I can.

I spoke with Don's widow, Irene, shortly after I learned the news. She said something that, despite my grief, brought a smile to my face.

"I can't tell you how much that story meant to Don," she said. "It was all he talked about once it came out."

I still feel stunned as I write this. Just a month ago Don and I were sitting in a movie theatre together, trading jokes. He was a kind man, content with his life and proud of his achievements in WWII. I'm glad I had the chance to hear what he had to say.

From the beginning, my heart and soul have been behind the T-R's "Lest We Forget" series.

Thanks to Don, I've been reminded of why.

Bill Baltisberger navigated his way through 3 missions over Europe



By ROB MERRITT
T-R City Editor
Part 49 of a series

Bill Baltisberger had never even been in an airplane before the start of World War II.

Yet war thrusts people into unexpected roles — and the Marshalltown native found himself working as a navigator for a B-17 bombing crew, flying missions against Nazi Germany. He was still a teenager at the time.

"We had to shoulder the responsibility of taking care of the best interests of our country," he says today. "That's an incredible responsibility at that age; I don't think we had a guy in our plane who was over 22 years of age."

"But I believe that, in the same situation, the young people of today would respond the same way we did," he continued. "I don't see any reason why they wouldn't."

Learning to navigate

Baltisberger enlisted in the military, rather than waiting to be drafted. That way, he figured, he would have his choice of where to serve — and he had his eye on the Army Air Corps.

"An attorney here in town, Chris Becker, convinced me that it was a good idea, because it was a relatively new branch," Baltisberger said. "I didn't want to be a pilot; I had no desire to. But I wanted to be a navigator, because it was a job that involved planning the mission and that appealed to me."

Baltisberger enlisted in late 1942 and was sent to gunnery school for six weeks. Training would include

going up in an airplane, manning a 50-caliber gun and shooting at a "tow-target" being pulled by another plane. The idea was that this lesson would teach gunners how to shoot down enemy fighters.

It was Baltisberger's first time in a plane. His first time firing machine guns. Yet the scope of it all didn't intimidate him.

"When you're 18 years old you think you can do anything," he said. "It was like one big new adventure."

Forming crews

Baltisberger completed his training in December of 1943. From there, crews of 10 men were formed for each plane.

"The rest of the crews were already put together; they were just waiting for us navigators," he said.

The men were sent to Carney, Nebraska, where there was a whole new supply of B-17 bomber planes waiting for them. Once Baltisberger's crew was assigned to their craft, they flew it to Presque Isle, Maine — and then on to England, stopping in Newfoundland for fuel.

The men were on their way to a new country, a great unknown, and a deadly war. Yet such thoughts were far from Baltisberger's mind during the trip. Instead, he was thinking of more immediate concerns. After all, he was the plane's navigator — and this was his biggest test so far.

"The only thing that concerned me was that I had to be damn sure I found Scotland," he says with a laugh.

Needless to say, Baltisberger fulfilled his duties just fine, and upon arrival the men joined the 452nd Bombing Group. The 452nd had only been there a short time, but they'd already suffered heavy losses in their bombing raids; Baltisberger's crew served as replacements.

The men had only been there a few days when they flew their first mission over Augsberg, Germany. Baltisberger would go on to fly five missions with that crew before he was transferred to a much larger role: Navigator on the group's lead plane.



Staff Photo by Rob Merritt/Contributed Photo

Bill Baltisberger of Marshalltown shows the Silver Star he earned for successfully flying his damaged plane back to base after the pilot had been killed in an attack. Baltisberger, who was a navigator in the 452nd Bombing Group, considers it his most precious award.



Contributed Photo

Baltisberger (shown in top row, far right) poses with the crew he flew his first five missions of WWII with. After that, he was transferred to the crew of the lead plane.



Contributed Photo

An on-board camera in Baltisberger's bombing group captured this photo of a damaged B-17 plummeting to the ground during an attack. The risk for flight crews was always great, thanks to the never-ending wave of enemy fire.

The lead plane

Each bombing group would fly in a "wing" of 39 ships, where everyone else followed the lead plane. "Until you become part of the lead crew, you just fly back in formation and follow," Baltisberger said.

Each morning, the men would have breakfast before sunrise, then at 5:30 go to a briefing room. A curtain would be pulled back to reveal a map of Germany, with yarn strung up to show the path of attack.

As navigator, Baltisberger had to study that path carefully — not only to know where they were supposed to go, but exactly how long it should take. One example was Control Point No. 1, the location planes had to fly over on their way to the main target.

"That was the job of the lead navigator, to get all the planes on time and on course to Control Point Number 1," he explained. "The reason is because two minutes later, another wing of 39 planes would be

coming past the same control point. There might be 500 planes flying a mission on a given morning, and they all pass through there."

Baltisberger's job was complicated further by the absence of radar. Crews didn't get radar installed in their planes until after D-Day, so they had to find targets based solely on navigation.

Taking control

The month of May was a dark one for Baltisberger and his crew. They lost their plane, "Dog Breath," over the English Channel during a battle with German fighter planes. The wing caught fire, sending the plane into a downward spiral, and the men were forced to bail out into the water. Baltisberger only counted eight parachutes, meaning that right away he knew two of his crewmates didn't make it out.

The men spent 30 minutes floating in the icy waters; Baltisberger was unconscious by the time he was rescued. Another 15 minutes in that water, he was later told, and he would have died of over-exposure.

The men also lost another plane during a bombing raid. An artillery

shell came right up into the plane, killing the pilot and severely injuring the co-pilot.

The easiest thing to do would have been to bail out; however, other members of the crew were injured as well. Baltisberger knew they had to get back to base for medical attention.

The tailgunner had training as a pilot, so he and Baltisberger took over the controls under the guidance of the injured co-pilot, who offered what assistance he could in spite of the pain.

The men made it safely back to base in what was left of their damaged B-17, which would never fly again. The men earned a Silver Star for their efforts; Baltisberger also earned a Purple Heart for injuries he sustained in the leg — although he doesn't look on that medal the same way.

"I don't really talk about the Purple Heart because it doesn't really seem fair," he said. "Other guys got the medal for horrible injuries, lost limbs, getting crippled ... And I got the same medal for this little thing on my leg. It just never seemed right."



Contributed Photo

Members of Baltisberger's crew receive medals for a completed mission. Baltisberger is visible second from left.

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....and when you
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Bill Baltisberger has helped the LaMoille Alumni in many ways to get this book published. Even though he did not live in the community he married Barbara Benson (Class of 1942) and has farmed for several years around LaMoille and is well known. Several people asked to have his military story added to our book.

Thanks Bill for helping and for your duty to our nation and world.

Flying a drone

Baltisberger flew a total of 31 missions. After that, his new role was to help train future lead crews.

However, there would still be one more, somewhat unusual, mission for him to complete.

Baltisberger was asked to navigate for a "drone" plane. "Those were planes that had flown too many missions and were no longer considered safe," he said. "So you flew them into targets instead, and bailed out at the last moment. But they were highly unreliable, to say the least."

The plane he and another man were in was supposed to crash into a bridge. The pair understood that upon reaching the target, they would see "smoke signals" from the members of the French Resistance who would meet them on the ground and guide them to safety.

"Is this it?" the other man asked Baltisberger when they arrived.

"Yeah," Baltisberger replied.

"But there's no smoke signals."

"But this is it."

"We better get out, then!"

The men bailed out and hit the ground at around 4 p.m. Their plane successfully hit its target — but now they were alone in enemy territory, with the expected assistance a no-show.

"We had been taught about escape; the first thing you do is try to just disappear for the first 24 hours," Baltisberger said. "But the Germans got there with search dogs. It didn't take long for them to find us."

The men were taken to an interrogation center, where they were grilled about their mission.

"To start with, they were friendly to us," Baltisberger said. "But they got angry once they realized we weren't going to tell them anything. They separate you. They isolate you. They make you think the whole world is against you."

The men spent two weeks as German prisoners. Then, when they were being moved to another interrogation center, they saw their chance to escape.

"They weren't paying attention to what was happening, so another guy says to me, 'Let's get the hell out of here, Baldy,'" Baltisberger recalled. "So I said, 'I'm with you.' And we ran."

The men walked at night for the next two weeks; with no map to guide them, Baltisberger used celestial navigation to find his way. "We knew if we just kept walking west, eventually we'd reach the front lines," he said.

Eventually, the men made contact with a farmer somewhere between Germany and France. They hid on the farm for two days watching for German soldiers, then made their move.

"We drew straws to see who would approach that farmer," Baltisberger said. "We figured that if one of us got killed, the other would still have a chance."

As it turned out, the farmer was on their side and promised help.

The next night, two members of the resistance came and led them back to where the Americans were.

"We always had hope that we would make it," Baltisberger said. "And we did."

Looking back

Upon his return, Baltisberger's flying days were over. He went back to the United States and spent the remainder of the war in Houston, TX, before being discharged in Sept. 1945.

He went on to college at Iowa State.

"Life has to go on," he said. "If I wasn't going to be in the military, I had to decide what I was going to do with my life. And by then the GI Bill was there; that was a great thing to be able to take advantage of."

In 1947, Baltisberger married his wife Barbara; just when it seemed his life was back to normal, he was recalled for duty in the Korean War on a B-29.

"It's a lot different when you go over there married and with two kids than it is when you go over there single," he said. "You have a lot more to lose; it makes you a lot less gung-ho."

However, he returned safely, and this time for good. He and his wife had a total of three children, Nancy, Sandy and Linda.

Looking back, Baltisberger says his proudest moment of the war was flying his damaged plane back to base — because it meant bringing his crewmates home safely.

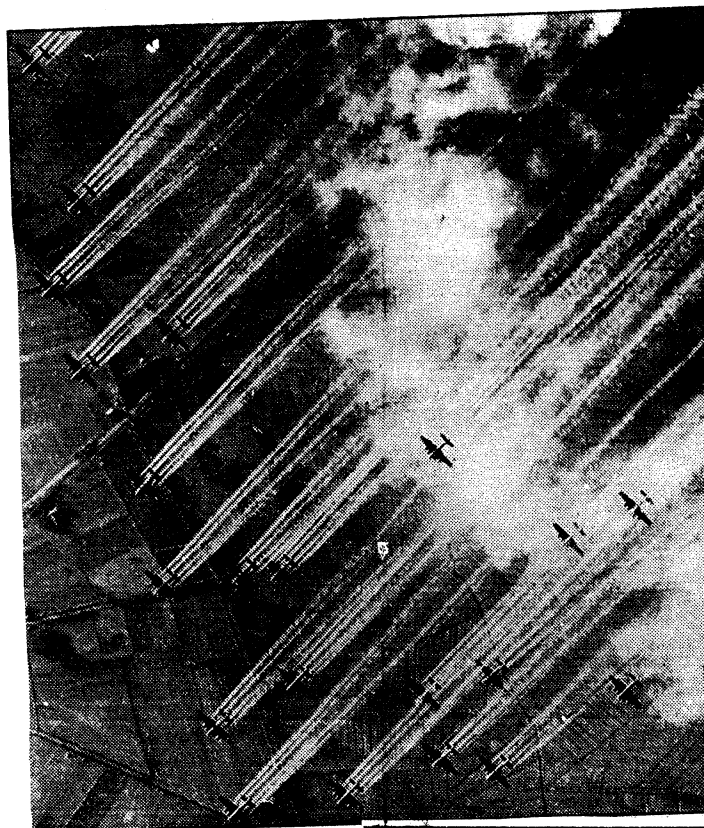
"Any time we were over a target, if anybody got wounded, we were four hours from medical help," he said. "I'm sure we lost a lot of guys because of that. If you're in Berlin, it's four hours back to base, and extremely cold up there, with no heat or pressurization. A lot of guys bled to death."

"So to know that we were able to bring back guys who were hurt, and see them live — that was a special moment for me," he said. "I'll never forget that."



Contributed Photo

Above, a B-17 in Baltisberger's bomber group flies through enemy "flak" as it explodes all around. Below, bomber group approaches its target in formation.



Contributed Photo

Bill Baltisberger (left) lights a cigarette for his captain during one of the crew's more light-hearted moments on the ground.