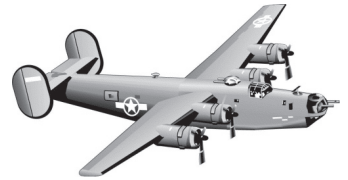




Flightline



Newsletter of the 780th Bombardment Squadron of WWII

June 2017

Piloting kept his mind off the danger outside **780th pilot: 'Others gave more'**

Editor's note: 780th pilot and flight leader Capt. Frank J. Teagarden passed away in January at the age of 97 (see Your Letters, inside). The Flightline was not able to find an obituary for Teagarden, but it did find this Houston Chronicle article from November 10, 2010. Teagarden vividly recounts his memories of several missions and what it was like to fly to the worst targets in Europe. The Flightline will publish an obituary if one is found or submitted, but hopefully this article, and the letter inside, serve to honor Teagarden's memory and his service.

by Charlie Bier. The Houston Chronicle

When Frank Teagarden enlisted for military service in January 1941, he had his eyes trained on being a pilot.

"I just figured it would be better to fly than walk," said the 91-year-old World War II veteran from The Woodlands.

Teagarden, a Dallas native and retired watch and jewelry salesman, did more than his part in the campaign against the Nazis.

As a B-24 pilot in the U.S. Army Air Corps, he flew 50 missions from the Pantanella Airfield where he was based in southern Italy, eventually earning the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal. Ultimately attaining the highest rank of captain, Teagarden also served as an instructor while in the Air Corps.

"I got my wings and commission Feb. 20, 1942, about three months after Pearl Harbor," he said.

As a flight leader of the 465th Bomb Group, 780th Squadron, he flew missions over Vienna, Budapest, Munich and the Ploesti Oil Fields in Romania, which he says were the thorniest assignments.



Frank Teagarden, pictured by some of his war photos. Photo credit: The Courier

The fields were a huge source of oil for Nazi Germany.

"It was a high, high priority target," Teagarden said. "If we could stop that oil, that stopped the German Army. And we never did, because the Ploesti Oil Fields had four or five refineries which were about a quarter of a mile apart, and every time we bombed it, you couldn't see it. We bombed by radar."

In addition to facing enemy ground and air fire, he and his crew were tasked with pinpointing targets while flying 20,000 to 25,000 feet above a whited-out landscape due to deliberately set fires that belched out smoke screens.

For his part, Teagarden said his squadron flew missions every other day, and at times, two days

continued on page 4...

Your News & Letters

Kathy,

This may help a little on expenses. And please change my address to the following:

*Harry D. Fike
4126 Northwest Blvd. #122
Davenport, IA 52806*

Harry

Editor's note: Thank you so much for your contribution, Harry. I did a little searching online and found a few articles about you that I have shared on page 3.



Kathy,

Hope all is well with you and yours. Hanging on here - just had 92nd one (birthday) in late February.

A friend sent me these B-24 news clippings. Thought you

might use a part of them some time.

Love you,

Jim Long

Editor's note: Thank you for the articles, Jim. I actually have a book about this aircraft, her crew and her fate. It's fascinating and she's very deserving of a U.S. postage stamp. I have summarized the article on page 5.



Dear Kathy,

We received your newsletter of March 2017. Thanks for all you do! My husband always enjoyed the news.

My news is sad. We lost Frank on January 18, 2017 to

heart failure and old age. He was 97-1/2 years old.

I read Frank Diederick's notes and have a feeling my husband, Frank Teagarden, could have been on some of those missions.

Frank flew 50 missions. He always remembered his crew and war buddies - with love and war stories.

*Life will never be the same without our sweethearts from World War II.
God bless!*

Patsy Teagarden

Editor's note: I am sad and surprised by your news, Patsy, as Frank had checked in with the *Flightline* only this past December. I am so grateful I found the article that appears on the front page of this newsletter. Clearly he was a great man, through all his days.

Thank You

Harry Fike

**for your donation
to the *Flightline***

2017 Bomb Groups Reunion Sept. 11-14, 2017 New Orleans, LA

**8 bomb groups from the 15AF to meet
Events include visits to WWII Museum, veteran presentations, dinners, social time and a memorial service
Transportation provided**

For more information or a registration form contact:

**Kathy Le Comte
1004 Williams Blvd.
Springfield, IL 62704
johnkath5@comcast.net**

Pilot Fike getting around - on the Internet

When I have some extra time I sometimes troll the Internet looking for photos and information about the 780th. Sometimes I get lucky, and sometimes I get really lucky.

Harry Fike sent in a generous donation to the *Flightline* recently, so I decided to see what I could find out about him.

I found a website, answersingenesis.org, that had a blog by founder and CEO Ken Ham. In November 2009 Ham wrote about meeting Harry and Lola Fike of Davenport, Iowa, at their headquarters in northern Kentucky. Ham blogged:

"Harry has a remarkable story. During World War II, he flew two dozen missions over various parts of Europe. He told us that he was never shot down (most pilots were either shot out of the sky or crash-landed, with many of them dying). In his 783rd Bomb Squadron, 28 planes were lost. The squadron was mostly based in central Italy (near Canosa). Harry, thank you for your service, and thank you for your support of the Creation Museum."

Ham provided the link to the 783rd Squadron's website: <http://www.783rd.org/>

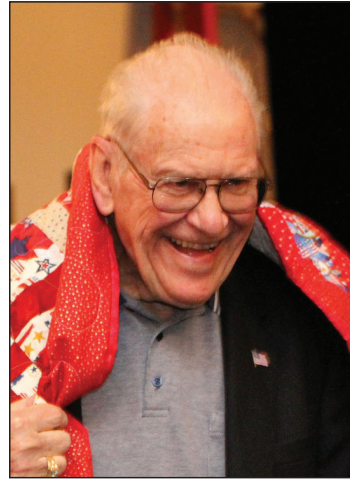
Then in May 2015, Harry's picture appeared in the Quad-City Times newspaper and website in an article about Quilts of Valor.

The handmade quilts are created by volunteers in the Quilts of Valor program and given to veterans. Harry received one of the quilts in Davenport, Iowa.

And *then* Harry showed up in Kentucky again, in August 2015, to visit AiG's Creation Museum and the Ark they have under construction.

"Harry Fike, a World War II pilot, will be 93 next month, and he drove all the way from Iowa by himself to see how construction was coming along on the Ark," Ham stated. "... (Fike) had a great time touring the Ark property and viewing the construction with two of the ladies who work here at AiG."

It is always satisfying to find news about the 780th on the Internet, but it's also great to see



Left: Harry Fike receiving a Quilt of Valor in Iowa in May 2015 and, right, checking out a new museum attraction in Kentucky in August 2015.

our squadron association members engaged in various activities and still being recognized for their service. Please consider sharing your activities, now and during the war, with the *Flightline*.



... from front page

in a row, facing intense, heavy flak each time, and limping back home with at least one of four engines shot out each time.

Had he been alone, Teagarden said the stress of facing death every day might have affected him more than it did. But "when everybody's doing it, you don't think much about it," he said, just before remembering one time when his nerves showed.

"The first time I went to the Ploesti Oil Fields, I was leading my squadron, and my co-pilot said, 'Take a look over there.' I never saw so much flak in my life and I was trying to get my seat adjusted and my seat went to the bottom. I couldn't see, and that kind of messed me up. My right leg started shaking, and I told my co-pilot I can't stop it, it's jumping so fast."

For all missions, Teagarden wore protective gear, including a flak helmet, but took it upon himself to add an extra measure of security. He buttressed the underside and back of his seat with thick plates of steel salvaged from a scrap yard for incapacitated planes.

He also said the tasks and responsibility of flying and bombing kept his mind occupied. Others weren't so lucky, like one of his co-pilots unnerved by the missions over the blotted-out oil fields.

"He just said, 'I won't go again. They can shoot me, but I'm not going to fly that target again. I've thought it over. I can't sleep at night. I'm not flying anymore.'"

Teagarden said he did what he could to get the co-pilot another assignment.

"He was a real good man, a good co-pilot. I said, 'Let me see what I can do.' I went up to headquarters and I told them, 'He's not dogging it or anything.' Now that I think about it and mature more, I really think that he gave more than I did. I was doing the flying, and that took my mind off the flak and the fighters. He had to sit there and look at all that. He gave to the ultimate point where he could not go any further. I never reached that point."

Teagarden's closest call came when he had to land a crippled B-24 at the island of Vis, located off the coast of Yugoslavia, which was utilized as a supply base and emergency stopover for Allied aircraft. Teagarden said the runway was very short, and he wanted to try to make it back to his

base, but crew members implored him to make the landing.

"It had a landing strip and a supply setup there, and against my better judgment, I landed there coming back from, I think it was Vienna," Teagarden said.

After his discharge in April 1946, Teagarden said the war didn't follow him home, either.

"I never, ever dreamed about one bit of this. If I did, I don't remember them, and I'm sure I would," he said. "At times, I might not sleep too well, but that's usually because I ate too much."

These days, Teagarden takes his marching orders from members of his walking group, which meets at The Woodlands Mall, such as Eli Rivera.

"He's a great man," Rivera said.

WWII Memorial marking 75th anniversary of war end

The Friends of the National World War II Memorial is recognizing the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II over the next four years with exhibits, symposiums and more than 60 battle anniversary commemorations.

Taking part in these ceremonies will be World War II veterans, representatives of our Allied Nations, members of Congress, military leadership, celebrities and everyday Americans.

"(This) is our last chance to honor, recognize, and thank the World War II generation who ... preserved our freedom, saved our nation, and literally saved the world," is the statement on the Friends website. "(These events) honor the heroic men and women of the Greatest Generation and thereby help to preserve the national memory of World War II, our veterans and their families, and all those who served on the home front."

The four-year-long commemoration started December 7, 2016 with an observance of the attack on Pearl Harbor and will conclude September 2, 2020 to mark the signing of Imperial Japan's surrender. Activities continue this year with observances of the Battle of Guadalcanal on August 7, and the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands October 25.

TAPS



George H. Kakaska, M.D., 92, passed away May 15, 2017. He was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on February 4, 1925, the only child of Henry and Katherine Kakaska. At the age of 18, he joined the U.S. Army, attending Xavier University as an air cadet. His high scores landed him a commission in the Army Air Forces as a B-24 navigator. He flew with the 780th BS/465th BG, 15th AF, based in Pantanella, Italy. 2Lt. Kakaska was awarded the Air Medal with 2 clusters, EAME medal with 5 Battle Stars, and a Presidential Unit Citation. After his discharge in 1945 George returned home to the University of Wisconsin where he completed his medical doctorate. He

moved to Dallas and opened a family medical practice of 56 years. He is remembered for his adventurous travel stories as well as his faith, benevolence, intelligence, honesty, wisdom and warmth. George is survived by his daughter, Gwendolyn Reynolds; son, Larry (Wynde) Kakaska; step-son, C.V.C. Shaw; daughter-in-law, Nancy Templin; and five grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his wife, Clairine; and step-son, Thomas Shaw II.

Franklin "Frank" J. Teagarden, age 97, passed away on January 18, 2017, in Texas. He was born August 2, 1919, in Dallas, Texas, to J.W. and Ealon Justice Teagarden. He was a pilot in the 780th Bombardment Squadron.

B-24 last bomber shot down over Germany on stamp

In 2005, the U.S. Postal Service included a B-24 in its commemorative aviation series. The plane they selected was the *Black Cat*.

The *Black Cat* is recognized as the last bomber shot down over Germany before peace was declared. Two of her 12 crewmembers survived. The crew wasn't originally scheduled to fly that day - April 21, 1945 - and bad weather should have forced a cancellation of the mission before take-off.

In 1995 Thomas Childers, a nephew of one of the crewmembers killed, wrote a book called *Wings of Morning*, about the plane and its crew. His research included letters from the crew, war-time records, and even interviews with eyewitnesses to the crash, including a then 19-year-old Bavarian girl. Fifty years later, Childers showed her a crew photo

and she picked out the man she found in a field, not knowing he was Childers' uncle.

The USPS says it receives about 50,000 of "the best idea ever" for a postage stamp. The USPS releases about 25-30 subjects for commemorative



stamps each year, so the fact that the *Black Cat* - or any B-24 - made it to circulation is impressive. About 60 million stamps were sold in 2005.

The *Black Cat* and her crew belonged to the 466th Bomb Group from Attlebridge, England. The group was active during the last year of the war and flew 232 missions.

Thank you, Jim Long, for sending the article to prompt this piece. I highly recommend *Wings of Morning* for anyone interested in the B-24 and her crews.

Kathy Le Comte
Editor, *Flightline*
1004 Williams Blvd.
Springfield, IL 62704-2832

Flightline



**Happy Fourth of July to all veterans, family and friends
of the 780th Bombardment Squadron**