

'I won't ever forget'

Memories of World War II remain for Air Force vet

By SARA McMANAMY
The Review

On Dec. 7, 1941, following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States declared war on Japan. Three days later, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States. And so began the United States' full entry into World War II.

In December 1944, Youngstown-area native John Fraser, now a Copeland Oaks resident, entered the war front.

In a diary Fraser kept during his nine months in Europe, he wrote, "If I live

to be 100, I won't ever forget (the war)." At 89 years old, his assertion seems to be holding true.

Fraser, an accounting graduate of Youngstown State University, was working as an auditor in Washington, D.C., when he was drafted.

"I guess they thought I



FRASER, 1944



Review Photo/Kevin Graff

World War II mementos adorn the wall in John Fraser's Copeland Oaks apartment.

was an assistant to the president or something because they gave me a 30-day dispensation," says Fraser.

He took that opportunity to enlist in the Navy.

"They wouldn't take me," says Fraser. "I was adopted, so I didn't have a birth certificate."

But the Army Air Force took him.

Fraser passed the pilot, navigator and bombardier exams, and when given

his choice of positions, he requested to be a navigator.

"So, they made me a pilot," says Fraser.

It didn't work out so well.

"Then they sent me to bombardier school." He

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Wing and a prayer

Florist business blossoms in fourth generation

By SARA GANUS

The Oklahoman

OKLAHOMA CITY — A dollar. A cup of coffee. A wing and a prayer.

They don't sound like business transactions, but to the Cheever family, each has been symbolic of a change in ownership to the next generation.

"(The shop) passed from Grandma to Dad for \$1, and it passed from Dad to me for a cup of coffee," said Larry Cheever, 64, owner of Cheever's Flowers, in Oklahoma City.

"And it's passing from him to me on a wing and a prayer," added his daughter, Tiffany Lechus, 34, who manages the store.

As the third and fourth generations of Cheevers to own the shop, the father-daughter business owners have worked side by side operating what is now Oklahoma's longest-running floral shop, and after 16 years together, they are celebrating the store's 80th year.

"When you're in the floral industry, the whole family's in it," Lechus said. "You just don't get out of it. It's the way it is. And that's the way it is for most flower shops, especially the mom-and-pop shops like us."

In 1927, Larry Cheever's

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still wanted to be a navigator. "Finally, they sent me to navigator school, and then they didn't need any more navigators."

Finally, as a bombardier for a B-17 "Flying Fortress," he was stationed about 60 miles north of London.

Fraser recalls his first mission in Europe. He and his crew, called "One More Time," were flying over German territory, and the plane had to go down. They reached the first field outside of German territory.

"Patton had just gone through and cleaned house," says Fraser. "We came down, but we couldn't stop the airplane 'cause we didn't have any brakes — the hydraulic system was shot out. So, we dumped it in a shell hole.

"When we got out, our engineer — a swarthy Italian from Brooklyn — said to these soldiers coming across the field 'Which way's the war?'"

They were missing in action for three days before a Canadian crew picked them up and flew them back to base.

He recalls another tense moment.

"We were hurtin' and flying back to England by ourselves, or trying to. We had a German ME-109 sitting way out there at 2,000 yards — where we can't hit him 'cause our guns won't go over a thousand yards — giving our altitude and air speed to these guys down below. But we made it... He finally ran out of fuel and had to leave."

In all, Fraser flew on 35 missions during World War II, and the planes were usually pretty shot up afterwards.

"One hundred holes was not unusual," says Fraser.

And three of his planes went down.

Much of the damage to the planes was caused by flak, or anti-aircraft shells, says Fraser.

"It goes right through the airplane."

He points to a framed collage of photos and other memorabilia from his ser-

vice hanging on the wall in his living room.

"Those are the pieces of flak that hit me," he says. "I took a piece of flak in the leg and one in the gut. (The one in the gut) picked me up and set me back in the navigator's lap. Would've killed me, but I was wearing a flak suit."

Fraser insists that his wartime experiences left little impact on him.

"Just the hearing aids," said Fraser. "They're from eight hours at a time, 35 times in a B-17."

He also notes that one of his good friends, Wolfgang, is a former German prisoner of war who is also a resident at Copeland Oaks. Wolfgang, an anti-aircraft gunner for the Germans, was captured in battle and brought to the United States as a prisoner of war. Shortly after the war, he returned and became a United States citizen.

"I say, 'Wolf, you tried to kill me,' and he says 'Well, you tried to kill me, so we're even,'" says Fraser with a laugh.

"It's funny how you get over it," says Fraser, quickly sobering, "cause it wasn't easy; it wasn't nice."

While Fraser's memories from World War II may still be sharp, he insists that he prefers to leave it in the past.


"I don't fight the war," says Fraser. "I fought it once."

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Review Photo/Kevin Graff


John Fraser recounts his experiences as a B-17 bombardier during World War II.



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