

CHRONICLE

Saturday, June 6, 1998

KANE COUNTY CHRONICLE

'Thanks, Murray, for what you did ...'

War jacket holds memories of an 'ordinary guy' who served his country in World War II

Editor's note: Steve Thompson, of St. Charles, is a war historian and collector of war memorabilia. He wanted to share this commentary on the A-2 jacket and Murray Weinstein on the anniversary of the Normandy invasion.

By STEVE THOMPSON
Contributing writer

ST CHARLES — It was 54 years ago, June 6, 1944, when 21-year-old T-Sgt. Mortimer "Murray" Weinstein squeezed his 5-foot-5 frame into the tail gunner position of his B-24 bomber.

That's where they always put the short guys because only they could fit into such a confined space.

This would be the first of two D-Day bombing runs Murray and his fellow crewmen would make as they paved the way for American troops and our allies to battle their way onto the beaches at Normandy.

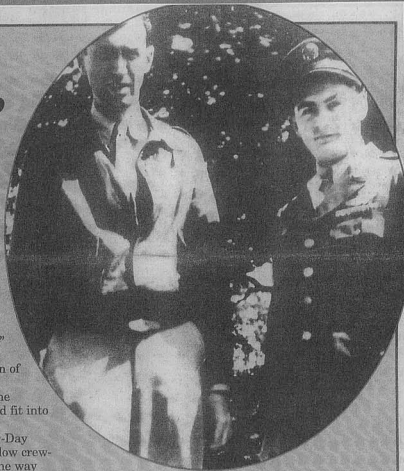
It was the beginning of the end for Adolf Hitler.

Murray survived that day, just as he did 25 other wartime missions. I am

Please see MURRAY page 8



Mortimer "Murray" Weinstein with his World War II medals and A-2 jacket.



Weinstein poses with actor Jimmy Stewart, left, during World War II.

Stewart, who went on to become a general in the Air Force Reserves, was a pilot and commander in Weinstein's bomber group and is credited with 20 combat missions.

Murray

Continued from Page 1

aware of all of this because I happen to own Murray's "A-2" leather flight jacket and all of his medals.

I obtained them through a military collector to whom he sold them in 1995. The medals include the Air Medal with four oak leaf clusters, American Service Medal, the distinguished Flying Cross and the distinguished Unit Citation for runs over Floesti, Rumania, oil refineries by his 566th bomber squadron Aug. 1, 1943.

Murray sold these items because, as his cover letter stated, "The monies I receive would be very helpful to me at the present time." He also indicated that he hoped the jacket would end up in a museum at some point.

A-2 flight jackets worn by hundreds of thousands of airmen in WWII become highly desirable collectibles — some because of the unique and beautiful artwork the owners applied during the war, and others because they may have been owned by a high-ranking officer, a fighter "ace" or some other deserving war hero. None of this applies in the case of Murray's A-2.

The leather is worn and the cuffs frayed. The painted artwork is cracked and faded. On the back is a large 8th Air Force emblem with "Newark, N.J." under it, and on the right front are 27 red bombs denoting each of his missions — including two with a small "D" for his June 6, 1944 runs. This is just an ordinary jacket that belonged to an ordinary guy.

However, I bought it because of one unique aspect of Murray's wartime service: He flew with the late actor Jimmy Stewart.

Stewart, who went on to become a general in the Air Force Reserves, was a pilot and commander in Murray's bomber group and is credited with 20 combat missions.

Murray flew on just one of those Stewart missions, but included in his scrapbook is a photo of him standing next to Stewart, both in full uniform. It was that small nuance that turned an otherwise "ordinary jacket" into a collectible.

It was my hope to learn a lot more about that one mission with Jimmy Stewart and the 26 others that Murray flew, by corresponding with him.

Within one month of my acquiring the jacket, I was contacted by his wife for a copy of his Honorable Discharge papers because Murray had died, and his widow needed evidence of his military service for government benefits.

According to Murray's discharge papers, the Brooklyn-born tall gunner gave American two years, 11 months and two days of his life.

Much of that time was intense combat and bombing runs over Europe and also the China-Burma-India theater.

When he mustered out on Oct. 31, 1945, he took with him a lump sum payment of \$300 and "travel pay" of \$3.45 to return home to his parents.

Like many other veterans, he quietly walked away without marching bands, public acclaim, speeches or pomp and ceremony.

But Murray had his moment in the sun with the mighty 8th Air Force, and he helped crush the tyranny of Hitler. He had his A-2 jacket, medals and his picture of Jimmy Stewart to prove it.

Thank you, Murray, for what you and so many others did for America, including D-Day June 6, 1944. It saddens me that you had to sell these hard-earned wartime honors and memories in your later years, but I will see to it that your jacket ends up in a proper museum.

