



Heathers Heights of Pittsford Salutes

A Veteran Hero

Tad Obark, a Heather Heights resident, recently celebrated his 90th birthday with friends and family. As if reaching the age of 90 wasn't special enough, perhaps surviving his twenties, given his occupation during WWII, makes it even more extraordinary that the birthday celebration occurred at all.

Tad served in the Army Air Corps, flying out of Torretto Air Field near Foggia, Italy with the 15th Air Force. He was a navigator aboard a B-24 Liberator, the most prolific four-engine bomber of the war. Tad flew fifty missions over Austria, Romania, and Europe, and took part in some of the most dangerous missions of the war. The B-24 was noted for its ability to fly at low levels, which maximized the chances of hitting the desired target, but at a great cost to men and equipment. Some missions suffered fifty percent and greater casualty rates. Many crews were killed or captured by the Nazis and spent time in POW camps. Tad's first plane, "Umbriago (Italian for drunken soak)" was shot down while being flown by another crew, killing all aboard. The replacement plane was also called the Umbriago as a tribute to the first. While flying as a replacement navigator with another crew, Tad's plane was shot down. He managed to survive that, and returned to flying missions ... fifty in all. He signed up for an additional fifty missions, but the war ended soon after. As Tad's son, Dwight, remarked, "My Dad went to war for God, his country, and his family. He didn't expect to survive, and it was his deep faith in God that got him through." Dwight also tells of a small dog that Tad had adopted in Italy. "Hercules" would greet Tad at the flight line every time a mission returned. Tad was also very giving to the local children, giving them candy and money to help them make an impoverished life a little better.



Tad returned from war, became a teacher, raised a family, and retired from the Air Force reserves as a Lieutenant Colonel. And he didn't leave his faith in Italy. "He remained very active and devoted to his church", said his son Tad.

Heather Heights recently saluted its thirty armed service veterans by saluting each one by one at a gathering on Veterans Day. Dwight Obark talked about his Dad's service and life.

Then we presented Tad with a large die cast model of the B-24 bomber, which Dwight had painted in Tad's squadron colors and logo. We also presented Tad with two books written specifically about his bomb group, containing actual photos of his plane in flight. Tad will donate the model, along with some of his Air Corps items, to the Sampson Air Force Museum in the spring. It will be a small tribute not only to Tad and his crewmates, but also to the brave young men who didn't make it back.

