

WWII vet, POW, 'Candy Bomber' Harry Bachus remembered

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Troy Moon • tmoon@pnj.com • May 20, 2010

Harry Bachus Sr., who died this week, was one of many who answered the call when the Pearl Harbor attack plunged the nation into war in December 1941. He would sacrifice as many did, leaving home and loved ones for war. But his sacrifice went further. Because Bachus also spent 10 months in German captivity.

But he also bombarded his former captors with literal sweetness, returning to Germany a few years later to drop candy for the children of West Berlin during the Berlin Blockade of 1949.

He felt an obligation to duty, said those who loved him. But many of his generation felt the same, as across the country, young men dropped classes, dropped relationships, dropped everything to sign up with Uncle Sam and ship off to a foreign land.

They signed up by the thousands — Bachus leaving Auburn University to become an Army Air Forces pilot — to join the fight.

He died Monday in Pensacola. He was 88 years old.

"The example they set was inspiring to a nation," said his son-in-law, retired Marine Corps Lt. Col. Randy Hammond, himself a pilot during Operation Desert Storm. "They saw what they did as an obligation. They looked at duty as an obligation. Certainly, some of that is lost today."

Bachus, who is survived by his wife of 24 years, Faye Bachus, and their six combined children, was like many of his generation — quick to go to war. Slow to talk about it.

In recent days, much of Bachus' heroics and hardships have just been discovered by family members. Many who loved him are seeing his old prison journal for the first time; these days, a weathered book in which Bachus wrote poems and

drew illustrations — one is a self-portrait that shows him cutting another inmate's hair, a trade he learned in captivity. Another illustration shows a POW looking through barbed wire.

The book was in storage and its existence unknown by most in the family until after his death.

"He never craved attention or thanks for what he did," Faye Bachus said Wednesday during visitation services at Faith Chapel Funeral Home. "He was a humble, kind man. And a gentleman as well. He always held the car door open for me. Always. It kind of irritated me for a while, but my granddaughter convinced me it was sweet. And he never ever called me Faye. I was always Shug."

On a bombing run over Germany in June, 1944, Bachus' B-17G was crippled by anti-aircraft fire. He navigated the plane over Holland, where he bailed out to safety. He was hidden by the Dutch underground resistance for a few weeks but eventually was captured — wearing civilian clothes — by German troops.

He was beaten savagely by German Gestapo officers who, at first, thought he was a spy because he had no uniform. His interrogators knocked out most of his teeth and worked over a knee that had already been badly injured when he ejected.

He was then transferred to a prison camp in western Poland, and later to a camp near Munich.

Bachus and the other troops at Stalag Luft 7A were liberated by General George Patton and the Third Army in April, 1945. He returned to the skies over Germany in 1949.

Bachus was one of the famous "Candy Bombers" who made countless runs to help the children and people of West Berlin, whose supply routes had been cutoff by the Soviet Union.

"He was a patriot who loved his country," said local military historian Tom Eilenstein, 64, who recorded Bachus' memories of World War II for posterity in 2007. "Look at what he gave up. The men of his generation were special people. And so many were heroes."

Few would argue Bachus' heroic status.

"He was not your typical veteran," Eilenstein said. "So many go to war and get a couple of ribbons and come back. And they serve admirably. But his service went beyond that. He was part of history."

After the war, Bachus worked numerous jobs, including as a civil service computer programmer for the Naval Aerospace Medical Center in Pensacola.

Bachus will be buried today at Barrancas National Cemetery.



Harry Bachus, World War II POW and one of the Famed "Candy Bombers" of the Berlin Airlift, died Monday. He was 88. (Special to the News Journal)

The Last Flight

(A poem written in captivity during World War II by Harry Bachus Sr.)

Big birds filled with eggs of death
 darken the skies of day
 and the enemy guns all blew their breath
 to take their lives away
 Chicks were nestled beneath their wings
 each with a job to do
 showing a courage known to kings
 as their guns spit a mad tattoo
 Then through the din of the great bird's flight
 a bullet had found her heart
 and slowed her down in her gallant flight
 as she fought to do her part
 Then she cautioned her chicks to be ready
 for her life was ebbing fast,
 her course was now unsteady
 and then she breathed her last
 Then each chick leaped from the great bird's wings
 and held with a trembling hand
 that wonderful man-made silken thing
 that carried them safely to land
 Now each chick had one thought in mind
 their time had not come to die
 but they thought of the land they had left behind
 and uttered a new kind of sigh
 that wonderful man-made silken thing
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him, he was a patriot, with Christian principles who stood for what was right and what was good in the world. In the aftermath of D-Day, on June 29, 1944 Allied aircraft commenced Operation RAMROD. Harry piloted a B-17G which targeted factories in Leipzig, Germany. The cloud cover obscured the target on the initial bombing run. While ultimately proving successful, German fighters and anti-aircraft batteries did considerable damage to the formation on the second run. Harry's plane lost two engines and was unable to maintain altitude, but he kept his bomber airborne long enough for his crew to bailout over Holland.

Despite a badly injured right knee, and with the aid of Dutch partisans, Harry managed to evade the Germans for several weeks before being captured. Harry's teeth were knocked out and his leg was further injured during interrogations by the Gestapo at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. A German Luftwaffe pilot learned of an American pilot being held in the concentration camp and secured his transfer to Stalag Luft III, a POW camp for Allied officers in Western Poland. Stalag Luft III was the scene of escapes made famous by the movie "The Great Escape". In a move to prevent the advancing Russian Army from overtaking the camp, the Germans force-marched the prisoners through the snow to awaiting cattle cars. They were then transported several hundred miles south to Stalag Luft 7A at Mooseberg, near Munich. Eventually liberated by General Patton and the Third Army, Harry recalled fondly seeing Patton himself crashing through the gates in the lead tank.

After World War II, Harry became a test pilot, fulfilling a childhood dream, and eventually returned to Germany to fly in the Berlin Airlift. Based on a "Stars and Stripes" article in 1949, Harry was one of a handful of pilots who gained fame as the "Candy Bombers," pilots who would make low passes over the Allied sectors of Berlin and Germany, dropping candy over schools and city parks for children. Harry earned a footnote in Air Force history as the only pilot to "bomb" seven German cities in one day, including his old prison camp in Mooseberg, on the last mission of Operation "Little Vittles."

He retired as a Civil Service employee at the Naval Aerospace Medical Center, Pensacola. He also worked into his 80's as a delivery driver for Hackbarth Delivery Service.

Harry was born and raised in Birmingham, and had an early ambition to attend Alabama Polytechnic Institute (later Auburn University). He worked a number of jobs as a young man and proudly tells of having saved over \$5,000, enough to pay for four years of coursework. He entered Auburn in 1941, but his studies were interrupted when he volunteered for the Army Air Corps. Later in life, Harry enjoyed attending Auburn football games with his wife Faye, members of his church, and his nephew, Spencer T. Bachus III of Birmingham.

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Harry was preceded in death by his parents, Spencer T. Bachus, Sr. and Eula Story Bachus of Birmingham; his brother Spencer T. Bachus Jr., two sisters, Ruth MacDonald and Sarah Cox.

He is survived by his loving wife, Faye; sons, Larry "Butch" Bachus of Nashville, TN, Harry "Buddy" Bachus of Mobile, AL, Terry Wiggins of Pensacola, FL; daughters, Toni Dutton of Birmingham, AL, Kaye Hammond of La Canada, CA, Sheryl Martin of Pace, FL; sons-in-law, Randy Hammond and Jim Martin; daughters-in-law, Linda Bachus and Barbara Wiggins; thirteen grandchildren, and one great-granddaughter. He is also survived by his sister-in-law Edith Bachus, and nephew Congressman Spencer T. Bachus III, both of Birmingham, AL.

Funeral services will be conducted at Emerald Coast Community Church on

Thursday, May 20, 2010 with interment at Barrancas National Cemetery.

Faith Chapel Funeral Home, 100 Beverly Pkwy, Pensacola, FL is in charge of arrangements.

Condolences may be placed online @cfchs.com

BACHUS, HARRY WARREN, SR.



October 3, 1921
- May 17, 2010

World War II POW and one of the Famed "Candy Bombers" of the Berlin Airlift

Dedicated family man, combat pilot, Purple Heart recipient, and lifelong Auburn football fan; Harry Warren Bachus Sr. of Pensacola, Florida answered the call of his Heavenly Father into eternal rest on Monday, May 17, 2010. A loving husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather and friend who will be dearly missed by all who knew