

movements prior to overseas deployment

* I'm still glad to be alive today. Alfred waited 50 years to tell me he witnessed the burial of my crewmates in the churchyard near Ingolstadt. In fact he has an aileron off of our B-24 on the top of his house and sent me a picture of it. he lives only a few blocks from the Catholic Hospital where I was taken on June 13, 1944.

Many good things happens to you if you wait long enough!

Bud, thanks for your help and cooperation.

Sincerely,

A H Fred Walker, Capt. USAF Ret.

Quoted from the Bryan-College Station Eagle
Story by Jennifer Bevers

To this day, Fred Walker wonders why he is still alive.

Now 80, Walker, an A & M graduate who lives in College Station, still isn't sure why his life was spared on June 13, 1944, when the B-24 Liberator bomber he was navigating over Germany was shot down by enemy fire. Only he and two others out of a crew of 10 survived.

Walker has made several trips to Germany since World War II to visit the places that were important to him, like the German hospital in Ingolstadt, Bavaria, where he was treated for extensive burns suffered while escaping from his aircraft. He was never able to find the tree that helped break his fall after his damaged parachute failed to slow his descent.

"In the Air Force, you have a 50 percent chance of getting shot down, and a 50 percent chance of getting out," Walker says. "You go in thinking you're doing your thing for the country."

The most important place Walker wanted to find was the burial site of his lost comrades. That remained a mystery until a few years ago when a letter from Germany helped locate the graves of the dead crewmen.

Alfred Wittmann, 62, was only 10 years old that day in 1944 when he saw Walker's B-24 go down in flames near his home. It was his family that insisted on giving the dead airmen a decent burial in a churchyard near their home.

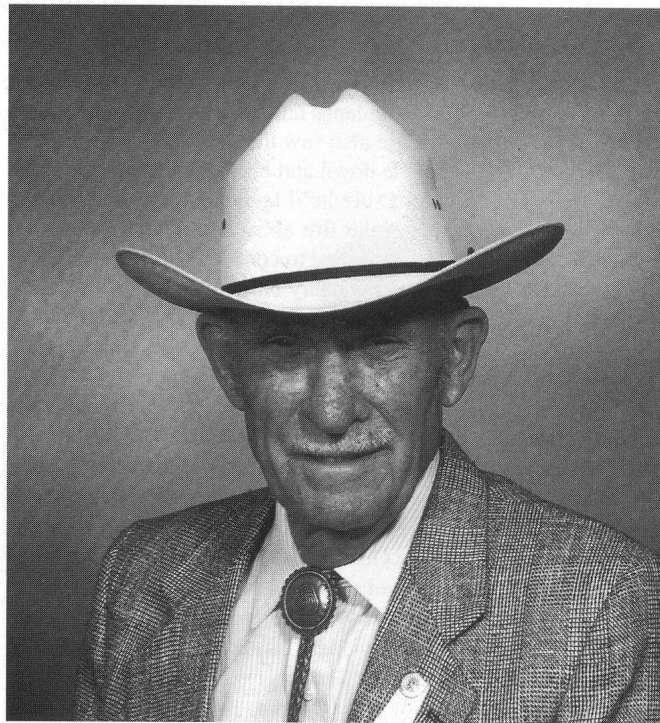
The memory of that wartime experience remained etched in Wittman's mind as keenly as in Walker's. He even kept a part of the aircraft's charred wing that sits today atop his home in Ingolstadt.

It was Wittman who tracked down the three survivors several years ago and who has been corresponding directly with Walker over the past year. Walker has a standing invitation to stay at Wittman's home in Ingolstadt if he ever wants to visit the gravesite.

Walker graduated from Texas A & M in 1936 and worked for a time at the Bureau of Entomology in Kinney County and then as a county agent in West Texas and Menard County before he joined the Army to fight for his country in World War II. In 1942, after he had been trained as an Army Air Corps navigator at Fort Riley, Kansas., 1st Lt. A.H. "Fred" Walker was assigned to the 825th Squadron, 484th Bomb Group, 49th bombardment Wing, 15th Air Force, flying out of Foggia, Italy.

The custom in those days was for the crew to give their bomber a name, i.e., Memphis Belle, Enola Gay, etc., and paint it and an appropriate emblem on the side of the plane. Walker said he remembers that his crew discussed doing this once during one of the four successful missions they completed. But the crew never got around to doing anything about it.

"I didn't call it 'My Lucky Baby' or nothing like that," Walker



Fred Walker

said.

Walker was hoping this mission to bomb an aircraft factory in Neuaubing near Munich would run as smoothly as the four earlier missions he flew. It didn't.

His crew's first alternate target was the city of Munich, and the second alternate target was the marshaling yards at Innsbruck, Austria. They never reached either target or the aircraft factory. "We were going to bomb the aircraft factory," Walker says. "We were hit and our plane was on fire. Our hydraulic system shut down."

When Walker summons up these memories of more than 50 years, he leans his head back and shuts his eyes. He says he can't remember the details as well in a face-to-face conversation. He has to take himself back to that day to recall them. Hit in the number three engine by antiaircraft fire, the bombers had to fall back from the formation. It was attacked by German Luftwaffe fighter planes, causing a fire in the bomb bay.

This is the first reason Walker thinks he shouldn't be alive. The second is his jump from the plane, through the flaming bomb bay doors that were open just enough for him to squeeze through. The pilot, 2nd Lt. Robert Willen, squeezed through the left window of the airplane to jump, and the bombardier, 2nd Lt. William Capece, somehow managed to escape from the nose.

The plane's co-pilot, 2nd Lt. Arthur Roth, tried to escape from his right side window. Roth managed to get out, but his parachute got caught on the plane, and he fell with the aircraft. Six other crew members plunged to their deaths inside the plane.

According to Walker, all the planes flying in the 825th squadron that didn't turn back for fuel were shot down that day. Walker's plane was flying at 29,000 feet. He free-fell for about 5,000 feet before he pulled the ripcord on his chute.