

the cowboys. He always wore cowboy boots and a 10 gallon hat, whether he walked or rode his moped to work.

Mr. Osborne, who is descended from Thomas Osborne, one of East Hampton's founders, was born at home on June 15, 1922, to Eleanor (nee Clark) and Nelson Osborne. He grew up at the family home on the corner of Main Street and Dayton Lane.

After graduating from East Hampton High School, he attended the University of Texas in Austin for 18 months. The World War II draft interrupted his studies. He served with the U.S. Army Air Corps, flying as pilot and co-pilot of B-24s out of Torretta, Italy. Two years ago, his daughter Candace and her husband, Steven Klein, flew with Mr. Osborne to Dayton, Ohio, for the bomber group's 50th anniversary.

"I knew him in a father-daughter relationship until then," his daughter said. "At that reunion, I learned about him as a man. There was so much that he had kept in, that he had not talked about.

She said that her father did not speak that much about his war experiences. Neither, it seemed, did the men with whom he served. But at that get together, the memories came back to life as the men who were in the front of the plane compared stories with the crewmen in the back. Until then, the last time Mr. Osborne saw the rear crew was the morning they boarded the bomber for what turned out to be its final mission. Robert Pease, a close friend, and a crew member said, "Charlie, as we called him, was first and foremost a pilot of a heavy bomber, the B-24 Liberator in World War II. I flew with several pilots and not one could surpass Charlie when it came to flying that rather clumsy machine. He could make it do anything he wanted it to do. He was superb.

"You should understand that there were ten of us that flew on that plane and we were a well trained crew of young men sent to Europe to do a job. We varied in age from 19 to 32, and we all survived the experience. I remember that we were, for the most part very serious. I think the situation demanded seriousness.

"One thing that stands out is the depth of the bond that developed between us. To illustrate that, we attended a reunion in 1995, six of us out of the original ten. Some of us hadn't seen one another for 50 years and we met and carried on as though no time had passed. We knew each other and we always will. I suppose that is a natural state for men who experienced what we did.

"The experiences were many. In San Francisco, shortly before we were going to fly a new plane to Europe, we spent as much time as possible in that marvelous city. We played hard and, I am sure we did some things that we shouldn't have, including drinking too much on occasion. One night the bombardier was in bad shape so Charlie and I tipped a hat check girl and checked him for a while so that we could continue our good time and when we returned to claim him, he was there just as we had left him and none the worse for the wear. I don't know who had the idea to check him, but if Charlie were here, he would claim that it was I and, since I am here, I swear it was he.

"On March 1, 1945, we were on a bombing mission. Our target was an oil refinery west of Vienna. Moosbierbaum Oil Refinery. We were over the target at 24,000 feet and had just dropped our bombs when there was a loud explosion. We had suffered a direct hit by a flak shell on the right wing. The impact shattered an



*Charles Osborne 827 Sq.*

engine and the oil pressure dropped so fast that we couldn't feather the propeller and the engine ran away, that is it wind milled at a terrible rate of speed.

"We were dropping like a rock and my first thought was to get the nose gunner out of the nose turret and then my second thought was as to whether or not it was time to bail out. I was the navigator and my position was in the nose of the ship. Our communication system was destroyed and I remember so clearly looking back through a maze of pipes and witnessing Charlie's feet still working the rudders. I said to myself that as long as I knew he was still trying to fly the plane, I was going to stick with him. That was a good decision. He got the ship under control.

"We knew that we had no chance of getting back to our base in Italy because of the seriousness of the damage so I gave the pilots a heading for Hungary, hoping we might get across the enemy lines and into Russian territory. We were attacked by fighters, but managed to make it to Hungary and we then landed, crashed might be a better word, in a field. It was then we discovered that five of our crew were missing. They had bailed out and were taken prisoner. They were all in the rear of the plane and because of our failed communication system, they felt the best thing to do was abandon ship. We concluded that they might have been lucky, because most of the fighter shells seemed to have hit in the rear of the plane. The rear was badly shot up.

"I think of that day and of the reassurance of Charlie's feet on the rudder pedals and I have always felt that I owe my life to him." Robert Pease gave this eulogy at the funeral. "Charlie knew of my feelings, because we had talked about it, but, typically, he wanted no credit for such a deed, he was just doing his job.

"When we had the reunion in 1995, it was a very special occasion for men who are all special and Charlie was one of those for whom we all had the highest regard.

"I won't talk about all our experiences, but while we were staying with families in a small town in Hungary, the bombardier