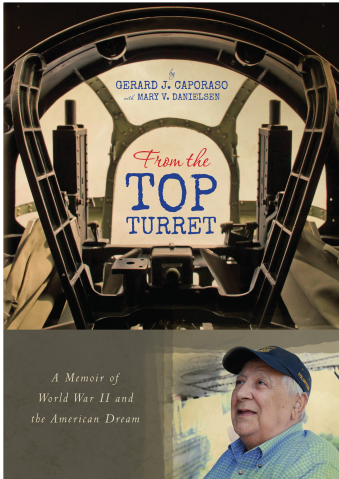


DOCUMENTED LEGACY LLC



Project Summary

From The Top Turret: A Memoir of World War II and the American Dream

(Manuscript - 55,000 words; 125 photos & military records; One last flight on a restored B-17)

Written by: : Mary V. Danielsen, Personal Historian

Documented Legacy LLC

2014 - Available on Amazon; Self Published Memoir; Full color

More than 2,000 copies ordered



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This was a family project that began as a simple desire to audio record a few stories regarding their father's military service during World War II. It immediately expanded into talking about his childhood, and growing up during the Great Depression in a family of 11 children. For years Gerard Caporaso wouldn't talk about his time in the Air Force, instead he chose to focus on the gift of being able to return home and live the life he wanted, complete with a family of three sons. Earlier attempts to interview him were unsuccessful.

From the Top Turret is the true story of courage, faith, family and commitment. It takes readers on Gerard's tumultuous journey from training in the US Eighth Air Force during World War II to the moment when the B-17 he was manning in the top turret, the Dottie J III, crash landed in a field outside Thiacyourt, France during the second invasion on Schweinfurt, Germany and his survival as a prisoner of war.

If there was ever a possibility to witness a slow descent to hell while still alive then it could be seen inside the double barbed-wire walls lining Stalag XVII in the village of Gneixendorf, Austria. Imprisoned for 19 months, Gerard watched brutal German guards take hostile command of their perceived authority on life, slowly peeling away every layer of a man's dignity. Then in the spring of 1945 he survived a 300 mile Death March on little to no food or water until he and fellow prisoners were rescued by Allied troops. This book became Gerard's story of triumphant survival and returning home to build the American dream.

This family project started out as a series of audio interviews and evolved into a book manuscript that was self published and has successfully sold more than 1,000 copies. Another 1,000 copies were ordered for family and friends.

Objective

To capture as many memories as possible about Gerard's time in the military and growing up in a large family during the Great Depression.

Goals

To produce both audio interviews and a written manuscript.

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Project Outline

- Preinterview meeting established scope of work
- Developed a customized list of interview questions regarding military history, in accordance with the Library of Congress Veterans History Project.
- Conducted background research on client's military history and the US Eighth Air Force
- Conducted five audio interviews with client, which were expanded to discuss growing up the sixth of 11 children during the Great Depression, being married and fatherhood, and serving in the fire department for nearly 70 years.
- Transcribed and edited interviews to be used in future multi-media projects
- **[Note: The project expanded from here.]**
- Genealogy research conducted to find families of client's training buddies and crew members. Organized a weekend reunion with the crew pilot's daughter (shown here with sons). Connected client with a 96-year-old training buddy and orchestrated a phone reunion. Corresponded other relatives to the family.
- Outlined manuscript
- Wrote manuscript with client, working chapter by chapter, weaving stories of growing up, serving our country and returning home to live the American dream. Quiet theme of how faith played a role in client's life woven into the manuscript.
- Additional research conducted throughout project on history of communities, weather conditions, weapons, and general fact checking.
- Interviewed three sons for Reflections section of the book.
- Wrote two legacy letters for the Prologue and final chapter of the book.
- Scanned and restored some 300 photos and Red Cross letters sent home to client's mother.
- Photographed military medals and memorabilia to use in book.
- Negotiated use of borrowed photos from pilot's daughter.
- Located historic photos and memorabilia on eBay for use in the book
- Preserved Red Cross parcel letters into archival-grade materials
- Content edited and proofreading conducted
- Project Management on book production - Presented clients with three options for producing manuscript into a book. Client chose a self publishing option, which would afford them the



opportunity to reorder books as need. No marketing plan was developed to promote or sell the book. Publishing was intended to make the book available to large extended family for as long as possible.

- Escorted client on visits to air shows of restored WWII planes &, even, flew in a restored B17 owned by the Collins Foundation with the client (His last mission).
- Conduct necessary revisions, as details emerged
- Help client identify family photographs to be used in the book
- Scanned 40 additional family photos into high resolution digital format, light restoration
- Help client identify family photographs to be used in the book
- Wrote book cover and jacket copy.
- Finished manuscript & electronic files prepared for print production
- Designed some marketing materials, such as post cards and book marks.
- Backed up all files, along with scanned photos, letters and records, to three external hard drives for each of client's sons.

SAMPLE CHAPTER - Chapter 5 The Crossing

(Approved for release as a marketing sample by client)



Chapter 5 - The Crossing

There wasn't much discussion. No elaborate goodbyes. No emotional separations. We were going war. Before we arrived we had already seen the world.

We left the arid dry dustbowl of the northern Texas Panhandle, flew north to Lambert Field in St. Louis, enjoyed the view of amber waves of grain in the Midwest and the lush marbled green mountains that blanketed the Northeast, especially over Pennsylvania and New Jersey in mid summer, and kissed the coast of Staten Island. We landed on bases in Bangor, Maine; Goose Bay, Labrador; Reykjavik, Iceland; and Prestwick, Scotland, before being shuttled to England and put on a train.

It was a long squiggly s-curve of a trip that took us nearly half way around the world: more than 5,300 air miles. We went from the heat of summer to ice and snow. The further away we traveled from home the closer to war we came.

I was still satisfied that I made my mark on Chatham, buzzing the treetops and making enough noise over town to snap my neighbors' attention away from their daily routines. I wonder what my mother and father would have thought of all of that. Would they have liked knowing their son was just above them, covering the skies, and serving his duty or would I have been scolded for making too much noise in the machine? I never knew.

As with all the air fields we trained on or passed through, Lambert Field in St. Louis was a whirl of commotion when we arrived in the summer of 1943. St. Louis' industry became an aviation manufacturing base during the War. The region was expanding to fulfill an order for 3,000 new planes. This is where they rolled off the line. We didn't stay long. While arrangements were being made for our crossing we had a few days off. One buddy of mine, the tail gunner Alton Baer was always ready to go. He always found a way to sneak off base at night and I managed to follow him.

Our shiny new B-17 was waiting for us on the hardstand. We dropped off the old B-17 we flew there and then went for instructions on the small technical adjustments made on the new plane. We called her ours. We were as trained and as ready as we could be. This was our first stop in the crossing. Now we were mentally ready to go fight the enemy and protect our country in a brand new B-17 with all the latest technological advancements. When you're flying a Fortress, that's an extremely powerful feeling. We were 20-somethings who thought we were invincible.

In democratic fashion, we all agreed on the name The Outhouse Mouse that Lt. Bye wanted for the plane. He had someone design the nose art of a mouse peaking around the corner of an outhouse and carried it in his pocket over to Scotland.

After swirling over Chatham and New York we stopped to refuel in Bangor, Maine and then landed overnight in Goose Bay, Labrador in Newfoundland.

Goose Bay, now known as Canadian Forces Base Goose Bay, was built by the Canadian Government as part of its contribution to the war effort. It was used as a refueling and shuttle stop for overseas flights by the United States and Great Britain. With three 7,000-foot paved runways it was the largest airport in the world when we landed there for an overnight stay.

In the morning we took off over Labrador Sea, crossed the southern tip of Greenland and flew more than 1,500 miles to Reykjavik, Iceland. We were air over water for about six hours.

When we got to Reykjavik-Keflavik Airport, our commanding officers gave each gunner 50 machine gun shells, just in case the Germans came over. Sometimes they flew over Scotland, but we never had to shoot them.

The airport was built by the United States military during World War II. The U.S. Army Air Forces needed an airfield that was capable of operating heavy bombers and providing fighter airstrips. The two runways of the fighter field, known as Meeks Field, had just been christened as part of Operation Bolero when we arrived. We were among the first wave of transatlantic military flights to land there.

Operation Bolero was the code name used to reference the United Kingdom in the strategic air force buildup in preparation for the initial cross-channel invasion plan known as Operation Roundup. Slated for April 1943, the Roundup called for the transporting and housing of one million U.S. troops: 525,000 ground troops, 240,000 Air Force troops and 235,000 from Services of Supply. Crew K90 was part of the basing of 69 combat groups and their service units, including 21 heavy bomb groups (B-17 and B-24 fighters), eight medium bomb groups (B-26 and B-25), nine light bomb groups (A-20), 17 fighter groups, six observation groups and eight transport groups.

In Iceland we were frozen in for a couple of days. It snowed like heck for almost a week and we couldn't take off. It was there that we first encountered people opposed to our participation in the war. After settling into the base, we went to town and pulled into a restaurant. People there weren't happy to see us. They served us - took care of us - but we certainly knew we weren't welcomed.

The Icelandic government had received many requests from the British government to consent to the occupation, but it always declined on the basis of the Neutrality Policy. Throughout the war the British and American soldiers built bases in Reykjavik, boosted the local economy right out of the Great Depression era and multiplied its population. At some point there were as many soldiers in Reykjavik as there were residents. I suppose they enjoyed the security that an influx of thousands of British and American soldiers provided. They certainly enjoyed the benefits of money being invested and spent in the country. Still, the locals didn't like being a bullseye for enemy fighters. We were critically necessary, but unwelcome tourists.

The thing I remember the most about our time there was that we were able to buy cigarettes at 50-cents a carton. Most of us didn't have much money to buy anything, but we bought a couple of cartoons.

Letter home - USO Letterhead

Somewhere over Iceland August 27, 1943

Dear Mom,

I know you won't get this letter for a week or more. I thought I'd write again. I am feeling swell and everything is OK. I hope everyone home is fine. I have often read about these places, but I never thought I'd see them. By the time you get this letter I will be gone from here. Don't worry about me, because everything will be all right. How is Betty? Tell her to be a good girl until I get home. You can start writing to the letter on the outside of this envelope. Please write soon. There isn't much else I can say. So I will have to close. Give my regards to everyone.

Love Jerry.

The trip to Prestwick, Scotland took us 840 or so miles over water. After training on land for almost a year, we really got a bird's eye view of what it was like to be a seagull. The approach to Scotland took us over a series of smaller islands and outcroppings of land, over the Firth of Clyde and onto the L-shaped runway of Prestwick Airport, now the Glasgow Prestwick International Airport.

We got to take a couple of days off. Naturally, as young men do, we headed into town to check things out. If we were lucky we'd find a dance hall. It was there I got to see my first indoor ice skating rink. It was neat. The complex also had a roller skating rink, which was good, because most of us could roller skate, but not ice skate.

Our crew was split up for a bit in Prestwick. We were divided up into groups. The radio operators were sent to different spots. Armorers went for further ballistics training to prepare them for different environments and varying weather. Lt. Bye and Lt. Malik had pilot business. The other engineer and I were shipped down to The Wash in England for further training and refresher courses. The Wash is a square-mouthed bay and estuary on the eastern coast of England where Norfolk meets Lincolnshire. The conditions were good there

for rehearsing flight training and maneuvers over The Wash and the North Sea. We were briefed there on different aspects of the planned bombing raids.

When we got out of our training, about a week to 10 days later, we were informed that we were heading to our base. We didn't know where we were going. They just told us to get on a train.

Our B-17 - the one we thought would be our steady plane, The Outhouse Mouse we named and planned nose art for, the nice new shiny one with all the new stuff in it - was taken away. We never saw it again. I'll never know if our plane was the famed flying ace of the same name.

If they told us the name of our base in England, no one remembered.

I asked, "How will I know where to get off?"

"Don't worry. The conductor will tell you when to get off. Just tell him Eccles Road. Get off at the station and a man there will tell you where to go," our instructor said, handing us our tickets. So we did. We landed in a small train station that was probably the one in Diss. From the platform we could see nothing in the distance, except a tower. Certainly there had to be a mistake. We asked a station engineer where the Air Force field was. The guy told us to walk up the street about a mile and we'll see the gates on the right hand side. That was as much as we knew about the base. Sure enough, ten minutes later we were standing at the foot of two large metal gates. Our entire crew reconnected at the base in staggered arrivals.

I didn't know the name of the base was Snetterton Heath for years. Decades later I was working in the Chatham Post Office when a customer - another Air Force veteran - was talking to a few fellas about his base in England. He mentioned Eccles Road and I knew instantly that we served on the same base. The other guys said, "Eccles Road? What were you doing?" He said he was put in charge of watching the coal. There were giant mounds of coal that people would steal. He said he didn't know if people would steal it or not. If they did, they only really took a few buckets full.

Snetterton Heath airfield was located six miles south west of Attleborough in Norfolk, England. It was home base for the 96th Bombardment Group of heavy bombers and the medium bombers of the 386th Bombardment Group. The airfield had one main 6,000-foot runway with two secondary runways of 4,200 feet each. Together they created a perfect triangle, providing pilots three directions to land: north to south, east to west and southwest to northeast on

the main runway. There were four T-2 hangars. With the arrival of the Eighth Air Force armada, the hardstands were quickly expanded to 50 on the southern and eastern sides of the airfield. Access from A11, London Road, the main road in between Norwich and New Market, was restricted.

Hardstands are the paved areas used for parking heavy vehicles and bombers. The paving material is generally thicker and more durable than pavement used in constructing driveways and city streets. We couldn't have B-17s sinking into the drippy English mud. Sometimes these hardstands were constructed of the frying pan type with 10-foot sections of galvanized steel pressed into compacted dirt.

Once we crossed through the front gates we didn't know where we were going. An official finally took us to an assigned Quonset hut and told us to settle in. The recalcitrant realities of war welcomed us. As we looked around we could tell the private possessions of two or three crews were neatly hung among wooden bunk beds and foot lockers throughout the hut. The official told us they had a bombing raid that day and a crew didn't return. As such, new space suddenly became available for us. In the moment we tried to quickly process the news - a crew didn't return - as he simply said, "This is where you are going to stay."

We didn't realize it at the time, but returning crews on base frequently helped themselves to the Army gear and possessions of crew members, who were shot down.

We non-coms lived in a cluster of dozens of Quonset huts in the southern end of the base, near the firing range and the aviation fuel storage. The commissioned officers slept in built barracks in the southeastern corner of the base.

Quonset huts were half-moon shaped prefabricated structures of corrugated galvanized steel that were widely used during the war as multi purpose light weight buildings that could be shipped anywhere and assembled without skilled labor. The original designs were about 16 feet wide and 36 feet long. The sides were made of steel and the ends were covered with plywood. These structures were used as barracks, briefing rooms, training rooms, medical offices, latrines, housing and bakeries. It's estimated that more than 150,000 Quonset huts were manufactured by the United States during World War II.

The first combat crews began arriving at Snetterton Heath in June 1943 from the Royal Air Force's Andrews Field. To help facilitate control among the thousands of bombers arriving in England, the U.S. Army Air Force devised a system of aircraft tail markings to identify groups and wings. Both the Eighth and Fifteenth Air Forces used a system of large, readily identifiable geometric symbols combined with numbers or letters to designate groups. Our 96th Group tail code was a square with a C in the middle. We were still among the first crews to arrive when we organized at the base some six weeks later.

Letter home - September 20, 1943

Dear Mom,

I just received two letters from you. I was certainly glad to get them. One was to Scott Field (Mo.). It was one month old. The other was a U-letter dated just two weeks ago. It was still good to get them no matter how old they are. I got one package with two boxes of gum when I was in Scott Field, but I didn't get the other package yet. It will probably get to me one of these days. Send me some candy, something like Baby Ruths, Milky Ways or Hershey bars. We can't get them here. Don't forget to send me the Chatham Press. I'm feeling fine and everything is OK here. We started flying again. We're still going to school, but I haven't had a pass yet. I sent \$250 home by radio from my last camp in England. Did you get it? And did you get the package from Texas, yet? (There was a gift for my baby sister Betty in it.) I hope so, because there were some pictures of my crew in it. How is everything back home? How is Butch? Give him a kiss for me. How are the kids back home? Tell them to write. That's about all for now. So I'll close. Give everyone a kiss for me.

Love, Jerry

T/Sgt. Gerard J. Caporaso 32461208

96th Bomb Group (H)

337th Sqdn. APO#634

c/o Postmaster New York City, N.Y.

The pilot and I were given brand new bicycles so we could cycle out to the plane in preparation for the preflight of missions. The rest of the crew had to scrounge around for a bike, maybe one from a crew that didn't return, or hop on a truck to get out to the plane.

We were treated well at Snetterton Heath. While we were there we had these young girls from town, who would come in to do our wash. We had to pay for it, but they didn't charge too much. I always gave them a little extra, some cigarettes and chocolate bars - D bars, the thick dark chocolate kind. They enjoyed them very much. Cigarettes and chocolate were so scarce during the war. Their parents could trade them.

We never got to go into town, but we were granted one weekend-long pass to go to London. Someone rode us down to the station and we took a train through Cambridge to London.

When we weren't flying we still worked a highly scheduled day. We got up early for breakfast and calisthenics, the usual stuff of jumping jacks, pushups and running. Afterward there might be further training sessions or work to do around the base.

One of my favorite memories of our crew is that we used to play cards together. We were very good, too. I still chuckle thinking about that day in England when we were hunkered down under the plane, waiting for something to happen. We had nothing to do and a set of dice in our hands. As time lingered we started a dice game. Since we weren't familiar with the currency, we ended up betting English pound notes, which were worth four American dollars, and five-pound notes worth \$20. The game got more exciting as the day wore on, especially for me. I closed out the night with \$600 in my pocket.

We had a good crew and always played together.

