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For Immediate Release

VVCC Neighbor shot down during WWII

November 5, 2019—Sedona— After high school, Wayne, 95, wanted to be an Army Aviator. World War II had reached the United States, and he wanted wings. As soon as he turned 18, he enlisted in the Army Air Corps. After testing, he was accepted for pilot training, which began at Thunder Bird Field in Peoria, Ariz. Wayne completed the program and, at 19, received his pilot wings! After graduating, he trained to become a pilot of the B-17 “Flying Fortress” bomber. He was assigned a nine-man team of three other officers and six enlisted men, and they finished crew training at Gulfport Army Airfield in Mississippi. Then, they went to Savanna, Georgia, where they were assigned a brand new B17 to transport to Great Briton.

Wayne turned 20 as they made their flight across the Atlantic. The war was getting closer but being in Great Britain was a pleasant experience. Briton had such a need for allied airfields that they built them right in the middle of wheat fields. People were harvesting wheat right around his plane. Young Wayne was very impressed by the British people. “I think we made the difference between whether Briton was going to be there or wasn’t after the war. We loaded the whole island down with airplanes. There were over a 1,000 of these planes by the end of the war.”

Wayne’s crew became part of the 388th Bombardment Group of the 8th Air Force, the largest air force ever assembled. This force was designed to take-out strategic targets in Germany, ending their ability to fight, more specifically to shorten that war. This was done at a high cost in

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planes and personnel. The dangers of this mission were Germany's highly trained air force planes and ground based anti-aircraft missiles. B17 bombers had been designed to fly above the range of enemy anti-aircraft missiles – before the war. By the time Wayne was flying, German fighters and anti-aircraft missiles could reach the higher altitude of the heavily armed bombers, but there was no defense against their missiles.

The peak of air losses was in 1943, when allies lost 20% of their planes in a two-week period. On average, only half of their 10-man crew escaped death by parachuting safely. Since their targets were deep into Germany, evasion after parachuting was very unlikely, and you would either be killed in action (KIA) or a prisoner of war (POW). The enemy was not prompt in advising friends and family of those taken prisoner, and POWs were generally termed missing in action (MIA), Wayne said.

On Nov. 26, 1944 his plane was struck by a missile, 26,000 feet over the German city of Hamm., and the aircraft exploded. When he regained consciousness, the cockpit was in shambles, the co-pilot and the engineer were gone, as was the upper turret. There was no sound, the sky was blue, without the top of the fuselage, and Wayne felt that he was in the process of dying... a near-death experience. He managed to disentangle himself from the upside down, burning, spinning wreckage, and parachuted into captivity. As the Germans said, "For you the war is over."

In the long, cold descent. Wayne counted the parachutes...only four. His thoughts were of all the preparation, all the training for doing the job, and about the responsibility he felt for his crewmates. He wondered how this all came about.

Wayne became a prisoner of war in Stalag Luft #1, a prisoner of war camp for Allied airmen. He was a POW for the last six months of World War 2. The prisoners were being starved,

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whether by food shortage or to deliberately weaken them, he does not know. At the end of the war, prisoners were being marched out to a meeting place where they would be bartered for Hitler's life. Stalag Luft #1 was too far away to participate in that March, which was a good thing because many of the prisoners would not have made it, Wayne adds.

The Russians were within one day of reaching the camp, when the Allied commander of this prison camp met with the German commander of the camp and said, "I think you'd better get out of here." Apparently, the Germans thought that was a good idea, because they left the camp of 5,000 prisoners in the middle of the night. The prisoners broke into the storerooms and got food to eat. The war ended in a few more days, and they were flown to France by B-17s, from the now Russian territory.

Wayne said the experience of being shot down and being in the prison camp has "lasted to this day. The period after the war was the most remarkable period of my life," he said. "People felt as though they could do anything." Wayne chose to remain with the Air Force on active duty. He became an air-sea rescue pilot, flying the B17, with a lifeboat attached, repurposed for use for sea rescue. After he left active duty, he remained a member of the Air Force Reserves, went to college, and then became a test pilot for an aircraft company. His first task was to test B-17's being refitted for service in South America. It seemed strange to pilot the B17 in civilian clothes. He also flight-tested P-51s Mustangs.

Wayne describes himself as a "determined person." He wanted to understand human behavior, "and get a perspective on why I am still here and justify why I survived when half of my crew were killed." He completed a Ph.D. in Psychology and Communication. "People make the difference," he said. And that's what he got out of his experience. He still lives by the strong military

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honor code he was taught and the fundamental Christian religious philosophy his grandmother taught him as an adolescent.

VVCC is in its 27th year serving approximately 2,200 older adults throughout the Verde Valley. Volunteers drive neighbors to the grocery store, medical appointments, dialysis, physical therapy and other important appointments. Volunteers also provide home safety checks, shop for neighbors, provide business help, patient scribe, respite and pet assistance. VVCC also loans Guardian Angel emergency alert units to older adults at risk for falling.

For information about VVCC services and volunteering please call (928) 204-1238. You may also visit our website at: www.vvcaregivers.org for a full list of volunteer opportunities. You decide when and how often you can volunteer.

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