WINGS



News

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Neil Baliber Publisher
Tred Kaplan Editor

Crash, Big Bucks, and Poetry Al Lewis

Before we ordered our lunch, Al hands me the 8 ¹/₂' x 11" black and white photo of the B-17 he piloted that was hit by another B-17 in clouds over St. Vith, Belgium. The Bomb Group was returning to England from a mission and was completely imbedded in clouds. The B 17s could not see each other. The B-17 flying above his plane and a little to his right clipped him with the left wing and propeller about where the co-pilot was sitting. It almost took off the nose of the plane. Fortunately, as they lost speed and altitude they came out of the cloud cover and were able to land near Brussels in about 45 minutes. Three of Al's crew had bailed out and all of the crew in the plane that hit him bailed out. Al will always remember April 5, 1945.

After the European was over, the 384th Bomb Group was relocated to Istres la Tube in France. There the Group flew passengers and courier missions to French Morocco, Germany, Rome, Athens, and often to England. U.S. troops were taken to French Morocco to be transferred back to the States. This service also included returning French displaced persons who had fled the Nazi Occupation back to France.

As I finished my wonton soup and bit into my veggie roll, Al, the pilot, began to share his life after his discharge in March of 1946. I assumed he would follow his flying experience as a pilot. No, he returned to Sacramento to join two of his brothers. At the capitol his employment was as an attendant for United Airlines assisting passengers with all the needs and questions that they might have. By 1948 Al joined Prudential and handled real estate finances including mortgages and various loan products. His career began to flourish when he became the Manager of the Production Office in Fresno in 1955. Seven years latter he was challenged by being responsible for appraisers, a larger office staff, and a much more expansive territory while still managing a Production Office for Prudential.

In July of 1965 his office was on 8th and Hill – the Union Bank. His responsibilities in the real estate investment department included selling loans out of Union Bank's portfolio and obtaining "take out" loans.

One of his clients was Lawrence Welk. His professional success led to him becoming manager of the department.

Then in the autumn of 1971 Al was employed by Continental Illinois Properties as an investment advisor to this trust. He worked "trouble cases." This included the Marina Towers in Chicago. Another case was the Omni Center in Atlanta. The \$100 million case of the Plaza America in Dallas was demanding. In 1976 his company acquired the commercial and two office buildings of the Watergate in our nation's capitol. These are just a few examples of his complicated and highly litigious business.

By the 1990's after over forty years of challenges, he decided to spent time with his wife and another couple from beautiful Omaha traveling and playing golf. He and Doty are dedicated to their son and daughter plus grandchildren and one great granddaughter. He also enjoys his hobby ... woodworking.

On their 60th anniversary, Al wrote a poem called Everlasting.

"Today I love you more than yesterday, less than tomorrow.

Today I love you more than ever, less than forever.

Without a doubt, as I am compelled to express my love for you that is everlasting,

You are to me all things of beauty, infinite grace, love of life.

When my beloved, will we be one?"

This poem became a song and sung to them be their friend Bonnie Bowden, jazz and popular singer.

Ed Moreno



B-17 Mid-Air Collision 04-05-1945: Pilot C. A. Lewis

Future Field Trips

Chino Air Museum Point Mugu Naval Air Station Robinson Helicopter Torrance Space X Torrance USS Iowa San Pedro

Richard Raskoff

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