

## WWII VET REMEMBERS HIS LIFE IN THE ARMY AIR CORP

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**COOKEVILLE** — Every day there are fewer and fewer veterans who personally remember World War II. Bill Medley of Cookeville, who will celebrate his 90th birthday on Sept. 26, is one of these brave men still around today.



(Pictured: Bill Medley, who will turn 90 in September, hold a photo of a plane he served in during World War II, while his wife, Gertha, looks on. Ty Kernea | Herald-Citizen).

He was born in Buffalo Valley, where he lived until graduating high school and “went to Nashville to make a ‘fortune’ at 40 cents an hour,” he said with a laugh. Medley worked as an aircraft sheet metal worker before enlisting in the Army Air Corps, the forerunner of United States Air Force, in November of 1943. He'd been interested in planes all his life, so the job seemed like a natural fit. There, he became a radio operator on a B29, flying on escort missions while crammed inside a tiny aircraft on trips that often lasted 14-16 hours each.

“It wasn't (hard) for me then. It would be now,” he said. “But it was a job, and we knew that once we did the job, we would get to come home.”

Every day he would get up at about 2 a.m. to go down for briefing with the other crews.

Then between 3-5 a.m., he would take off on a mission with his crew mates.

Though his missions were mostly routine, he did have one close call during a training. The plane had come into Mobile, Ala., with an engine out. A new engine was shipped in from New Mexico, and “they put it on, but they failed to put a safety in the oil pressure line,” Medley said.

While in flight, this oversight caused engine problems, and as they touched down, the landing gear folded up underneath the plane. Miraculously, no one in the 11-member crew was hurt.

“The major came down and took a look at it, said, “You have any radio equipment on there?” I said, ‘Yes, sir.’ (He said,) ‘Go get it.’ ... We went back in the wreck and got it

out.

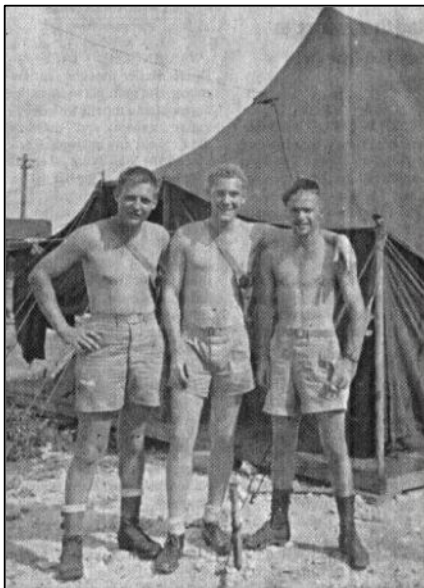
“When we came back out, two bulldozers were coming toward us. They pushed (the plane) into the bay. ... Just another day at work,” Medley chuckled.



He says a couple of the things he is most proud of is having his photo in the Putnam County Veteran’s Hall, and having been able to stand on the rock where the famous photo of the soldiers raising the flag on Iwo Jima was taken.

(Pictured: Bill Medley smiles from the seat of a plane after a flight).

When he was honorably discharged from the Army after 30 months of service, he married his first wife, Bonnie and went to TTU to get education in Animal Husbandry and Soil Science. He worked in soil conservation for 33 and a half years.



After 42 years of marriage, Bonnie passed away. It would be a year later that he would meet his second wife, Gertha, at First United Methodist Church in Cookeville.

(Pictured: Bill Medley, far left, poses with some Army friends).

“I blame it all on a Methodist preacher,” Medley teased. “(The preacher) said, ‘We have something at our church that you need’ I said, ‘What are you talking about?’”

The preacher encouraged Medley to come to a singles group at the church.

“Gertha happened to be sitting next to one of the ladies I’d met before. I managed to scootch in between them to talk a little while. Before it was over, I was pretty sure I was coming back next Monday,” he laughed.

The couple was married later that same year and will have been together for 25 years in September.

“The good Lord’s been awful good to me twice,” he said.

The couple has one adopted son, who, Medley points out with pride, was the best man at

Medley's second wedding.

Likewise, Medley was the best man at his son's wedding.

Family will be celebrating Medley's 90th birthday along with his 25th wedding anniversary next month.

These days, Medley spends his time relaxing at home, working in the flower beds when he can. "But mostly I just do whatever my wife tells me to do," Medley said with a grin.

\*Read more about the people of Buffalo Valley, Putnam Co., TN at:

<http://www.ajlambert.com>