

## RECALLING STORIES OF WAR 63 YEARS LATER

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**COOKEVILLE** -- Sixty-three years ago, Putnam County native Clarence B. Palk Jr., known as Junior Palk, left his hometown and joined countless other young men, many just teenagers, to embark on the journey of defending their country during the second World War.

Hopping aboard a plane to work as a ball turret gunner and later a waste gunner in the 8th Air Force, life overseas was certainly different from the farm life he had experienced in Putnam and Jackson counties.

But Palk learned to adjust early on, beginning with one of the 34 or so missions he completed during his military service.

"The first mission we were shot up so bad," Palk said. "Big shells would come up. The shells tore the plane."

During that early mission over Germany, Palk and his crew crashed the plane in a wheat field, near their base in England, but luckily, none of them was injured.

"After that, you kind of adjust to danger," he said.

Palk said his 10-person crew flew very few missions as dangerous following that day in August of 1944.

"All of us were kind of leery," he said. "We were lucky to be at the right place at the right time."

Although Palk's crew flew a number of missions during the heat of World War II, as they were preparing for a mission to Japan, the atomic bomb was dropped.

"When they dropped the atomic bomb, we had completed our missions," Palk said. "Believe it not, they started letting the boys go home."

Palk headed back to his parents' farm in Jackson County and went to work for his father the same day he came home from the war.

He later earned a degree in agriculture from Tennessee Tech University, and immediately after, worked teaching veterans in Pulaski.

Soon after, he was a dealer of John Deere products at a store on the courthouse square in Cookeville, and later came to own Putnam Farm Supply, which he continues to own and where he continues to work today at 83 years old.

Although many 83-year-old men, including veterans, are enjoying retirement at this point in their lives, Palk said he enjoys working.

"I'm working for my health," he said. "I've enjoyed every minute of it."

And Palk knows something about what it takes to live a long life. His mother, Clinnie Avo Palk, died earlier this year at the age of 102 after years of working and volunteering.

Knowing that, Palk maintains a working routine, getting up as early as 4 in the morning to begin his working day until 5 in the evening.

"I'm satisfied with God, with what I do," he said. "I'm satisfied with myself."

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