

Roscoe Rouse, Jr.

AN AIR FORCE NAVIGATOR'S STORY: MY EXPERIENCES IN WORLD WAR II

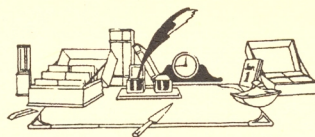
ROSCOE ROUSE, JR.

I was born on November 26, 1919, the eighth child of Minnie (Corbett) and Roscoe Rouse. My family lived at 407 East Rodgers Street in a five-bedroom house that my father built in 1921 when I was two years old. I entered the military service in April, 1942, at the age of twenty-two. At the time I was working for a shipbuilding company in Charleston, South Carolina, and could have had a deferment because my job in the construction of naval vessels was crucial to the nation's war effort. Nevertheless, I preferred to join the military. At Fort McPherson in Atlanta, I was tested, physically examined, and assigned to the Army Air Corps. After basic training at Shepherd Field at Wichita Falls, Texas, I went to Randolph Field at San Antonio for further testing and assignment. The Air Corps then sent me to the Army Airways Communications Service, and I studied radio mechanics and operations at Scott Field, Illinois, near St. Louis.

Having graduated, I gained the rating of Radio Operator and Mechanic and was transferred to Hensley Field at Grand Prairie, Texas, near Dallas. There, I became a corporal without ever having been a private first class. My primary assignment was as a Morse code operator, and I gained experience also as a control tower operator. In early 1943 I left Hensley Field for Natal, Brazil, where I continued to work as a Morse Code operator, responsible for maintaining contact with other American bases abroad and with aircraft that came down from the United States to cross the Atlantic to Africa via Natal. During my ten-month stint there I also reached the rank of sergeant but I had a strong urge to become a flying officer, so I took and passed the required examinations. With orders to return to the United States for training, I traveled to Kessler Field at Biloxi, Mississippi, and from there I went to Ada, Oklahoma, to spend a semester at East Central State College. The purpose for the assignment was to remedy my lack of previous college training. My being at East Central State paid a major dividend because I met a lovely young freshman girl, Charlie Lou Miller, who eventually became my bride. We pre-cadets enrolled in classes in the general college curriculum but were required as well to take a course in aerial navigation and a "hands on" flying course. In ten lessons we learned to fly a single-engine Beechcraft on our own, including take-offs and landings. A major aim of the course was to "wash out" those who seemed unsuited for a flying assignment. Consequently, the instructors were very harsh in their methods and in the air made use of unnerving maneuvers such as loops, spins, and even cutting off the engine.

In December 1943, I was sent to SAAC in San Antonio, Texas, for further testing and for assignment to a flight officer training school. When all the psychological, physical, and other types of examinations were completed, I heard the welcome news that I had qualified for all officer-rank positions (pilot, bombardier, and navigator). Asked if I had a preference, I made clear that I did. From the beginning I had known that I wanted to be an "Aerial Observer" (as indicated by the words on the silver wings), otherwise known as a navigator. I believed that the navigator was the "brains" of any aircraft's crew. Then twenty-three years old, I entered the basic training school at Selman Field, near Monroe, Louisiana, and after finishing there went to San Marcos Field, Texas. The course work at San Marcos was advanced, demanding, and strenuous. A major focus was celestial navigation, which required knowledge of, and the ability

Albert's Desk



By Albert S. Pendleton, Jr.

P. T. A or P. T. O.

It seems school starts earlier than in the old days. I know it does. Didn't our school begin about the middle of September? This year it began about the second week in August. In those old days each of us young students wore a bandage on one arm, evidence of the dreaded vaccination.

Thoughts of the old days in school brought up the P. T. A., which later became the P. T. O. – Parent/Teachers Organization.

According to the History of Lowndes County 1825-1941: "The object of Parent/Teacher Associations is to promote welfare in the home, school, church and community; to raise the standards of home life; to secure adequate laws for the care and protection of children; to bring into closer relation the home and the school that parents and teachers may cooperate intelligently in the training of the child; to develop between educators and the general public such united efforts as will secure for every child the highest advantage in physical, mental, moral, and spiritual education."

The first P. T. A. organization in Valdosta was in 1914. This was in connection with the Valdosta Training School at the college. Mrs. D. D. Smith was first president. Some of the ones who followed her were: Mrs. D. B. Small, Mrs. C. B. Turner, Mrs. W. E. Sparks, Mrs. Mack Register, Mrs. Vernon McRae, and Mrs. W. H. Oliver.

The P. T. A. brought in lecturers, worked on health conditions, encouraged mothers to attend meetings and help found similar organizations in all Valdosta schools.

I asked around if we still had the P. T. A. and got a resounding "YES!!"

Their history is a long one, full of names we'd recognize. Their work has helped many a child.

MUSEUM NEWS

On September 5, the board of trustees met and welcomed the new board members.

The annual meeting on September 15 was a successful one. Our speaker, Todd Womack, presented a very interesting program on the role of Georgia in WWI. Read more about him on page 6.

The 3rd grade of Hahira Elementary School came to visit on Friday the 13th. The kids enjoyed our slide show, especially a postcard with the heading that Hahira was "noted for her pretty girls."

Albert Pendleton's High School Reunion, graduating class of 1942, was at the Museum on September 22nd.

Ed Willis and his wife left town to be with their daughter Kathy, who underwent serious surgery. We are sending our best wishes to her and her family.

Our curator, Julie Smith, tore out the raised stage in the downstairs exhibit. This section still serves as our presentation area but now is at floor level and no longer a stumbling hazard. Anita Shelton donated a new lectern and some beautiful ficus trees that frame the projector screen, and give the whole area a complete new look. The lectern should be delivered soon.

Our director, Renate Milner, who is teaching German at Georgia Military College, brought her class to the Museum for a German Picnic Lunch; Papa John's Michael Aycock provided the free pizza.

Mrs. Jane K. Caudle resigned from her position as Corresponding Secretary and Mrs. Lilla Kate P. Hart took over that post. We thank Mrs. Caudle for many years of dedicated service to the Society.

Todd Womack and Renate Milner are working on an exhibit of materials collected during Todd's research for his recently published book. The exhibit will be displayed during the month of November.

One of Albert's *Way Back Whens* in the Valdosta Daily Times was asking the community for Yearbooks from the local city and county schools. We already received several copies of Lowndes High School yearbooks.

On September 11, Lowndes Fire Fighter Dwight Bennett donated a pair of gloves to the museum that he wore during the recovery and rescue efforts the week after September 11, at the World Trade Center site in New York.

Navigator's story - Continued from page 1

to identify, heavenly bodies and to use advanced mathematics. I had to master the operation of the circular slide rule and the sextant. I also learned to use the chronometer and numerous other instruments in flight to determine compass headings and wind direction and strength. Frequent night flights evaluated the ability of student navigators to employ the sextant properly and to identify the stars. My required final test flight over the Gulf of Mexico featured "dog legs," acute angles to turn, and numerous changes in direction. The aircraft departed the base to fly over water, with the objective of returning precisely to Bay City, Texas, whence we left. Aboard were six students, each of whom plotted the course. I was the student designated as the "lead" navigator, who gave instructions to the pilot. I followed the instructions given to each student, and at the end of the test, our instructor said to us on the intercom, "We are now over the city." I could hardly believe I had hit the target on the nose and asked, "Which city?" He said that it was our target, Bay City. I felt considerable pride at having been so accurate after flying three hours over water, making numerous turns, having to factor in wind direction and speed, and was elated by receiving an A+.

Graduation was on a hot, dry day in August 1944, but I hardly noticed the heat because my girlfriend was there to pin on my wings. As a new second lieutenant, my first assignment was to McDill Field at Tampa, Florida. This may have been the site of an army base where my father was stationed during the Spanish-American War in 1898. At McDill I met my crew and commenced practice missions in heavy bombardment. Our aircraft was the Flying Fortress, the B-17, which we considered invincible. On one practice flight at night, I saw Valdosta below and excitedly told the pilot that we were over my hometown. He responded by swinging the plane low over the city and revving up the engines to make as much noise as possible. My family later reported that the roar of the engines rattled the windows in the house, and they guessed that I was aboard.

The crew soon went from McDill to Stewart Field at Savannah, then on to a staging area at Fort Dix, New Jersey. A night train carried us from Fort Dix to Brooklyn, New York, where we boarded the *Ile de France*, the fourth largest passenger vessel in the world. On November 30, 1944, we sailed away toward the war in Europe. Our convoy crossed the Atlantic in six days, but en route we encountered a fierce storm. Most passengers were seasick; I was not able to eat for two days. Nevertheless, the *Ile de France* reached port safely at Greenock, Scotland (near Glasgow), the most beautiful harbor town I had ever seen. Our trip continued by train to the Midlands of England until we arrived at Kettering in Northamptonshire. A truck then drove us over rough roads to the small but picturesque village of Grafton Underwood, where we found the 384th Bomb Group (Heavy). By the time we reached Grafton Underwood, it was mid-December, 1944. We hardly had a moment to orient ourselves to our new surroundings, for practice flights over England began immediately. The base had a shortage of navigators, so I was the first of my crew to fly a real mission in a real war. I went out with an experienced crew on New Year's Day, January 1, 1945.

Fate was not kind to me and the crew I flew with that day. Deep in the heart of Germany, high above the bucolic landscape, we lost the two engines on the right wing to accurate anti-aircraft fire, or flak. The aircraft faltered and lost altitude. The pilot called, "Navigator, find the nearest safe landing field not behind enemy lines. We are aborting the mission." After ascertaining the plane's location, I scanned the maps and chose the City of Luxemburg, only recently freed by Allied troops. The pilot decided to consume most of the fuel by circling the city at a high altitude. The weather was mild and the sun shining. I considered the aircraft a lost cause, at best, because it had numerous shrapnel holes, and who knew which of its vital systems might be disabled? I called the pilot and suggested that we would be on the safer side to have the crew bail out. The plane itself would be headed toward the North Sea. The pilot, however, had made up his mind that he would put the bomber on the ground.

The crew moved to the radio room as we had learned in training and sat in prescribed crash positions: backs to the forward bulkhead, knees up, with the next man nestled against the upright knees of the man behind. We had a bumpy, rough ride down a heavily damaged runway, which the aircraft exited out of control. The plane smashed through a barbed wire fence and roared onto a plowed field, where it went up on its nose as it stopped, now an undignified shambles. The Plexiglas nose, wherein the navigator and bombardier normally were stationed, was pushed back under the pilot's and copilot's positions. The plane's stance, once it crashed down from its original position perpendicular to the ground, was unwieldy and awkward. It sat there in the plowed field looking completely disreputable and forlorn. Such a result was not surprising, given that a battle had been fought over the runway, which had been shelled and bombed many times and was replete with large holes. As soon as the aircraft finally stopped moving, we scrambled out and jumped to the earth. We had no serious injuries, although I sustained a blow to the chest that was a source of pain for most of the next month. The clout was caused by the sextant, which I had cradled to my chest because of its being considered not only precious but secret. A platoon of infantrymen, whose headquarters was in a nearby chateau, rescued us. We stayed with our rescuers until each member of the crew could hitch a ride on an American plane bound for England from another, safer, airfield. One by one, we flew out to any base in England, whence we could get other flights nearer our home base. I was routed to three different bases before one of them had a scheduled flight to Grafton Underwood.

When I reached Grafton Underwood after an absence of three weeks, I walked into the barracks and definitely surprised the members of my own crew. Then, I was shocked in turn to find my bedding rolled up and my footlocker and all my belongings removed. I dashed off to headquarters and asked if I had been reported as "Missing in Action" (MIA); the response was affirmative. I also asked if a message had been sent to my family and was relieved to find that it was only now being prepared. I had never written home that I was flying missions over Germany, and I continued to tell about practice missions over England. Eventually my sister informed me in a letter that I should drop the

Navigator's Story – Continued from page 3

“practice” flights subterfuge because *The Valdosta Daily Times* had run a report sent by my base headquarters that I had received the Air Medal for missions over Germany.

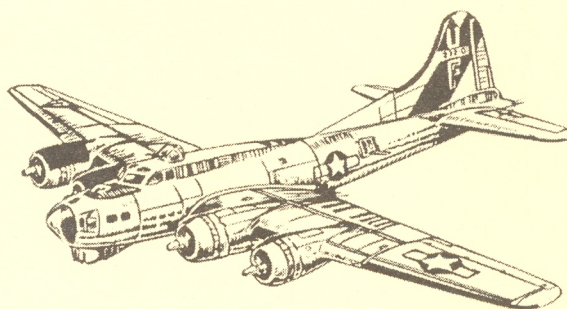
Although every mission caused damage to our aircraft, I remember one in particular because of the heavy flak and its results. When we could see the red fireball in the center of the black cloud of smoke, the bursting flak was spreading its shrapnel too close for comfort. Such was the case during a mission when I was at my desk in the Plexiglas nose of the plane, plotting our course for the pilot, and happened to look out my window. I saw a B-17 from my squadron, on the left wing of the V-pattern flight formation that was hit by flak and began going down. Apparently, either a critical mechanical part was disabled or the pilot and copilot suffered a direct hit because there was no obvious damage to wings, rudder, or engines. The big plane simply plummeted nose first toward the ground without seeming to have any human hand in control. I later learned that a friend from Valdosta had been the navigator on the lost aircraft. I had not been aware that Rudisell Dewberry was stationed with me at Grafton Underwood, though I now think that I saw him a number of times in the Officers Club there. I read in *The Valdosta Daily Times* of the loss of Dewberry in an article that specified Grafton Underwood as his base. Then I recalled the plane that I had seen fall and went to headquarters to inquire if that had been when Dewberry went down. My assumption was verified, and I also discovered for the first time that Dewberry had changed his last name to Berry.

When I returned home, Berry's mother telephoned because she had heard from my family that I had seen Barry's plane shot down. Mrs. Willie Dewberry had been my seventh grade homeroom teacher and had taught me one course. She also once paddled my palm with a ruler after school for misbehavior. Now, she invited me to her home for dinner, and, of course, she wanted to talk with me about her son's loss. Understandable, Mrs. Dewberry was hopeful that Rudisell could be alive as a prisoner of war. She spoke of the plan that her older son, Joe, had to go to Germany to search for Rudisell, a plan that I tried to discourage. I described for her the circumstances in which Rudisell's B-17 fell. I told her that I had watched for parachutes from the falling aircraft but had seen none. The absence of parachutes was the most difficult part of the story to relate to Mrs. Dewberry. Once the monstrous B-17 went into a spin, for crewmembers to reach an exit and jump was virtually impossible. I had experienced just such a spin and had found myself pinned against the plane's inner shell, unable to pull away from that position because of centrifugal force. Whether the Dewberry family ever received further information, I do not know.

Toward the end of my career as a B-17 navigator, I was surprised on one mission to learn after the group's planes were airborne that I was flying in the 8th Air Force's lead bomber. I had the momentous responsibility for navigating the mission for all squadrons that day. Eventually, I flew thirty-three missions over Germany, for which I earned the Air Medal and four leaf clusters, each cluster representing seven missions. My providing a detailed account of all thirty-three missions would be extremely difficult and it probably would be more than any reader cares to

endure. Therefore, I shall content myself by relating the story of one other mission, which ended with my second crash landing on the soil of Europe. This time I was with my own crew when the pilot reported that German flak had disabled both starboard [right] engines and that we could not make England on the two remaining engines. He asked me to find a base in friendly territory where we could land. I located Lille, France, and gave him the heading to that destination. Our landing was successful, though much less exciting than the one at the city of Luxemburg, because of the skills of our excellent pilot and copilot. We found housing afterward with U.S. military personnel and got back to Grafton Underwood through the courtesy of the Air Corps.

Ultimately, I began to wear down because of the mental and physical demands of flying high altitude missions in extreme wartime conditions. All too often, I flew with strange crews because of the continuing shortage of navigators. I asked headquarters for time off for R & R [rest and recreation] at the Air Corps' retreat in the South of England near Southampton, but the request was denied. Nevertheless, I got some R & R on my own. My brother-in-law, Jimmie Copeland – the husband of my sister Ethel – owned two grocery stores in Valdosta. During the War, Jimmie was in the Medical Corps, stationed near Lincoln, in the North of England. I visited him at Lincoln, and we met on weekends in London. We went to the theater to see John Gielgud play *Hamlet*, we visited Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum, and we took in the damaged city. On one occasion we traveled around the countryside by train, visiting Reading and other cities. But I remember most vividly a trip to London by myself, when I went to a cinema to see *The Picture of Dorian Grey*. When I exited the theater, the city seemed alive with an electrical air all around. People were rushing about, excited, even shouting. I dashed to a newsstand to read the headlines; “Germany Surrenders” was the message in large black type. I still have the newspaper.



B-17

Very soon afterward, I was ordered to navigate across the Atlantic to the United States a B-17 carrying senior officers home. We had a night flight without navigational aids, even radio. All that was visible was the black abyss of the sea under a moonlit sky. I had to resort to using the sextant to take fixes on the stars. The method worked, and the plane landed safely for “overnight” at Reykjavik, Iceland, where, although it was “nighttime,” the sun never set. The next day, we flew on to our destination, Camp Miles

William Rudisell Dewberry-Barry another Navigator from Valdosta

Roscoe Rouse, in his article, referred to Rudisell Dewberry-Barry of Valdosta, whom he observed shot down during World War II. The museum is pleased to hold items, which belonged to Lt. Barry. Mrs. Willie R. Dewberry, in 1975, gave the Society an extensive collection of her son's memorabilia. The following is a reprint of a newsletter article by Albert S. Pendleton, Jr. from April 16, 1975.

Mrs. Willie R. Dewberry has given to the Society an extensive collection of memorabilia of her son, 1st Lt. William R. Dewberry (Barry). Mrs. Dewberry sates that her son was called Rudisell while in Adel and when growing up in Valdosta. After he lived in Chicago for a while, Rudisell had his name changed from Dewberry to Barry, and was known from then on as Bill Barry.

Rudisell (or Bill) was born March 26, 1918 in Stillmore, Georgia and attended schools in Adel and Valdosta. There are pictures, diplomas, and the like in the collection from Mrs. Dewberry. Rudisell graduated from Valdosta High School on June 1, 1934. After the move to Chicago, he was a linotype operator with the Chicago Tribune Newspaper. Dewberry (or Barry by then) was a member of the Illinois National Guard. On January 19, 1942, as William R. Barry, he joined the Royal Canadian Air Force, only to ask for discharge on May 21, 1942, in order to join the U. S. Forces. Barry was with the 384th Bombardment Group, based in England. Barry died in the service of his country for his plane was reported missing January 10, 1945.

Among the mementoes from Mrs. Dewberry are a U. S. Air Force uniform, medals, purple hearts, and two books. One book is called, *As Briefed, the Family History of the 384th Bombardment Group*, in which is related the story of the last flight of Barry's plane. The second book is called *Britain's Homage to 28,000 American Dead*, published by *The London Times*, 1952, and dedicated, "In Memory of 1st Lt. W. R. Barry, U.S.A.A.F." The Society also has a model of a patented invention by W. R. Barry, "Instrument with photos, The Synthetic Sky System of Celestial Navigation (to determine geographical positions celestially-to wit-the observer's latitude and longitude), Apparatus For determining Geographic Positions Celestially, U. S. Patent #2,407,467, patented September 10, 1946.

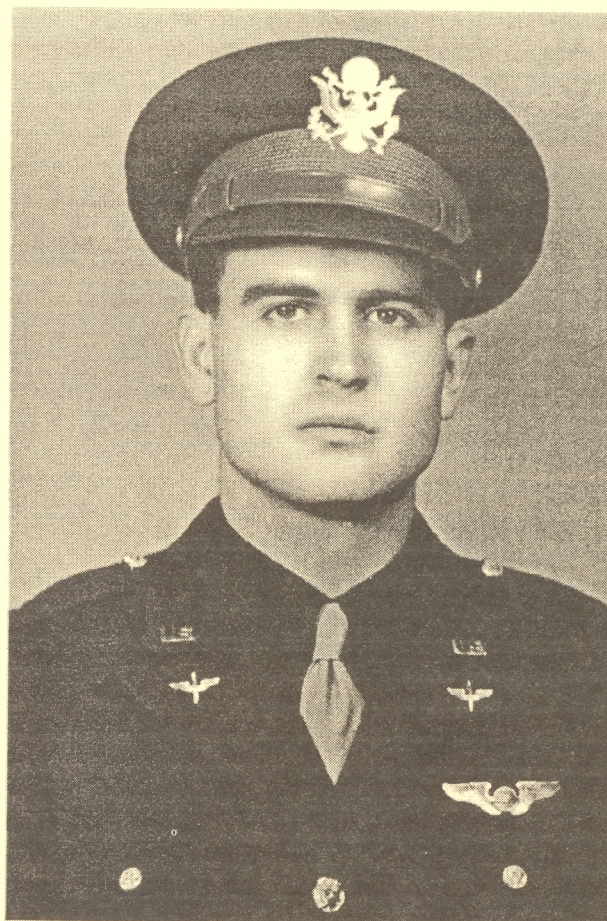
The Dewberry-Barry collection is most interesting and we greatly appreciate it. As one of our retired schoolteachers, Mrs. Willie R. Dewberry is remembered as having taught school in Valdosta's schools for many years.

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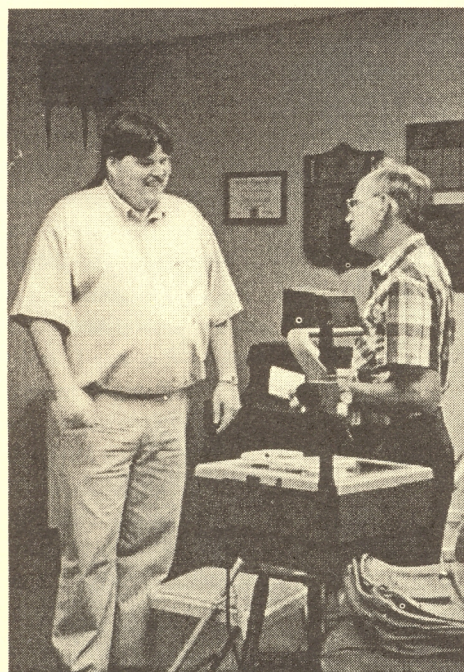
Many items from the Dewberry-Barry collection were put on display in the basement exhibit space to commemorate World War II. These items are still on display. Please come by and take a look. Furthermore, a street at Moody Air Force Base was named in honor of 1st Lt. Dewberry.



William Rudisell Barry, April 12, 1942
Royal Canadian Air Force



William Rudisell Barry
Army Air Forces, 384 Bomb Group



Todd Womack (left) talks with a guest after the presentation.

TODD WOMACK

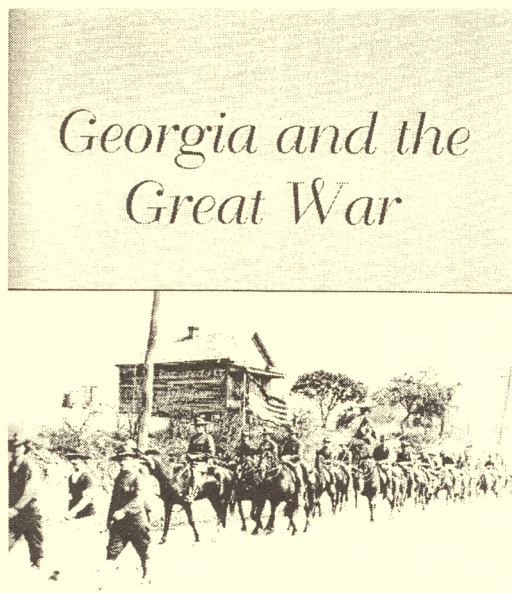
Todd Womack, a Tennessee native and resident of Douglas, GA, presented illustrations that briefly looked at the role of the state of Georgia in the First World War. He discussed the war training camps, the mysterious loss of the USS Cyclops, and the impact of the sinking of the HMS Otranto. He had pictures and artifacts on display for discussion.

Mr. Womack is currently an instructor of United States History and Anthropology at Coffee HS and adjunct professor of history at Prewton Parker College in Douglas, GA. He received his Master's degree from Valdosta State College.



Dr. Marvin Smith and Mr. John P. Sinnott

The information for this presentation came from Mr. Womack's book on this little known subject *Georgia and the Great War*. Some additional books written by him are *The History of Hospitals and Health Care in Coffee County* (private publication) and *Wiregrass Baseball*. He is the author of a number of articles, relating to a wide variety of historical subjects. Mr. Womack has been presenting his research throughout the region. He received the GCSP Volunteer Award in 1998, was the Coffee High Teacher of the month in May 2000, and Coffee Board of Education Employee of the Quarter in 2002. He is also a volunteer at the Lowndes County Historical Society.



Todd Womack

Todd Womack's book *Georgia and the Great War* can be purchased at the Museum for \$15.00.

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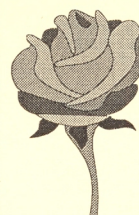
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Navigator's Story – Continued from page 4

Standish, Massachusetts. There I was given a thirty-day leave with instructions to report to a base in South Dakota. Subsequently, I received a change of orders and was to report to Ellington Field, near Houston, Texas, for training to navigate the new monster, the B-29. During my leave I visited my mother in St. Clair Shores, Michigan, where she lived with her second husband. From there, we went by train to Ada, Oklahoma, for my marriage to Charlie Lou Miller.

Not long afterward, while I was at Ellington Field preparing to go to the war in the Pacific, the Japanese surrendered. Despite the military's urging me to remain in the service, or, at least, to join the reserves, I was anxious to fulfill my greatest dream, to get a college education. Thus, I was mustered out at Fort McPherson in Atlanta, where I had been sworn in. I entered the University of Oklahoma and earned the B.A. degree in three years. Later, I completed a M.A. at Oklahoma as well as a M.A. and the Ph.D. at the University of Michigan. I came home from the war unscarred, for which I have been grateful all my life. I married the woman I chose, for which I have been grateful all my life. Life since the war has been kind and generous, and I give thanks to God for all of it.



IN HONOR OF
the 60th
Wedding Anniversary
of
John and Gloria Sorenson
by
Donald O. Davis

Thank you

The Lowndes County Historical Society thanks Mrs. Jane Caudle for her many years of dedicated service as a volunteer. She was always willing to lend a helping hand and bring an extra batch of cookies. She resigned her position as Corresponding Secretary due to health reason.

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John Henry "Jack" May

by

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By

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Mr. and Mrs. Albert S. Pendleton, Jr.
Mr. and Mrs. J. Edward Willis

MUSEUM CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Sept. 30 Monday 7:00 PM Sons of Confederate Veterans Meeting

Nov. 11 Monday Opening of the WWI Exhibit

Nov. 28 – 30 The Museum will be closed for Thanksgiving Holiday.

Lowndes County Historical Society & Museum

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YESTERDAY & TODAY

Newsletter of
Lowndes County Historical Society
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