War Era Story Project 2012

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Age: 91

I, Pasquale (Pat) Nicastro, graduated from Farrell High School in 1939 in the throes of the Great Depression. I could not get a job after graduating from welding school. I did work a short bit in Bristol, CT. I returned home and got a job at Carnegie Steel plant in Farrell, PA, in 1940. We made the 2 1/2 inch armored plates on the two upper sides of the General Sherman tank, M-28. My steel-cutting job was considered "critical to the war effort," hence I was given a six-month deferment. The women, a.k.a. "Rosie the Riveters," were just starting to replace the men in the factories.

I was in a relationship with my future wife Marie, who lived in The Bronx. When I received a second deferment for another six months, I felt that I would be home for the duration. I then proposed over the phone and Marie accepted my proposal, and we were married in February, 1943. We were both so elated. However, I also had a strange guilty feeling not being called to serve my country. Every one of my boyhood friends was called to serve. I could not go anywhere without feeling that people were wondering why I was not in a uniform. I thought being married would give me some relief.

As it so happens, a third deferment never came. I received my draft notice to join Uncle Sam. I enlisted in the Army Air Corps on January 1944 and was in pilot training school when my entire class was 'washed out' because the Battle of the Bulge was in full force in December, 1944, and airplane pilots were not needed.

I was temporarily attached to the Signal Corps for radar training. After completion of schooling at Fort Monmouth, N.J, I became part of a six-man team with John R. Walker, Syl Kanaby, Tony Mielecki, Edwin Kouba, me and team officer, Captain Clarence Sanderson. After training in Warner Robins Air Force Base in Georgia, we were deployed on a six-month temporary basis and stationed at Payne Air Field in Heliopolis, Egypt, to train another team in setting up an Instrument Blind Landing System. The air base, being near the desert, had many sand storms, and several aircraft were destroyed attempting their landings. Following the full training of another team, we were being re-assigned to the Pacific theater. The day we departed for Warner Robins Air Force Base in the U.S., May 7, 1945, Germany surrendered. I was then assigned and sent to Victorville Air Force Base in California. I was in charge of filing the daily reports on all the personnel at the base. After 28 months of service, I was discharged as a Technical Sergeant from Fort Ord, CA. and returned home to my wife and a bouncing baby boy.

In 1998 I succeeded, via the internet, in contacting four of my five enlisted team mates and team officer, Captain Clarence Sanderson. Only one, John R. Walker, I was not able to locate. They all agreed to meet once again in February, 1999, at my condo in St. Augustine, Fl. The local paper, The St. Augustine Record, printed a picture of our team in the Sunday edition. A gentleman, Mike Bonacci, who was wintering about a mile down the road from my condo, saw the picture in the paper and called me to say that he lives in Carbondale, Pa., the home town of John R. Walker, and promised he would try to locate

him for me upon his return home. We were all so surprised that we were able to get together after some 53 years. We had a most unbelievable and memorable reunion, minus John R. Walker!!

Upon my return home from Florida, Mike called to say that he met a classmate of John in high school and I was given a number to call him in Myrtle Beach, SC. Lo and behold, John was in Lantanna, FL, also wintering at the same time. He was so near, and yet so far from our reunion in St. Augustine. I am glad to report that we had another reunion in St. Augustine the following year and John was able to join us.

In the past two years, we lost two of our teammates, Tony and Edwin. We consider ourselves fortunate to have lived this long and remain a close-knit team. Captain Sanderson is the oldest at 92, and I am the next oldest at 91. We constantly stay in touch to this day and ever will.

PS: Come February 2013, Marie and I will be celebrating our 70th wedding anniversary.