

# AVIATION WALL OF HONOR



## **Lieutenant Andrew Henry Lehtinen Bomber Pilot USAAF**

Henry "Lightening" Lehtinen was known for his speed and prowess on the basketball court when he played on the Ishpeming High School team. Perhaps his love of speed influenced his decision to try for the Air Corps.

In October 1940, he enlisted in the Army and started preflight training in January 1942. In February 1943, he became a flight officer and later in the year was commissioned a Second Lieutenant.

His overseas duty began as a member of a tactical bomber squadron attached to the British Eighth Army in the Mediterranean Theater. Here he helped the British mop up German resistance in North Africa before bombing runs over Sicily, Italy, Yugoslavia, Albania, Bulgaria, and Greece.

Then, as a pilot of a Mitchell medium bomber, he worked in close support of the American troops in their march up the Italian Peninsula. They were blasting German artillery emplacements no further than 500 yards ahead of the advance American forces.

With the true reticence of a boy who has seen considerable service, Lehtinen spoke rather lightly of his experiences. He got ducked once, parachuted into the water off Pantelleria, an

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island southwest of Sicily. Asked if his plane cracked up, he said “No, but it was hit rather bad and burning, so we thought we’d better bail out.”

He hit the sea, but in five minutes was in a rubber raft, and fourteen hours later was picked up by a British patrol ship and returned to his base.

“The Isle of Capri” was first a popular song to the boys and girls back home, but Lehtinen spent seven very blissful days in a rest camp on Capri. Breakfast in bed was one of the luxuries the fliers greeted with easy grace.

“We had a tough time getting the fellows to go there and a tougher time getting them back,” he grinned.

Why don’t the boys want to go to a rest camp? Because they feel they’re getting cheated out of a chance for more missions. And they covet the chance to make those flights. When their 50 missions are up, it means furlough and a chance for home.

And what did he want to eat when he finally made it home? A big brown pasty right from the oven. “Ma” Lehtinen made sure that dream came true!

TJ Mudge, May 2004