

# AVIATION WALL OF HONOR



## **Tech Sergeant Robert Charles Velin US Army, Air Force, WWII**

Robert Charles Velin was born to Oscar Edwin and Ella Velin on January 2, 1924 in Ishpeming, Michigan. The fourth of five children he was raised and educated in Ishpeming, graduating from high school in 1941.

After induction into the US Army on March 19, 1943 he was sent to Fort Sheridan, Illinois and then Atlantic City, New Jersey for basic training. Following this he was transferred to Omaha, Nebraska and then Fresno, California for radio training. Early in 1944 brought a transfer to Las Vegas, Nevada for aerial gunnery school.

In the spring of 1944 and now a sergeant he was assigned as a Radio Operator/Gunner for B-17 bombers and transferred to McDill Field in Tampa, Florida for crew assignment and overseas training. At the end of June the entire crew was sent to Savannah, Georgia to pick up their aircraft and receive orders to report to the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force, 463<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group headquartered in Foggia, Italy. They flew to Italy by way of Gander, Newfoundland, the Azores and Marrakech, Africa arriving in Foggia, Italy on July 2, 1944.

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During his time in the Air Force he flew in the Eastern Theatre, the African Theatre, and the Middle Eastern Theatre including Italy, the Northern Apennines, Southern France, Northern France, Rome-Arno, the Rhineland and India. From home base in Foggia he flew bombing missions throughout Europe.

On July 28, 1944 during a bombing run over the German controlled oil refineries in Ploesti, Romania his plane was shattered by anti-aircraft fire. With the loss of number one and two engines the aircraft was unable to attain the altitude necessary to fly over the Alps to home base at Foggia, Italy. Instead they headed south towards Turkey but before reaching it were forced to ditch into the Black Sea. With only minutes to spare before the plane sank the crew launched its rubber raft and got off the plane. Bob was wounded in the face and suffered a concussion but somehow managed to follow the evacuation procedure. The crew was fortunate to be spotted by a Turkish fishing boat and pulled from the water. They were then taken to Geti, a fishing village where they were temporarily interned and were listed at their home base as Missing In Action. At the same time Bob's brother John, a navigator in the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force, was shot down over Europe and was a Prisoner of War in Germany.

When Turkey broke relations with the Third Reich, the crew was taken to Ankara, the capital, and the American Consulate made arrangements to fly the crew to Cairo, Egypt and then back to Foggia. During this time Bob's rank changed to Tech Sergeant.

On return to Foggia, Bob was not assigned to a particular aircraft but had fifteen individual missions one of which was back over the Ploesti Oil Works. On another they landed in German controlled France at night where some downed air men had been hidden by the Free

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French. They landed in a field with no lights, kept the engines running while they pulled the guys aboard and took off after maybe only five minutes on the ground.

Other missions included targets in Austria, Germany, Yugoslavia, Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

For individual action during a bombing raid, Bob was nominated by his pilot for the Distinguished Flying Cross. Anti-aircraft fire had severed the wiring for the elevator controls to the tail of the plane. He went aft and using trailing wire antenna joined the two pieces that were separated allowing the plane to return safely to base.

In May 1945 Bob was assigned to the ATC (Air Transport Command) as a pick-up radio man which meant flights to Morocco, Egypt and Iran, and then later to India where he flew the notorious Himalayan Mountain ranges called "The Hump" to China.

Tech Sergeant Velin's medals and citations include the Air Medal with two Silver Oak Leaf Clusters, a nomination for the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Purple Heart, and the European-African-Middle Eastern Theatre Ribbon with one Silver Battle Star and two Overseas Service Stars.

On January 3, 1946 Robert was honorably discharged from the Army Air Corps. In 1945 he married Mary Wellsted of Negaunee. They have two daughters and reside in Rockford, Illinois where he retired from Sundstrand Aviation as a aeronautical engineer.

TJ Mudge, Sept. 2006