

Jack L. Hager



Jack Leondius Hager was born in Akron, Ohio but lived most of his life in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio. He graduated from Cuyahoga Falls High School in 1936 and later attended and graduated from the Hammel Business School.

Jack was working for the Ohio Bell Telephone Company when the United States entered into World War II. After joining the Army Air Corps, he was selected for the exacting eighteen-week bombardier-training program. He received his wings on July 15, 1943 from the San Angelo Air Corps Basic Flying School (now Goodfellow Air Force Base) at San Angelo, Texas. As such, he became one of the 45,000 bombardiers trained during the war.

Lt. Hager was assigned to the 740th Bomb Squadron, 455th Bombardment Group (Heavy) of the 15th Air Force. The 455th (H) had been activated on May 22, 1943 and was organized in New Mexico at Clovis Army Air Base on July 16th. After training at various bases in the United States with Consolidated B-24 Liberators, the 455th transferred to Italy early in 1944 for combat operations against the Nazi War Machine.



The whole purpose of any bombing mission was to put the bombs on target. As bombardier, it was Lt. Hager's job to program the top secret Norden Bombsite, which actually flew the plane on the bomb run and make sure that his bombs hit their target. In fifteen months of combat in the European Theater of Operations (ETO), the 455th dropped almost 15,000 tons of bombs on Axis target. One of those bombing missions, however, took their toll on the 455th with 147 killed in action (KIA), 268 missing in action (MIA) and 173 Prisoners of War (POW). Jack Hager would become one of those POWs

On the April 21, 1944 mission, Jack's squadron had just completed the bomb run and was forming up for the return flight to their base. Flak had been heavy and now enemy fighters were

attacking the force. Two engines were damaged on Jack's B-24 "Sadie Hawkins" and a third was on fire. It was last seen, by the surviving bombers, going down near Bucharest, Romania.

All but three members of Jack's crew made it out of the burning plane. Jack said of his parachute jump, "I was more afraid in those few moments than at any other time I was overseas." He spent nearly six months as a POW in Romania. He even managed to escape once, but was recaptured and spent several days in solitary confinement.

At the time, Romania was a reluctant partner of the Axis Powers and the Germans wanted to relocate the downed flyers back to prison camps in Germany. However, Romanian Princess Catherine Caraja intervened to keep the Americans in Romania under Romanian guards where they were cared for properly. The Russian Army liberated the camp near the end of August 1944

POWs here hail savior, a princess

By Lou Mc...

"Princess Caraja, it's so good to see you again."

The lady of castles there a few days ago, Princess Catherine Caraja, formerly of Bucharest, today in Bucharest.

It's the kind of greeting Caraja is used to giving to her captives. "I welcomed you here," through the terms and labors of the American Ex-Prisoners of War Commission of America's 10th Air Force.

She has been going to these meetings to discuss the capture of POWs since she was a young girl. She is the latest member of a family that has been in the service of the United States since the time of World War I.

John H. Henshaw, 44, of Main Street, remembers her well. He was in the camp from April 1, 1944, to July 1, 1945. She was the first to be released. She was the first to be released. She was the first to be released.

"She's the one who kept us away from the Germans," said Henshaw. "She was a great help. She was a great help. She was a great help."

The princess is a bit of a mystery. She is a bit of a mystery. She is a bit of a mystery.

"The Germans wanted the princess back in Germany."

"I had no more fighting to do. I had no more fighting to do. I had no more fighting to do."

Caraja's own story is a puzzle. She is a puzzle. She is a puzzle.

She got the country with her own hands. She got the country with her own hands.

"We opened back up, Jack."

The princess first became known internationally as a result of her opposition to Romania's alliance with Nazi Germany during the Second World War II. When the oilfields at Ploiesti were bombed by the Allies in August 1943 in Operation Tidal Wave, she personally took custody of surviving Allied crews, saw that they were cared for in her hospitals, and facilitated their escape to Italy. During the Allied bombings of spring and summer 1944, several American airmen landed on her estate at Nedelea, after either emergency landing or parachuting. Throughout the war, she eased the burden of captivity for more than one thousand flyers that had been shot down. Those deeds earned her the nickname "Angel of Ploiesti" among the airmen.

In December 1955, Caradja received a visa to come to the United States; soon after landing, she appeared on the Dave Garroway show. She resided in the U.S. for more than 35 years, mainly in the town of Comfort (in the Hill Country of Texas), but also in Baltimore, Maryland and in Kansas City. While traveling across America, speaking at various venues, she found more than five hundred of the former prisoners of war she knew from Romania. She organized a reunion in Dallas, Texas on August 28, 1972, an event that continued to be held each year for many years, with the Princess as the guest of honor and main speaker. On August 27, 1976, during the U.S. bicentennial year, she helped present a Peace Monument for the Freedoms Foundation at the Valley Forge National Historical Park; in January 1977 she was awarded the George Washington Honor Medal by the Foundation. One of the pilots who survived crash landing, and escaped thanks to her efforts, was Richard W. Britt, who recounted the story in a book, many years later.

By September, Jack was returned to Allied Control in Europe and on his way back to the United States. He served in the Army Air Forces until his discharge at Lowry Field in Denver, Colorado on December 26, 1945. He had been awarded the Presidential Unit Citation, the Purple Heart, an Air Medal with

two Oak Leaf Clusters and the European Theater of War Campaign Ribbon with two Bronze Stars.

Jack returned home to his family and was given his old job back at Ohio Bell Telephone Company. He became an avid golfer, coached youth baseball and was active in many community and church organizations. Jack Hager was just a normal American, part of the “Greatest Generation”, who put his life on hold to go help win a war against tyranny.

Jack L. Hager passed away on June 3, 2010 at the age of 92.

The Jack Hager display at MAPS Air Museum is located in our Gallery of Heroes and was formally dedicated on Saturday June 25, 2011.