

TROUTVILLE Tidbits



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HENRY THOMAS GRINDSTAFF

By Tyler and Anita Baker

My grandfather, Henry Thomas Grindstaff (known as "Poppy-T" to his grandchildren), grew up in a small coal mining community tucked away in the Blue Ridge Mountains of southwest Virginia. He has told many wonderful stories to his children and grandchildren about his boyhood adventures on the steep hillsides in Appalachia and in the coal camp at Inman. One of those stories tells of his father, Harry Grindstaff, who had the dangerous job of going into the mines at night with a lantern to do a safety check before the other miners entered. Another one of his tales--a fun, made-up one--is about three skunks, Stinky, Stanky, and Stunky and their misadventures in the woods.

H.T. didn't finish high school in the usual way. He was called to military service just as his senior year was getting underway. He was sent to Basic Training and then to Europe without ever receiving a promised break to go home in between. At the age of eighteen, he found himself abruptly separated from home and everything he had known, and thrust into World War II. After the war, the principal of Appalachia High School awarded H.T. a diploma, saying that he had earned all his remaining credits as a result of his military service.

H.T. was a ball turret gunner on a B-17 bomber. It was his job to operate the two .50 caliber machine guns which protruded from the ball turret on the underside of the plane. The turret could rotate and pivot to allow the gunner to aim at enemy targets approaching from most directions. He was originally stationed in Stone, England as a member of the 387th Bomb Group in the 8th Air Force. Three months after his arrival in Europe, he was transferred to the 15th Air Force in Naples, Italy, due to heavy casualties among B-17 gunners flying out of that base. He remained stationed in Italy for the remainder of his time in the European theatre as a member of the 817th squadron of the 483rd Bomb Group.

The mission that stands out the most throughout H.T.'s service is the bombing of a tank factory in Berlin on March 24, 1945. Seven B-17 bombers in his group took off at 7:55 in the morning from an air base in Italy. By the end of the day, H.T.'s plane would be one of three planes to return, and the only plane to land with all crew members still alive. The flak was intense and there were many enemy fighters, including ME 262 jets. My grandfather recalls another B-17 was flying next to his plane in a close formation. The plane fell from the sky while his glance was diverted for a moment. He received an Air Medal for his service that day.

On the 24th of October 1945, H.T. was released from his service in the Army Air Corps. He was awarded an Air Medal with two oak leaf clusters, a Service Medal with 2 bronze stars and a Good Conduct Medal. In January, 1946 he enrolled at Virginia Tech and received a B.S. Degree in Business Administration and eventually a Master's degree in Education. He married Mary Dove from Blacksburg in 1948. He taught school for two years, and then became the Assistant Superintendent of Botetourt County Schools in Fincastle. In 1960, H.T. joined State Farm Insurance Company as an agent in Daleville; he retired in 1991 after 31 years with State Farm. *(Continued on Page 2)*



Third Annual Veterans Day Service

Friday, November 11, 2011 @ 10:00am

Troutville Elementary School

This is a very special service for all Botetourt County Veterans. Recognition and medals will be proudly given to each veteran by a family member or friend. The public is invited to join us as we honor those who have given so much.



An **APPRECIATION LUNCHEON** will also be served for veterans and their guests at **Troutville Town Hall at 11:15am**, hosted by the *Troutville Sunshine Girls*. For more information or to sign up a veteran for the program and/or luncheon, please call 819-6335.

"Veterans First.....They Earned It!"

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