

John Abram Hargett was born January 20, 1923 in Gaithersburg MD, the third of nine children, and grew up in Gaithersburg and Washington Grove. John was married to his wife Mary (Bart) for sixty-five years until her passing. They have 3 daughters, 7 grandchildren, and 7 great grandchildren. After graduating from Gaithersburg HS 1940, John worked as a carpenter and mechanic for one year, and at the Glen Martin (now Martin Marietta) aircraft factory in Baltimore, MD for two years. John was discharged in December 1945, and upon his return home had no trouble finding work. John said: "When I first came home I worked for a garage door company. Then my grandfather needed someone to take over his farm in Gaithersburg, so I sharecropped my grandfather's farm for two years, raising wheat and corn, selling to the local feed mill. For the next two years I rented the Atlantic Gas Station in Gaithersburg. I've been a carpenter, farmer, business owner, and a long time mechanic, and retired at age 80. I currently live in Monrovia, MD."

For his military service, John was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal, and Good Conduct Medal. John used the GI Bill to obtain his single-engine pilot's license. He joined the American Legion in 1988, transferring to Post 171 in 1999, and has been an active bingo volunteer fixture since then. John was a charter member of the Gaithersburg VFW post.

John received his draft notice in September 1943. When he reported for the draft he was told that if he enlisted, he could then pick either the Army or the Air Force. John joined the Army Air Force and was inducted at Camp Lee, VA. From there he was sent to Greensboro, NC to complete basic training, then onto Gulfport, MS for aircraft mechanic school. After completing aircraft mechanic school in early 1944, John went to Louisville, KY for training as an Aircraft Aerial Engineer (Crew Chief). The Crew Chief was assigned to a particular aircraft, and was responsible for the maintenance, loading, and unloading of that aircraft. The crew chief always flew on only his aircraft, so it behooved that crew chief to ensure his aircraft was always in top condition. And although the two pilots and radio operator would be moved from aircraft to aircraft, the crew chief for that aircraft never changed.

After completing his training John's group was sent to Fort Wayne, IN, where they picked up their new Douglas C-47 Skytrain aircraft (aka Dakota by the Royal Air Force) cargo planes and flew to Bangor, ME, their final stop in the USA. John said: "The Douglas C-47 was one of the best and most reliable planes that ever hit the skies." The C-47 is considered by many to have been the finest and most reliable aircraft ever built, and was vital to the success of many Allied campaigns, in particular those at Guadalcanal and in the jungles of New Guinea and Burma where the C-47 (and its naval version, the R4D) made it possible for Allied troops to counter the mobility of the light-traveling Japanese army. The C-47 was also the plane that supplied post WW-II Germany during the Berlin airlift, when the Soviet Union blockaded the city. In the European war theatre the C-47 was also affectionately known as the "Gooney Bird"; possibly because of its ungainly appearance.

Upon leaving Bangor, MD John's air group's ultimate destination was an airfield in East India. Along the way they made stops at Newfoundland, the Azores, Portugal, Marrakesh (Morocco), Tunis, Cairo (Egypt), Abadan (Iran), Karachi (Pakistan), East India, finally arriving at Chittagong, East Pakistan, which is now the country of Bangladesh. John said that when they got out of the plane at Abadan, Iran "It was scorching hot; I thought it had to be the hottest place on earth." At each stop, except Cairo, they were only allowed to stop overnight; so it was a very grueling trip. They stopped at Cairo for two days which gave John time to see the city, the Sphinx and the Pyramids. North Africa at that time was free of German and Italian occupation. While in India, John had an opportunity to see Calcutta and the Taj Mahal. From their base at East India, John's group supplied the English and Indian troops fighting the Japanese in Burma. They would land at an airfield if one was available; if not, they would drop their supplies by parachute. When they could land, they would evacuate the wounded, attended to by an in-flight nurse. John continues: "We did lose a few planes but that was due to pilots losing their bearing and/or running out of fuel. That happened mostly in China where we had to navigate around the mountains where the directional signals didn't work. When the planes went down they either crash landed or the crew bailed out. We don't know what happened to them after they went down"

Combat Cargo was the name of John's air group, and although his group did lose a few men and aircraft, John was one of the lucky ones as his plane never came under attack. As John tells it, his biggest scare was: "We were flying over China carrying a full load of 55-gallon drums of fuel, when an engine went out. Remember, the C-47 only had two engines! The plane handled beautifully and we were able to land at a nearby airfield. We didn't even want to think about crash landing with all that fuel aboard!"

When asked who he admired most during the war, John said: "I really admired Franklin Delano Roosevelt because he did what had to be done. I especially admired him because even though he was confined to a wheelchair, it didn't stop him from being a great president."

"When the war ended we were flying out of Chittagong, East Pakistan. The big letdown coming home was that we had to take a troop ship across the Pacific from Calcutta, India to Tacoma, WA. The trip took three weeks, with a mail stop at Singapore, but nobody was allowed off the ship. A lot of people got seasick but I was ok; when I felt woozy I just went below and laid on my bunk. We then had to take a train across the states from Tacoma to Ft Meade, MD where I was discharged, and went back to resuming my normal life." When asked what he thought was his best contribution to the war effort, John said: "Nothing spectacular. We flew in supplies and soldiers, and whenever we could we flew out the wounded. We did what we were supposed to do." That seems to be the overriding theme of the Greatest Generation: "We did what we were supposed to do." Amen!