



30 DAYS OF HONOR ★ *A Salute to Local Vets*



‘WE LOST WONDERFUL PEOPLE’

Veteran Ralph Buechler looks back at time in South Pacific in WWII

By Dan Richter
For Gannett Central Wisconsin Media

Wausau resident Ralph Buechler was 23 when he joined the United States Army Air Forces.

Originally from Ohio, Buechler was a recent graduate of Purdue University with a degree in mechanical engineering and a love of flying when he left for the South Pacific in 1941.

Buechler, 97, recently talked about his military career, his civilian life that brought him and his family to Wausau and about being part of the first Never Forgotten Honor Flight in 2010.

Q: What did you do in the service and where were you stationed?

A: I had an airplane myself before I went into the service, so I thought they'd have me teach flying, but they didn't let me. Instead, the colonel said he they were starting a worldwide meteorology setup and wanted me on that. I was overseas for two years in the Pacific, going from island to island, keeping track of the weather for the pilots that would be taking off. I'd go up before the other pilots and tell them what the flying weather would be like for that day.

Q: What is your most enduring memory from your time in the service?

A: One of the flights we went on we took a bunch of empty beer bottles, put them in bomb bay, and then went over one of the islands where the Japanese were and dropped them all. They whistled like crazy on the way down, and when they hit the ground and broke, it was almost as bad as a bomb.

Q: What do you most want people to know about World War II?

A: The war was a mess. We lost wonderful people and are still losing them today. At the time, we thought that it would be the last war, but now look what's happened since.

Q: What was your life like after the war?

A: I was the vice president of sales for Murray Machinery in Wausau. I had a job in Ohio with an outfit that made paper mill machinery and was offered a job here with a company that made pulp mill machinery. It was the best move my wife and I ever made in our lives.

Q: What did going on the Honor Flight mean to you?

A: I went on the very first Honor Flight and was just overwhelmed. To see those monuments and all the people we lost in all those wars. ... We honored them. One of the things I liked most about the flight was when we came home we had mail call and got little notes from school kids. We all enjoyed that very much.

ABOUT RALPH BUECHLER

Age: 97
Residence: Wausau
Conflict involved in: World War II
Military branch: United States Army Air Forces
Years of service: 1941 to 1945
Rank upon discharge: Major



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T'XER ZHON KHA/GANNETT CENTRAL WISCONSIN MEDIA
Ralph Buechler poses for a photo Tuesday in his house at Primrose Assisted Living Facility in Wausau.



A FLIGHT TO NEVER FORGET

The Central Wisconsin chapter of Never Forgotten Honor Flight celebrates its fifth anniversary this spring. Since April 2010, the Honor Flight program has taken more than 1,700 veterans of World War II, Korea and Vietnam from Central Wisconsin Airport to Washington, D.C., to view the memorials built in honor of their service.

30 Days of Honor is a project of Gannett Central Wisconsin Media to profile veterans who have taken an Honor Flight, or are scheduled, and to encourage more veterans to do so. Profiles will appear each day April 26 through Memorial Day.

Veterans may apply for a free Honor Flight (or loved ones may apply for them) by filling out an application. The only qualification for a veteran to take an Honor Flight is to have served in any branch of the U.S. military during the periods of World War II, the Korean War or Vietnam War. Veterans do not have to have been in combat. The applications and more information are available at <http://www.neverforgottenhonorflight.org>

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