John J. Chesnut

Professor
English
(1950-1968)



WWII
U.S. Army Air Force
Eighth Air Force
Second Lieutenant
Co-Pilot on American Flying Fortress

[Thanks to Glynn Chesnut for providing documents from which most of the information contained in this tribute to John J. Chesnut's military service and service to The College at Brockport, SUNY was extracted.]

John J. Chesnut graduated from Barbourville High School and Union College both located in Barbourville, Kentucky and attended the University of Louisville. Before entering the Army Air Force he was employed by the Louisville loan agency of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. After basic training he graduated from Marana Basic Flying School in Tucson, Arizona. He received his wings when he graduated as a second lieutenant from the Marfa; Texas Army Air Force advanced Flying School. He was commissioned upon completion of his course in training in twin-engine planes.

Soon thereafter John found himself as co-pilot on an American Flying Fortress, "Lady Godiva", stationed with the Eight Air Force in England where he along with other members of the Fort's crew made several bombing raids over Germany.



Following are excerpts from a letter John wrote home on November 6, 1943:

> "This finds me O. K. but rather cold. It doesn't get terribly cold here, but it's damp so it seems colder than it actually is…
>
> Things are getting a little tougher over here. We're getting it pretty hard, but as you can tell from the papers, the Germans are being literally blasted out in a lot of places. I can't help but feel sorry for them when the bombs go. They probably deserve it, but I still fail to appreciate the fact that people are being killed. The get a few of us always, but the odds are against them. As with most of the others here, "it ain't the fighters, it's the flak" that gests on my nerves. The P-47's, Lightnings, & Spitfires do a wonderful job of escorting. Boy, they look good buzzing around us. German fighters just don't get to us when we're escorted. We love fighter pilots with great fervor. They're much better than the Germans.
>
> We have a pass coming up shortly, at which time I shall celebrate in London."

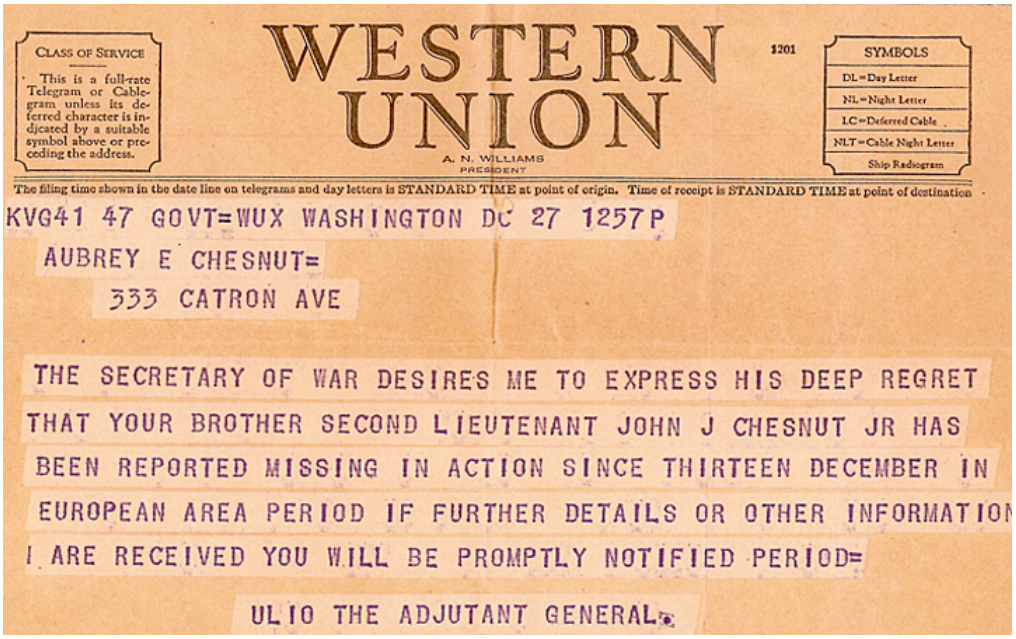
Excerpts from another letter home on December 8, 1943 include:

> "Thanks a lot for helping me woo Eunice. I know you've gone to a lot of trouble for me and maybe I'll get to do something for you someday.
>
> Our last mission was probably the toughest we've been on. That has been some time ago, so I can tell you about it now. Shortly after we got over Germany our number two supercharger went out & we couldn't keep up with the formation, so we jettisoned our bombs over some town to lighten the load. Then by pulling full power and using maximum manifold pressure we started gradually catching up with our group. Just before we caught them a bunch of German fighters hit us. They were estimated to be about 125, but nobody took time to count them accurately. We had no fighter protection the, so they lined up & fired their rockets at us & came on in. We were still lagging, so several of them came in on us. The attack lasted about fifteen minutes but seemed like an hour. We went through some pretty violent evasive action, but I still can't see how they missed us. The rockets aren't very accurate, but they look pretty mean buzzing around. The ZOMM slugs look even worse. Most of our guns had frozen for some reason (it was over 50 degrees below zero) so we were pretty helpless. Those FW's came head on at us as I ducked behind the instrument panel. I felt pretty silly afterwards because that would hardly stop a bullet, but it was sort of involuntary I guess…
>
> In the last few weeks we've lost two crews out of this barracks. They've already been replaced, but it gives one a peculiar feeling. I can't quite get used to the idea of buzzing peacefully about England, then just a few minutes later over France or Germany to watch the flak bursts pock the sky, and watch the fighters coming in. After the first raid, one of my crew quit, his nerves wouldn't take it. A Fort that was going down nearly hit us and scared hell out of him. I can't exactly condemn

him for it, but I couldn't quit bring myself to do that sort of thing because someone else would just have to take the same risk.

We finally got a plane of our own, and named it "Ole Bassar." We flew "Wabbit Twacks III" on our first mission and "Charlene the Bama Queen" on our second. Both of them were borrowed.

Shortly after John wrote this letter his family received this undesirable telegram:



CLASS OF SERVICE

This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless its deferred character is indicated by a suitable symbol above or preceding the address.

WESTERN UNION

A. N. WILLIAMS
PRESIDENT

1201

SYMBOLS

DL = Day Letter
NL = Night Letter
LC = Deferred Cable
NLT = Cable Night Letter
Ship Radiogram

The filing time shown in the date line on telegrams and day letters is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination

KVG41 47 GOVT=WUX WASHINGTON DC 27 1257P

AUBREY E CHESNUT=
333 CATRON AVE

THE SECRETARY OF WAR DESIRES ME TO EXPRESS HIS DEEP REGRET
THAT YOUR BROTHER SECOND LIEUTENANT JOHN J CHESNUT JR HAS
BEEN REPORTED MISSING IN ACTION SINCE THIRTEEN DECEMBER IN
EUROPEAN AREA PERIOD IF FURTHER DETAILS OR OTHER INFORMATION
I ARE RECEIVED YOU WILL BE PROMPTLY NOTIFIED PERIOD=

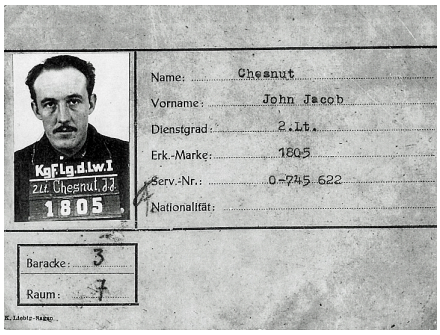
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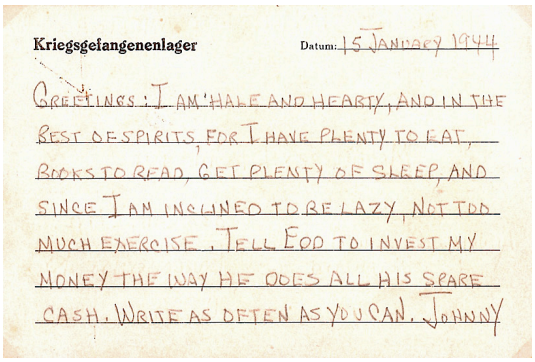
This was followed by a newspaper article in from a newspaper in Kentucky headed by: 13 Wounded, 1 Missing On State Casualty List containing a photograph of LT. J. L. Chesnut (missing in action) and the following that was extracted from the article:

"A Kentucky flier is missing and thirteen other Army men wounded, the War Department reported yesterday.

Lt. John J. Chesnut Jr., pilot on a Flying Fortress based with the Eighth Air Force in England has been missing in action since December 13 [determined to be 1943], according to a telegram received by his parents…Stationed in England since September, Chesnut had made several missions over Germany, and on one occasion had to bail out of his damaged plane on the return trip to England."

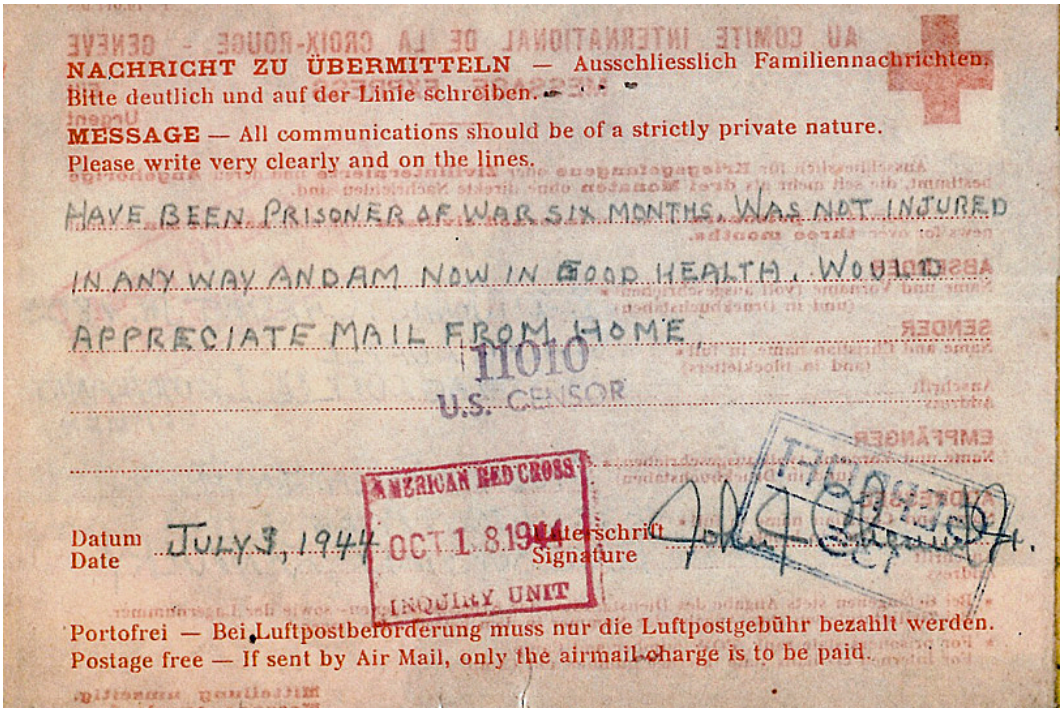
Confirmation of his POW status was received from him. Below is a copy of his POW ID and two notes that were received from his while he was a prisoner.





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Following are recollections from John's wife Eunice Chesnut: "John Chesnut was a veteran of World War II and had been a Prisoner of War for two years. He was a co-pilot



in a B17 plane that got shot down over Germany. As soon as the plane landed, the Germans captured him. My husband didn't talk about his time in the prisoner of war camp. The one thing he did say was, "We were hungry all the time, but we weren't starving the way the prisoners in the Japanese camps were. Sometimes, we were lucky and got bread but there was nothing to go with it. It was dry, stale and often had bugs in it. But, we ate it anyway."

When his family finally got an address for him, they would send him packages. They would pack boxes with Hershey bars or anything like that they could get, but things were still rationed and hard to obtain. The Germans opened the boxes first and my husband never did get the candy. The Germans were hungry, also.

John was nine years my senior and had already graduated from Union College in Kentucky before the war. After John and I married, we lived in Atlanta, Georgia for two years while he did his graduate work at Emory University. We moved to Brockport in 1950, when he was hired to teach in the English Department at the college.

[Taken from Eunice Chesnut's interview for the Brockport Community Museum posting at: http://www.brockportcommunitymuseum.org/pdfs/interviews/

John taught as a Professor of English from 1950 until he had to take sick leave in 1968 and he thereafter died in 1969.

english

[from 1968 Saga]

first row: miss hamilton, mr. chesnut, dr. ruf, dr. heyen, dr. gerber, *department chairman;* dr. lautz, miss emmanuel. *second row:* dr. mauganis, mr. boehm, mr. curran, mr. edmunds, dr. styza, mr. longerbeam, dr. burelbach, mr. bird, dr. grade, dr. bowman, dr. ryan.

