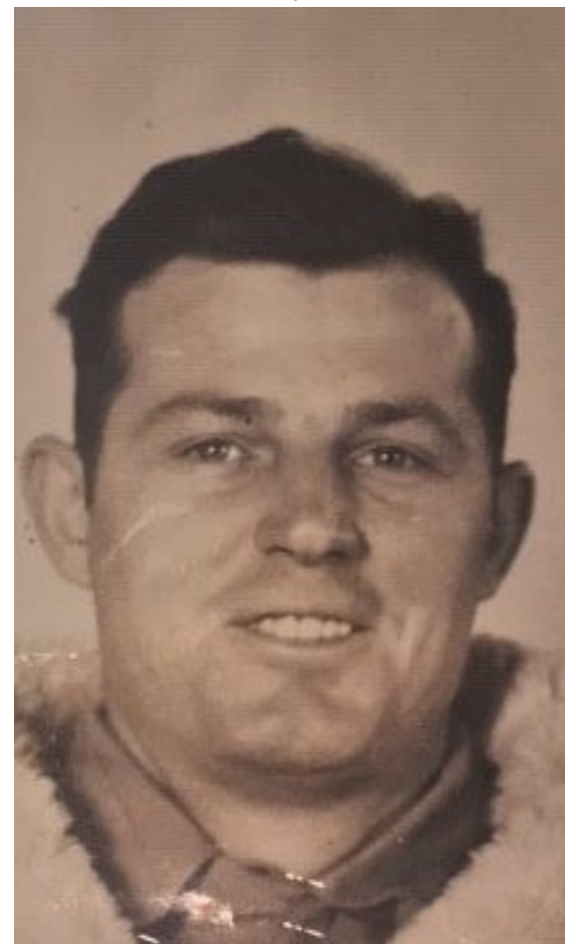


A POW's Story

Robert Plude Sr. enlisted in the Army in 1942 and was placed in the Air Corp, specifically the 8th Air Force (the Mighty 8th). He was stationed in Great Britain after training in the U.S. and was assigned to a crew that manned B-24 bombers attacking German-occupied Europe. The crews stayed together as they rotated through planes. He was on this 22nd mission when his plane was shot down over Germany.

On Nov. 4, 1944, he was the tail gunner in the “American Beauty” when it was hit it began to disintegrate. He did not remember anything from the point of the plane being hit to his waking up on the ground where he was turned over to German soldiers by a farmer near Misberg, the target of the mission. Of the 9-member crew (who had been on 20 or more missions together) only 4 survived to become POWs.

In the camp, Stalag Luft-1, Plude was known for betting on anything he could, and wore a piece of parachute silk that was signed by of his “hut” mates as a scarf. Near the end of the war, in 1945, food became scarce and the treatment by the guards became more brutal. Later, the camp was liberated by Soviet troops. They sent the GIs toward the American lines and killed the German guards.



The photo of Plude in his bomber jacket was taken before the mission. The photo of him in is dress uniform was taken after he got out of the hospital (he was hospitalized after he reached U.S. lines).

The items in this display include a diorama of the “American Beauty” (note: the nose art on the plane is not included since there are no existing photos to show what it consisted of); the parachute silk signed by POWs; his Army Air Corps. dress cap, his sergeant bars (complete with “Caterpillar Club” pin – whenever an airman bailed out of a plane [parachutes were silk] he automatically became a member of the club); WWII European campaign medal, a figure of a WWII bomber gunner; reproduction medals of his Purple Heart and POW medal (he was buried with both); and a commemorative booklet issued to POWs after the war.

