

2018 Summer Arts Guide

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'Scared every day': WWII bombardier shares his story

BY SUSAN FADEM
SPECIAL TO THE JEWISH LIGHT

Don't call him a hero. It's OK to marvel that, at 95, he plays bridge five times a week, has a daily exercise regimen that includes 25 against-the-wall pushups and that he reads a book a week, usually a mystery.

But do not tell Ralph Goldsticker Jr. of Creve Coeur, a World War II bombardier who flew the maximum of 35 missions in 1944, that he's a hero. He'll bristle.

One of about 16 million men and women — an estimated 500,000 of them Jewish — then serving in the U.S. military, he says: "My job might have been more dangerous than some, but we were all doing something to win the war.

"Scared to death every day. I was just doing my job."

Part of the fabled Greatest Generation of American World War II veterans, only about 550,000 million are still alive, according to U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Nearly 75 years after the war, Goldsticker's memory is astonishing. He can still describe what he wore, layer by layer, as he attempted to stay warm in the plexiglass nose cone of a B-17. At an altitude of 25,000 to 27,000 feet, the 10 crewman aboard endured temperatures of 30 to 40 degrees below zero.

Goldsticker, a first lieutenant in what was then known as the U.S. Army 8th Air Force, said his wartime gear usually began with two pair of socks and long underwear, then regular pants, a shirt, a fleece jacket,



During World War II, Ralph Goldsticker Jr. served as a first lieutenant in the U.S. Army 8th Air Force. Goldsticker was a bombardier on B-17 planes flying missions over Europe. At top right are medals Goldsticker earned for his service. At bottom right is a photo of a B-17 Goldsticker shows when he speaks to groups about his experiences. PHOTOS: MIKE SHERWIN

silk gloves, fur-lined gloves, fleece-lined boots, a fur helmet with a metal helmet on top, a Mae West inflatable life jacket (named for the buxom "bombshell" of vaudeville and Broadway), a parachute and a flak suit (form of body armor). Goldsticker was also equipped with an oxygen mask and hose, headset, throat microphone, heated suit, binoculars and a 45-caliber gun.

He'd remove the cotter pins holding in place the detonators on each of his plane-

load of bombs, either "six 1,000-pound bombs or 10 500-pound bombs or 28 100-pound bombs," he said.

B-17s measured close to 75 feet long and 104 feet wide.

"It was hard to move, huh?" asked Dick Scharnhorst, who was attending a recent talk by Goldsticker at Congregation Shaare Emeth.

"It was, and we didn't move much," acknowledged Goldsticker, who retired as a children's clothing sales rep.



With "pinch me, we can't believe we're hearing this from someone who lived it" reverence, the audience at Shaare Emeth sat enraptured.

Was it tough to fly in close formations? ("I don't know," Goldsticker responded. "I wasn't the pilot. But we had six planes in a squadron, 18 in a group.") Could you hear the bombs drop? ("There was too much other noise.")

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2018 UNSUNG HEROES



Maxine Mirowitz gets a kiss from her husband, Steven, after the 2018 Unsung Hero awards, held May 17 at the Jewish Community Center. Maxine Mirowitz was one of 10 people to be honored as an Unsung Hero. Find more photos from the event on page 4, and see an extensive gallery online at stljewishlight.com/multimedia. PHOTO: PHILIP DEITCH

Could Israel's army have acted differently on Gaza border? Experts disagree.

BY BEN SALES
JTA

What should an army do when tens of thousands of protesters mass on its border?

When that happened on Gaza's border with Israel May 14, Israeli soldiers opened fire on protesters who were storming the border fence, killing 60 and wounding more than a thousand. In the days since, debates have raged over larger ideas and issues like terrorism, occupation, withdrawal, blockade, civilians and militants.

But in real time last week, did the Israel Defense Forces conduct itself appropriately? Could it have defended its border with less bloodshed? Here are the cases for and against the IDF's conduct — and an example of a similar situation where things ended a little differently.

Defenders of Israel's conduct say it minimized casualties.

"The number of casualties was very, very small," said Doron Almog, who led the IDF Southern Command from 2000 to 2003.

Like other Israeli officials and veterans, he is defiant. What the world described as a protest, he said, was a crowd-sourced operation by Hamas, the militant group governing Gaza, to infiltrate Israeli territory and harm civilians.

"What's the last time you stood opposite 47,000 people?" he said. "Are you crazy enough to imagine what that is? What happened was a planned affair by Hamas. Hamas took out operational directives, it gave orders that within the groups

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Schmooze: Scouts' honors; building the Arch Café

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Zach Wild, Avery Fredman and Ben Fister and Max Hampton. Temple Israel is the only Jewish institution in St. Louis that sponsors a Boy Scout troop. The TI troop is 98 years old and currently has 23 scouts ranging in age from 12 to 17 years old.

Talk about coming full circle

Joe Spiegelglass started his business in downtown St. Louis in 1904, from a pushcart. He'd walk the streets, knocking on small storefronts, looking to do carpentry repair work.

As retail grew in St. Louis during the 1930s, and department stores got larger, Joe found he needed additional help. He hired a few carpenters to work with him, and then little by little began bringing on subcontractors to assist in their individual areas of expertise.

Over the next eight decades, Spiegelglass Construction, a Jewish-owned family business, continued to grow both locally and nationally, as more generations joined the company. Today, Barry and Tim



An artist's rendering of the Arch Café, which is being built by Spiegelglass Construction.

Spiegelglass, Joe's grandson and great-grandson, respectively, are co-owners, and working on a signature project: the Arch Café, a new restaurant that is, of course, located downtown, at the base of the Gateway Arch.

The 1,600 square foot café, which is scheduled to open July 4, will offer farm-to-table food that includes everything from ribs, hamburgers, paninis and toasted raviolis to vegetarian and gluten-free

options. Visitors can also enjoy locally sourced foods, as well as organic produce.

"Spiegelglass Construction has strong roots in St. Louis — our business began here in 1904, the year of World's Fair," said Barry Spiegelglass. "It's an incredible honor to now be constructing the Arch Café more than 110 years after my grandfather opened Spiegelglass Construction nearby in downtown St. Louis."

Like I said, full circle.

▶ 'WWII Experience'

WHAT: With visuals and mementos, World War II bombardier Ralph Goldsticker Jr. will share his experiences

WHEN: Saturday, June 2, 1 p.m.

WHERE: Indian Trails Branch Library, 8400 Delport Drive, Overland

HOW MUCH: Free

MORE INFO: To register, visit slcl.org/content/ww-ii-experience, or call 314-994-3300.

Veteran: WWII bombardier shares his story

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Ever since making headlines in 2015 as one of the American recipients of the French Legion of Honor medal, given for helping liberate France from Nazi control, Goldsticker has been in demand as a speaker.

He earlier received the Distinguished Flying Cross and five other air medals from the Army Air Corps. Another medal, from the Russian government, recognized that after a mission, his plane landed in the Soviet Union, where it was destroyed on the ground by German bombers.

Augmented by his own research and air-combat footage from the documentary "Memphis Belle: A Story of a Flying Fortress," Goldsticker tells his story. A savorer of history, he counts among personal souvenirs his wartime paychecks (the Army's \$75 a month dwarfed his previous St. Louis wages as a 50-cent-an-hour clerk), his train tickets and flying records.

Goldsticker tailors his sharing to particular audiences, whether schoolchildren, pilots or senior citizens, and talks about:

- Friday nights at Royal Air Force's Deopham Green airfield in England, where the 15 or 20 Jews on base, without benefit of a rabbi, conducted religious services. A twice-a-year-to-temple Jew at home, serviceman Goldsticker discovered that "a little praying never hurt." Raised at Shaare Emeth, he's a longtime member of Congregation Temple Israel.

- His experiences, using photos, maps and other visuals that his son Bob has turned into a PowerPoint presentation.

Instead of lecturing, the elder Goldsticker — father of three, grandfather of five and great-grandfather of one — makes eye contact with listeners. Rarely does he look at his notes.

His speeches, about a dozen to date, have proved something of a mixed blessing. With occasional pauses as his emotions surge, he relives the two missions he flew on D-Day, June 6, 1944, remaining in the air for 14½ hours. His voice wavers.

During his first D-Day mission, on a stormy morning shrouded in clouds, his plane bombed big coastal guns. In the clearer afternoon, he witnessed the magnitude of the Allied fleet, invading France on the Normandy coastline.

Goldsticker emerged from the war with no major injuries. But he talks firsthand of returning to a Quonset hut acutely aware that 40 percent of the beds that had been filled the day before were now empty.

Half of the Army Air Force's casualties during World War II were taken by the 8th Air Force, in which Goldsticker served. About 26,000 airmen died.

Goldsticker was one of the lucky ones. His and his wife, Helen, a kindergarten teacher and tour guide, were married for 63 years. She passed away at age 86 in 2012.

Although his father had a stroke at age 75 and died six years later, his mother lived to age 96 and 8 months.

"She was fine, right to the very end," he says.

On his own calendar, he's marked June 28. So hopeful is he of surpassing his mother's longevity that on that day, he'll be 96 years, eight months and one day old.

Celebrating
our
collective
commitment
to

EQUALITY

PRIDEFEST

June 24, 2018 • 12 pm

Celebrating Our Collective Commitment to Equality

Jewish Federation of St. Louis invites you to stand with us at this year's PrideFest. We have a great deal to stand together in solidarity for, to celebrate, and to speak out with our collective voice. We have a strong history of coming together as a community and are excited to bring everyone together again to get involved! Please arrive by 11:30 am to walk with us.

Register at JewishInStLouis.org/PRIDE

T-shirts are available for \$12 and can be purchased online with your registration. Shirt pick-up will take place at the Jewish Federation of St. Louis' Kopolow Building the week before PrideFest (June 18-22). To guarantee size and style, shirt pre-orders are due June 2.

For more information, contact Karen Sher at KSher@JFedSTL.org or 314-442-3824.

We look forward to a strong Jewish Community presence!

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