

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

"Major Havens Rescues Crewman"

Carroll County Times article for 29 January 1995

by Jay A. Graybeal

Fifty years ago nearly 3,000 local men and women were serving in uniform in military units throughout the world. Some faced constant dangers in frontline combat units while many others served in support roles behind the lines. Among the latter group was Major Charles W. (Coach) Havens of Westminster. During the last year of the war, the former athletic director of Western Maryland College was serving in England with the 486th Bombardment Group, 8th Air Force. His unit was equipped with B-17 Flying Fortress bombers and was heavily engaged in the daylight bombing of strategic German targets. Their missions were extremely hazardous from start to finish, as the following January 19, 1945 Westminster Democratic Advocate newspaper article reveals.

FLYERS TRAPPED IN BURNING BOMBER

Major Charles W. Havens Awarded Soldier's Medal

For Bravery and Heroism In Rescue

An Eighth Air Force bomber Station, England-For bravery and heroism displayed while helping to extricate badly hurt flyers trapped in a burning bomber, Major Charles W. (Coach) Havens, 486th Bomb Group air inspector, has been awarded the Soldier's Medal.

The award was presented to the major at this Eighth Air Force B-17 Flying Fortress base by his base commander, Colonel Glendan P. Overing, Orange, Mass.

One morning early as Major Havens watched silver Forts take off for an attack on a vital Nazi war target, something went amiss.

One of the big bombers crashed in a nearby field. Parts of jagged steel filled the air, red flames leaped some twenty-five feet skyward and the roar resounded. The fire spread rapidly, and many continuous explosions followed. Fifty caliber shells were bursting in mid-air and flying in all directions.

Fully aware of the dangers involved, Major Havens rushed into the blazing, bomb laden plane. Here he helped to remove three unconscious crewmen.

According to the citation accompanying the medal: "The courage and disregard for personal safety displayed by Major Havens on this occasion reflect the highest credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of the United States."

Major Havens, former athletic director of Western Maryland University, is the son of Mrs. Charles W. Havens, Rome, Md. His wife, Mrs. Jessie M. Havens, and two sons, Charles III and Richard, live at Westminster. The major is a graduate of Western Maryland. In addition to this service in England, he served with the anti-submarine Command at Trinidad.

Mayor Havens' group is a unit of the Third Bombardment Division-the division cited by the President for its England-African shuttle bombing of the Messerschmitt aircraft factories at Regensburg, Germany.

Like most local service personnel, Major Havens returned to Carroll County and resumed a civilian career after the war. I met him in the late 1960s when he was a teacher at North Carroll Junior High

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School. He was a friendly teacher and I enjoyed talking with him but I never knew that he was a veteran. I first learned of his service with the "Mighty Eighth" when I saw the accompanying photograph and an undated press release in the Historical Society's collection.

Photo Caption: Major Charles W. (Coach) Havens, 486th Bombardment Group, 8th Air Force, taken shortly after he rescued three crewmen from a bomber that crashed at American air base in England. Historical Society of Carroll County collection, gift of Donald Jordan, 1955.