

**John H. Klette, 1917 –
1st Lt USAF Pilot**

**Arthur Unruh, 1920 –
SSgt. USAF Gunner**

**15th Air Force, 5th Wing
301st Bomb Group, 32nd Squadron
Foggia Air Base, Foggia Italy**

In John's Words: It was an honor, privilege, and delight to pilot the aircraft of World War-II and the Korean War."

In Arthur's words: "I was fortunate. I got to come back to the States and grow up. But for my buddies who didn't, my flag goes up for them every day of the year".

Rarely does one have the opportunity to hear personal stories of 2 (two!) decorated air force personnel who crewed B-17s during WW II: But such is the case this year with Parade Marshalls John H. Klette, Park Hills, KY resident, and Arthur (Art) Unruh, Seattle, WA resident. John and Art are the Grand Marshalls of the 2018 Park Hills Memorial Day Parade, to be held on Monday, May 28th at 11:30am in Park Hills.

1st Lt. John H. Klette: John is a long time resident of Park Hills. He is an established and well-known Northern Kentucky practicing attorney, focusing on real estate law and estates for over 75 years. John also is an experienced pilot; he learned to fly at Lunken Municipal Field, Cincinnati, OH in the late 1930's. Following the Pearl Harbor attack on December 7, 1941, John drove his car from Park Hills, KY to the front gate of the Wright Patterson Army Air Corps base in Dayton, OH and asked to join up. He passed with colors; and was accepted into the US Army Air Corps Reserves the very next day. After his initial training, John ferried military aircraft to North Africa, and then was assigned to the 15th Air Force, 5th Wing, 301st Bomb Group, 32nd Squadron, in Foggia, Italy. From Foggia, Italy, John flew 51 WW-II B-17 (The Flying Fortress) strategic bombing missions. Following WW II, John was recalled to active duty and flew 50 Air/Sea rescue missions during the Korean War, piloting the SA-16 (The Grumman Albatross). John received 8 medals of commendation, including the Silver Star Award. The 15th Air Force lost 3,364 aircraft, with 20,420 personnel either wounded; Missing in Action (MIA); or, taken prisoner.

John provides further detail: *21,671 flying personnel were killed on 15th Air Force missions: "That is why we are here today: On Memorial Day: To honor the Airmen as well as the other military personnel who lost their lives in the service of their country."*

S.Sgt. Arthur (Art) Unruh: On February 1943, a lanky kid from Kansas was called by the draft board to defend the United States of America against Germany during World War II. After nearly a year of Army Air Corps flight training, Art was assigned to the 32nd Bomb Squadron of the 301st Bomb Group of the 5th Wing of the 15th Air Force. There, Art flew 50 B-17 bombing missions from the same the Foggia Italy air base where John was based. *"Most people don't know this" says Art. "The chance of making it through all 50 missions was only 27%". "We lost more B-17 men than all the men we lost in the Pacific. That's because each bomber had ten men. On my last mission we had seven planes, and our aircraft was the only one to come back. Five went down in the first eight minutes so 50 men were gone with that quick action attack."* Today, Art tells his stories to children at school assemblies and as a volunteer at the Flying Heritage Collection, located at Arlington Airport, WA. *"That's my candy store!"*

says Art. The 84-year-old decorated veteran beams as he gazes at the restored WWII and Cold War-era planes and the ones awaiting parts for restoration.

Art relates: *“All the time I was in the air, I was busy shooting at eh enemy fighters and I didn’t think about things until I got back on the ground and saw how butchered up the airplane was. That’s when I would fall apart.”*

The Silver Star Award: John and Art were critical crew members on the Silver Star mission: Art was the Gunner on the B-17 airplane, and John piloted the aircraft on the bombing run over the suburbs of Vienna, Austria and the return flight to home base. Among John and Art’s multiple combat awards, they were awarded the Silver Star Award (the third highest military decoration for valor in the US Armed Forces) for the mission they flew to destroy aircraft manufacturing factories in the suburbs of Vienna, Austria. During this raid at Weiner Neustadt, a suburb of Vienna, Austria, the 32nd squadron was on a bombing run and was attacked by overwhelming odds of enemy aircraft. Their injured crew and heavily damaged B-17 aircraft was the only returning aircraft from their squadron that safely made it back to their air base in Foggia, Italy.

The Silver Star Mission: Under the provisions of AR 600-45, as amended, and pursuant to authority contained in Circular No. 69, Headquarters, NATOUSA, 10 July 1944, the Silver Star is awarded the following named personnel, Air Corps, United States Army, residence as indicated with following citation:

For gallantry in action on July 27 1944, the Silver Star is awarded to the crew of a B-17 Flying Fortress type aircraft which was attacked while on a highly strategic bombing mission against the important enemy aircraft engine factory at Weiner Neustadt/Weiner Neudorf, Austria. Approaching the target, this heroic crew was aggressively attacked by approximately Seventy (70) persistent enemy fighters of the Me-109 and the FW-190 aircraft types. Their aircraft received approximately six hundred (600) direct hits from enemy 20mm cannon and machine gun fire. The concentrated enemy fire destroyed one-half of the rudder; the left elevator and elevator trim tab jamming these controls in position. Many hits were sustained in the fuselage and wings, severely damaging both wing spars; puncturing both inboard propellers; and destroying and setting fire to all radio equipment and the oxygen system from the radio room to the tail. The tail guns were destroyed and the tail gunner received very serious injuries. Despite the overwhelming odds, displaying outstanding courage and professional skill in the face of enemy fire, this crew beat off wave after wave of hostile enemy aircraft, destroying 9 enemy aircraft and severely damaging many others. Turning from the target after the successful bombing run, they again encountered heavy enemy opposition, and in spite of the fact that five guns were rendered inoperative, and their aircraft severely damaged, they drove off all subsequent attacks, while accounting for several more enemy aircraft destroyed or heavily damaged. Through outstanding teamwork and determination, they then brought their almost un-airworthy aircraft through to base without further damage to the crew or aircraft. The return trip was accomplished in approximately two (2) hours. Five (5) of the enlisted crew-members were without oxygen the whole time, at an estimated time of forty-five (45) minutes above 20,000 feet altitude. By their conspicuous gallantry, professional skill and devotion to duty, as evidenced throughout their brilliant combat careers, these men have reflected great credit upon themselves and the Armed Forces of the United States.

UNDER THE PREVISIONS OF AR 600-50 AS AMENDED AND PURSUANT TO AUTHORITY CONTAINED IN CIRCULAR NO. 89, HEADQUARTERS, NATO USA, JULY 10, 1944, THE SILVER STAR IS AWARDED TO THE NAMED PERSONNEL, DATED 24 AUGUST, 1944.