

Fred Belcher Military Service

Fred Belcher was born in Pelham, Georgia, Nov 11, 1919. When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941 he was at the University of Georgia preparing to become a lawyer and when he graduated in 1942 he immediately said goodbye to his family and friends in Pelham and joined the Army Air Corps. He received a year of training in the U.S. before being sent to war. He went to boot camp in Louisiana and from there to Wendover Utah, where he became a qualified aerial gunner before ever flying in a plane. at Boise Idaho and Casper Wyoming he became a top turret gunner in a B-17 with rank of Tech Sergeant.

When Fred was sent to join the 94th Bomb Group at Bury St. Edmonds, England in 1943, conditions were not good. The U.S. had not yet been able to produce enough fighter planes to protect the bombers and the enemy brought them down easily. B-17's with a crew of eight flew from England to bomb targets all over Europe. When they completed 25 missions, the crews were to return to America, but no crew had made that many missions. The prospect was either death or prison. The crews of the bombers bonded closely. By the next year, 1944 the allies had air superiority but Fred's plane was shot down on his eighth mission, September 26, 1943.



Fred Belcher, aerial gunner

The Pelham Journal Nov. 4,1943

Fred Belcher is War Prisoner

Young Pelham man reported missing is heard from.

Tech Sgt. Fred Belcher who was reported missing in action several weeks ago has been heard from. The message was received Wednesday morning by Dr. D. P. Belcher, father of Sgt. Belcher and is as follows:

Dr. David P. Belcher

200 Green Street,
Pelham, Ga.

"Reports received- through the International Red Cross state that your son, Sgt. Fred L. Belcher is a prisoner of war of the German government. Letter of information following from Provost Marshal General."

The Belcher family have been completely overcome with joy since the news that their son was alive. While other details are lacking, it was a great relief to know that he still lives.

Medal is Awarded Sgt. Belcher

While Sgt. Belcher was still missing Dr. Belcher received the following letter:

My Dear Dr. Belcher,

I have the honor to inform you that by direction of the President, the Air Medal has been awarded to your son, Technical Sergeant Fred L. Belcher, Air Corps, for exceptionally meritorious achievement while participating in aerial flight against the enemy

Since your son has been reported to the War Department as missing in action, the decoration will be presented to you....

May I again extend my deepest sympathy.

Sincerely yours,

J.A. Ulic, Major General.



Dr. and Mrs. D. P. Belcher

The crew parachuted into Belgium, which was occupied by the Germans, and all eight survived except the pilot. Fred and another who landed near him evaded capture for three days and nights, then were spotted by a farmer who took them to his house for food. Before they could

eat it the soldiers were there and shipped them by rail to Frankfurt Germany where they were interrogated by the Gestapo. From there Fred was sent to a prison camp, Stalag 17-B at Krems, Austria, near Brenau where Hitler was born. He lived there through two very long, cold winters. He was fortunate in that he escaped the torture which was prevalent in some camps during World War II but he did not escape the bitter cold and scarce food, and most of all, loss of freedom.



Stalag 17-B



Crew of "The Reluctant Dragon"
Bury St. Edmonds, England, 1943



When the war was ending the Germans marched 4,300 American prisoners northward to avoid capture by advancing Russian soldiers. They camped along the roads and in the woods until they were liberated by American troops on the banks of the Em River, May 3, 1945. That was a happy day.

Fred returned to the University of Georgia to get his ABJ degree, and there he found a sweetheart, Suzanne Smith. They both graduated in 1947 and later that year married and moved to Nashville Georgia, where they raised their family of three children, David, Robert and Lisa. Fred practiced law in Nashville until he retired in 2003. He remained in the Air Force Reserve and was assigned to in the Judge Advocate General office at Moody until he retired as a Lt. Colonel in 1979.



Home from the war!!!!