

Darwin Wilson Michael, T-40

8 September 1922 – 30 November 2009

(aged 87)



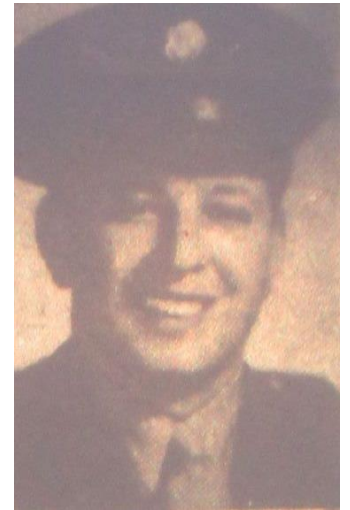
"Healthier, not wealthier but a whole lot wiser," grinned Lieutenant Darwin Michael was a sage twinkle in his eye that belied his 21 years of age.

His topic was his nine months as a B-24 pilot in Africa and Italy, but to keep this beribboned war hero's mind on his job was quite a task. He kept beaming approval of his just being home with his wife and 11-month-old son, Darwin Michael, Jr., and his parents, Mr. and Mrs. H. E. Michael of 766 North Trezevant.

Pinned above his pilot's wings were ribbons including those representing the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with seven oak leaf clusters. He has completed 50 missions and has arrived in this country after being temporarily stationed in Naples.

"Hairless Joe" was the name of Lieutenant Michael's plane, which almost left him hairless on one occasion. He was piloting "Joe" as the lead ship in a squadron flying on a mission over Klagenfurt, Austria, when enemy flack knocked out one motor before the plane had reached its objective. But Lieutenant Michael kept in formation although the flack had knocked the windshield completely out. Neither he nor the co-pilot were harmed because their oxygen masks shielded them from flying splinters.

After their objective was gained and destroyed and the planes started on their return voyage, the second motor in the B-24 started cutting out "Hairless Joe" was forced to drop out of formation over the Balkans, but in spite of the two motors, Lieutenant Michael finally nursed the plane safely back to an airfield in Italy. A rare occurrence to bring a plane in on nothing much more than a prayer, the young Memphian was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.



"I felt like that was my last day," breathed Lieutenant Michael, "but here I am at home. It's unbelievable."

Speaking of resorts, Lieutenant Michael went to one of the world's most exclusive at this point, which the Army has taken over as a rest resort.

"Why, they even served my breakfast in bed," Michael said approvingly. He stayed at a hotel formerly a showplace for the most cosmopolitan of tourists. Swimming, fishing, boating - - -I'd rather be home."

But life in Italy was not quite that pleasant. Christmas morning when the boys awoke there was water up to their knees in their tent. Lieutenant Michael's clothes were all wet and he had to wear them in a mission that day over Germany.

Later his squadron was moved to an old Italian barracks that had also been used by the Germans. You read about the push on Sicily, Anzio, Rome? Lieutenant Michael helped clear the way for all those.

In his spare time, the Memphian fought the Civil War over again. And in case you're wondering about "Hairless," it was just one of a whole squadron of planes named for characters from the Lil' Abner comic strip. Lieutenant Michael attended Tech High School and Memphis State College. He and Mrs. Michael will leave August 6 for his temporary station in Miami.

Information from The Commercial Appeal, Sunday, July 23, 1944.