

Bethinking of Old Orleans

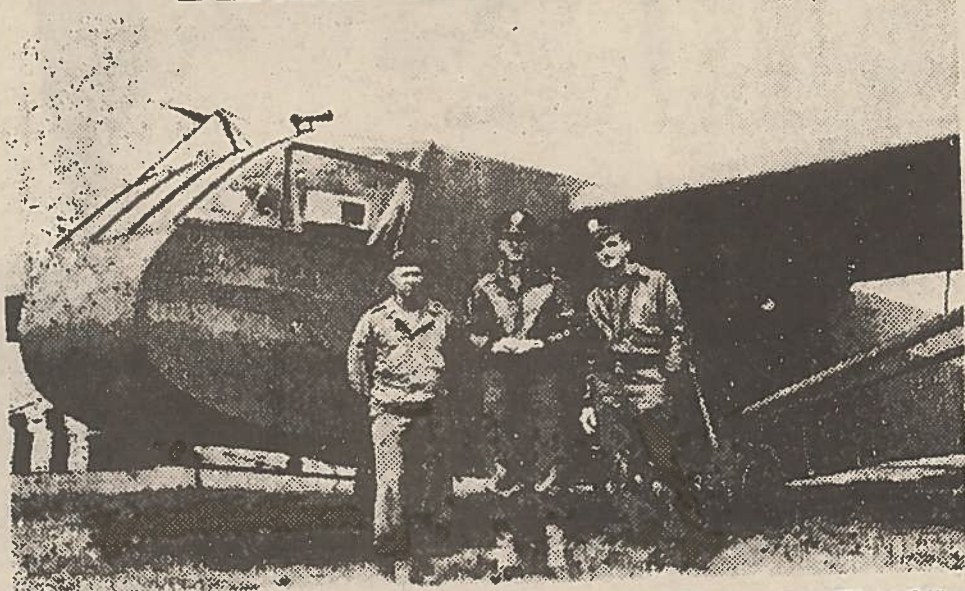
C.W.Lattin County Historian

Vol. XVI

11-17-94

No. 46

BEHIND ENEMY LINES



With Veterans Day just behind us and the 50th anniversary of World War II still upon us, our interest is now peaked for war stories of vigilant veterans. But before I begin this story, let me emphatically say to the younger generation, especially our children and adolescents of today: Don't wait until it's too late to get a first hand account of what it was like both abroad and at home fifty years ago. A great uncle, a grandfather, distant cousin or even a neighbor may have a wealth of information of what it was like to fight in WWII. Don't miss a chance to be able to pass these accounts down in your family because almost every family had servicemen involved in WWII. Tape cassettes are cheap, paper and pencil are cheap and if nothing more, ask questions, listen and remember. How often I've heard people say: "If I had only been interested enough years ago to ask my great aunt this or that, but now it's too late."

My family was no different than most in providing at least one able-bodied man for the war effort. He is my third cousin, William S. Lattin who with his wife Anamae of fifty-one years, now lives on Lexing Court in Lockport.

Here is his story: William S. Lattin grew up in Albion, NY, the son of Harry D. Lattin and Florence Clark Lattin. He also had a sister Helen Lattin Ryan who has been deceased for over twenty years. He graduated from Albion High School in the Class of 1931 and then attended the University of Florida and is a graduate of Iowa State College having taken up the study of landscape architecture.

Along about 1939 a man enticed him to take a flying lesson for \$6 on a plane with a rudder. Eventually, he acquired a license and became a "Sunday Pilot" taking friends for rides. On December 30, 1941 he enlisted in the Armed Services and began his training at Fort Niagara. Following Fort Niagara he was sent to Biloxie, Miss. and put up in a tent city. For the next two and a half years he was to be in training,

located in various bases around the country including Shreveport, La. and Columbus, Ohio.

He had put in for becoming a glider pilot in Tampa, Florida and after waiting for the training in Columbus he was then relocated at Okmulgee, Oklahoma. Here there were 150 trainees and he became a Corporal. From there he went to Fort Sumpter, New Mexico and then "real training" at Wickenburg, Arizona. Here gliders were towed up by tow planes to 15,000 feet before being released. He also trained at Sheppard Field in Texas where he became a glider mechanic. Gliders he worked on were made of fabric and steel tubing manufactured by WACO. Some were fifteen passenger crafts also designed for cargo. A C47 in front could tow two of these gliders at once.

In 1943 he headed over seas on the Aquatania with 10,000 soldiers. Again, more training took place in England on British gliders which he said were terrible. "When the time came for invasion, they put us behind barbed wire so we could not talk to anyone." When D Day came, he piloted a glider and landed his cargo of men and weapons in the front lines of the invasion of Normandy. This included a bazooka team, a mortar squad and their weapons and ammunition. He states: "The tops of tall trees had been trimmed by the Nazis to interfere with aerial reconnaissance of the landing zones and

tracer bullets were going into the tail of the glider ahead of us. Our own tail was chewed up a little but the airborne boys unloaded and went into action without a hitch." There were sixty gliders in four squadrons for the invasion with only about 100 feet in between during flight. As a result of the

success, Flight Officer, William S. Lattin was awarded the Air Medal at an Air Force Troop Carrier Base in the European theater of operations.

With this success behind him he was then a part of an airborne invasion into Holland during September of 1944. This turned out to be a most perilous journey. At about 500 feet altitude over enemy lines there was an explosion. The pilot of the tow plane was killed instantly leaving the co-pilot to release the glider ahead of schedule. The maximum distance a glider could go was three miles. F.O. Lattin was able to land his craft in a cultivated field. "Hardly had we stopped when several men, women and a boy gathered around us." The little Dutch boy, who spoke English, guided them to a convent where the Sisters hid them over night. The boy told them they were in very dangerous territory, as there were Nazi troops all about. F.O. Lattin and his crew had started to walk back 55 miles into France through enemy territory. Fortunately they escaped falling shells, acquired a ride and got back to safety largely through the Underground. Upon his return to the States he had to report directly to Washington in order to protect the secrets of the Dutch Underground involvement. From January 1945 - September 1945 he served in the 301st Troop Carrier Squadron and the 92nd Troop Carrier Group.

William S. Lattin says, "People often think everybody went off to war but there was a lot going on here at home." Imagine two and a half years of training here for six months of duty in the European theater of operations. Flight Officer Lattin is shown in the center of this 1944 photo by one of the gliders he used during WWII.