

IN LOVING MEMORY OF A TRUE AVIATOR, MAN, AND FRIEND

—My God, what a painful double whammy for me today... April 15, 2014: I tragically lost one of my closest, and most cherished WWII aviator mentors and longtime friends — the day I feared for years had come — the day we lost George Meshko. A year on, the pain stings just as much...

Of the hundreds, and hundreds of pilots I personally know, decorated WWII B-17 waist gunner and flight engineer George Meshko personified and defined the very 'Spirit of Aviation' itself!

As a devoted aviation artist, I learn from the very best. It has been my great fortune to have traveled all over the country with George nearly two decades. In that time I have illustrated his famed B-17/F "Skyball" on three occasions. You guys can't imagine the stories...

A TRUE AVIATOR - A TOUR OF FLIGHT SPANNING A LIFETIME

Ret. Staff Sergeant, George Meshko flew with the 96th Bomb Group, 339th Bomb Squadron, 8th Air Force, Army Air Corps during WWII, and was in the air as an observer, that "Day of Days" June 6, 1945, for the D-Day Invasion on Normandy, France. Born in Staten Island, New York in 1925, George served as waist gunner and flight engineer and survived 25 combat missions in the B-17, from November 1943 to March 1944.

For his outstanding service and dedication, George was awarded the Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters and the Distinguished Flying Cross, which was presented by the legendary, General James Doolittle, himself.

George completed his combat tour just two weeks before his 19th birthday. Following his safe return stateside from the war, George married his sweetheart Nancy, started a family and continued his love affair with both, Nancy and aviation.

George took flying lessons through the GI Bill and became a flight instructor. He flew crop dusters and did a variety of other jobs that allowed him to hang around the airport and keep flying. Eventually, George landed at Frontier Airlines. Over his lustrous 33-year career as an airline Captain, he flew the DC-3, the Convair 340, the Convair 580, the Boeing 737 and finally the MD-80.

To his very last days, George was involved with the EAA, the 8th Air Force Historical Society, and made it a point to get out to speak about his experience and the joy flying to his Rocky Mountain community.

Not only have I learned most everything I know from George about the reality of air combat during WWII, and endless details of the Boeing B-17s — (becoming an awarded aviation artist) but far more importantly, George taught me to become a much finer man through the process.

Real Americans like George Meshko helped build America into a great country. It is because of them I understand the vast difference between nationalism and patriotism. To this day we owe these honored veterans everything!

George was like a walking aviation encyclopedia. I'll never forget the times we shared at the Smithsonian Air & Space Museum in DC, The National Air Force Museum in Dayton, OH, and our visit to the 8th Air Force Museum in Savannah, GA. George's knowledge, understanding and recall of flying and the mechanics of aviation was just staggering.

At all of our annual 96th Bomb Group reunions, George and Nancy always ran our hospitality suites in the finest style. What grand times! Always a great story to share, George was just funny as hell. Man did he always just bust me up!

No combination of words I could possibly muster could ever convey what a genuine, wise and remarkable brand of man George was in real. Nor could I articulate all the remarkable times we shared, his profound influence, and all this great man took his time to teach me.

There will never be another George!

Sadly, America has truly lost one of her finest patriots and pioneers! This amazing man has forever changed my life and made me understand appreciate the duty to honor those who came before us! I am truly privileged to have known such fine man, friend and aviator. My God, this still hurts so damn much!

I DEARLY THANK YOU GEORGE FOR EVERYTHING!!!

Blue skies my dear friend!!! God bless you sir, your devoted friend - ALWAYS ~ Joe Jones

