

Nicholas A. Orlando
Adjutant
Lawrence - Cedarhurst American Legion
Post 339

Nick was born on December 16, 1922 in Brooklyn, N.Y.. His mother Mary Italiano emigrated to the USA from Italy in 1919. His father served in the U.S. Army Infantry during WWI. When Nick was two years old his father died and his mother moved to Inwood because she had relatives and friends living in the area.

Nick was a child of the Depression Era who experienced hard times at an early age. He attended Public School No. 4 in Inwood and Lawrence High School. Although he had the desire to get a college education he was unable to do so. After graduating from High School he had to get a job in order to help support his family. At first Nick worked in construction doing manual labor building streets and sidewalks in Nassau County. Later on, he got a job at Republic Aviation in Farmingdale and contributed to the War effort by participating in the production of P-47 aircraft.

Like many of his boyhood friends, Nick was called upon to serve his country during WW II. In January, 1943 he was drafted into the Army Air Corps. He completed his basic training in Atlantic City, N.J. and then went on to attend several training schools in Utah, Colorado, South Dakota and Washington State. Nick volunteered for flight duty and decided to become a belly gunner (lower ball turret) on the B-17 Flying Fortress. Nick, a Staff Sergeant in the Eighth Air Force, was assigned to the 306th Bomb Group (H), 423rd Squadron (nicknamed the "Grim Reapers") and was based in Thurleigh, England.

Nick flew on fifteen bombing missions over Europe, concentrating on targets such as ball bearing factories, munitions plants, fuel depots, train yards and highways. For his efforts he received several medals including the Air Medal with two Oak Leaf Clusters, the Bronze Battle Star, the European-African-Middle Eastern Service Ribbon, and the Purple Heart. It was the 15th mission that would become a turning point in his life.

On March 22, 1944, just after completing a bombing run over Berlin, his plane got hit by enemy anti-aircraft fire. Thinking the plane was out of control and going down, Nick, along with three other gunners and the radio operator, bailed out on their own free will without being ordered to do so. The good news was he parachuted out and made a safe landing near Osnabruck, but the bad news was that he was immediately captured by German civilians and members of the German Youth Home Guard. Only later did Nick come to know that his disabled plane crash landed in a plowed field on the English coast without injury to the remaining crew members.

Nick was taken to Dulag Luft, an interrogation center near Frankfurt, Germany, for processing. He was kept in solitary confinement for 13 days and was interrogated three times. Eventually he was transported by train in a cold boxcar for a three-day trip to Stalag 17B, a Prisoner of War camp located near Krems, Austria. Nick arrived there on Easter Sunday, April 9th.

Stalag 17B was initially used as a concentration camp from 1938 until 1940 when it began receiving French and Polish soldiers as the first POWs. By 1944, the entire camp held nearly 30,000 POWs of various nationalities including over 4,000 U.S Air Force noncommissioned officers. Nick spent over one year as a POW living under conditions that were harsh, oppressive and sometimes even brutal. He credits his survival to the Red Cross parcels he received and by playing baseball as often as possible. Movies such as "Stalag 17", "The Great Escape", and more recently "Memphis Belle" are based on circumstances similar to those experienced by Nick during his tour of duty in Europe.

By April 1945, the Germans realized that they were losing the War and that Russian troops were advancing. They decided to evacuate the camp and forced the American POWs to march almost 300 miles in 18 days in order to reach another POW camp near Braunau, Austria. It was there in the woods surrounding the camp that the POWs were liberated by the 80th Infantry Battalion of the Third Army and the 13th Armored Division of the Seventh Army. After a few days, Nick was flown by C-47 to LeHarve, France and on to Camp Lucky Strike for rehabilitation and processing. He then sailed back to New York on a German luxury liner that was captured by the British.

In June, Nick was given a well deserved furlough and returned to his home in Inwood to make a new life for himself. On July 29th, he married Katherine Jareb, a neighborhood girlfriend who he had known most of his life. The wedding ceremony took place at Saint Joseph's R.C. Church in

Hewlett and the reception was held at the home of the Bride's parents, also in Hewlett. The couple went to Atlantic City, N.J. for a brief honeymoon. Nick had to leave his new bride for a short time, going to Colorado to complete his remaining time in the service in preparation of his discharge from active duty.

Upon his return to civilian life, Nick decided to go into business for himself and bought a stationery store/soda fountain on Lawrence Avenue within close proximity to childhood home. Nick and his wife lived in an apartment above the store. After the births of his two sons Richard and Dennis, and four years of long hours and hard work Nick decided to sell the business, look for a new job and hopefully buy a house where he could raise his children and finally settle down. Nick managed to get a job with the U.S. Postal Service working at the Lawrence Post Office. He started as a clerk, was promoted to the Superintendent of Mails, and eventually retired after 33 years of dedicated service.

Early in 1951, Nick purchased a home on Oakland Avenue in Cedarhurst where he and his wife currently reside. Both of his sons were educated in the Public School system and went on to attend local colleges. Nick and Katherine are parishoners of St. Joachim's Church. They recently celebrated their 47th wedding Anniversary. Nick's sister Clem Mazzeo is also a resident of Cedarhurst and her husband Fudie is a member of our Post.

Nick's older son Richard is a Staff Director with NYNEX in White Plains. He resides in Uniondale with his wife Margaret and her sons Robert and Cris. Richard's three children - Richard, Thomas and Renee - reside in Port Charlotte, Florida with their mother. Nick's younger son Dennis works for the U.S. Postal Service in Punta Gorda and also resides with his wife Sara and two sons - Michael and Nicholas - in Port Charlotte. Nick and Katherine make an annual trip to Florida by Auto Train and usually spend five or six weeks vacation with their long distance family.

Nick enjoys his retirement. He does his own landscaping and gardening, and keeps busy by doing odd jobs around the house and running errands. He goes for daily walks, rides his bicycle and occasionally plays golf. Nick is a member of the Royal Arcanum, the Inwood VFW, and has been associated with American Legion Post 339 for over twenty years.

Nick has been Adjutant of our Post for the past few years. He works hard, does his job well and strives to do the best he can for the Post and its members. Nick is always there to provide a helping hand and friendly advice. He is honored and proud to be a member of Post 339 and enjoys serving in his capacity as Adjutant. Nick is patriotic and is very grateful for the freedoms he believes in and has fought for. Nick is proud to be an American and is glad that he had an opportunity to serve his country well.