



Clarence John Puska, Sr.

August 28, 1916 - July 29, 2010

Mr. Clarence John Puska, Sr., a long-time resident of Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, was born on the Keweenaw Peninsula in Mohawk, Michigan, on August 28, 1916. He had lived on Kincheloe in recent years. Clarence grew up in Rudyard at a time when it was a bustling family farm-based community with horse drawn carriages and dirt paved streets; and Detroit, where the popularization of Henry Ford's Model-T transformed it into America's car city. As a young boy in Detroit, Clarence received his first baseball mitt, his most treasured possession, and he developed his lifelong love of baseball. He became an avid and loyal fan of the Detroit Tigers, who won the World Series in 1935, and tracked each and every game as closely as a statistician. Clarence enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps on April 7, 1941. He served as a Flight Maintenance Gunner and Power Turret/Gunsight Mechanic until October 4, 1945, when he was discharged. He flew on 14 combat missions during World War II in the European Theater, where he served two overseas tours. Two of his combat missions were near disasters. In February 1944, Clarence's aircraft was damaged returning from its mission over Germany. All crew members safely parachuted over the English countryside, while the pilot sent the B-24-D on auto pilot into the English Channel. Once on the ground, Clarence walked to the nearest building, which happened to be a pub that served warm beer, to request a pick up by his unit. In another mission, Clarence's aircraft was riddled by heavy ground flak when their unit passed over Antwerp, Belgium. Both the pilot and navigator were hit, but managed to

fly the aircraft back to England where they safely crash landed in Dover. Clarence did not have even a scratch from the mission, but after he landed he saw that flak had narrowly missed his head. Clarence participated in several European operations, including the Normandy, Northern Apennines, Po Valley, Air Offensive Europe, Northern France and Rhineland campaigns. His awards include the Air Medal with First Oak Leaf Cluster, Europe-Africa-Middle East (EAME) Medal, the American Defense Service Medal, and the World War II Victory Medal. He reached the rank of Staff Sergeant, which he earned and lost many times throughout his service. During an interview with a wartime correspondent, Tim Malone, Clarence quipped that he had been "busted" (that is, reduced in rank for committing a military infraction) and regained his rank so many times that he should "have zippers on my stripes." After the war, Clarence settled in the Sault area. He met his future wife, Ruth Marie Puska (nee Rasmussen), while he was a patient in the War Memorial Hospital where he was recovering from a work-related accident that destroyed his left eye. Ruth, an Army Nurse Corps veteran, had served in the Philippines during 1945. She worked at War Memorial Hospital until she retired in 1984. They celebrated their 63rd wedding anniversary on July 19, 2010. In addition to his love of baseball, Clarence loved to take long walks and drive around the countryside. He drove into his 90s and was tickled to renew his driver's license by mail in the days before his death. He and Ruth spent many happy hours driving through the back roads of Chippewa County and throughout Michigan, counting wildlife and watching the seasons change. Clarence cherished a profound sense of pride in his wartime service to his country and nostalgia for the camaraderie he had shared during times of terror and relaxation between missions as a member of the Eighth Air Force in England, as well as other units in Italy, North Africa, and during training in the United States. Clarence was a lifetime member of the Veteran's of Foreign Wars. This year was his 39th year of continuous membership in the American Legion, where he received a Citation for Meritorious Service in 1990. Clarence took special pride in the fact that his wife, son, and daughter all served in the

military, as well. Family and friends will most remember Clarence as a proud 'Finlander' with an irreverent sense of humor. His sharp memory for dates, people, places, events and directions lasted into his 90s. Late in life he enjoyed playing the nickel slot machines and the occasional jackpot. Always quick with a joke or wry observation, he brought playfulness and laughter into the lives of the people who knew him. He will be sadly missed. In addition to his wife, Ruth, Clarence is survived by his sister, Verna Geering, age 95, of Burr Oak, Michigan; and his children, Clarence John Puska, Jr. of Kinross, Michigan, who is a Vietnam War veteran who retired as a Senior Chief from the Coast Guard in 1989, and Susan Marie Puska of Arlington, Virginia, who retired as an Army Colonel in 2005. Clarence is preceded in death by his father, John Jacob Puska of Rudyard, who was born in Jalasjarvi, Finland, on July 14, 1884 and died in 1960; his mother, Rosa Alphilda Puska (nee Mattson), who was born in Calumet, Michigan, on March 14, 1885, and died in November 1924, in Rudyard, Michigan; four sisters, Laila Kaunisto, Edna Ismond, Junetta Durity, and Alice Ruona; and two step-sisters, Hattie Kivela and Malinda Mayer. Funeral services will be held at 3:00 PM on Wednesday, August 4, 2010 at C.S. Mulder Funeral Home with Pastor Bill Lockhart and Pastor Josh Rader co-officiating. Friends may call at the funeral home from 1:00 until the time of the service. Burial with military honors will be at North Rudyard Cemetery. Memorials may be left to The National World War II Museum, 945 Magazine Street, New Orleans, LA 70130 or the Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum, P.O. Box 1992, Savannah, Ga. 31402.

Tribute Wall

VT

“ Uncle Clarence, I wanted to say something at the funeral, but as Uncle Clarence said "you are a bawlbaby just like Alice". First, thanks to all the Veterans that participated in his funeral. You made his day and ours, also. Uncle Clarence loved his family dearly. Aunt Ruth was his companion and best Friend. He was very proud of his son, Clarence, and daughter, Susan. If you asked about them he always knew where they were and what they were doing. He may not have said it but "he loved you dearly". Clarence always was willing to help his sisters, He checked on them if they were ill, he enjoyed teasing his sisters. Our mother, Laila, was scolding him and said to him "why, don't you behave so you can stay a sargeant"? He laughed and said, "that's no fun". All Uncle Clarence's nieces and nephews, and their kids, want to say we enjoyed the time you spent with us. To describe Uncle Clarence in one word - would be FUNNY. Our Dad, Ensie, would comment after a death, "Let him rest in Peace" so to all relatives and friends remember him as a great Patriot, important family link, and we ask him to keep his jokes clean in Heaven. We will remember you with pride and love. Your Godchild & niece. Verda Toler

verda toler - August 06, 2010 at 12:00 AM

SP

“ Dear Sue, I wanted you to know I send my sympathy and prayers. Sally Cartwright Plummer

Sally A Plummer - August 04, 2010 at 12:00 AM

MR

“ Sue, and Family, I was saddened to see that your loved one passed away. You are in my thoughts and Prayers and I wish you all God's blessings.

Mary M. Rohrer - August 03, 2010 at 12:00 AM

VF

“ *Aunt Ruth, Clarence, and Susan. A beautiful write up.
we will see you Wednesday.*
Verda

verda, jerry, fay - August 02, 2010 at 12:00 AM