

An American Hero in Highland Beach

John Shoemaker

Life is not always easy and time moves quickly. We may lose sight of who our neighbors are, especially our heroes.

This is one effort to highlight one of our special heroes in Town of Highland Beach.

38 years ago, John Bury and his wife, Shirley, decided to live in Highland Beach when most of it did not exist at the time beyond sand, mangroves and iguanas. The Seagate condominium was a major new facility at the time.

John Bury has a special place in history being one of the few navigators left from WW II who flew on the massive B-17 Flying Fortress bombers of the Eight Air Force, based in Polebrook, England. Over a quarter of the crews of B-17's was lost as they made repeated bombing runs over Germany to destroy industrial sites, transportation centers, and other strategic targets for the Allies.

We have seen movies of what some of that was like. Dozens of B-17's was loaded down with ten 500 lbs. bombs, with 10 personnel, machine gun ammo, and the wings loaded with fuel. They would take-off and fly in a tight formation for protection to their targets where they were met by Luftwaffe fighters and anti-aircraft flak.



Once the bombers were outside the range of fighter protection, they had to rely on their own defenses against desperate German fighter pilots. Each B-17 was armed with thirteen .50 Caliber Machine Guns in turrets above, below and at each end of the fuselage.

John's role in the lead bomber of their group was to make sure to follow the predetermined flight plan, get to the right target at the right time, and return safely.

He did that 28 times. Earned the Distinguished Flying Cross with four Oak Leaf Clusters.

After the war, and with a degree from Seton Hall University, John started out as an assembly line worker for Purolator Corp. and worked his way up over the years to become their Vice President of Marketing. His career at Purolator spanned 39 years.

Today, John and Shirley stay protected in their Seagate condo and are receiving tremendous support from a real "angel", their daughter, Carol, who lives in Boca Raton. She does their food shopping, obtains their meds, and has breakfast with them once a week. Neighbors and friends also chip in with hot meals on occasion. They also take advantage of tele-medicine with their doctors.

John is pushing 100 in a few months and, with his wife of 73 years, they have four adopted children, eight grandchildren and three great, great grandchildren.

They are all heroes in paradise.



Rear: Lt. Girardin, Lt. Bury, Col. Carter, Capt. Purcell Front: Lt. Real, Lt. Galloway, Lt. Stear. (E. Stear)

BOEING FLYING FORTRESS (B-17G)

Engines: Four 1,200 h.p. Wright Cyclones
 Wing span: 103 ft. 9 in.
 Length: 74 ft. 9 in.
 Height: 19 ft. 1 in.
 Top speed: over 300 m.p.h.

Gross weight: over 65,000 pounds
 Service ceiling: over 40,000 feet
 Armament: (50-cal.) 13 guns
 Crew: 6 to 10
 Wing loading: 38.5 lbs./sq. ft.

