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## Author's first book to tell the story of Warren County hero

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John Lanza's first book, 'Shot Down Over Italy,' will be available in June. In the book, the former New York City banker, and current resident of New Jersey, tells the true story of a B-25 bomber, shot down in the mountains of Nazi-occupied Italy on May 26, 1944. Lanza first learned of what transpired that day, and in the days that followed, in 2006 from his 90 year-old uncle, William Lanza, one of seven men who were on that plane.

The hero of this story happens to be William Clark Hunter, who was born and raised in Warren County. Hunter's nephew, John Hunter, and John's wife, Candy, are thrilled that his story will soon be in print.

"We are tickled to death. It's a story, like many veterans' stories, that's an untold story. I think it's wonderful that somebody is telling it," Candy Hunter said.

An untold story for decades, due to 'Escape and Evasion Reports' which bound those involved to silence and were not declassified until 1995, Major William Clark Hunter's heroic efforts that day helped to save the lives of the six other men onboard. Hunter's own life was tragically lost, but the tale of his courageous performance will now live on, thanks to Lanza.

Hunter, was flying the bomber that day, as the lead aircraft in a fleet of more than 20, about to carry-out an air strike on the enemy. Just before the lead bombardier was about to drop his bombs, the B-25 bomber was hit by enemy fire and the right engine was taken out. Knowing the plane could quickly begin to spin, making it impossible for the men to bail-out, Hunter's skillful guidance and level-head kept the aircraft from spinning out of control. The following is an excerpt from 'Shot Down Over Italy' and tells of the harrowing experience

from William Lanza's point of view:

While Hunter had been successful in preventing the aircraft from rolling over, he was still struggling to regain control. His course had abruptly changed ninety degrees from northeast to southeast. He was losing altitude and was heading toward the mountains, lots of them. Realizing the extent of the problem, he gave the order for all crew members to abandon ship...Bill got the signal to bail from Todd.

"Todd was on the interphone listening carefully for further instructions. When he looked at me and pointed to the escape hatch, it was time to go. The plane was diving and we had trouble opening the hatch. We were kicking it, and when the plane leveled off a bit (thanks to Hunter), the hatch gave way. You could see the patchwork on the ground below. I figure that we were at about 7,000 feet.

I never had any experience in jumping before, and was trying to remember what we were told. I remembered something about a hinge. When I sat down with my back to the front of the plane and dropped my legs through the hatch, they were whipped back up, and I fell backwards. I could hear the flak --Boom Boom Ba Boom! It was deafening, but I had to go, so in one motion I just put my legs down again, braced my arms against the aft side of the hatch, so I wouldn't hit my face, and slid out feet first."

According to John Lanza, four of the men onboard were able to bail out before the aircraft passed over the first mountain range. The other two held off and jumped out over another valley. Once on the ground, Italian families who were part of the partisan resistance against the Nazis, came to the aide of the American soldiers and hid them. Hunter and his plane didn't make it over the next mountain range. The plane crashed, and Hunter died.

Lanza explained that Hunter's parents, Herbert and Shirley, didn't get the news of the

plane crash and their son's death until three months later, because it had went down in Nazi-occupied territory. Herbert and Shirley never did learn much of what happened on May 26, 1944.

According to Lanza, Hunter was buried by Italian civilians in a civil cemetery in Anghiari, Italy. After the town was liberated, his body was moved to a temporary military cemetery in Vada, Italy. In 1949, he was brought home to his final resting place in a West Lebanon cemetery.

"I'm just amazed," said Lanza. "He wasn't thinking of himself. He was just doing his job. He controlled (the aircraft) in such a way that these guys got out."

For more about the author, Hunter's story, or the stories of the other six men, visit John Lanza's website [www.shotdownoveritaly.com](http://www.shotdownoveritaly.com). The book will also be available through this website once it is printed sometime in June.



Major William  
Clark Hunter

Photo courtesy of Glaze,  
Hunter and McDonald families