

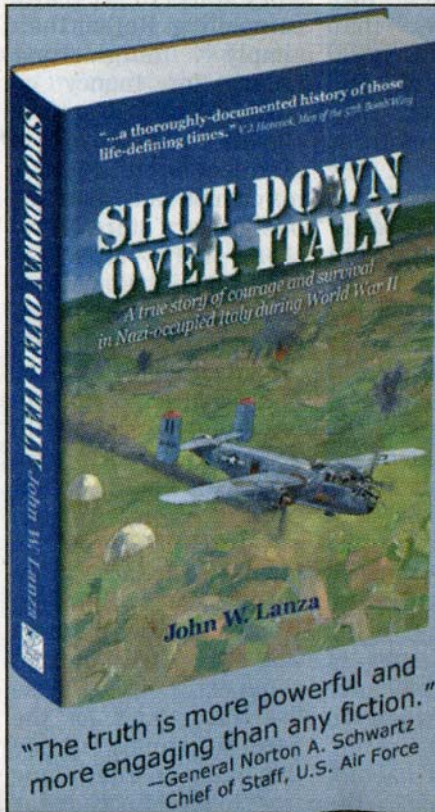
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top left,
Laverne Reynolds
during World War II



bottom right,
Laverne and wife Aline

Laverne Reynolds Featured in New World War II Book

John Lanza Pens Fascinating History Lesson Within Its Pages

Growing up on the family farm near Stickney, SD Laverne Reynolds could not have imagined the many twists and turns his life would take in the ensuing years. He lived with his grandparents in Plankinton, and graduated from Plankinton High School with the Class of 1938. He then enrolled at South Dakota State College (University) hoping one day to teach high school and to coach. His decision to join the National Guard to help pay his college tuition would eventually lead to his transfer to the U.S. Air Force, and

his deployment overseas during World War II. On May 26, 1944 the B-25s bomber on which Laverne and six others were assigned was shot down near Florence, Italy, and he was captured by the enemy. Laverne was sent to a Nazi prisoner of war camp and spent almost an entire year being shuttled from one camp to another, as the Nazis, who were now losing the war, used the POW's as hostages.

Halfway across the country and sixty years later John Lanza, a retired investment banker living in New Jersey, was visiting with his 90 year

old uncle, William Lanza, about his experiences as a crew member on the very same B-25 that Laverne was assigned to during the War, and discovered a story that John felt needed to be told.

Little was known about the experiences of each crew member after their plane was shot down, even by their families, because evaders have to certify in writing that they will remain silent, prisoners of war chose to remain silent about their hellholes, and the war dead could not tell tales. John learned that his uncle and another crew

member survived the war thanks to the courage of the plane's pilot and two Italian partisans and their families. During the ensuing four years, the author bonded with his uncle, visited the two Italian families, and connected with the only other surviving crew member (Laverne), as well as the families and friends of the deceased crew members. Along the way, he pieced together a captivating true story with many fascinating

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Laverne Shot Down

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aspects, including a pilot who put his crew's safety above his own, airmen who trusted partisans with their lives, partisans who risked their lives to honor this trust, airmen who as prisoners of war survived inhumane conditions, and families who struggled to deal with the cruel realities of war.

John said, "People like a good story—particularly if it's true. In 2006, I fell upon an incredible story that had remained untold for over sixty years. When I learned that the crew of a B-25 bomber was shot down over Italy during World War II and that the pilot got his crew off the plane before it crashed into a mountain with him in it, I became curious. When I learned that two crew members evaded the enemy for two months by living in a cave, and that two families risked their lives to help them, I became even more curious.

"It took me four years to satisfy my curiosity. The deeper I dug, the more fascinated I was by what I found. One of the most intriguing revelations was that none of the six surviving crew members told their families very much about their experiences in Nazi-occupied Italy after they were shot down.

"As I learned more through my reading, research and discussions, I developed a deep respect for the pilot, his crew and the two Italian families who helped two American airmen in distress during the war.

"Along the way, I learned a great deal

about the war in Italy and the contribution of air power to an Allied victory. I also saw the havoc that a powerful dictator who seeks more power through force can bring upon his country. Moreover, I saw the human spirit shining through despite the inhumanity of war.

"Through it all, I gained an appreciation of the B-25 Mitchell bomber and those who courageously flew it in combat, most notably the crew that sparked my interest in the project. It was also gratifying that my curiosity led to two men being honored for their courage and humanity on Liberation Day, April 25, 2008 – a public holiday on which Italians celebrate the day in 1945 on which they were liberated from Fascist rule and Nazi occupation." The book that John has written, entitled "Shot Down Over Italy" chronicles the stories of those seven crewmen on that fated mission, and afterwards. He was able to track down Laverne through his contact with Bob Stiefvater of Plankinton.

Laverne, after his liberation from the POW camp in April of 1945 and discharge from the service, returned home to his wife Aline, whom he married before being sent overseas. The couple settled in Texas and raised their family of two daughters and a son. Laverne worked for many years for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Dallas, and was a member of the Air Force Reserves, from which he retired with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in

1980. A proud member of the PHS Alumni, Laverne makes the trek from Dallas each year with one or both of his daughters, Evangeline (Vange) and June, to attend the Alumni Reunion.

Laverne said about the book, "John Lanza, the author of this book has put a lot of effort into finding the facts about World War II and crew members of his uncle's flight that was shot down over Italy on May 26th, 1944. I had always wondered what had happened to the rest of the crew that was shot down with me. John found out that the pilot was killed when the B-25 plane crashed. Two other airmen were rescued by Allied Forces. Two more air men were hidden by Italian farmers for several months. Myself and one other became prisoners of war. Thanks to the South Dakota Mail and Bob Stiefvater, John and I were able to connect so that he had my part of the story about our B-25 being shot down over Italy. This book started out as a 'Thank You' to the Italian families who helped his uncle hide, but it is so much more. The book includes factual details about WWII as well as the personal accounts from the surviving crew members."

For details about the book and its author, a website has been set up at www.shotdownoveritaly.com.