

## Sgt. Martin John Rademacher

Hello, I'm Martin Rademacher. It's good to see you in this beautiful cemetery. I see my twin sister Martha and my baby sister Monica. Are my classmates, Tony Fedewa, Joe Halfmann, Esther Rademacher, Revella Hanses, Agatha Rademacher, Lucille Pung, and Helen Simon here? Today I'll tell you about myself – my life – all the nineteen years of my life.

I was born in Westphalia on June 27<sup>th</sup>, 1925. My father was William Rademacher and my mother was Bertha Goerge. I won the race with my twin sister Martha when we were born. We were born at home and that home was a small farm one mile east of town on Hinman Road. I was baptized by Father Krams and given the name Martin John. The name John was for my mother's only brother who died at an early age.

On that farm east of town I took care of the chickens and I think I tried my best to milk the cows. I loved all the animals. Now the family on that farm are raising llamas.

We moved to town into a home on South Westphalia Street – now the home of Larry Feneis. That house was bigger than our farm home and since I was the only boy in the family, I had my own bedroom upstairs where I enjoyed my wood-burning etching set and I could tinker with the radios.

Monica was born in this house and now I had four sisters: Lillian, the oldest, who married Walter Fox, Martha, my twin sister married Martin Thelen, Germaine married Donald Trierweiler, and Monica remained single. My sisters loved me, but boy, did they tease me!

When I was six years old I started school at St Mary's. My teachers were the Sisters of Christian Charity. And do you remember Sister Notburga? I do. I was a "town kid" so I had to run a lot of errands for Sister and I was always rewarded with a big sugar cookie.

During my school years I delivered milk for the Fink Family. That meant getting up early every morning in all kinds of weather carrying bags of glass bottles of fresh milk. Sometimes my younger sisters would help – sometimes broken bottles were the result of their help.

At home I raised rabbits, planted flowers, did “spruce-up” work around the house and yard, and I hunted small game. My friends, Francis Keilen, Bobby Belen, and Tony Fedewa, and I played a lot of baseball. I think I practiced my marksmanship shooting at transformers, you know, those colored glass covers on the lines – a no-no for sure! I suppose it was training for what I'd be – a tail gunner on a B24 Liberator.

I graduated in 1939 from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. And what a great celebration that was. Father Gutha was our parish priest and dear Sister Expedita was our 8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher. Yes, 1939 when the war clouds were already gathering over Europe.

When I was 14 years old I started working for Ed Witgen. I went with him to buy eggs from the farmers in the area and to Pewamo to buy cream. Ed then hauled them to sell in Detroit's Eastern Market. Sometimes I helped Patty and Donna Witgen with their lawn mowing jobs. I loved my work for Ed Witgen and I guess his girls thought of me as their brother.

At the time I was eligible to be drafted, recruits were needed for the air war, so I was signed up with the U.S. Air Force. I was 18 years old and soon to leave home. My family gave me a farewell party. They rolled-up the rug in the parlor and we danced to the music of Paul Koster's accordion. It was time to say good-bye to my family, to my girlfriend. It was off to Fort Custer. This was the start of my travels – a young me who had never left Michigan.

After Fort Custer I was sent to Kessler Field in Mississippi for 12 weeks of basic training. My first Christmas away from home was tough, but I made special gifts to send home. The women in my family loved the bracelets I made.

In January I was sent to Laredo, Texas. I started gunnery school at the Air Field. In March I received my silver gunner's wings. While in Texas I was spending time with a cousin, Harold Schafer. A welcome time – Someone from home.

After Texas it was off to Fresno California. There I was promoted to Private First Class and in May I was given a long-awaited furlough – 13 and a half days at home in Westphalia.

From Westphalia it was back to California to Lemoore Air Force Base for more training. In Muroc, California I was assigned to a 10 man crew as a Tail gunner and Assistant Radio Operator and at this time I was given the rank of Corporal.

Late in July my crew was sent to Hamilton Field, California to await our overseas orders – orders that left many questions. We were assigned light clothing, these were exchanged for cold weather clothes, but we were also given mosquito netting and insecticide made by McKonnan Co – a product my dad sold at one time. We were going to the European Theater of Action because we were given orders to board a troop train for New York.

Again I crossed the country – over the Sierra Nevada Mountains, the desert, and wide-open farmland. On the train our crew was given “drawing rooms” – couches made into beds – not bad. The train made stops so we could stretch our legs. We were not allowed to talk to the people but we were shown acts of kindness – ladies handed out fresh fruit. We all had KP on the train. I took my turn dishing out chow. Our Catholic Chaplain wrote to Mom and Dad telling them that I was sturdy and good-spirited and that I had gone to Confession and Holy Communion.

In New York we boarded a ship bound for Europe. Sailing across the ocean was another great experience for me. I saw schools of flying fish and sharks and I didn't get seasick and I was rocked to sleep during an ocean storm.

We arrived in Italy in September and I had a wonderful surprise. I had 27 pieces of mail – news from home. Mail – something a service man needs.

We were finally assigned a heavy bomber – a B24 Liberator. During this time I was promoted to the rank of Sergeant.

For 3 months we flew missions over Northern Italy, Hungary, Austria, and Germany. The raids over Germany were the toughest – heavy flak. Our bomber returned to base with more than 40 holes. In November our squadron was awarded the Presidential Citation by Major General Twining. We had completed 25 successful missions.

All of the crew had great respect for Pilot Plepel – a great pilot and my good friend. He would go to Mass and Communion with me. I was 19 years old – the “kid.” I grew a mustache. My Dad didn't like it, I guess because Hitler had a mustache.

At home people were praying for me. Sister Erminelda, my mother's sister sent me a rosary and a crucifix. I carried these in the pocket of my flying suit.

We were in very heavy fighting and I thought my future was so uncertain. I wrote to my girlfriend telling her to date others and to go on with her life.

While on our 26<sup>th</sup> mission over Hungary, our plane developed engine problems and we were forced to leave the formation. In an attempt to reach friendly territory, the plane crashed. I and 4 other crew members were killed upon impact. The other five survived and were held prisoners for 7 months by the German Government.

In late November of 1949 my remains returned to Westphalia and on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, I was buried in this cemetery beside my father who died in June of 1949 and my Mom who died in June of 1990.

It's time to say good-bye and, friends and classmates, let's give a salute to those brave men and women who gave their lives to protect our country. They truly are members of the greatest generation.