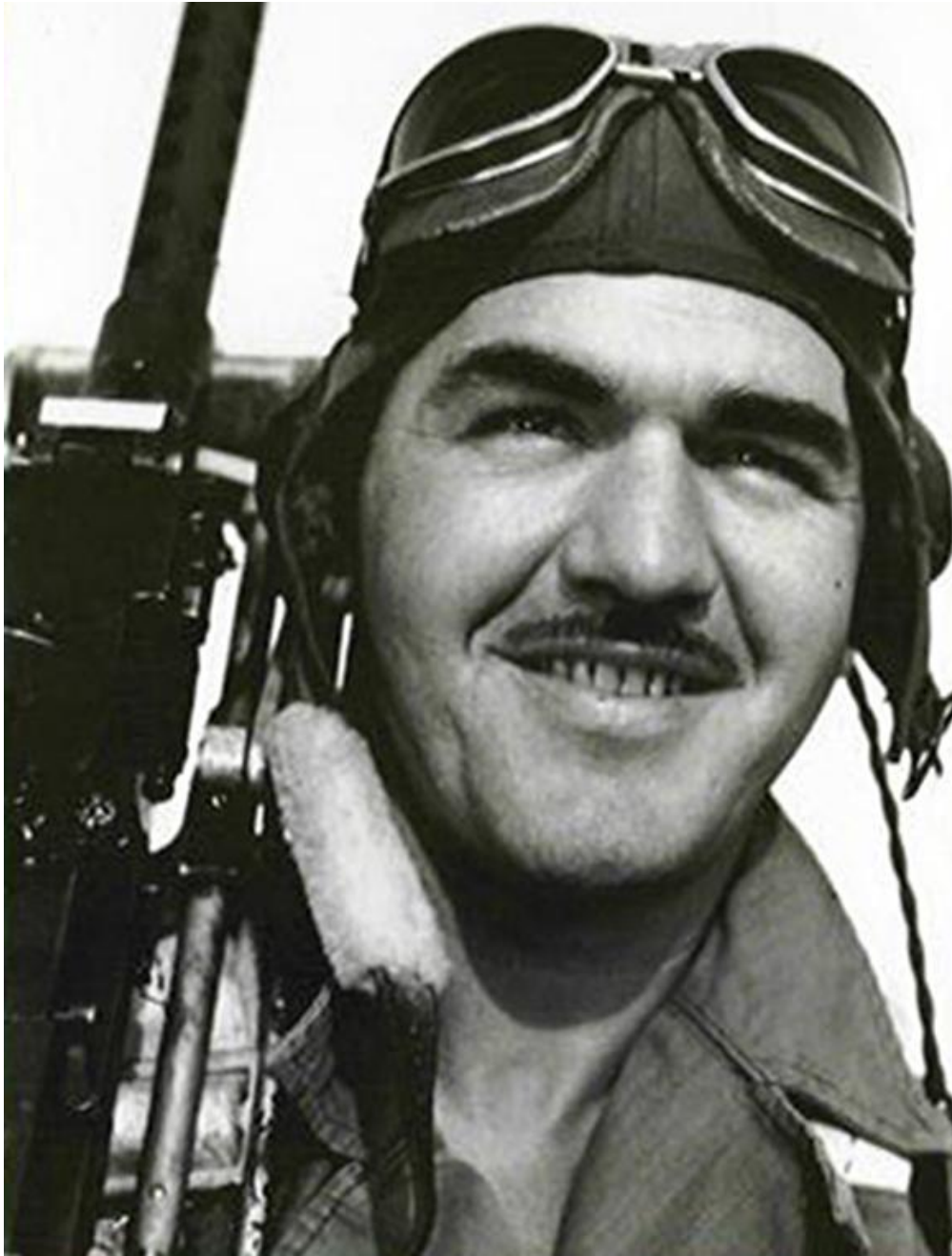


*Memories of Thomas Ira Walsh*

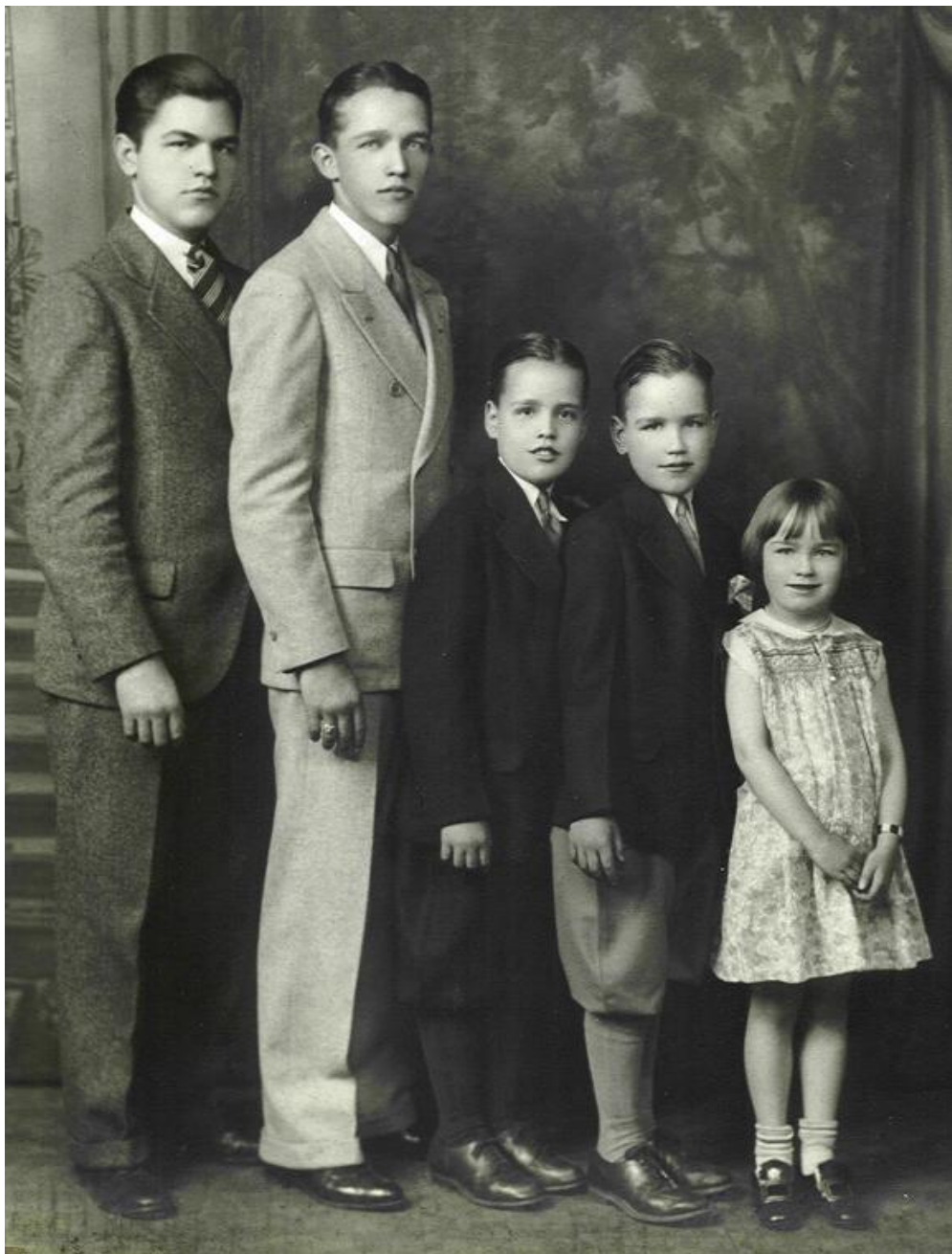
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**SSgt Thomas I Walsh**



*Photo courtesy of Claudia Walsh*

Thomas I Walsh was born in Cook County, Illinois on May 17, 1914 to Thomas Ira Walsh Jr and Helen Olive Peterson Walsh. He was the oldest of five children.



L-R: Thomas Ira, Clifton Laurence, Harold Oliver, Homer Jerome, Olive Helen

Mr. Walsh enlisted for the service in Illinois and was given the serial number 36606965. After gunnery school he was assigned to the 416th Bomb Group, 670 Bomb Squadron.

On March 3rd and 4th the first missions list were prepared. Even though the first missions were recalled, the crew of Lt. Crispino, SSgt Walsh and SSgt Conopask were among the first bombers. The crew would see their first action on mission 7, March 20, 1944. Their assigned aircraft was 43-9224.

The A-20 was among 28 aircraft that took off from the Wethersfield Airbase in England heading for the Foret Nationale Tournehem, France. All but five planes received flak hits, according to Ralph Conte's book, *Attack Bombers We Need You*.

Until May 19, 1944, the crew managed to avoid flak, thick black gun powder walls around targets and Germany fighter planes. Mission #49 would be their last. The bombing destination was the coastal installations at Benerville, France. The crew was Pilot - 1st Lt Joseph C. Crispino, Gunner - SSgt Walsh and Gunner - SSgt Royden E. Conopask. The 416th Bomb Group had sent thirty-eight bombers to destroy the defense battery. The bombs were released with fair results.

The formation headed back to the base through a thick overcast. Suddenly Lt Joseph Crispino's plane 43-9696 went into a spin and spun out of control. He could not save the plane and ordered his two gunners, SSgt Thomas I. Walsh and SSgt Royden E. Conopask to bail out.

Then Lt Crispino jumped, his body was thrown against the plane's tail assembly fracturing his leg. He parachuted to earth hoping to land on his uninjured leg. The gunners never got out of the aircraft and were killed when the plane crashed near Biggin Hill, England.

Lt Crispino fell into friendly hands and was taken to a local hospital. to convalesce, he was transferred to an Evacuation Hospital.

The following was taken from the 670 Bomb Squadron record: "Sadness descended upon the organization on May 19th, when, after 369 sorties without loss, the squadron was deprived of two of its best known and best liked members. SSgt Royden E. Conopask, of Bristol, Connecticut and SSgt Thomas I. Walsh of Chicago, Illinois, two veteran gunners were killed in action returning from a raid on the Bennerville Coastal Defense Batteries. The ship, piloted by Lt. Crispino, went into a spin at 5,000 feet over Bigginhill, England. Lt. Crispino was able to bail out and parachute to safety. He was injured in the descent and hospitalized. However, SSgt Conopask and SSgt Walsh were unable to get out the aircraft and met death with its crash. The loss of these two men was keenly felt by the organization. They had been among the first gunners assigned to the squadron after its activation."

The remains of the two gunners were interred at the Cambridge American Military Cemetery, Cambridge.

Capt Moore and Lt Geffinger took a representative of the squadron to the American Military Cemetery in Cambridge to attend the burial of SSgt Conopask and SSgt Walsh. In a simple but impressive military ceremony, tribute was paid to the members of our squadron who had died in combat.

The brave gunner was awarded the Air Medal with 3 Oak Leaf Clusters for flying 24 missions for his country.

SSgt Walsh is buried in plot E, Row 2, grave 98.

He left a wife, Marion Edna Wood behind to mourn his loss. His country mourns his loss still and thanks him for his service to keep us safe.