

“A Warrior Taken Too Soon”

John Hrywnak

S. Sgt. Engineer 403rd Bomb Squadron, 43rd Bomb Group

Born February 1, 1918, Died September 7, 1943



John was born to parents Michael and Catherine Hrywnak in Spring Brook, PA in 1918. His parents emigrated to the US in 1902 and went on to have 9 children of which four were boys with John being the oldest. Michael was a farmer and both he and his wife spoke Polish although census data indicates they were Russian/Polish. Two of John's brothers also served in World War 2 with younger brother Harold, a private, seeing action in the Rhineland and Northern France campaigns.

John was inducted into the service on June 5th, 1942. His stateside training included stops in Mississippi, California and Texas where he graduated from Harlingen Army Gunnery School in early 1943. His tour of duty abroad began on July 1, 1943, when he transferred to the Pacific Theatre and served aboard a B-24 where he was listed as an Engineer. There he became a member of the highly decorated 43rd Bomb Group which had two Medal of Honor recipients and was awarded the DUC (Distinguished Unit Citation).



He was killed tragically on September 7th near Port Moresby on a reconnaissance mission. His plane "Pride of the Cornhuskers" was piloted by Howard Wood. The B-24 crashed shortly after takeoff barreling into a truck convoy loaded with members of the Australian Army 2/33rd Infantry Battalion. It was determined that no foul play was involved but rather Flight Officer Wood was thought to be disoriented in the darkness at 4:25am.

Unfortunately, all 11 members of the B-24 crew were killed along with 59 Australians. Another 92 were injured making it the worst aviation related disaster in Australian history. Sadly, these soldiers had just survived battles in the Middle East.



Despite John's brief tenure in the Armed Services, he was awarded several medals to include: the Air Medal, Purple Heart, Victory Medal, American Campaign Medal, Army Presidential Unit Citation, Army Good Conduct Medal and Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal. He was buried in a US Cemetery in the Pacific before his remains were brought home and he was reinterred at the Gettysburg National Cemetery in 1948.

His was a life taken much too soon and one can only wonder what could have been. RIP John Hrywnak of Spring Brook, PA.