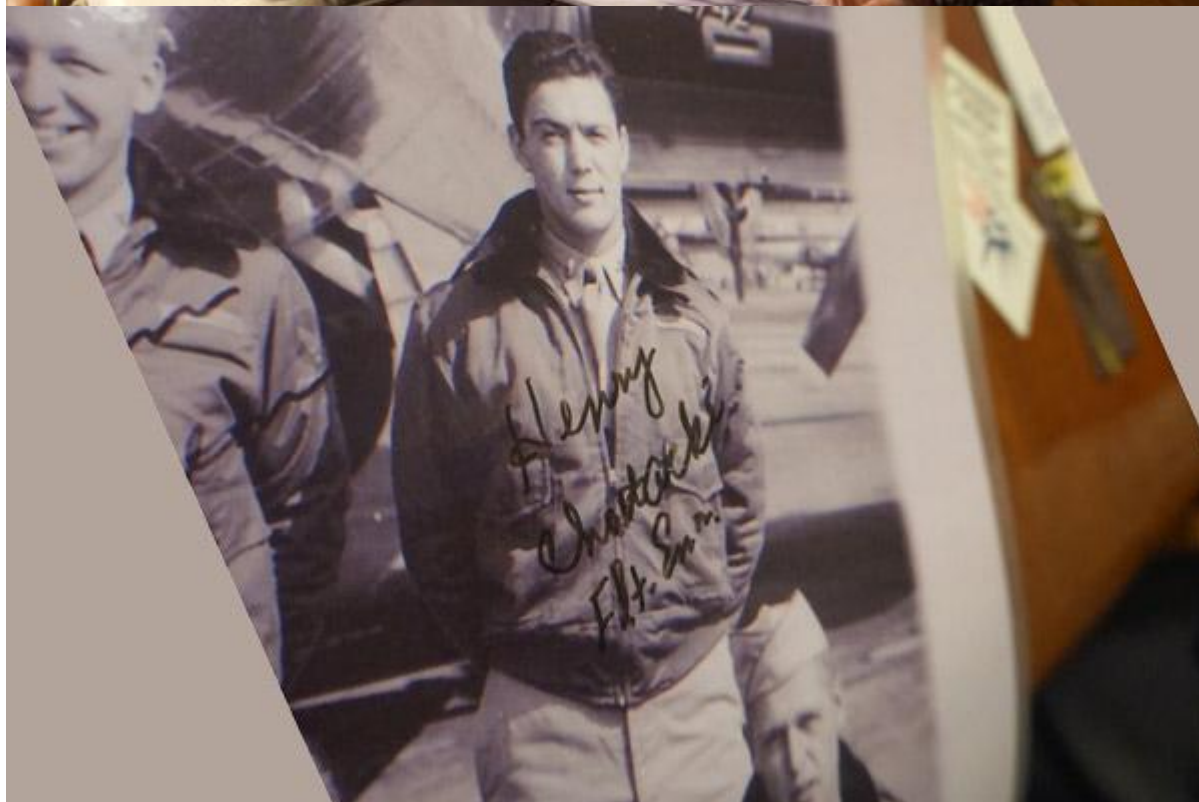


# At 100, Mountain Home veteran looks back on service

written by Aprille Hanson Spivey |



Henry Chodacki is seen in a photo taken when he served in the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II as a flight engineer. He is now a parishioner at St. Peter the Fisherman Church in

Mountain Home. (Aprille Hanson)



The 58th Bomb Wing Memorial at the New England Air Museum in East Granby, Conn. — the hangar, the B-29, and the surrounding exhibit — were dedicated May 31, 2003. The aircraft on display is a real World War II-era B-29 that did not see combat, painted to look like the original Jack’s Hack. (Photo courtesy New England Air Museum)

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MOUNTAIN HOME — Upon graduating from mechanic school at Chanute Field in Champaign County, Ill., U.S. Army Air Corp flight engineer Henry Chodacki and his buddies had hoped to be sent to Pearl Harbor.

“One of them had a brother that was stationed there. So they were looking forward to having a good time,” said his wife of 47 years, Lea Chodacki. Instead, they were chosen to stay and teach.

On Dec. 7, 1941, 2,403 Americans were killed after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the United States entered World War II.

“He didn’t get to go to Pearl Harbor. It turned out to be a good thing,” she said.

Chodacki, a parishioner at St. Peter the Fisherman Church in Mountain Home, celebrated his 100th birthday Aug. 16. About 200 people celebrated his life Aug. 17 at a birthday party in the parish hall.

While a century of life has taken its toll, Chodacki is quick to flash a smile and point out his fellow airmen.

“He’s the best looking,” he laughed, pointing to himself, a handsome dark-haired man of just 21 with a slight smile.

He was the flight engineer for “Jack’s Hack,” a Boeing B-29 Superfortress. A WWII-era B-29 painted to replicate “Jack’s Hack” is now on display at the New England Air Museum in Windsor Locks, Conn. He enlisted in 1940 and was discharged in 1946, though he served in the active reserves until 1950, according to his military biography on the museum’s website, [neam.org](http://neam.org). He was a member of the 794th Squadron of the 468th Bombardment Group, part of the 20th Army Corps 58th Bomb Wing.

“That was the biggest one they had,” Chodacki said of the B-29.

The Superfortress model would go on to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Chodacki taught and established military mechanic training schools in various states like North Carolina and Florida, and Yale University.

He went on 16 missions, bombing runs, and seven hump missions. As part of the 11-man crew, he was responsible for the engines, fuel levels and how the plane was flying, the altitude and speed, an important task for a plane with a 20,000-pound bomb load that could reach up to 365 mph. The hump missions meant flying through thick clouds over the eastern end of the Himalayas to transport supplies from India to China.

During the Korean War, he was responsible for research and development for new airplanes, making sure they’d stand up to various altitudes and weather. According to his military biography, he received a commendation for the “quickest development of a U.S. aircraft (B-47B) for approval to enter service.” He also received several medals, including the Presidential Unit Citation.

Chodacki’s experience led to a successful career working as a facilities engineer and management for large companies like Honeywell.

Both were born and raised in Chicago, but the two didn’t meet until much later at a party in Minnesota.

“When I met him, the deal was that he had to learn how to ski. and I had to learn how to do the double-time polka,” she laughed.

They moved to Mountain Home in 1993. The two would often dance at the local Elks Lodge, winning countless competitions.

“Every chance I could get,” Chodacki said of when he’d dance. “12 hours or three, just a matter of occasion.”

The couple has been faithful parishioners of St. Peter Church, choosing not to sit in the handicap pews despite Chodacki’s age.

“No why would we be? We were healthy people,” Lea Chodacki smiled and laughed.

Chodacki has been a longtime member of the Knights of Columbus and they attended daily Mass up until September, after a car accident has caused the couple to rely on others for transportation.

“We have a nice couple that pick us up for Sunday Mass, but we aren’t able to go every day like we used to,” she said, adding that their Catholic faith has always been “very important. I don’t know how we’d ever manage without it. We pray every day, and God blesses us.”

*There were 11 members of the B-29 Jack’s Hack crew. An earlier version of this article incorrectly stated the number of men on the crew. This article has been updated.*