

# *Silver Star Medal Ceremony*

## *Sequence of Events*

Arrival of the Official Party

Presentation of the Colors

National Anthem

Invocation

Remarks by

Brigadier General Paul J. Fletcher  
Commander, 314<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing

Presentation of the Silver Star Medal by  
Major General Lewis E. Lyle, USAF (Ret)

Remarks by

Mr. Wilbur C. West

Departure of the Official Party

Reception

## *Wilbur C. West*

Mr. West graduated from Pine Bluff High School in 1935. After attending Ouachita Baptist and Purdue Universities, he received a Bachelor of Science degree in Mechanical Engineering in 1939.

Mr. West served in the military from 1940-1945.

1940-1941	Arkansas National Guard (Active Duty)
1941-1942	U.S. Army Air Force, Pilot Training
1942-1943	B-24 Heavy Bomber Pilot in North Africa and European Theater
June 1942	Flew in first American bombing raid on European Continent--Ploesti Oil Fields Squadron Commander, 513th Squadron, 367 <sup>th</sup> Bomb Group (combat)
1943-1944	Heavy Bomber Instructor Pilot
1944	Graduated from the Air University, Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio--Class of 44-B
1944-1945	Engineer and Test Pilot in Very Heavy Bombardment Research and Development, Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio

After serving in the military, Mr. West became and continues to be a farmer in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. He owns and operates 1,448 acres of farm land, planting cotton, rice, and soybeans. In 1983, Mr. West received the Harvey W. McGeorge award for Distinguished Service to Agriculture in Arkansas by the Rotary Clubs of Pine Bluff and West Pine Bluff.

Mr. West is a member of the First Baptist Church and is very active in the Pine Bluff community. In 1991, he was inducted into the Pine Bluff Leadership Hall of Fame.

Mr. West enjoys restoring and flying World War II aircraft. In February 1990, he flew a WWII A-26 attack bomber in the production of the movie "*Havana*" starring Robert Redford.

Mr. West was married to the late Ruth Evelyn South. He has three daughters, three grandchildren, and four great grandchildren.



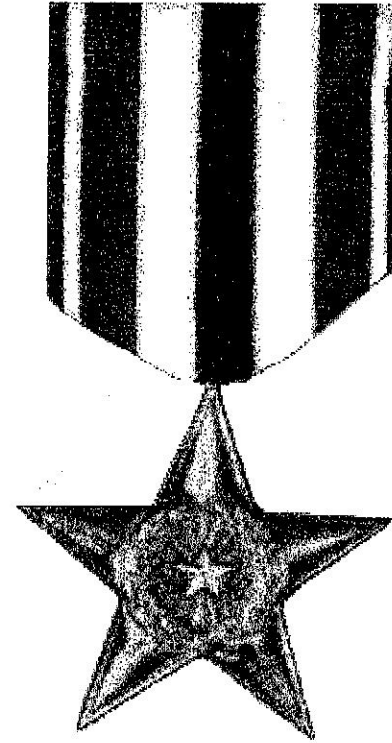
**B-24 Liberators over Ploesti Oil Fields**

Sir Winston Churchill called Ploesti, Romania, "the taproot of German might," because this is where the Nazi Third Reich obtained much of its oil. Five oil refineries circled the city—Ploesti was "the premier oil target of the continent"—thus one of Europe's most heavily defended cities. According to World War II historians, Ploesti will always be a symbol of surpassing bravery in air warfare.

The German commander in charge of Ploesti, General Alfred Gerstenberg, had provisioned Ploesti with 2,000 smoke generators, placed in patterns to take advantage of the prevailing winds, to help conceal the refineries. Gerstenberg's anti-aircraft battery concentration became the heaviest in the world.

The Halverson Provisional Group (HALPRO), which consisted of 23 B-24Ds, enroute to China by way of Africa, were held over in the Middle East to help defend against Rommel's advancing Afrika Korps. While there, the decision was made for the force to carry out a single raid against the Ploesti oil refineries. Thirteen planes of the Halverson Detachment carried out the first Ploesti raid on June 11-12, 1942.

# SILVER STAR MEDAL



## Ceremony

**Little Rock Air Force Base, Arkansas  
23 April, 2001**

# West receives WWII Silver Star

## Pine Bluff man recognized for 'gallantry in action' in the European Theater

By Rob Moritz  
CONCRETE/LITTLE ROCK BUREAU

LITTLE ROCK — Americans should not forget the historical significance of World War II, a Pine Bluff war hero said Monday.

Wilbur C. West, 78, a farmer and retired businessman, received the Silver Star medal Monday for "gallantry in action" during World War II.

The ceremony was held at the Little Rock Air Force Base and his cousin, Maj. Gen. Lewis E. Lyle, presented him the medal.

"It (the war) was the turning point for freedom for the world," West said.

"This feels great. It's amazing that the American people are remembering World War II. There won't be many World War II people here much longer," he said.

"It's great to be remembered for having a small role in protecting our freedom," he said.

West was a first lieutenant in the Army Corps and was pilot of a B-24 Liberator during the Halverson Project 63, the first American heavy bomber attack on enemy targets in Europe.

After causing major damage

to enemy oil fields in Romania, many his plane and three others landed in Turkey because they were low on fuel. West and nearly 30 other men were taken hostage.

**'This feels great. It's amazing that the American people are remembering World War II. There won't be many World War II people here much longer.'**

Wilbur West

Six months and three days later, West led a group of nine captives that stole a Turkish plane and flew it to Cyprus and freedom.

"You're looking at a true hero today," Lyle said.

West's daughter, June Spakes of Pine Bluff, said that as a child she had heard her father talk about his five years in the Army Air Corps during World War II.

At her urging, West began gathering the necessary documents to apply for the medal. All the men who returned safely from the mission in 1942 received the Silver Star, while those held captive did not.

A friend from Kentucky who participated in the mission also helped provide information

because a lot of military records were destroyed in a fire in St. Louis several years ago, Spakes said.

Spakes also enlisted the help of former 4th District Rep. Jay Dickey of Pine Bluff, for whom she worked at the time.

"I'm filled with pride that I could be able to help," said Dickey, who attended Monday's ceremony. He said he has known West and his family for years.

Also attending the ceremony were current 4th District Rep. Mike Ross, D-Ark., and state Rep. Jay Bradford, D-White Hall.

"This is a wonderful," said Bradford, who has known West and his family for 45 years. "He's excellent. An excellent businessman, farmer and for what he did in World War II."

West owns and operates 1,448 acres of farmland, planting cotton, rice and soybeans. In 1982, he received the Harvey W. McGeorge award for Distinguished Service to Agriculture in Arkansas.

He was inducted into the Pine Bluff Leadership Hall of Fame and helped start Jefferson Regional Medical Center in Pine Bluff, which has a wing named after him.

"We can't praise him enough," said Jefferson County Judge Jack Jones, who also attended the ceremony.

"He's successful in everything he does."