

Across Oceans, Across Time® ...
Stories from the Family History & Genealogy Center



An “Ironman” of Distinction -- Among the many Danish-Americans who served in WWII was Jens A. Norgaard, who had the distinction of being the pilot of the “Mary Jo,” the leading bomber of the group sent to soften up German defenses on the Normandy coast prior to the D-Day landing. All in all, June 1944 turned out to be a big month for Jens. Although he was unaware of it at the time, two days prior to leading the Ninth Air Force’s Silver Streak Marauders over Normandy, his wife Mary Jo had given birth to the couple’s first child, Anders Jensen Norgaard, and the day after his flight he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel. In July 1945 he was awarded the French Croix de Guerre with Palm for “exceptional service of war rendered in the course of operations for the liberation of France.” He also received the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with 10 Oak Leaf clusters. Born in 1916 on St. Croix, in what is now the Virgin Islands, Norgaard had lettered in football in high school and at the University of Iowa, and was an end on the famed 1939 “Ironman” football team, before receiving a degree in Mechanical Engineering. He joined the Air Force in 1941 following his graduation.

After his discharge from military service, Norgaard joined the American Oil Company, later part of Standard Oil and Amoco, as a design engineer, and served in increasingly responsible capacities at several locations over the years before being appointed manager of the refinery in Whiting, Indiana. An innovative manager, he developed many new systems within the company, and patented some of his innovations. He earned an advanced degree from Harvard University before his retirement in 1981. Jens and Mary Jo Norgaard had five children: Anders “Andy” J., who followed his father into the Air Force; and Mary, James, Ann and Jenise, all University of Iowa graduates. Jens Norgaard died in Burlington, Wisconsin, in September 1989. Accounts of his Air Force exploits and subsequent career were donated to the Museum by Dr. J.C. Webster.