

FEATURES

PAGE B1 MADERA TRIBUNE Saturday, September 19, 2015



Leon Emo

MO'S MUSINGS

Saturday Sage

That was one of the titles suggested by dear and dedicated reader, Linda Recalde, for this beginning-of-the-weekend birdcage liner. However, I looked up sage in the dictionary and after stating the term was short for sagebrush, it also said it meant a person of wisdom, who is judicious and prudent. That obviously lets me out. However, I once (actually, I met him a few times) knew a desert sage who rambled around the Northern Mojave and southern Utah, and Arizona spouting things like: "Power is always dangerous. Power attracts the worst and corrupts the best" and "A man without passion is like a body without a soul." And finally, "Life can be unfair, and it's not fair that life is unfair."

...

And it was certainly no Fair and a Rough time for this scribe and others at this time last week. It became the first time I missed going to the Fair. Most of all I missed seeing a lot of friends, readers and fellow Maderans this year. I just couldn't get out there with the air quality from the massive Rough Fire east of Fresno resembling an ugly fog over our usually fair city.

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Old Timers Day is a couple weeks away, but almost immediately after (okay, a few days later), Wednesday evening, September 30, the annual exhibition known as the Madera County Arts Council's Celebrate Agriculture will begin at the Council's Circle Gallery. This year's category is dedicated to the drought, water issues and how it relates to agriculture. This will be the 22nd year of the wonderful event that includes arts competition and exhibits. The agricultural art display will run through Nov. 21.

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Now, onto the parade and party in the park. Thanks to those wonderful perennial parade people, the Madera Kiwanis Club and the Madera Downtown Association, it looks like our annual jaunt down Yosemite Avenue is on again for this year with floats, bands, horses and (well, you know how horses can be) and much more. In Courthouse Park at the end of the parade route there will be fun, games, friendship and food, including the annual, for over 40 years, Breakfast Lions Barbecue in the Park. It is always a terrific lunch and the proceeds help our community and kids.

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Tomorrow will be no
SEE FIESTA, PAGE B2



COATE TALES



By Bill Coate

Emmert's story crossed the ocean

An amazing thing happened in Madera last Sunday morning. A World War II researcher from Holland came to Madera looking for Wallace Emmert.

Readers may remember a story written sometime ago about Emmert, who as the pilot of a B-17 bomber was shot down over Holland while on a bombing mission to Germany.

Then again, maybe they won't remember; it has been several years since I wrote the story. Perhaps I should refresh my own memory before I try to tell this latest, exciting chapter.

Back in 2011, two men and their wives held a special reunion in Madera to recount how they were captured and became prisoners of war while fighting the Nazis 68 years earlier.

It was on Oct. 8, 1943, when Wallace Emmert, a 26-year-old Maderan, was on a B-17 headed for Bremen, Germany, to drop a payload of a dozen 500-pound bombs on the Nazis. Emmert was the pilot, and his co-pilot was 19 year old Robert Fortnam.

They were never able to drop their bombs. A Nazi fighter plane met them head on and fired into the cockpit of the American plane. Two bullets struck Emmert—one just under the heart and the other through his arm, severing his oxygen hose. They had to turn around and crash-landed in Holland.

Four years ago the two old Air Corps pilots sat together on the couch in Emmert's home, looking at a scrapbook that summoned memories of the sacrifice they made to help keep America alive.

Emmert, a life-long resident of Madera had joined the Army Air Corps cadets in 1943. Fortnam joined the Air Corps in January 1942, just after Pearl Harbor.

They both graduated from flight school and Fortnam joined Emmert at what they called "Coyote Rattlesnake Field," an air base in Texas. With the other members of the 10-man crew, they went to Scott Field, Illinois, to pick up a brand new B-17 to fly overseas.

From Illinois, they flew to Scotland where they left their new plane, which went to another group in need of aircraft. Emmert, Fortnam and the other two officers and six en-



COURTESY OF FRIES VERZETSMUSEUM

The B-17 bomber shown here crashed landed on this spot near Urk, Holland, in 1943. Its crew of 10, including Maderan Wallace Emmert, survived the crash but were captured by Nazi soldiers. The plane was destroyed by the Germans a few days later.



COURTESY OF PAT EMMERT MANNING

Second Lieutenant Wallace Emmert left his Madera home to become a B-17 bomber pilot during World War II. He was shot down and captured in 1943, and repatriated in 1944.

listed men of their crew then went to an air group in Chelveston, England, where they were assigned to another plane.

The standing rule in this combat area said that if a crew flew 25 missions, it was sent home, so Emmert and Fortnam began that long journey on October 8, 1943. It was Emmert's fourth mission and

Fortnam's second.

They were somewhere over Holland, when they met the German fighters. They had lost their own fighter escorts because the P-47s could not fly more than 50 miles into Europe from England. In a short time, the Americans were taking fire from the Nazi aircraft.

SEE EMMERT, PAGE B2



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