



Text Version of Audio Story: Uncle Roy

When I was a kid, we really looked forward to a visit from my Uncle Roy Davis.

He grew up here in Juniata County, but then moved down around Philadelphia.

The reason all us kids liked him so much is, well, he was one of us — just bigger. He had a great big grin, and his ears sort of stuck out a bit. His hair was thick and bushy and black. He didn't want a whole lot to do with visiting the adults. I think he thought that was boring. He wanted to be with us kids.

Uncle Roy was real mechanical and we always had fun building something ... flying something ... shooting at something ... tearing stuff apart — and Uncle Roy was right in the thick of it.

If something was broken, he could fix it. If it didn't work right — it would, when Uncle Roy was done with it.

It is the people of Morocco who say, "When you look into the eyes of a boy, you can never see a man. When you look into the eyes of a man, you can always see a boy."

That was my Uncle Roy.

He didn't seem to age. For as long as I knew him, he saw the world through the heart of a curious little boy.

Uncle Roy Davis: quiet, gentle, just plain likable. If you'd have known him, you'd have never suspected ... a cunning and courageous World War II combat veteran ... a member of the prestigious, and very exclusive, Caterpillar Club (had nothing to do with insect collecting, had everything to do with brave soldiers whose lives have been spared by emergency parachute jumps). The parachutes were silk ... the silk caterpillar ... the Caterpillar Club.

Twenty-three October 1944: A young farm boy plucked from the fields of Juniata County — now a turret gunner in the belly of a B-24 bomber — Sgt. Roy Davis.

He was thrust into a harrowing odyssey, on a mission over occupied France, far behind enemy lines.

Uncle Roy's plane was hit. He bailed out. The thrust of his parachute opening was so great that it knocked his untied boots off. He worried. "Will I break my ankles when I hit the ground?"

The Germans were everywhere. There seemed little hope for escape.

Uncle Roy hit the ground ... he barely missed a church steeple. He was still in one piece and ready to run.

But he was instantly met. A group of men speaking a foreign tongue ... he was terrified.

But he soon came to realize that these men were friendly. They were trying to help him, to hide him.

They were the legendary heroes of the French Underground Resistance.

He gave his newfound friends his parachute, as silk was a commodity in the war-torn countryside. Young French girls used the material to sew wedding dresses.

And so the odyssey for escape would begin ...

Using a bicycle, the baby-faced plowboy from Pennsylvania strategically maneuvered across Europe ... disguised as a peasant woman.

At times, he was within 20 feet of the menacing troops that were Hitler's war machine.

After 90 days on the run, hiding in barns and basements and under bombed-out bridges — malnourished and weak, but determined never to surrender — Sgt. Davis reached Allied Territory. He was shipped stateside to finish out his tour.

His mother, who had been notified that her son was missing in action and presumed dead, had no idea of his fate. Imagine her delight when she got the call ... from him, personally.

Roy Davis went on to marry my dad's sister, Aunt Esther Lauver ... two children, Donnie and Karen. Donnie perished in an automobile crash when he was just 19.

When I looked into my cousin Karen's eyes, I see my Uncle Roy looking back — and I remember the big kid.

Roy Davis took his own life in 1989 at the age of 69. The ravages and pain of cancer had become unbearable. Everybody liked him. He was my favorite.

Broadcasting from the Juniata Valley, I'm the American Storyteller.