

1945 November 9-15

A Marriage Born From Tragedy

Bradford-Quackenbush
 Married at the Baptist church in
 Dallas, Texas, on October 31, 1945, were
 Mrs. Margaret Lee McLean Bradford
 and Mr. Gerald Glenn Quackenbush.

(*West Salem Journal*, West Salem, Wisconsin, 1945 November 8, page 1)

Marriage announcements have been a staple of local newspapers for centuries. In this period just after World War II, there were lots of marriages as servicemen came home to their sweethearts. Years of separation had often intensified romantic feelings, and young couples were anxious to start their new lives together.

On the surface, the marriage of **Gerald Quackenbush of West Salem** and Margaret Bradford of Texas was not that unusual either. Servicemen had been stationed all over the country and the world, and some relationships inevitably developed between the men and local women.

But this marriage was unique because it did not fit into either category. It was born from a wartime tragedy with twists of fate worthy of a romance novel or a Hallmark movie.

Gerald Glenn Quackenbush was born at Melrose, Wisconsin, on July 11, 1916, to Ward and Bessie (Radcliffe) Quackenbush.¹ His parents lived on a 200-acre farm two-and-one-half miles from Melrose. Ward Quackenbush later bought two adjacent farms from his uncles to expand his ownership to 365 acres. At the time of Gerald's birth, he was the fifth child; two daughters and two sons had preceded him. Another daughter completed the family.²

When Gerald was two years old, the family moved to West Salem.³ His father bought and sold purebred livestock, so he wanted to be closer to the railroad. Three of his farmer friends had already made the same move, so that was a contributing factor in his decision. Ward Quackenbush bought a smaller farm, just outside the village limits of West Salem, that they would call Maple Lawn Dairy Farm.⁴ They drove the cows on the road from Melrose to West Salem, which probably took them a couple of days.⁵



Front Row: Dad, Gerald, Ruby, Mother, Earl
Back Row: Geneva, Marjorie, Forrest

Gerald Quackenbush, third from left, with his family

(A Poetic Kennel of Rhyming "Doggies" by Ruby Quackenbush Lokensgard)⁶

Gerald Quackenbush graduated from West Salem High School in 1934. He then attended the University of Wisconsin where he earned a bachelor of science degree.⁷



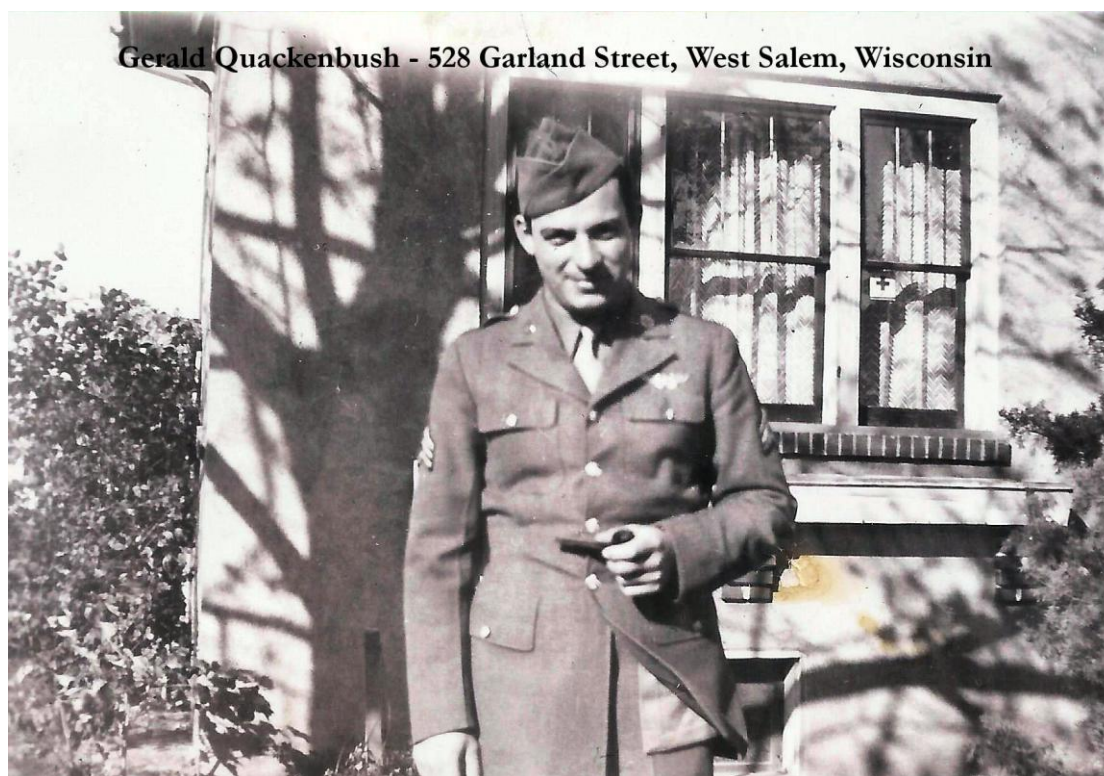
Gerald Quackenbush as a student at the University of Wisconsin

(A Poetic Kennel of Rhyming "Doggies" by Ruby Quackenbush Lokensgard)

Quackenbush did very well at the University of Wisconsin while majoring in agricultural chemistry. He was honored by Alpha Zeta, the professional agriculture society, for being the freshman student with "the highest scholastic ranking."⁸ Following the 1938-1939 academic year, Quackenbush was on the sophomore honor roll for the Wisconsin College of Agriculture.⁹ In addition to academics, he was a member of the Alpha Gamma Rho fraternity. The handsome farm boy was the king of the pre-prom dance, escorting queen Kathleen Kennedy, in January 1940.¹⁰ Later that month, Quackenbush escorted the "dark-haired" Kennedy at the Junior Prom in the Memorial Union.¹¹

After graduating from the University of Wisconsin, Quackenbush enrolled at [Purdue University](#) where he earned a master's degree.¹²

He then enlisted in the Army Air Force on February 14, 1943. Quackenbush had his training at San Antonio, Texas; [Sheppard Field, Texas](#); Kingman, Arizona; Sioux Falls, South Dakota; Salt Lake City, Utah; and Sioux City, Iowa; as he acquired the skills to be a radio operator on a [B-17 "Flying Fortress"](#) heavy bomber.¹³



Staff Sgt. Gerald Quackenbush, 1943-1944 ca.

(Courtesy of Jerry & Karen Quackenbush)

In the spring of 1944, Staff Sgt. Quackenbush was flown to England.¹⁴ As part of the 8th Air Force, Quackenbush and his [B-17](#) crewmates were part of long-range missions designed to demolish German war production, neutralize its air force, and destroy German morale. American strategic bombers had been mounting their air campaign for over a year. Early in the war, a bomber crew had to survive 25 combat missions before rotating to other assignments. Most did not make it. After the introduction of the long-range p-51 Mustang fighter plane, the bombers had protection all the way to their targets and

back. This increased the survivability of the bombers, but the number of missions needed to go home also increased. Missions with more bombers than ever before were striking every important city in Germany, including the capital of Berlin.



[B-17 Flying Fortress bomber](#)

[\(History on the Net\)](#)

After many missions, Gerald Quackenbush's B-17 was shot down over Berlin.¹⁵ He was reported missing on June 21, 1944.¹⁶ The mission on June 21 was the twelfth and biggest air raid on Berlin up to that time, with over 1,000 heavy American bombers escorted by 1,200 fighter planes. German anti-aircraft fire and fighter planes shot down 43 American bombers and 15 fighters.¹⁷

On July 30, Quackenbush's parents were notified that he was a prisoner of war in Germany.¹⁸ His sister, Marjorie, traveled by train to see their parents. She recalled, "It was the first time I had ever seen tears in my father's big brown eyes. Mother's hands just kept moving from nervousness."¹⁹

Out of the ten-man crew of their B-17, just Quackenbush and two other men survived to parachute into captivity as prisoners of war.²⁰

One of those other men was S.Sgt. Joe W. Bradford, whose wife, Margaret, lived in Arlington, Texas.²¹ Ironically, Gerald Glenn Quackenbush, 28, of West Salem, Wisconsin, and Joe Wayne Bradford, 26, of Arlington, Texas, had signed up with the Selective Service on the same day---October 16, 1940. At the time, Quackenbush was a student at the University of Wisconsin, and Bradford was a student at [Texas A&M University](#).²²

The other survivor was S.Sgt. Perry Romulus Raymond, 23, of [L'Anse, Michigan](#). L'Anse is a small town in Baraga County, Upper Michigan, located on the shore of Lake Superior. Before joining the Army Air

Force, Raymond worked for the Ford Motor Company (possibly with a dealership) in L'Anse. He was imprisoned at [Stalag Luft 4](#), as was Gerald Quackenbush.²³

Quackenbush stayed at Stalag Luft 4 at [Gross Tychow, Pomerania](#) (Poland) for seven months. Then he was transferred to [Stalag Luft 1](#) at Barth, Germany, which was about 100 miles north of Berlin, for three and one-half months.²⁴

In a letter to his parents, Quackenbush wrote:

Don't know if there is enough to write about to make a letter as there is so little excitement to be written. Am feeling fine and the ankle is pretty well now . . . By the way, I didn't remember to tell you to see the Red Cross for instructions on mail and packages for prisoners of war. To show my appreciation for Red Cross, I wish you'd give them 25 bucks or so of my money. Their help is worth much more than can be expressed with money however. We all sure wish this thing would end soon so we could get home, don't worry about me as all is well.²⁵

Another bit of news about their son came to Ward and Bessie Quackenbush in March 1945. S.Sgt. Chester J. Padlo of Detroit, who had been freed from a POW camp, wrote a letter to them stating that Gerald sent greetings to all of his friends and asked for letters from home. There were also specific instructions from him on how to address the envelope and what kind of paper to use.²⁶



Portion of Stalag Luft 1

[\(National WW II Museum\)](#)

Stalag Luft 1 (Luft signifying controlled by the German Luftwaffe, or air force) was right outside the city of Barth, Germany, on the Baltic Sea. The camp was opened in 1942 and American air force POWs

started to arrive in 1943 until the camp held over 7,700 of them. It also held about 1,400 British POWs. In February 1945, the Germans cut off delivery of Red Cross parcels. Without this supplemental food, the prisoners became so weak they could do little else but lie in their bunks.²⁷

With the American army closing in from the west and the Russian army pounding its way from the east, the Germans knew it was just a matter of time before they lost the camp. Red Cross deliveries resumed and security relaxed. Other POW camps about to be overrun by the Allies had been evacuated by forced marches to camps deeper inside Germany. The occupants of Stalag Luft 1 seemed destined for the same fate. The senior Allied officer, American fighter ace [Colonel Hubert Zemke](#), son of German immigrants and fluent in German, refused the commandant's order to evacuate the camp. Instead, he worked out a deal that allowed the Germans to leave the camp and head west to surrender to American forces. No German wanted to be captured by the vengeful Russians. The Germans left during the night of April 30-May 1, and the POWs took over the camp on May 1. Col. Zemke set up an organization that kept everything under control until Russian troops arrived.²⁸

Russian troops entered the Stalag Luft 1 on May 2. After they tore down the barbed wire fences, Russian troops and former POWs went wild in the city of Barth before order was restored the next day. About 700 Americans set off on their own to find the American lines. On May 8, Germany surrendered to the Allies.²⁹

Ward and Bessie Quackenbush were notified by the Red Cross on May 19, 1945, that Gerald was safe and free. Gerald sent a cablegram on May 26: "All well and safe. Hope to see you soon. Love to all at home. Gerald." They received a letter from him, dated May 20, stating he was in La Havre, France.³⁰ He had caught a ride on a B-17 from Barth to Lyons, France. A truck took him to Reims, France, and a [C-47 transport plane](#) brought him to La Havre. There he boarded a ship for the trip across the Atlantic to the United States.³¹

On Thursday evening, June 19, Gerald Quackenbush walked into his parent's home in West Salem.³²

Every person in the armed forces faced some adjustments after returning home, but released prisoners of war had additional burdens. Gerald's sister, Marjorie, wrote: "It had been such a terrible experience that he couldn't even talk about it for a few months."³³ Besides the physical and mental stress, he may have suffered from ["survivor's guilt"](#) because seven of his crewmates had gone down with their plane over Berlin.

Quackenbush had a 60-day furlough before he had to report to Miami Beach, Florida, for reassignment.³⁴ He used part of the time to reconnect with his family. On July 12, Gerald and his sister, Ruby, drove to Wisconsin Rapids to return their niece, Barbara, to her home after her visit with her grandparents in West Salem. Gerald and Ruby remained in Wisconsin Rapids for a couple of days with their sister, Marjorie.³⁵

In late July, Quackenbush traveled to Baraga County, Michigan, to reunite with his B-17 crewmate and fellow POW, Perry Raymond, who had been liberated from a different prison camp at the end of the war in Europe. According to the West Salem newspaper, "The men plan on doing some real fishing."³⁶ They had served on the same plane during many bombing missions, been shot down together, and spent the first part of their captivity in the same prison camp. They had a lot to talk about.

On August 14, at the conclusion of his furlough, Quackenbush left West Salem for Miami, Florida.³⁷

Gerald Quackenbush had another important visit to make, and we do not know whether it was in early August while still on furlough or after he was stationed at Miami in late August. The other survivor of his bomber crew, Joe Bradford, was from Arlington, Texas. But this was to be a very different encounter because Joe Bradford had died in a German POW camp.³⁸

Quackenbush made a "condolence" visit to Bradford's widow and young daughter in Texas. That meeting led to something more, and they ended up getting married.³⁹

Within three months of meeting for the first time, Gerald Glenn Quackenbush and Margaret Lee McLean Bradford were married on October 31, 1945, at the Baptist church in Dallas, Texas. Margaret had attended [North Texas Agricultural College](#) in Arlington, Texas, and she was working for the Murray Cotton Gin company. Gerald was a civilian now, having been discharged shortly before the wedding. Following the wedding, they embarked on a trip that took them to Kansas City, St. Louis, Indianapolis, and Chicago, as well as visiting friends at the University of Missouri, Purdue University, and the University of Wisconsin. Then they headed to West Salem for a November 15 meeting with Quackenbush's family.⁴⁰

With the honeymoon over, there was the future to consider. Quackenbush's sister, Marjorie, wrote, "He pulled himself together, wiped the cobwebs out of his brain and went back [to college] to get his Ph.D. degree."⁴¹ Quackenbush returned to Purdue University and earned a doctorate in agricultural economics.⁴²

Quackenbush adopted Margaret's daughter,⁴³ and on October 12, 1947, Margaret gave birth to their son, Robert.⁴⁴



Margaret & Robert Quackenbush, 1947 November

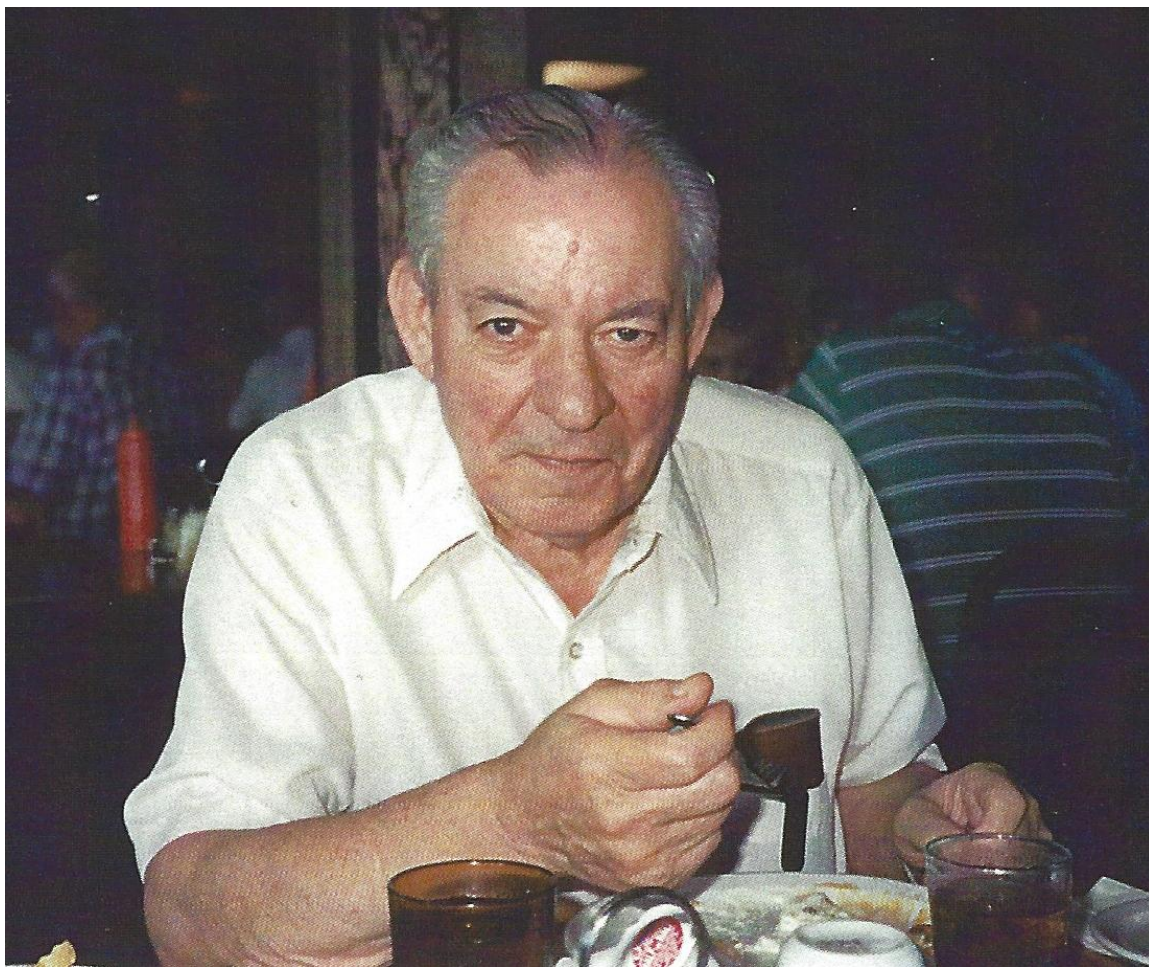
(Courtesy of Jerry & Karen Quackenbush)

Quackenbush was hired as a professor at Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan, where he specialized in dairy marketing.⁴⁵ He was a popular teacher there.⁴⁶

In 1960, he took a job with the American Dairy Association to supervise their market research programs. This meant a move to Elmhurst, Illinois.⁴⁷

Because of his experience being shot down during the war, Gerald Quackenbush was a nervous flier for the rest of his life. His nephew, Jerry, says, "He had a real tough time getting on planes." Gerald would have a few drinks to settle his nerves before boarding.⁴⁸

After his retirement, they moved to Oak Brook, Illinois.⁴⁹



Gerald Quackenbush in 1991

(*A Poetic Kennel of Rhyming "Doggies"* by Ruby Quackenbush Lokensgard)



Margaret Quackenbush in 1991

(A Poetic Kennel of Rhyming "Doggies" by Ruby Quackenbush Lokensgard)

The Germans could not kill Gerald Quackenbush, but cancer did. He died at the age of 84 on February 17, 1999, in Elmhurst Memorial Hospital, in Elmhurst, Illinois. Besides his wife, he was survived by his son, Robert, and two grandchildren in Pennsylvania, and daughter, Kelly, of Chicago. A young son, David, preceded him in death. Burial was at Chapel Hill in Elmhurst.⁵⁰

Margaret Quackenbush was 82 years old when she died on July 25, 2001, at Hinsdale, Illinois. Her body was interred beside Gerald's at [Chapel Hill Gardens West](#).⁵¹



[\(Find a Grave\)](#)

Beneath this simple grave marker lies a love story spawned from the calamity and heartbreak of war and so incredible that one would think it was a work of fiction, but it really happened.

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Sources & Notes:

- ¹ "Gerald Glenn Quackenbush," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1999 February 27, page A-10.
- ² Marjorie (Quackenbush) Jacobson, *My Footprints* (West Allis [?], Wisconsin: Marjorie Jacobson, 1990), 2-26. Marjorie was a sister of Gerald Quackenbush. Jerry (nephew) and Karen Quackenbush of West Salem loaned a copy of this book to the author.
- ³ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1999 February 27.
- ⁴ Jacobson, 33.
- ⁵ Jerry Quackenbush, West Salem, Wisconsin, telephone conversation with the author, 2020 November 12. Jerry is the nephew of Gerald Quackenbush.
- ⁶ Ruby Q. Lokensgard, *A Poetic Kennel of Rhyming "Doggies,"* (Hallmark Cards: 1999). A copy of this was loaned to the author by Jerry and Karen Quackenbush of West Salem. Ruby was a sister of Gerald Quackenbush.
- ⁷ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1999 February 27.
- ⁸ "West Salem Student Wins U. Ag Award," *The Capital Times*, Madison, Wisconsin, 1938 November 21, page 11.
- ⁹ "Madison Area U. Students Win Honors in Ag College," *The Capital Times*, Madison, Wisconsin, 1939 September 22, page 6.
- ¹⁰ "Pre-Prom," *The Capital Times*, Madison, Wisconsin, 1940 January 7, page 10.
- ¹¹ "Demure or Sophisticated, Colorful Gowns Will Form An Attractive Background," *The Capital Times*, Madison, Wisconsin, 1940 January 28, page 17.
- ¹² "Bradford-Quackenbush," *West Salem Journal*, West Salem, Wisconsin, 1945 November 8, page 1.
- ¹³ "Quackenbush, Salem, Is Home," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 June 19, page 8.
- ¹⁴ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 June 19.
- ¹⁵ Jacobson, 50.

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- ¹⁶ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 June 19. See also: "31 Wisconsin Soldiers On Missing List," *The Capital Times*, Madison, Wisconsin, 1944 August 14, page 9.
- ¹⁷ "Berlin Bombed By 1000 Planes in Heaviest Raid," *The Mercury*, Pottstown, Pennsylvania, 1944 June 22, page 2.
- ¹⁸ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 June 19.
- ¹⁹ Jacobson, 50.
- ²⁰ Jacobson, 51.
- ²¹ "Germans Release Names of Yanks Held Prisoners," *The Courier Gazette*, McKinney, Texas, 1944 October 17, page 6.
- ²² The National Archives in St. Louis, Missouri; *Draft Registration Cards for Wisconsin, 10/16/1940-03/31/1947*; Record Group: *Records of the Selective Service System, 147*; Box: 579; image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>: accessed 2020 November 14). Also: The National Archives in St. Louis, Missouri; *Draft Registration Cards for Texas, 10/16/1940-03/31/1947*; Record Group: *Records of the Selective Service System, 147*; Box: 157; image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>: accessed 2020 November 14).
- ²³ The National Archives in St. Louis, Missouri; *Draft Registration Cards for Michigan, 10/16/1940-03/31/1947*; Record Group: *Records of the Selective Service System, 147*; Box: 979; image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>: accessed 2020 November 15). Also: The National Archives at Washington, D.C.; *Records of World War II Prisoners of War, 1942-1947*; *Records of the Office of the Provost Marshal General, 389*; transcript, *Ancestry.com* (<http://ancestry.com>: accessed 2020 November 15). Also: "S/Sgt. Gerald Quackenbush," *The Nonpareil Journal*, West Salem, Wisconsin, 1945 August 2, page 5.
- ²⁴ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 June 19.
- ²⁵ "Prisoner Of War Expresses Appreciation Of Services Performed By American Red Cross," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 March 1, page 4. Among the services the Red Cross provided to prisoners of war were supplemental food, medical supplies, news from home, information for families, clothing, cookbooks, garden seeds, and mail delivery.
- ²⁶ "With Our Boys In The Service," *The Nonpareil Journal*, West Salem, Wisconsin, 1945 March 15, page 1.
- ²⁷ "The Liberation of Stalag Luft 1," *The National WWII Museum*, 2020 April 30, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/liberation-stalag-luft>.
- ²⁸ *The National WWII Museum*.
- ²⁹ *The National WWII Museum*.
- ³⁰ "Gerald Quackenbush Free, Parents Hear," *The Nonpareil Journal*, West Salem, Wisconsin, 1945 May 31, page 1.
- ³¹ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 June 19.
- ³² *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 June 19.
- ³³ Jacobson, 51.
- ³⁴ "With Our Boys In The Service," *The Nonpareil Journal*, West Salem, Wisconsin, 1945 June 21, page 1.
- ³⁵ "Miss Ruby Quackenbush," *The Nonpareil Journal*, West Salem, Wisconsin, 1945 July 12, page 5.
- ³⁶ *The Nonpareil Journal*, 1945 August 2. According to information on *Find A Grave* ([findagrave.com/memorial/36350678/perry-r-raymond](https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/36350678/perry-r-raymond)), Perry Raymond died on January 3, 2008, at the age of 86. He is buried in the Willamette National Cemetery at Portland, Oregon.
- ³⁷ "S/Sgt. Gerald Quackenbush," *The Nonpareil Journal*, West Salem, Wisconsin, 1945 August 9, page 1.
- ³⁸ The National Archives at Washington, D.C.; *Records of World War II Prisoners of War, 1942-1947*; *Records of the Office of the Provost Marshal General, 389*; transcript, *Ancestry.com* (<http://ancestry.com>: accessed 2020 November 15). The name of the camp and the cause of death are not given. Bradford could have died from disease, during one of the forced marches from camp to camp, at the hands of a guard, or even friendly fire from Allied airstrikes. Some men gave up hope and stopped eating. We just do not know.
- ³⁹ Jerry Quackenbush. He says this was his memory of it from his childhood. According to family folklore, Margaret's husband was the pilot of the plane and had gone down with it over Berlin.
- ⁴⁰ *West Salem Journal*, 1945 November 8.
- ⁴¹ Jacobson, 51.
- ⁴² *La Crosse Tribune*, 1999 February 27.
- ⁴³ Jerry Quackenbush.
- ⁴⁴ Jacobson, 17.

⁴⁵ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1999 February 27.

⁴⁶ Jerry Quackenbush.

⁴⁷ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1999 February 27.

⁴⁸ Jerry Quackenbush.

⁴⁹ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1999 February 27.

⁵⁰ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1999 February 27. According to Jerry Quackenbush, Robert Quackenbush died a few years ago.

⁵¹ "Margaret Lee McLean Quackenbush," *Find a Grave*, accessed 2020 November 14,
<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/115713973/margaret-lee-quackenbush>.