

JOHN R. BOZEK



A man who exemplified the title "The Greatest Generation," died on July 16, 2023, at the age of 98. He was preceded in death by the love of his life, his wife of 73 years, Clara Bozek, née Belcik.

John was born on August 16, 1924, in Detroit, Michigan. His parents, John and Sophie, had emigrated from Poland at the turn-of-the-century. John was the youngest of five children, Chet, Leo, sister Fran, Ed, and John. He grew up during the difficulties of the Great Depression, but John liked to recall a childhood of friends and play. He knew that there were many neighbors struggling, but his father's steady work as a salt miner afforded the family a modest life without significant want. By the time WWII came, John was in high school and enjoying carefree teenager years. He particularly enjoyed going to the movies, with double features being his favorite. Right up to the week of his death, John could recall plot details and actors' names from many movies of the 30's and 40's. When Pearl Harbor was attacked, John and some friends went to enlist for military service. They were turned away to complete high school. Not long after graduation, John reported for duty, requesting an assignment in the US Army Air Forces, the predecessor to today's Air Force. John first completed the Aviation Cadet Program by earning his navigator rating, and then qualified in the B-24 "Liberator" bomber. When they were qualified, John and his crew boarded a troop ship with no idea where they were headed. Only after they were away from shore was it revealed to the men that they were sailing to Italy. Assigned to the 450th Bomb Group of the 15th Air Force, John was stationed in Manduria, in southeast Italy. As a navigator and occasional bombardier, John flew 50 missions in B-24 Liberator aircraft over Germany, Austria, Hungary and the Balkans. He survived flak, enemy fighters, bone-chilling cold, and even near misses with friendly aircraft. His final mission was in April, 1945. As his US-bound ship was passing through the Straits of Gibraltar he got the news of the victory of allied forces in Europe. With the war still raging in the Pacific, John received orders to report for training on another aircraft and eventual combat duty in the Pacific Theater. John was in Texas in August 1945, training for redeployment when the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. John turned 21 two days after the surrender of Japan and its allies. His military career also included service as an Intelligence Officer in the Michigan Air National Guard's 127th Fighter Group and as a liaison officer for the US Air Force Academy. He retired as a Lieutenant Colonel in 1974.

Before deploying to Italy, John was on leave when he met a beautiful young lady in a soldier's canteen. There was an immediate connection between him and the beguiling Clara. When John returned from Italy in 1945, they dated 29 of his 30 days of leave before he left for training. They married in 1948 and began a life together that would span nine decades and, at times, stretch around the world. The newlyweds moved to Washington, D.C. for John to attend Georgetown University. Employment with Reynolds Metals, Olin, and finally, Nikon USA, saw the couple and their growing family move to Detroit, St. Louis, and Wyckoff, NJ. John and Clara had five children: Blair (Jane), Mark (Elaine), Greg (Marjorie), Paul (Mich), and Christine (George) Crompton.

John's example would likely play a large role in his four sons serving in the US Air Force (Blair), the US Army (Paul and Greg) and the US Marine Corps (Mark). John and Clara traveled across the US and in Europe to visit their deployed family members, the growing number of grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and their many friends. When in NJ, they opened their home to countless visitors, many being cadets from West Point. They loved West Point and were renowned for their hospitality while tailgating at Army football games. After retirement in 1998, they moved to Whitehall and then Mt. Lebanon. John and Clara embraced the Pittsburgh area as their new home and loved to explore it for food and entertainment. What John called one of the greatest days of his life occurred in Pittsburgh when, on November 14, 2021, he was invited onto the turf during the Steelers/Lions game at Heinz Field and honored for his military service before the cheering crowd.

John was deeply interested in history, finance, biography, military affairs, and current events. His curiosity over events and places was only overshadowed by his interest in the people he met. John would talk with anyone, anywhere. He was genuinely interested in other people's lives and stories. Friendship with John could start at a Bomber Group reunion (of which he attended many) or in the line at the post office. He valued nothing greater than good talk over a meal, a cup of coffee, or a Manhattan cocktail. Once a friendship was formed with John, it was forever. Among the last visitors before his passing were a West Point cadet that John and Clara befriended while walking the grounds of the academy over forty years ago, Paul Humphries, and his wife, Tammy. John was the much loved grandfather to John (Daniela), Katie (Eric) Kinnamon, Jake, Avery (Damon) Ramos, Mickey (Brooke), Jeep (Erin) Crompton, Audrey Crompton (Dylan Royston), and Denise. He was the proud great-grandfather of Lola, Layla, Lydia, Hazel, Maeve, Savannah, Hank, Tomas, Jack, Luke, Lennon, and Gwen. He is survived by special nieces and nephews, and friends who he loved dearly. His family sincerely appreciates the many people at Brookdale Mt. Lebanon and from Gallagher Hospice who took such good care of him and Clara in their last years. John and Clara loved them all.

The family requests that, in lieu of flowers, donations be made to a local nonprofit that John supported, The Veterans Breakfast Club, to honor the selfless spirit of service to the nation that John exemplified. Donations are accepted through the website veteransbreakfastclub.org or at 200 Magnolia Place, Pittsburgh, PA 15228. Visitation will be held at **JOHN F. SLATER FUNERAL HOME**, 412-881-4100, 4201 Brownsville Road, Brentwood, PA 15227 from 4:00 to 8:00 p.m. on Sunday, July 23, 2023. A blessing service will be held at the same location at 10:30 a.m. on July 24, 2023, with interment to follow at the National Cemetery of the Alleghenies. Please send condolences to www.johnfslater.com