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Wartime Bomber Pilot Compares Hollywood to Reality

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Central IL
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Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine

Wartime Bomber Pilot Compares Hollywood to Reality

Editor's Note: James Mack, retired vice president and controller for State Farm's property and casualty insurance companies, resides at 3013 E. Oakland Ave., Bloomington.

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--If you want to get an idea of what it was like piloting a B-17 Flying Fortress in World War II, take a look at the 1949 film "Twelve O'Clock High," rather than Hollywood's 1990 "Memphis Belle," according to James Mack.

He should know. Mack flew B-17's for the 8th U.S. Air Force, 100th Bomb Group--"The Bloody Hundred"--based in Diss, England.

Mack's wartime experiences are recounted in the Fall, 1995, edition of *Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine* in an article, "A Change in Plans: IWU and the War," marking the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II. The article, written by Bob Aaron, IWU's director of public relations, is attached to this news release.

"'Twelve O'Clock High,' a film starring Gregory Peck, Mack said, "is more accurate than 'Memphis Belle' in depicting the problems the Air Force faced in conducting the war and in showing the dilemmas of commanding officers at all levels."

While Mack did not fly combat missions in Europe, he did participate in humanitarian aid missions.

"Parts of the German army were isolated in Holland and Belgium," he recalled, "and the Red Cross worked it out for us to drop food to people who were starving. We had to fly certain routes, coming in at 500 feet, and the Germans didn't shoot at us."

Mack is a 1949 IWU graduate and a retired executive with State Farm insurance.

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls 1,860 students in a College of Liberal Arts, College of Fine Arts, and a four-year professional School of Nursing. The university's endowment is valued at more than \$100 million. A \$25 million Center for Natural Science Learning and Research opened Aug. 28. A \$15 million athletics and recreation center opened in the fall of 1994. The Carnegie Commission for the Advancement of Teaching promoted Illinois Wesleyan to

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a "Baccalaureate I" institution in 1994, a classification that places it among 164 highly selective National Liberal Arts Colleges in the annual *U.S. News & World Report* rankings. *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*, another respected college guide, rated IWU "highly competitive (+)" in its latest edition. *101 of the Best Values in America's Colleges and Universities* calls IWU "undoubtedly one of the finest small colleges in the country," adding, "Illinois Wesleyan has surged to national prominence on the basis of its reputation as a school with a rock-solid academic program."