



Walter – 10 April 1944

Walter Kuchinos
Technical Sergeant U.S. Army Air Corps
1942 – 30 October 1945

Walter was born on 31 August 1922 in Bath, Pennsylvania, the youngest of eight sons born to **Paul Kuchinos** (ca.1890 – 1927) and **Sophia (Gjodick) Kuchinos** (born ca.1890). His parents were born in Ukraine and came to the United States via Austria in 1910. Walter graduated from Northampton High School in 1940, and then went to work for Lenz Motor Company while studying engineering after work. He enlisted in the Army in 1942. After training as a B-24 Flight Engineer/Gunner, he was assigned to the 861st Bomber Squadron, 423rd Bomber Group, at McCook Army Air Base in Nebraska. The squadron left McCook on 1 January 1944 for England, where ultimately it was stationed at Royal Air Force Base, Debach, England, and assigned to VIII Bomber Command. Walter flew his first bombing mission over Normandy, France, on 6 June 1944 in support of the Allied invasion. Eight days later, while flying his third mission to bomb a German airfield at Laon, France, he and his crew bailed out when their aircraft was shot down. While descending, he was fired upon, with several bullets hitting his parachute. He landed safely in a lake. A young boy helped pull him out and took him to his house to hide him in a bedroom. However, German troops soon arrived and put him in a truck along with two of his crew who had also been captured. After two weeks of solitary confinement, beatings, and interrogation, they put him on a train in a railroad car packed with about 150 prisoners with standing room only, and with no food or water for about a week. They were transported to the Baltic Coast where they debarked and walked under guard to Stalag Luft IV Prison Camp at Tychow in Pomerania. Walter was imprisoned there until 6 February 1945, when he and the other prisoners were put on a forced march in the cold and snow as the Russian Army was rapidly approaching the area. He joined a long column of about 8,000 prisoners and was marched for 88 days, bartering whatever possessions he had for food. He drank water out of contaminated ponds, and ate fire-blackened tree branches to stop the diarrhea. He slept in barns or outside in the snow. The march became known as the “Black March.” When they reached Swinemunde, Germany, they marched the prisoners for a straight 24 hours to prevent the Russians from overtaking them. They reached Stalag 357 near Follingbostel on 3 April 1945, where they remained for a week before continuing the march. On the afternoon of 2 May 1945, they came upon advancing British troops who liberated them. The German guards were disarmed with the help of the prisoners, who were given virtually nothing and told to march west toward the Allies. Walter spent the first night at the house of a prisoner from Ukraine (who had been doing forced labor on a farm) whom he had met and befriended. The next day, Walter and another soldier set off for Camp Lucky Strike, a U.S. Army camp on the northeastern coast of France. They first commandeered bicycles, later horses and a wagon, and finally a Mercedes Benz automobile. Walter was repatriated on 5 May 1945, after he reached Camp Lucky Strike. He later boarded Liberty ship *Gideon Welles*, and landed in Boston, Massachusetts, in August 1945, boarded a train for Philadelphia, caught the Liberty Bell Trolley to Allentown, and hiked to his home in Northampton. He was then discharged on 30 October 1945, and was awarded the Bronze Star, Prisoner of War, World War II Victory, and European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign medals. Walter married Tessie Mazur in 1947 in Northampton. Initially they made their home in Allentown, and in 1971 they moved to Wescosville. Walter taught auto body repair for 25 years in the Allentown School District until his retirement in 1985. Five of Walter’s brothers, **Charles, Paul, John, Michael, and Joseph**, also served in the U.S. Armed Forces during World War II.



B-24 Liberator



Gideon Welles