

In the Air or On the Sea, Muir Beach Hero, Taylor McGee

by Paul Jeschke

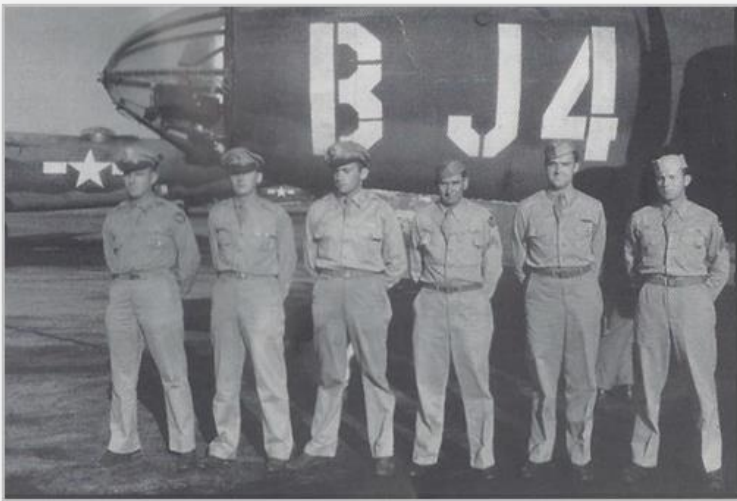
Whether flying a B-26 through bursts of anti-aircraft fire or maneuvering a 62-foot fishing vessel through choppy seas, Taylor McGee is always calm and in command.

McGee, who celebrated his 96th birthday December 18th is a long-time Muir Beach resident who moved here in 1973. "I'd be salmon fishing off Muir Beach in the fall and I'd look up and see all that construction going on," McGee said during an interview at the Starbuck Drive home he shares with two of his five children. "I thought, 'who'd be silly enough to build on that billy goat hill?' Well, here I am."

A Captain in the U.S. Army Air Force in World War II, McGee was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with Silver Oak Leaf Cluster for his heroics while piloting a Martin Marauder through German skies filled with deadly flack.



*Taylor McGee as a young pilot
for the Army Air Force*



*McGee's Crew" in training at Barksdale Army Airfield, Louisiana.
Lt. McGee, far left.*



The Maurauder", an early B-26 circa 1942

Years later, as the civilian captain of a sport fishing vessel, McGee rescued a fisherman clinging to the hull of an overturned boat off the Marin Coast and hauled him aboard his boat, the *New Merrimac*, saving the angler's life.

One of four brothers, McGee grew up just outside Dallas, Texas. By the first grade, he was sweeping the floors after school at his father's general store and, at age 12, he delivered cattle feed and ice to Texas ranchers in his dad's Model T truck. When World War II was declared, McGee volunteered for the Army Air Force, despite never having been on a plane.

McGee's military experience culminated in his marriage to his wife, Yvonne, who died in 2013 at the Muir Beach home the couple bought 43 years ago for \$120,000. "Now they're building a house next door that's probably worth two or three million dollars," McGee said.

It was military service that was responsible for Taylor's marriage to Yvonne. He was awaiting final discharge at the end of the war and, still in uniform, accompanied his brother to an Officers' Club dance at San Francisco's Fairmont Hotel. "This gorgeous woman who had just moved here from New York was sitting in front of me and I asked her to dance," he said as a smile lit up his face. "That was the start of a wonderful life together."

Taylor and Yvonne decided to make their home in San Francisco. "I took a ferryboat ride on a cold, foggy afternoon and that was it," Taylor said. "It felt pretty darn good to a guy who had grown up in hot, dusty Texas."

During his first few years in San Francisco, Taylor worked for Zellerbach Paper. Later, the couple moved to Tam Valley and raised their family on a large property that abutted the George Wheelwright ranch. Wheelwright grazed cattle on land that is now Zen Center and the cows would occasionally break through the fence and end up at McGee's doorstep. The two men became friendly and Taylor would occasionally bring Wheelwright a freshly caught salmon.

The former Army Air Force Captain took his brother's boat out on fishing trips occasionally and he liked it so much he decided to become another type of captain -- the skipper of his own charter fishing boat.



Captain McGee with a big catch.

The *Lilly B* was a 36-foot vessel berthed at Fisherman's Wharf. Captain McGee took anglers out for \$5.00 a day fishing trips. "We'd go out at six in the morning, get back at four in the afternoon and then I'd spend the rest of the day and most of the night down in the engine room doing all my own repairs and modifications," McGee remembers.



New Merrimac, 1967

"I'd get maybe two hours sleep and then be up at five for another fishing trip." He was one of only three or four boats that did sportfishing charters even though the waters off San Francisco were teeming with king salmon. His last boat, the *New Merrimac*, was one of the most popular Bay Area charters and could very comfortably handle 36 excited anglers.



Captain McGee

Taylor has been retired for many years and credits his good health to "one or two" glasses of whisky at night. He spends days cooking, reading, listening to big band music and watching old movies on television. He's a big fan of movie stars like Audrey Hepburn, Gary Grant, John Wayne, Kirk Douglas and Susan Hayward. "They don't make movies like they used to," he said wistfully.

Watching over Taylor from his cage next to the window is his parrot, Molly. She replaced Clancy, an African grey parrot that he raised from a tiny chick that fit in the palm of his hand. Clancy died in Taylor's lap at age 33.

"He was a good talker," he said of the parrot. "No dirty words. Just things like 'bye, bye, babe' and 'night, night.' Just nice, friendly talk."

It's an attribute Clancy must have learned from Captain Taylor McGee.



Taylor with his daughters at the 2015 BBQ

Special thanks to Tony McGee for providing the wonderful archival photos.