

## **Staff Sgt. William Breckenridge Grymes**

by Paul Carter

“William Breckenridge Grymes, son of William Randolph and Emily Leftwich Grymes, was born in Nottoway County, Virginia, on 5 July 1925. The family lived on Main Street in Orange in a house that was torn down where Taylor Park is now located. The father was an electrical engineer who worked for the power company. Breck, as his family and friends called him, graduated from Orange High School in 1942 and attended one year at William and Mary College before enlisting in the Army Air Corps.



**Staff Sgt. William B. Grymes**

From an undated *Orange Review* clipping found in the Tex Webb scrapbook at the Historical Society. €

“He tried to enlist at the age of 17, but was not called until 21 October 1943. After his initial induction in Richmond, VA, he trained at Greensboro, NC; Tyndall Field, Panama City, FL; Lincoln Field, NE; and completed training at Army Air Corps Field, Pueblo, CO, on 5 September 1944, as a nose turret gunner on a B-24 Liberator. After a short leave home, he sailed from Camp Patrick Henry, Warwick County, VA on 10 September 1944. Camp Patrick Henry was located on the same site at what is now Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport.

“Breck was assigned to the 15th Air Force, 98th Bomber Group. 343rd Bomber Squadron located in Lecce, Italy. If you can imagine Italy as the shape of a boot, Lecce is located on the heel. From this location bombing missions were flown to Vienna, Munich, and parts of Italy

attacking viaducts, railroad yards, and bridges. Round trips usually took from eight to twelve hours. On one such mission on 7 November 1944, to knock out the bridge at Bolzano, Italy, located in the northern mountainous region, his B-24 lost an engine and sustained 43 flak holes at an altitude of 14,000 feet. The plane was able to return safely. All total, Breck flew twenty bombing missions.

“While most people were thinking of the Christmas holiday season, Breck was to fly on a mission on 23 December 1944. Fog and poor weather over the target area called off the mission at 7:00 AM, so seven of the crew members decided to get some ‘sack time.’ The co-pilot and two other members got in a jeep and went to town because they knew more than likely that whoever was hanging around might be subjected to all sorts of training exercises.

“Their prediction proved true. The seven were picked for an indoctrination flight with a new crew to learn the area and procedures. When the three returned that night, they were told that the B-24 had been reported missing. The plane had crashed into a mountain in poor weather. Ground troops were able to recover the bodies. The actual report of the people on the flight, including Breck, was not declassified until 1973. The Air Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster and the Purple Heart were awarded posthumously to his mother. His body was disinterred from Italy and buried in Graham Cemetery on 19 November 1948.

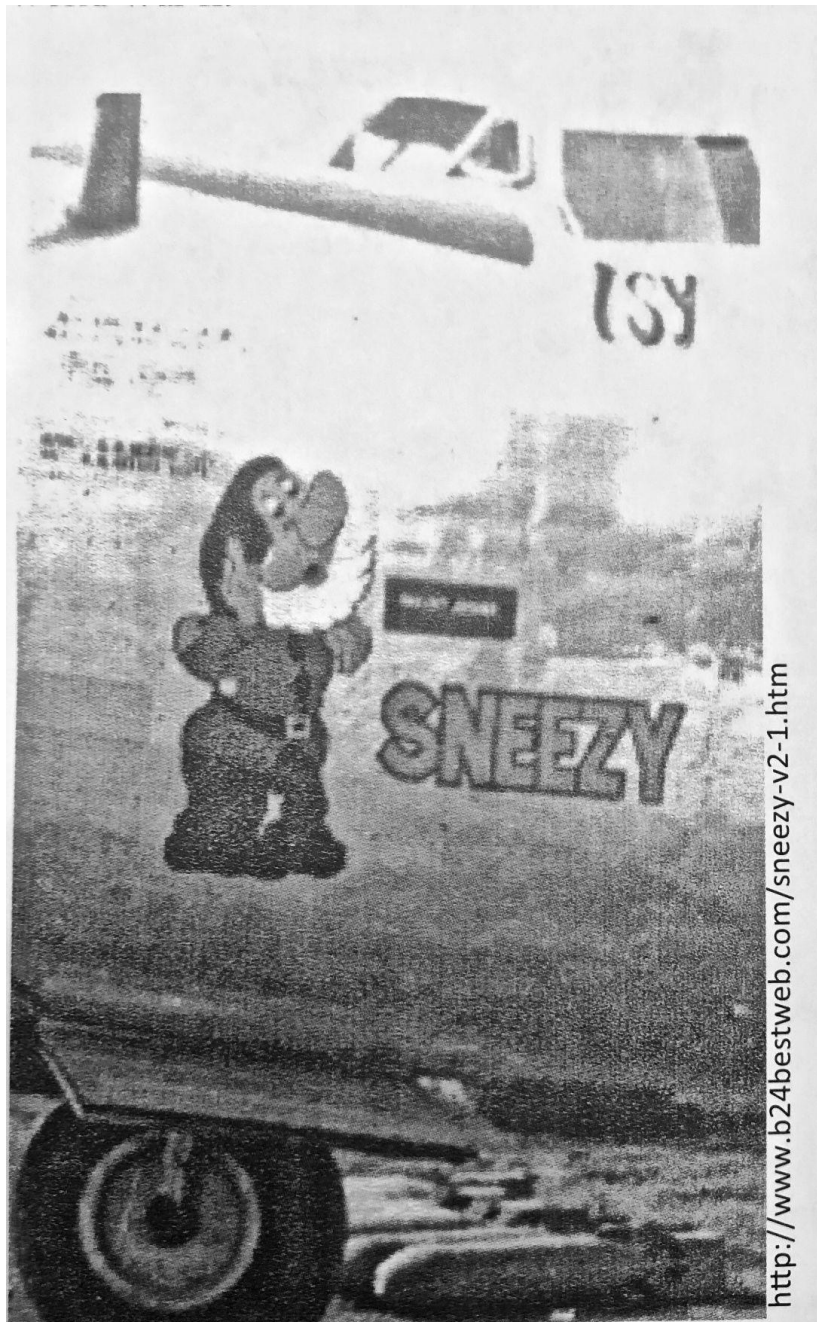
“Back home Mr. and Mrs. Grymes were in shock. They had lost Breck’s only sister, Betty, at the age of 20 on 14 July 1943, with kidney disease, and now their only son at the age of nineteen had been killed overseas less than two years later.

“The family went on with life in Orange. Breck’s mother, Emily, started a private school in a summer kitchen behind their house on Main Street and later moved it upstairs. This school prospered into what is now Grymes Memorial School located on Spicers Mill Road. It was named in honor of Breck and Betty.

“At St. Thomas Episcopal Church, Breck is listed along with William Barton Mason and Severn M. Nottingham, Jr., on the stained glass War Memorial window dedicated to the memory of St. Thomas members killed in World War II.”<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Paul Carter, “Staff Sgt. William Breckenridge Grymes”, *Orange County Historical Society Record*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (Fall 2016), 8-9.



<http://www.b24bestweb.com/sneezy-v2-1.htm>

One of the B-24's on which Breck was a gunner. The planes in his unit all had a painting of one of Snow White's Seven Dwarfs, done by Sgt. Gerald Viola, aircraft electrician on base.

From the Grymes family file, Orange County Historical Society



Picture of his air crew with Breck in the center front with Dixie, their mascot. Dixie never went on a flight, but always waited for them to return. The picture was sent to the Grymes family by the co-pilot of Breck's plane.