

# Merrill Eldon Barnes

NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS

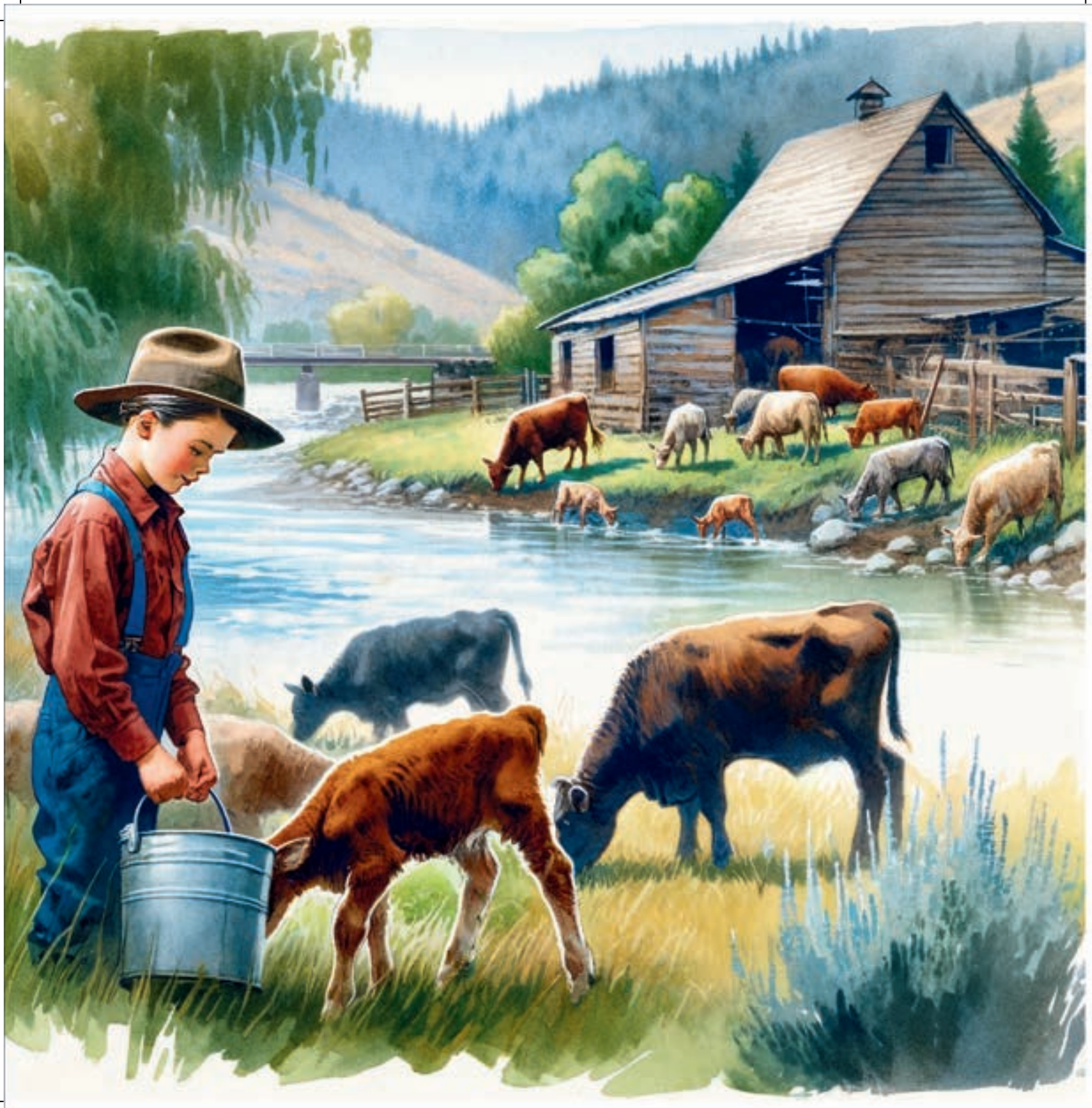


**Family History StoryBooks**

**In the heart of Idaho, nestled by the winding Boise River, young Merrill Barnes grew up on a bustling farm. The Great Depression cast a long shadow over his early years, but the Barnes family worked tirelessly, tending to their land and livestock. Merrill, even as a young boy, showed a knack for farm work, helping wherever he could.**

**Tragedy struck when Merrill was just 13; his father, Charles Frederick, passed away from pneumonia. This sudden loss thrust young Merrill into responsibilities far beyond his years. He worked alongside his elder brother Wayne, shouldering the heavy load of farm duties. Through this, Merrill learned the values of hard work and resilience, shaping him into a steadfast young man.**







**Merrill's life wasn't all work, though. He found joy in playful adventures with his friends, forming a close-knit group known as the "Barnes Bunch". They were always involved in pranks and outdoor escapades. One time they secretly moved a family's outhouse during the night. Another time they hid under a bridge and jumped out to toss anyone smaller than them into the canal.**

**The gang loved to play that they were outlaws like Jesse James. It was during these carefree days that Merrill first crossed paths with Isabelle Marie Stroud. Their initial encounters were playful and innocent; however, it wasn't long before the young farm boy and Isabelle formed a special connection.**



**After taking two years off school to support his family on the farm, Merrill returned to school. Balancing farm duties with education was no easy feat, but he managed it with determination. His days began before sunrise, tending to animals and crops, followed by long hours of study and classes. He was driven by a desire to make his family proud.**

**In school, Merrill discovered a passion for sports, excelling in football and boxing. These activities not only honed his physical abilities but also taught him the importance of teamwork and perseverance. Despite the weight of his responsibilities at home, Merrill never let it dampen his spirit or ambition.**









**High school was a time of growth and achievement for Merrill. He shone both academically and athletically, earning respect and admiration from his peers and teachers. His older sisters, Winona and Ruth, had set a high standard, and Merrill was determined to live up to it.**

**One day Merrill was in a serious accident, crashing his motorcycle into the school. Although Merrill's right arm was severely injured, he tried to run from the crash, worried he would be punished. His indomitable spirit saw him through the recovery. This incident, while a setback, only strengthened his resolve and underscored his resilience in the face of adversity.**



**At Boise Junior College, Merrill continued to flourish. His involvement in sports and student government reflected his leadership qualities and his ability to inspire those around him. He transferred to Idaho State University, where he was a captain on the football team and made a name for himself.**

**College life also deepened his interest in the Church, playing a significant role in shaping his spiritual path. He wrote to his mother, "It sure gives a feeling of security to read [the scriptures] and realize that we only need to live the principles of the Gospel to stay happy in this world no matter what happens. And am I happy!" Meanwhile, his romance with Isabelle blossomed. Their relationship, rooted in shared experiences during their youth, grew stronger with each passing day.**







**After a year at Idaho State, Merrill was drafted into the Army Air Corps. Leaving behind his family and Isabelle, he embarked on a journey that would take him across the world and test his courage and determination like never before.**

**The early days of training were challenging but exhilarating. Merrill quickly adapted to the rigorous demands of military life, driven by a commitment to serve his country. His natural leadership abilities and determination shone through, earning him the respect of his peers and superiors.**



**As his training advanced, Merrill's passion for flying grew. He embraced every lesson, every trial, transforming into a skilled and confident airman. He wrote to his mother that "flying is just like driving a car!" His bond with fellow Latter-day Saint soldiers added a layer of camaraderie and spiritual kinship, creating a strong and supportive unit.**

**These bonds were forged in the crucible of training, where they learned not just the mechanics of flying, but the deeper lessons of trust, faith, and unity. They formed a flight crew largely composed of church members. Together, they prepared for the realities of war, ready to face whatever lay ahead with courage and conviction.**









**After finishing flight school, Merrill traveled back to Idaho during a short 3 day leave. He and Isabelle were married, and the town came together to celebrate their union. Isabelle was not a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but Merrill felt confident that he was making the right decision.**

**The newly married Barnes family were assigned to New Mexico, where Merrill learned how to pilot a B-17 Bomber- one of the most important planes of the war. Merrill would fly the plane while the rest of his crew would be responsible for navigation and identifying bombing targets, and dropping bombs accurately out of the bay doors.**



**Merrill's wartime missions were a testament to his bravery and skill. He was deployed to Italy, where each flight was a harrowing adventure, fraught with danger and uncertainty. He navigated hostile skies, leading his crew with a calm and steady hand, determined to fulfill each mission successfully. His courage during these challenging flights was not just about skillful piloting; it was about making split-second decisions under immense pressure, protecting his crew, and serving his country with honor.**

**In December of 1944, Merrill received a letter from Isabelle announcing the birth of their baby boy, and her decision to be baptized a member of the Church. This excitement would get him through the coming months of immense tragedy.**







**Merrill's last mission stood out for its danger and sheer test of human spirit. He and his crew were hit by anti aircraft cannons over Vienna and had to parachute out of the burning plane. Despite the imminent danger, Merrill's quick thinking and bravery saved lives. He did his best to keep the plane steady while the other men jumped out.**

**The aftermath of the crash was a dire situation. Merrill and his crew were captured by Nazi soldiers. Becoming a prisoner of war (POW) was a harsh reality, filled with hardships and uncertainty. Yet, even in captivity, Merrill's resilience never wavered. He faced each day with hope and an unbreakable spirit, drawing strength from his faith, his family, and the solidarity of his fellow POWs.**

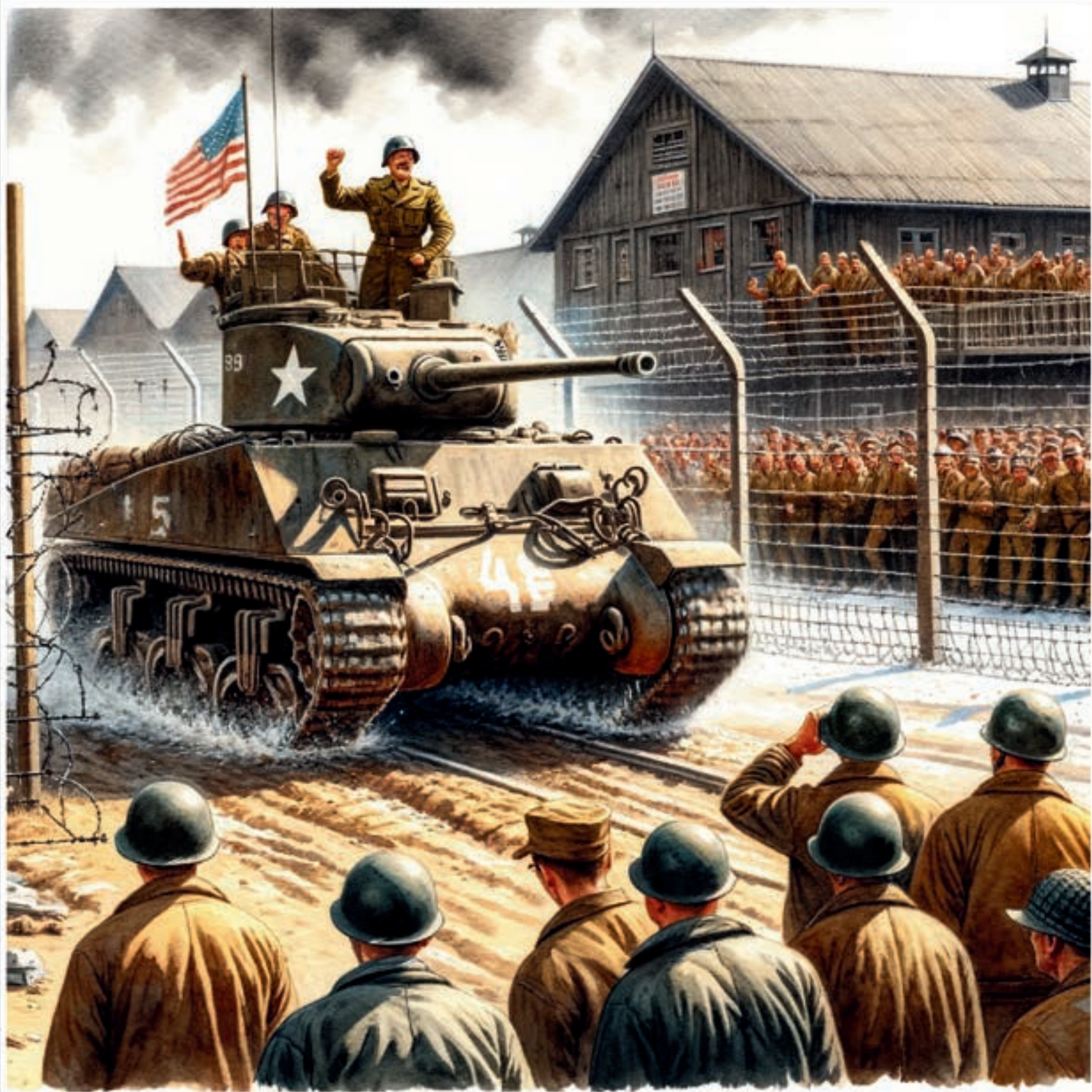


**Life in the POW camp was a daily struggle for survival, marked by hunger, deprivation, and the constant shadow of war. Yet, Merrill endured, his faith unshaken. He witnessed the war's toll on Germany, observing the changing attitudes of soldiers and civilians as the tide of war turned.**

**The POW's were shipped around from one camp to another as the Allied soldiers gained ground and drew nearer and nearer. Their hope of rescue was crushed every time they were sent away from the warfront. These experiences in captivity taught Merrill profound lessons in endurance and the human capacity for hope.**









**The day of freedom finally came. General Patton himself arrived at the Stalag VII camp, and the victorious soldiers immediately started sharing food with the hungry POW's. It was a moment of overwhelming joy and relief. Merrill, along with countless other POWs, welcomed their liberation as a second chance at life.**

**Returning to civilian life, Merrill carried with him the memories of war and the lessons it taught. He had lost 40 pounds during his time as a POW, but the emotional toll was even more severe. The joy of freedom was mixed with reflections on the war's impact, both on the world and on his personal journey. These reflections would shape his approach to life in the years to come.**



**Coming home was a poignant reunion for Merrill. Embracing his family and meeting his son for the first time were moments of pure joy, marking the end of a long and arduous journey. Adjusting to civilian life brought its challenges, but Merrill faced them with the same resilience and determination he had shown throughout his life.**

**His reflections on the war were deep and introspective. He pondered the impact of his experiences, the lessons learned, and how they shaped his views on life, family, and faith. These reflections guided him as he embarked on the next chapter of his life.**







**Post-war life saw Merrill returning to college and the football field, obtaining a degree in Civil Engineering. After graduating he worked several different jobs that suited his spirit of adventure. He helped construct a nuclear weapons facility in Washington, and then worked as a civil engineer on many different bridge and dam projects in the region that still stand today.**

**His career was marked by achievements and advancements, but it was his role as a husband and father that brought him the greatest satisfaction. He maintained a close relationship with his mother and other family members as well.**



**In his later years, Merrill often reflected on his life's journey. He pondered the lessons learned from hardship and joy, from war and peace. These reflections were not just personal musings; they were the legacy he passed on to his children and grandchildren.**

**Merrill's life was a testament to the power of resilience, faith, and courage. His story, rich with experiences and wisdom, was a guiding beacon for his family. His legacy continues to inspire and guide those who knew him and those who will come to know him through the stories passed down through generations.**





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**Merrill's High School Graduation, 1940**



**Merrill as a Golden Glove Boxer before the war**



**Merrill learning to fly a P-49**



**The LDS Unit of the 44-6546 B-17 bomber, 1944**



**Merrill's photo at POW Camp**



**Liberation Day**



**Merrill and one of his sons**



**Captain Merrill E. Barnes, 1957**