

A soaring tribute to POWs

WWII vets honored with flight by Airpower Museum

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As he lay by the side of the road in German-occupied France, Bernie Rader buried his dog tags. His unit had been ambushed, and Rader, who had been wounded, knew he'd be captured. But before the Nazis got him, the Jewish soldier from Brooklyn made sure they wouldn't see his tags — stamped with an “H” for Hebrew.

The Army private spent 47 days in a hospital in 1944, enduring harsh questioning by his captors about his identity. He was freed with 148 other American, British and French soldiers in the only recorded prisoner exchange of World War II.

Yesterday, Rader was honored at the American Airpower Museum in Farmingdale along with four other former POWs.

Museum officials presented the Long Islanders with certificates of appreciation as a crowd of about 100 cheered.

Certificates were also presented to five other World War II veterans.

“It’s our goal to present our guests and visitors all of your experiences having served your country in difficult and trying circumstances,” Jeff Cly-

man, the museum’s director and president, told the men.

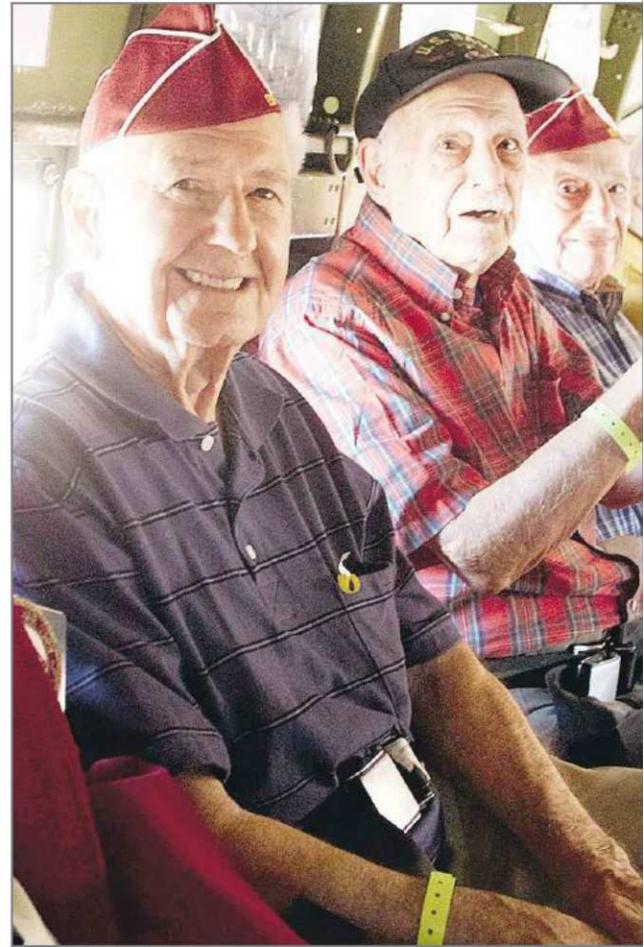
“It’s all nice, I love it,” Rader, 91, of Freeport, said afterward.

The other former POWs honored were: Joe Abbondandolo of Melville, who served in the Air Force and was captured in Austria in 1944; Glen Cove resident Ben Chrzanoski, who served in the Army and was captured in France in 1944; Steve Kirtyan of Malverne, who served in the Army and was captured in France in 1944; and East Meadow resident Stan Kosierowski, who served in the Air Force and was captured in Hungary in 1944.

They were among the 97,000 American soldiers captured by the German military. All but 1,121 survived, according to military records.

Chrzanoski, 91, spent seven months in a prison camp in Schwerin, Germany, according to his daughter-in-law, Kate Baker of Locust Valley. The private was freed in 1945 when the guards fled in the face of approaching Russian forces.

“They’re not gonna be here



much longer,” Baker, 65, said of the veterans. “I like that we’re doing everything we can to honor them.”

After the ceremony, the honorees were treated to a flight on a vintage C-47 — a twin-propeller cargo plane that delivered supplies during World War II.

Joe Lakis, 91, of Bethpage, who served in the war as an Air Force sergeant, flashed a toothy grin after the plane landed.

“It was absolutely outstanding,” he said, standing on the tarmac in a green Air Force jumpsuit. “It brings back so many memories.”



Looking north from 44th Street, Times Square is packed May 7, 1945, with crowds celebrating Germany’s surrender.

Latest fiasco shows LIRR still out of touch

The Long Island Rail Road did a poor job communicating with riders Wednesday. Yes, the railroad generated tweets and emails and messages and updates galore about late-running trains, and about a temporary suspension or service into Penn Station.

But honestly, commuters — including those who, wisely, signed up to receive the LIRR's notices — frequently get word about late trains. And, as for temporary interruptions of service, well, those, from time to time, are part of the commuting experience, too.

Which is why when such missives come, LIRR commuters generally will do what LIRR commuters do — grit it out.

But the commuting experience was far from ordinary on Hump Day after a 4:45 a.m. power outage that affected the railroad's signal system outside the East River tunnels in Queens cascaded into hours of disruption for morning-rush riders.

Over time, late trains became stalled or slow-moving ones, while the wait for would-be riders on platforms and in Penn Station on a hot September morning transformed into an ordeal.

Effective communication — earlier and throughout the day — would have given riders information they needed to make their own plans, whether that meant working from home or seeking alternate means of transportation to their intended destinations.

But no. "It's as if there was a disconnect between riders sitting on the trains and the people sitting in the railroad's front office," Mark Epstein, chairman of the Long Island Rail Road Commuter Council, said Friday.

And that disconnect, frustrated riders told *Newsday*, appeared to extend even to the LIRR's own workforce — as conductors on some trains told passengers that they had no news to share because they didn't know what was going



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on either.

This, in hindsight, ended up being a test for the railroad's new leadership. And one, even the railroad would end up acknowledging Friday afternoon, that it failed.

Yes, last week's problem was fraying infrastructure; and, yes, that most certainly must be addressed. But when significant disruptions occur, the railroad should be able to handle the job of getting things back on line — and giving riders information enough to decide their next move.

In 2012, after service went down domino-like after a lightning strike generated a power surge that disabled a portion of the signal system west of Jamaica station — which was then followed by an employee error that made things worse rather than better during evening rush — the Office of the MTA Inspector General did an investigation.

It found a number of faults — and the railroad's lack of effective communication was one of them. "Despite the development of a communication strategy that aims to provide detailed and informative

content, the substance of on-board messages still does not adequately and consistently explain travel conditions and offer useful information that allows customers to evaluate alternate travel options," the report noted.

The result?

The LIRR's "Pledge to Customers" — which now covers MTA subway, bus and train riders too — includes this promise: "If we must temporarily suspend service or close facilities . . . the MTA will provide timely notice . . . so that customers can plan their trips accordingly."

For too many riders, the LIRR failed on that promise last week.

On Friday afternoon, the railroad posted "An Explanation and an Apology for the Events of September 2, 2015," which states, in part:

"We regret that because we could not estimate when the signal power problem would be resolved or trains would again be moving, our communication efforts did not live up to either our customers' expectations or our own standards."

The statement goes on to state that the LIRR will scrutinize how it handles rider communications as part of its review of last week's service disruption.

Next time will tell.



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SURVIVOR'S SALUTE: At top, Bernie Rader of Freeport salutes during the ceremony yesterday at the American Airpower Museum in Farmingdale. Above, World War II veterans sit on a C-47 transport plane.

WWII INTERACTIVE

See video interviews with LI vets, more photos, interactive timeline and database newsday.com/worldwar2



LIRR riders wait for an announcement at Penn Station after service was suspended because of signal problems Wednesday.