



# RETURNING MONEY BACK TO YOU –

## THE 3RD COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE



by Craig Buros, CEO & General Manager

The 3rd cooperative principle is “Member Economic Participation”.

As an electric cooperative, our mission is to provide safe, reliable, and affordable energy to our members. But as a co-op, we are also committed to the people, businesses, and communities we serve. One of the fundamental principles we follow as a member-owned, not-for-profit utility is a commitment to return excess revenues to our members.

While investor-owned utilities return a portion of any profits back to their investors, electric co-ops operate on a not-for-profit basis. Like most well-run businesses, our annual revenue generally exceeds our expenses. However, unlike other businesses, our members receive any excess revenue we earn each year in the form of a capital credit allocation, based on the amount of electricity used during the year.

One of the biggest benefits of being a member of a cooperative is that you aren’t just paying a bill to a company for a service. A portion of your payment for electric energy use is an investment to help finance



your cooperative’s operations. That investment is returned to you through the retirement of capital credits as a bill credit when the co-op is financially able. With that in mind, during its February meeting, the Vernon Electric Cooperative Board of Directors approved a \$552,545 capital credit general retirement.

Capital credits are returned on a rotating schedule. This year the cooperative is retiring 6% of our allocated capital and applying that amount against the oldest capital credits assigned to the members along with small portions of all other years.

As a cooperative member, you are receiving a vital resource—electricity—from a business owned by you, your friends, and neighbors. Working together, we provide you with the highest level of service we can, while striving to keep your electric bills affordable. The best possible service at the best possible price.

Since incorporation in 1936, Vernon Electric Cooperative has returned \$21 million in capital credits to its members. That’s the cooperative difference!

## SUB-CONTRACTORS OUT AND ABOUT

Vernon Electric works with many sub-contractors who may need to access our rights-of-way on private property. During the month of May, Badgerland Utility Solutions will be inspecting VEC’s underground electric utility enclosures (“green boxes”) to make sure they are in good condition and to mitigate any potential problems to ensure the best reliability possible to your electric service. Their employees carry employee identification, wear marked clothing, and drive marked vehicles.

Badgerland Utility Solutions will have employees and vehicles working in the Towns of Genoa, Wheatland, Freeman, Sterling, Harmony, Jefferson (Vernon Co.), Christiana, Viroqua, Franklin, Utica, Clayton, Kickapoo, Liberty, or Forest. If you see them on your property, please know they are there to do important work. Feel free to approach them for proof of identification if you are unsure about who they are.



Badgerland Utility Solutions trucks will be working in rights-of-way in May.

# A TAIL GUNNER'S TALE FINALLY TOLD

By Leah Call

**H**istory teacher and Vernon Electric Cooperative member John Armbruster had no intention of becoming a published author, yet that is the role he embodies with the debut of "Tailspin," a historical nonfiction book released April 30. The book, published by Ten16 Press, tells the story of WWII airman Gene Moran, who was gunned down over Germany, fell four miles without a parachute, and lived.

The tale of how Armbruster came to tell Moran's story is a story in itself. It begins in 1994 in Soldiers Grove, Wisconsin, where Moran was and still is a local legend. Armbruster, then a new social studies teacher at North Crawford High School, heard of Moran and hoped to get him to speak to his class. Serendipitously, Moran's daughter, Joni, taught in the room next to Armbruster. However, he quickly learned that Joni's father did NOT talk about the war, not even with family.

Though he didn't get him in his classroom, Armbruster did form a close bond with Moran, who became a family friend and surrogate grandfather to Armbruster's sons, Matthew and Joe. "Gene came to birthday parties, first communions, football games," recalled Armbruster. "For 10 years, I did not ask him about the war."



Gene Moran just before his death in 2014.



Left: Gene home on leave in Soldiers Grove in the summer of 1943. Inset: front view of his bomber plane, Rikki Tikki Tavi.



That silence broke following a 2007 event hosted by Representative Ron Kind to honor Moran. Veterans' groups, family, friends, and Armbruster himself urged Moran to tell his story. "This was an incredible WWII story and it was local... I thought, this story can't go to the grave," said Armbruster.

**The Story Emerges** Three years later, Gene finally agreed to share his survival saga, but only if Armbruster wrote about it. Armbruster hesitated. Though he had some journalism experience, he didn't consider himself a writer, and he was in the middle of his own fight, as his wife, Carmen, battled breast cancer.

Encouraged by friend and author Ben Logan, also a war veteran, Armbruster reluctantly took on the task of telling Moran's incredible story. That story emerged over a series of interviews from 2011 to 2014. "There were a few



Gene Moran (standing, first on the left) and his Flying Fortress bomber crew. Below left: A headline that appeared in 1944 while Gene was in a German POW camp.

**Soldiers Grove Gunner Falls 4 Miles In Plane Tail—And Lives!**

NEW YORK—(P)—Trapped in the severed tail of a Flying Fortress, S. Sgt. Eugene Moran of Gays Mills, Wis., fell four miles into a tree top in Germany and lived, to become a German prisoner of war, an eyewitness relates. (Moran's home is near Soldiers Grove, the Tribune was told today.)

Moran's escape with only minor injuries was described by S. Sgt. George C. Fisher, of Rosindale, Mass., one of 218 wounded and ill American soldiers repatriated by the exchange ship Gripsholm and interviewed at Halloran hospital.

It happened last Nov. 29, Fisher said, after flak had cut off the plane tail, with Moran, the tail gunner, caught inside. Moran couldn't jump because his parachute had been shot full of holes, so he folded the chute around him and waited for the inevitable.

**Stabilizer Hits Tree**

As the tail dropped earthward, the damaged vertical fin and horizontal stabilizers fluttered and flapped, Fisher said, breaking the speed of the fall. Then, one of the stabilizers stabbed into the tree—and held.

Fisher said that he saw the plane tail fall and lodge in the tree as

he floated to earth after bailing out of a plane which had been hit on a bombing mission over Bremen. After he was captured, Fisher said, he heard the Germans talk about "a soldier who in the tail of the plane," and later heard Moran's story when the two men became friends in the prison camp.

Moran's one request, Fisher said, was for backing when he returned to the United States with the almost unbelievable story, similar to the experience last April of another tail gunner, Sgt. James A. Raicy of Henderson, Ky., who fell more than three and one-half miles in a Fortress tail section and landed in a tree top in the Italian area.

Fisher said he promised to vouch for Moran's story.

Sgt. Moran is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Moran, who live in the West Fork community about five miles from Soldiers Grove. His parents received word that he was missing in December, 1943. Notification that he was a prisoner came Jan. 21, 1944.

Sgt. Moran entered service Oct. 18, 1942 and trained at Jefferson Barracks, Mo., Las Vegas, Nev., and Lowrey Field, Colo. He landed in England Oct. 19, 1943.



interviews that were pretty tough," recalled Armbruster.

After a volatile air war and four-mile plunge, Moran was captured and imprisoned by German forces. Those were the memories that seemed the hardest for Moran to verbalize. "He spent time as a POW, was in a death march at the end of the war, and was treated terribly," said Armbruster. "There were things he didn't tell me—I could tell. But I think I did a pretty good job getting most of the story."

Readers of WWII-era books will find similarities between Moran's story and that of Louie Zamperini, told in

Laura Hillenbrand's book "Unbroken." Armbruster calls "Tailspin" the "Unbroken of Europe."

"Gene didn't float around the ocean with sharks [as Zamperini did in Unbroken], but he had a terrible POW experience," Armbruster said.

Moran was also subjected to a death march similar to the more widely documented death marches in Japan. Armbruster's interviews and research revealed gruesome details of the march that Moran endured. "I hope this book sheds some light on that, because there were thousands who died from that march, mostly from

"This was an incredible WWII story and it was local... I thought, this story can't go to the grave.

—John Armbruster

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malnutrition and exposure,” Armbruster said. “It was horrible. There’s not a lot out there on that march.”

**Shared Struggle** Armbruster’s wife, Carmen, passed away in December 2012, one year after he began interviewing Gene. Struggling to cope with her death and raising two young boys alone, Armbruster forced himself to continue working on the book. “I needed help. I didn’t know what I was doing. So I went to the UW-Madison Writer’s Institute,” he said.

To his surprise, a chapter submitted to an editor at that conference was accepted. “She looked at 25 submissions there and chose my book,” said Armbruster. “She said ‘I think you have something here.’ So she became my editor, and we have worked together since 2014.”

When his editor learned that Armbruster lost his wife during the same time that he documented Moran’s tale, she insisted readers needed to know about it. Though he worried about the impact it would have on his boys, Armbruster ultimately decided to weave the two stories together.

“In a way it honors their mother’s story, because it honors her struggle and how she fought,” he said. “You see Gene’s resilience, refusing to die. You see Carmen’s resilience, refusing to die. You see me, coming to terms with unexpected death. And Gene had so much unexpected death. Neither of us would say we did it well; we struggled in our own way. That kind of becomes a story

in itself—two guys dealing with grief and death.”


The decision to merge their stories along with countless hours spent interviewing, researching, writing and rewriting—all while teaching full time—paid off for Armbruster. Early reader reviews of “Tailspin” are exceptional. “Every time someone reads it, they say ‘I’ve never read a book like this before,’” said Armbruster.

Gene Moran died in 2014 at age 89. He is survived by eight of his nine children. Many still live in the area. Though he never got to see his story published,


his family was thrilled to attend the launch of this long-awaited tale.

Armbruster is in his 29th year of teaching, now a teacher at Westby Middle School, a job he loves. “I was going to teach social studies for 30 years and retire to fish in a hunting shack somewhere. I never intended to write this. Someone put it best when they said, ‘you didn’t find the story, the story found you’.”

And though Armbruster doesn’t anticipate writing another book, he’s not ruling it out if the right story finds him again.



*“Tailspin” is available for purchase on [ten16press.com](http://ten16press.com), Amazon and Barnes and Nobel. Watch for upcoming book signings at bookstores throughout Wisconsin.*



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