



**MNA CHAPLAIN MINISTRIES VETERAN OF THE 1<sup>ST</sup> QUARTER 2006**  
**IRVING B. (IRV) WICKER**  
**Lt Col USAF (Ret)**

Lt. Colonel Wicker retired from the United States Air Force in 1969 after 25 years of service. He served during WWII, Korea and the Vietnam era. He and his wife Marge, recently celebrated their 54<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. They have 5 children, eight grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren and have lived in Prattville, Alabama since 1962. He has a B.S. degree from University of Maryland and an M.P.A from George Washington University.

In 1943 he enlisted in the United States Army Air Corps in the aviation cadet program. While awaiting flying school he was assigned to numerous installations throughout the American theater of operations. One item he vividly remembers during basic training was that he became close friends with a fellow service member. In fact, so much so, that they were confronted by an "old" sergeant. who ordered them to cease that relationship which could interfere with their actions during combat, with the admonition, "If you two were together and one were killed, could you use his body as a sandbag to protect yourself?" The next day they were reassigned to different units.

At that time each GI was assigned two occupational specialties. One of his was as a flightline emergency ambulance driver. This was particularly difficult as he had no medical training. On several occasions bombers came in for forced landings and caught fire, causing the bodies to be decomposed. He was one of the medics who had to collect the ashes to take to the morgue. The heat! The smell! Gruesome! Detestable! He still has nightmares over this.

The second specialty was as a replacement waist gunner on B-17 bombers flying the coast of the Atlantic looking for enemy submarines. He sighted two and the Navy sunk one.

VE Day saw a renewed effort to concentrate training for the Pacific area. Before that they needed to celebrate VE Day. The celebration went a bit overboard. He overstayed his two day pass and spent the night in the brig for being AWOL, along with 12 others. VJ Day saw the end of hostilities and a great reduction of forces. In November 1945 he was discharged as a private.

He returned home to Ohio, got married, and later found himself knocking on the recruiter's door saying, "Let me back in." He reenlisted as a staff sergeant, in the USAF. He was selected for Officer Candidate School and graduated as a second lieutenant. His class was the first co-educational and the first to graduate in the new Air Force blue uniform. Upon graduation he was assigned to the Office of Special Investigations (OSI), as a special agent. For some 18 years he wore civilian

clothes since his rank and military status were confidential. His functions included personal, criminal and counter-intelligence investigations, and conducting security penetrations of Air Force bases. OSI was the counterpart of the FBI for the Air Force.

His assignments took him throughout the US, Europe and the Far East. During the overseas tours he was engaged in counter-espionage operations to combat hostile intelligence agencies targeting our forces. During much of this time he was a member of a special squad (as the lie detector operator) designed to handle sensitive investigations worldwide which demanded a rapid response. He had two suitcases ready to go at a moment's notice: one at home, one at the office. These investigations were highly sensitive: classified secret or top secret.

Many cases took him to West Berlin. He found getting to West Berlin was much more difficult than he experienced traveling throughout Europe or the Far East. The purpose of the trips was to participate in the interrogations of enemy espionage or sabotage agents in designated safe houses. At this time Berlin was divided into four sectors. The Communists would not permit entry through their sector of Germany to Berlin. Thus, special arrangements were required for either the "closed RR train" or by flying the specified "corridor" to arrive in West Berlin. The East German Intelligence Agency had placed a \$25,000 bounty for his apprehension. It became quite frightening when Russian MIGs would accompany the flights. One trip in particular made a great impression. He arrived on the day that the construction was started on the Berlin wall, which was to seal off access between east and west Germany. The erection of this wall greatly hampered the west in its intelligence gathering activities. That evening he went to the wall at dusk. Eerie! A streetlight shone through the haze. East German police, with machine guns, walked along the top of the wall in which large shards of glass were inserted to prevent escapes. As he watched, a basket was lowered quickly from the East side. Three West Germans ran to the basket, shoved some food into it and it was hauled up immediately.

One report described him as "His many years as a Special Agent...led him to all parts of the world. He is respected 'in the trade' as one of the nation's outstanding polygraph...operators and has been responsible for neutralizing foreign espionage directed against the United States."

In 1962 he and his family returned from overseas to Maxwell AFB where he attended the Air Command and Staff College. Upon graduation he was assigned to the faculty. This provided a more "normal" life away from spies, interrogations, double agents, crooks, thieves, dissidents, safe houses, 18-hour days, and permitted him much-needed family time. In 1969 he retired and has remained in Alabama.

After retirement he became very active in Alabama's criminal justice program.

Excerpts from one article described him: "His research work in performance evaluation and cross-cultural interaction had brought him wide recognition...His background as an Investigative Research Analyst and Planner added...to the agency's ability to provide technical assistance to the Alabama law enforcement community..."

Military chaplains played an enormous role in the family's spiritual life. At each installation they found chaplains who would go above and beyond the call of duty to be there when needed. One especially became close friends. He accompanied Col. Wicker to Paris on several occasions looking for "sermon material". A friend in need indeed, and responsible for the Wickers taking such an active part in the local church.

During their time in Alabama (1962-present) he and family were very active in the PCA church in Prattville. Under the auspices of Pastors John Neville and Henry Lewis Smith, he became a deacon, then an elder for 26 years, and clerk of session for 22 years. He served as an active member of Presbytery, moderator of two presbyteries and chairman, and member, of several presbytery committees. He rarely missed a General Assembly, and served on numerous Committees of Commissioners and PCA Permanent Committees. He also served as the GA delegate to the OPC, RPC and NAE assemblies. He has just resigned from teaching an adult Sunday School class after 43 years. On 9 February 2003, at a church dinner, his Sunday school class presented him with a plaque to commend his services to their church.