



384th Bomb Group, Inc. News & Journal



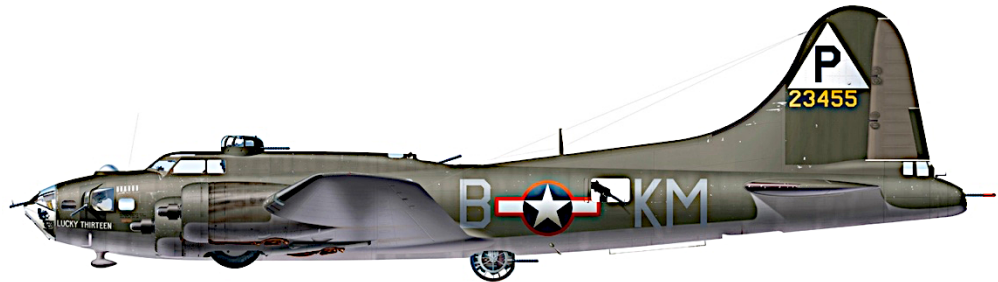
"Keep The Show On The Road..."

June 2021

Hangar Thirteen update – a 384th restoration moves forward

Many 384th Bomb Group members are familiar with Hangar Thirteen and the amazing effort to rebuild the 384th B-17F known as "Lucky Thirteen." For those who don't know the story, some brief background:

Hangar Thirteen is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit charity in Asheville, N.C. rebuilding a 384th veteran B-17 to flying condition. *Lucky Thirteen* (42-3455), was a Douglas-built F model. It arrived at Grafton-Underwood 11 August



1943, flying seven combat missions before being shot down on 6 September 1943. This is a rebuild, with elements from multiple B-17s – including the *Lucky Thirteen* wreck. It has the highest accuracy standards of any B-17 project attempted.

None of today's surviving B-17s are veterans of the air campaign of late 1943/early 1944 over Europe. Rebuilding *Lucky Thirteen* will rectify that, creating a lasting memorial to participants in history's largest aerial confrontation – including factory workers, ground crews, planners and air crews.

The bond between Hangar Thirteen and the 384th is close. Founder Ray Moore is the nephew of Marvin Hudson, line chief for the 546th squadron (*Lucky Thirteen's* unit). Several volunteers are 384th members with veteran family. An effort led by Chris Wilkinson, composed primarily of 384th NextGen members, located and purchased a rare top turret dome – a major accomplishment. Other 384th NexGen members and supporters include Bob Hachmann, Don Price, Keith Ellefson, Ray Moore, Gerad Blume, Andy Rivera, Don Price, Bob Jacoby and Karl Hauffe.

Since it has always been our intention to finish *Lucky Thirteen* to wartime standards, our goal is to not only fully equip the aircraft but ensure said equipment is fully functional. Amazing progress has been made with the radio systems, as volunteer Charlie Liberto has tracked down virtually every component originally installed on the airplane. Several of these systems are already operational, now only needing a power supply to put them on display.

Ray's work on the airframe has focused lately on Station 5 (the front wall of the radio room) and the carry-thru spars that comprise the lower portion of the bomb bay. Other efforts include the aircraft's instrument panel – for which Bob Hachmann is currently building the housing assembly – and various aspects of the armament – to which Bob Jacoby is fabricating pilot seats and E-12 gun cradles (the waist and radio position guns) while I build ammo boxes.

With radios nearly completed, we have shifted our attention to a larger, more challenging project: the gun turrets. Due to the rarity of components, we estimate that it will cost \$120,000 to rebuild these. Still, we have made some progress. The effort by 384th members to purchase the top turret dome was a major advance. Other advances include the acquisition of a rare early top turret hand control assembly, a ball turret ammunition magazine, and locating power drives and transmissions for both turrets by a small group of 384th supporters. One major accomplishment saw the purchase of a parts collection in Belgium, retrieved by locals in 1944 from the wreckage of B-17G 44-6139 (351BG). This rare collection includes a massive top turret base assembly.

There are many ways to support Lucky Thirteen. You can donate via PayPal – send money to Store@HangarThirteen.org and click on Friends/Family to avoid unnecessary fees. For those who wish to volunteer, you need not be an Asheville local – if you have skills, we have blueprints! Those who know metal fabrication, molding, casting metals and plastics, 3D printing, CAD modelling, and laser cutting are particularly helpful. Keep the show on the road! — Gerad Blume

384th 2021 REUNION: Our reunion dates are 29 September - 3 October in Ogden, Utah. See the story on page 4 for initial details and stay tuned for more information in coming weeks as the final arrangements are confirmed!

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2021 Calendar

3824th Bomb Group, 2021 reunion, 29 September – 3 October, Ogden, Utah (see story, P. 4)

8th Air Force Historical Society 2021 Reunion, 27-31 October, 2021, Savannah, Ga.; details available at <https://www.8thafhs.org/>

On the Internet

384th BG website

Our internet home, maintained by Fred Preller and team.

384th Facebook page

A great place where many of us share our experiences, photos, etc. from both sides of "the pond."

8th Air Force HS

The home for the 8th Air Force Historical Society online.

8th AFHS Facebook

Information, photos, stories, current events, pertinent information relating to "The Mighty Eighth."

The Arrowhead Club

Cindy Bryan's wonderful and inspiring blog. Her father was a 384th crewman and POW.

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The real story of the "Aeronca L-3B" crash

Many of us for years have seen photos of this incident, always described as the crash of an Aeronca L-3B, a military version of the Aeronca 65TC Defender. Stories about the incident are legion, from a joyriding (joy-flying?) maintenance officer who cracked it up after his shop had salvaged it (at the cost of many man-hours), to a bomber pilot buzzing the barracks. That question, the identity of the aircraft, and the crash location, have been somewhat clarified by a recently obtained Accident Report ([AR44-06-30-526.pdf](#)).

The AR names the pilot as **1st Lt. Robert E. Maahs**, who joined the 546th Bomb Squadron in November 1943, completed his tour in April 1944 and was released from the group in May. After that we have no information until 30 June 1944 when, thanks to the AR, we know he was assigned to the 27th Transport Group, 325th Ferrying Squadron at Heston AAF, Station 510 (west of London). Maahs stated he departed Heston for Deenethorpe AAF, Station 128 (near Grafton Underwood), and on the way decided to buzz his old squadron at Grafton Underwood. Preparing for his fourth and final pass over the barracks, he lost control in a strong crosswind and his right wing struck a bystander (**2nd Lt. Wilbur L. Shearer**), then crashed into a 546th squadron officers' barracks. Shearer sustained a "severe laceration of the neck" and a concussion that hospitalized him and kept him off operations for a couple of weeks. Lt. Maahs suffered minor cuts and bruises. The AR identifies the aircraft as an L-4B – a Piper – serial number 43-685.

Our Friends of the 384th in England took up the challenge to identify the building damaged in this incident and tell us that it is indeed a 546th officers' barracks, Building 484, within Site No. 11. You can view a collection of photos of this plane as well as the location of the crash at <https://photos.384thbombgroup.com/index.php?/category/1359> or type "piper" into the photo gallery "quick search" box and select 'Piper L4-B "Grasshopper" '.

— Fred Preller

Progress continues at Grafton-Underwood with site clearing

As the process continues to obtain charity status and bank accounts for the museum at the 384th Bomb Group airfield (AAF Station 106), clearing of the site is going well and some old foundations and other artifacts are emerging (see photo, at right, of builder's mark from the Ops Block foundation).



An initial terms of lease with Boughton Estates, the site's owner, is also in progress. Current plans include construction of more Nissen huts on site and full road access from the existing vehicular route and widening of that road to accept two-way traffic.

— Neill Howarth

Honoring Luther Earl “Smitty” Smith; 19 February, 1923 - 8 April, 2021

About that much will be on the headstone in Conway, N.H.’s cemetery. But there is much more to Smitty. I first met him in 1961 on a trip in which my dad (Lt. George Hunt, the copilot on Smitty’s B-17, the Spirit of Winsome Winn II) visited as many of the crew as he could from Maine to Texas. I next met Smitty in 1994 or so when my mom found an old Christmas card as I was getting interested in the crew, since I had become a pilot myself.

During our first call, he told me he deeply wanted to find his friend Sgt. Jack Kushner, tail gunner on the B-17, and thank him for saving his life. He gave me the last address he had, a P.O. Box in Los Angeles 6, California. This was before Zip



“Smitty” signing the 384th wing panel, September 2013, with Ray Lustig (left)

Codes. Fortunately, a company specializing in finding people was running a deal checking public records online. There were only 137 Jack Kushners in the U.S. Only seven that fit the specifications. I wrote a letter detailing the circumstances of the mission during which Jack bailed Smitty out. I made seven copies and sent it off.

Sometime later, I was driving when my cell phone rang. It was my daughter telling me Jack had called our home. We stopped in a little town and the phone rang. It was Jack. I told him how I had found him. Then he told me how amazed he was that our daughter, Katherine, knew all about him saving Smitty’s life. Finally, he asked me for Smitty’s address and phone number. Smitty told me that he and Jack talked for an hour and a half.

Smitty and I went to the Oshkosh fly-in in 1996. Smitty would sit in his lawn chair under the B-17 Yankee Lady, near the ball turret and

regale attendees with stories of what it was like to fly and fight in that constricted space. Several times he got into the turret and closed it because he still fit in the turret and his uniform.

22 February 1944 was the third day of “Big Week,” 1,000-plane raids on Germany. It was continuous bombing, day and night, to damage Germany’s war-making ability. The Spirit of Winsome Winn II, a 547th squadron ship and crew, had returned from its 12th mission on 8 February badly shot up, on two engines, unable to clear the cliffs of Dover. It landed up a hill under the wires and into a plowed field thanks to great airmanship by pilot Lt. Norman DeFrees and copilot Hunt, under a set of 300 KV power wires, side slipping around the tower holding them, on its last engine.

Since the Spirit wasn’t ready for their 13th mission, the crew got a brand-new silver B-17G. That morning, there were problems with the superchargers but DeFrees decided to launch because it was a “full effort” and he wanted to do his part.

As they passed the channel, they popped out of clouds into bright sunshine ... tail-end Charlie in the middle formation of three, reflecting the sun like a diamond in a well-lit jewelry store. Smitty, Jack and DeFrees said they suffered attack after attack for about 10 minutes. DeFrees got on the intercom and said the superchargers were running away, and the props would come off if someone didn’t pull the breakers that fed them. Smitty had climbed out of his turret because brass from the radioman’s gun had fallen into the gears and it wouldn’t turn. The breakers were on the bulkhead above the ball turret. Smitty started to pull the breakers when a 20mm cannon shell nearly severed his right arm between the hand and elbow.

With most of the stabilizer shot away, the plane entered a screaming 8,000-foot dive. Somehow, they managed to recover. My dad told me they armed the bombs and set the plane on autopilot before DeFrees ordered “abandon ship.” Kushner came forward and saw Smitty holding his arm and trying to get his chest pack on. He helped Smitty into his chute, got him to the escape door and pushed him out. They were going so fast, Smitty’s boots came off when the ‘chute opened.

Smitty made it to the ground and was taken to an assembly point for POWs. There, a German doctor amputated his right arm. Smitty was in a POW camp for seven months. Later, Smitty was sent to Switzerland where he was exchanged for a German who also was “no longer fit for military duty.” He was repatriated to the U.S. and released from service. That was just the start of his accomplishments. He was a healthy 21-year-old (except for the arm) and popular with the ladies as a veteran. He raced Harley-Davidson motorcycles, handling the shifter with the hook on his right arm. He had a career with the Post Office, raised three boys, and was a frequent subject of Veterans Day articles in his local paper, The Daily Sun.

In 1996, after Smitty and Kushner reunited, we tracked down DeFrees. We decided to get all three together for the 55th anniversary of the end of the war. I was gathering security and flight line volunteers for the 2000 Oshkosh airshow. This group, the three veterans, my mom and Kushner’s lady, spent a week meeting people in aviation. I was fortunate to introduce the crew at the Oshkosh Warbirds Banquet. I shared the story of Kushner bailing Smitty out of the B-17. They were given a two-minute standing ovation by notables including test pilot legend Chuck Yeager, astronaut Frank Borman, and renown aircraft restorer Kermit Weeks. I felt that I had done my duty by the men who served with my father.

Smitty was a surrogate father to me, since my dad died of complications of diabetes at 51 when I was 24. I feel Smitty’s loss strongly because I had traveled to see him and his family several times. It is cliché, nonetheless, they don’t make ‘em like that anymore. Rest in Peace, my dear friend.

— George Sylvester Hunt, Jr.

384th squadron patches and Challenge Coins

Show your 384th Bomb Group affiliation and remember your 384th service member with a group or squadron patch.

Original WWII Group patches were used as templates to recreate each one as closely as possible in design, size and color. Squadron patches are \$9 each.

Orders of four or more squadron patches are \$8 each. The 384th Bomb Group patch is \$10. Shipping is included in the price. To buy, email Keith Ellefson at 384thbombgroup@troycable.net

A new order of challenge coins has been received and they are now available for purchase from Keith as well. They are \$15 each, domestic U.S. shipping included.



TAPS

We do our best to keep everyone updated when a 384th veteran flies west. Here are the latest obituaries, as of June 2021.

Lt. Robert J. Fisher, copilot, 544th squadron, 35 missions, 12 August 1944–3 February 1945. Entered Air Force post-war, for a 24-year, second military career focused on research and development, infrared photography and flying. Died 18 April 2021, aged 98.

S. Sgt. Luther Earl “Smitty” Smith, died 8 April, aged 98 (see story, p. 3).

S. Sgt. Carroll Raymond York, tail gunner with the Charles Goble crew, 547th squadron, completed 27 missions, 17 January–17 April 1945. On final mission, landed at an airfield captured from the Germans only a few hours earlier, with two engines out. Died 23 August 2020, aged 95.

If you know of a 384th veteran’s passing, please write our editor, Paul Furiga (paul.furiga@wordwritepr.com or 222 Courtney Place, Wexford, PA 15090).



The itinerary for the 2021 384th reunion begins to take shape ...

With the pandemic receding, the 384th Bomb Group executive board and reunion planners are pleased to share this initial itinerary for our 2021 reunion. We’re planning on 29 September -3 October in Ogden, Utah. Here is the initial plan:

Wednesday, 29 September — Arrivals

A 384th Hospitality Room is open for us for the entire reunion at our hotel, the Hilton Garden Inn, Ogden. We will have a small buffet and cash bar that afternoon/evening.

Thursday, 30 September — Tour of Wendover museum (where the 384th began)

- After breakfast at the hotel, charter bus departs 8 a.m. for a 2½ hour ride to Wendover to tour Wendover Field. (8 hours total). Box lunches from hotel.
- For those not interested in the Wendover tour, we will have multiple activities.
- Dinner at 6:30 p.m. at Sonora Grill on 24th Street, a primo Mexican restaurant.

Friday, 1 October — Hill Air Force Base visit and wing panel dedication

- Breakfast at the hotel.
- Bus departs the hotel 9:15 a.m. for a 20-minute ride.
- 10 a.m.: 8th Air Force and 384th Dedication Ceremony at Hill Aerospace Museum. The museum will conduct the ceremony and the 384th and attending members will be acknowledged. We will also visit the Mazer Memorial Chapel.
- Noon-12:30 p.m.: We load the bus to return to Ogden. Afterwards, free time in Ogden until dinner.
- Banquet at Hotel: Cocktails at 6 p.m. and dinner at 7 p.m.

Saturday, 2 October potential Park City visit

Park City attractions include a brewery, ski-lift ride, stores, restaurants, etc.

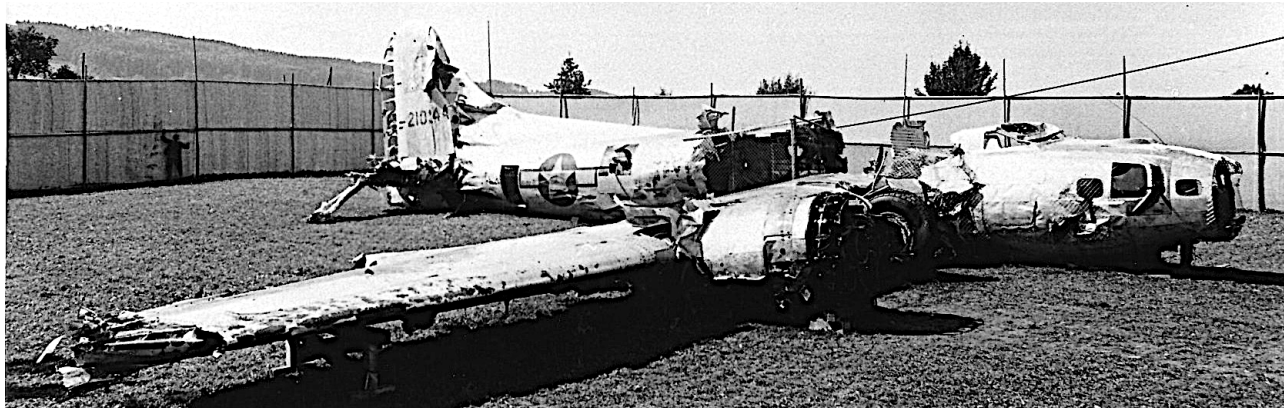
Sunday, 3 Oct 2021 Departure

Safe travels home!

Museum inspired by 384th's 'Little Chub' continues to grow

Rolf Zaugg's passion began with a [museum](#) dedicated to the tragic loss and memory of the crew of "Little Chub," one of seven 384th Bomb Group planes lost on the 24 April 1944 mission to Oberphaffenhofen, Germany.

Over the years, he's been a good friend to many in the 384th and has been visited by family and friends of the Little Chub crew and others from the group. Recently, his museum earned a two-page story and pictures in the February 2021 issue of the German language aviation magazine, *Jet & Prop*. As the pandemic slows, Rolf is eager for more 384th visitors.



The main wreckage of Little Chub, after recovery from the Greifensee in 1953. Rolf Zaugg later recovered more of the plane in 2000.

From his initial interest in Little Chub, Rolf's museum has expanded to become a primary resource on the history of foreign aircraft in Switzerland from 1939 to 1945, especially U.S. Army Air Force emergency landings and crashes. In addition to Little Chub, the museum provides information on B-24, other B-17 and fighter crashes. And it all started with Little Chub.

On the crew's first mission, Little Chub, a 545th squadron ship, was attacked by fighters over Stuttgart. The bombardier, Lt. Jesse Greenebaum, was hit by two 20mm shells and died. The crew was planning a crash landing near the Greifensee, a lake in Switzerland, when they were attacked by three Swiss fighters. Fritz Kolb, a Swiss pilot flying a French-built Morane fighter, fired two rockets as a warning, which went unnoticed. He then fired on the plane, which caught fire and fell into the Greifensee. Five died. Pilot Lt. Everett Bailey was killed when his chute failed to deploy at low altitude. The others killed were copilot Lt. James E. Burry, ball turret gunner Sgt. Anthony Melazzi, waist gunner Sgt. Richard Sendlebeck and tail gunner Sgt. Sidney Pratt. Four become internees (navigator Lt. Charles Wallach, engineer S. Sgt. Raymond Newall, radio operator S. Sgt. William Silag and waist gunner Sgt. Richard Hollingsworth.)

Kolb didn't know that Little Chub, one of 14 damaged B-17s the Swiss had ordered to land at the Dubendorf airfield, was trying to jettison its ball turret. The pilot was circling, waiting for the crew to bail out, hoping to belly-land in a nearby field.

Embarrassed Swiss authorities had to explain why the air force shot down a crippled American bomber trying to land in neutral Switzerland. The official justification was based on an accidental American bombing on the Swiss town of Schaffhausen. The Swiss Army, and hundreds of civilians, honored the crew.

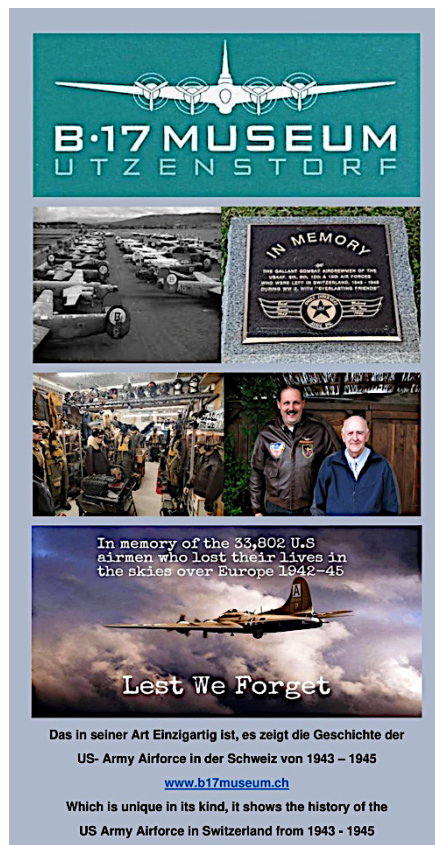
In 1953, most of the wreckage was recovered, along with the body of copilot Lt. Burry. The B-17 was displayed for a short time, then was scrapped. Much of the wreckage remained on the bottom of the lake.

In 2000, Rolf brought in divers and recovery equipment at a personal investment of thousands of dollars. He recovered Little Chub's frequency meter box, the frequency calibration book, a parachute, live ammunition, sections of the wing and fuselage, two propeller assemblies, and the #2 Wright R-1820-65 engine.

Since then, Rolf's interest and passion has expanded to make Utzendorf a popular stop for enthusiasts, families and historians interested in the experience of American flyers who crash-landed or were interred in Switzerland during the war.

In the museum, visitors see headgear, goggles, medals and photos of U.S.A.A.F. crew. The museum also has a variety of wreckage from American aircraft that made emergency landings or crashed in Switzerland during the war, including the entire #2 engine from Little Chub. As visitors stroll the exhibits, American songs from the 1940s play in the background.

— Paul Furiga



Know your 384th Bomb Group, Inc. Officers and Board of Directors

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The 384th Bomb Group, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) non-profit veterans organization based in Ohio. Membership includes the quarterly newsletter for \$25, renewed yearly in January.

2021 DUES INFORMATION, DETAILS

Our 2021 treasurer is Carol Alfter, so please send dues to:

Carol Alfter
1306 Adams Way
Beavercreek, OH 45434

If you previously mailed dues to the former Virginia address, please resend a check to Carol. We will check payments to try to ensure that you do not pay twice for 2021. If a double payment is made, we will shred the check rather than mail it back. Thank you for your help in ensuring that the group activities are financially supported.

Maintenance Donations for 384th BG Memorial at Grafton Underwood

Kevin Flecknor (with help, especially given recent health issues) continues to do a super job maintaining the memorial.

He keeps eyes on the memorial and immediately makes repairs when required. He’s a great supporter of the history and honor of the Group. But it does cost money to do some of the work. The Group recognizes and helps support Kevin. Donations can be sent via:

Internet Banking within the U.K.
HSBC Sort Code: 40-32-04
Account No: 91836064

Internet Banking outside of the UK:
International Bank Account Number (IBAN):
GB36HBUK 40320491836064
Swift Code: MIDLGB22

If you wish to send donations via a check, please make these payable to: “384th BG Memorial” and send the check to:

384th BG Memorial
c/o 28 Lime Road
Kettering Northamptonshire NN16--9TB

**384TH BOMB GROUP, INC.
1306 ADAMS WAY
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“Keep The Show On The Road...”

We’re on the Web at: www.384thbombgroup.com