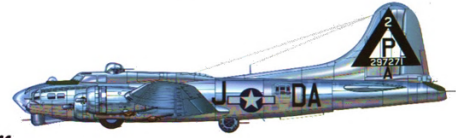




# 384th Bomb Group, Inc. News & Journal



*"Keep The Show On The Road..."*

December 2020

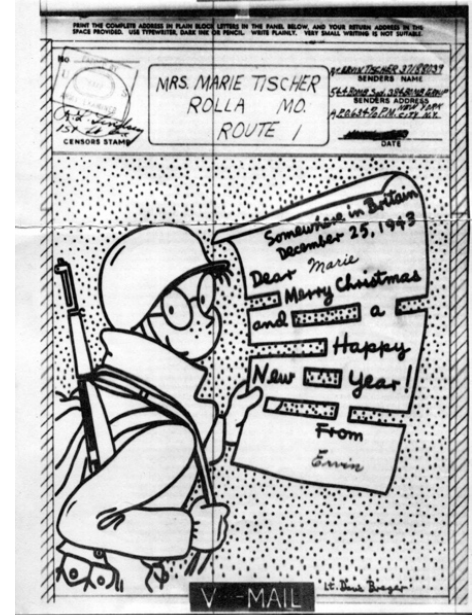
## Remembering the holidays at Grafton Underwood, 1943-45

With the possible exception of a COVID-crazy 2020, is any loneliness more profound than a service member in a war zone, aching for the holidays at home?

During the 384th's time at Grafton Underwood, the group flew missions against Axis targets throughout the 1943 and 1944 holiday seasons, with missions both years on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve and on New Year's Day 1945. The group flew Thanksgiving 1944, but not on Christmas or New Year's Day in 1943 or 1944. Missions around holidays probably brought the same tension as any other, mixed with emotions of holidays away from home. In 1943, mission 37 to Bremen on Nov. 26, the day after Thanksgiving, brought the loss of four crews.

To maintain morale, the Eighth Air Force and the 384th provided entertainment, special meals and ways to connect with the family back home, including V Mail and Christmas cards.

The men of the 384th knew that holiday missions, though they brought danger and potentially death, were worse for those they fought to free. In October 1944, the group organized a candy, clothing and gift collection for French orphans, that was delivered in Nantes on New Year's Day 1945, the traditional day that French children opened holiday presents.



According to a press release from the Eighth, the special mission was Lt. P. Oscar Picard's idea. Lt. Picard was the 384th's prisoner of war officer in the intelligence section. Col. Dale Smith, group commander at the time, endorsed the idea and the men of the group were given mimeographed letters to send home asking their families to participate.

As the Oct. 14, 1944 press release put it, "the response among the men of this veteran group was instantaneous ... many of the men have pledged their scanty candy rations for the next 11 weeks ... Lt. Picard pointed out that the American airmen possess a great affection for the French people. Hundreds of U.S. fliers, shot down over France ... today owe their lives and liberty to French people who concealed them from capture by the Germans and nursed their wounds."

Below, some pictures from the special holiday mission and an example of messages to home, above.

*At right, packing gifts before the special mission. Far right, loading gifts aboard a B-17 before the holiday flight.*



## In this Issue

Holidays at GU	P. 1
The Sortie Project	P. 3
Jack Hunter turns 100!	P. 4
Taps	P. 4
Missing, not forgotten	P. 5

## 2020 Calendar

8th Air Force Historical Society 2020 Reunion, POSTPONED

## On the Internet

### [384th BG website](#)

*Our internet home, maintained by Fred Preller.*

### [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.*

## Contact Us

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## ‘Wingy’ now in its new home at Hill Aerospace Museum

Several years ago, the 384th Bomb Group Association initiated an ambitious effort: have as many surviving 384th veterans as possible sign a B-17 wing panel before they passed on as part of the Commemorative Wing Panel Project.

After several cross-country trips and signings by more than 150 384th veterans, the Wing Panel – aka “Wingy” – is now in its new home at the Hill Aerospace Museum in Ogden, Utah, and has been installed as the centerpiece of a new display focused on the Eighth Air Force.

Above is an image of the display, shared by Justin Hall, museum curator. Justin writes that “The case on the left will discuss the mission and organization of the Eighth Air Force in WWII, the center case is dedicated to those who served, and the case on the right will discuss ties to Utah. Embedded in those larger themes, we discuss different roles (fighter pilots, bomber pilots, ground crews, gunners and bombardiers, etc.), related equipment (flight gear, bombsights, navigation equipment, etc.), and of course, the centerpiece of the display, the wing panel. Although we are still installing the signage, and last bit of furniture and artifacts, we’ve had tremendous positive feedback. We’re excited to be nearing completion!”

We hope to make a trip to the museum to see Wingy as part of the next 384th reunion, which is now in planning stages for late 2021 in Utah. The 384th’s Utah ties are deep, as the group was formed in January 1943 at Wendover Field.

## Speaking of museums ... An update from Grafton Underwood

In recent newsletters, we have reported on the progress of Friends of the 384th in securing approvals for land, buildings, etc. at the former 384th air base owned by Boughton Estates.

The museum project is moving ahead with lots of work behind the scenes. Stay tuned for more information on the announcement of an organizational structure to be submitted for charity status from the U.K. Charity Commission.

A proposed three-officer structure with six additional committee members (half from the States and half from the U.K.) is in organizational stages, with potential committee members and officers identified and willing to serve.

In the meantime, with the cooperation of Boughton, clean-up and preparation work continues at the future museum site, as weather permits. In recent weeks, volunteers have laid AstroTurf at some sites, with additional rolls stored on site to provide future weed suppression and tidy work areas at the Museum location.

# The Sortie Report Project: Entering 100,000 Records – Manually

It was 2006, and I had a dream. At first it seemed impossible: display every crew that flew every combat mission on the website and make it easy to access (and maintain). The numbers were beyond our ability to comprehend. Each time an aircraft was dispatched on a combat mission it was called a "sortie." For the 316 combat missions the 384th flew, there would be about 10,000 sorties. Each sortie aircraft would be manned by about 10 men, so that would be about 100,000 pieces of information that had to be associated with the proper sortie. All the information needed would have to be obtained, and then it would have to be organized into suitable form for the website.

Fast forward to 2020: the dream has been realized! The data mentioned above has been entered into the website database

SORTIE REPORT				
<b>MISSION DATA:</b>				
DATE	384th BG Mission #	8th AF Mission #	384th PRIMARY TARGET	
1943-06-22	1	65	TARGET: GENERAL MOTORS TRUCK FACTORY TYPE: INDUSTRY LOCATION: ANTWERP, BELGIUM	
FIRST 384TH COMBAT MISSION: COL BUDD J. PEASLEE LED THE 384TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H) ON THIS MISSION, A "SECONDARY EFFORT" FOR THE DAY, CONSISTING OF THE 384TH FOLLOWED BY THE 381ST BG. THE 384TH PUT UP 20 AIRCRAFT FOR THIS MISSION; TWO B-17S FAILED TO RETURN, 10 CREWMEMBERS WERE KIA, 1 WAS MIA, 9 BECAME POW, AND 4 WERE WOUNDED.				
<b>SORTIE DATA:</b>				
COMBAT CREDIT		STATUS	TARGET ATTACKED (MODE)	
YES		COMPLETED MISSION	PRIMARY (VISUAL)	
<b>- SORTIE AIRCRAFT DATA:</b>				
TYPE	SERIAL NUMBER	SQ CODE	NAME	GROUND CREW CHIEF
B-17F	42-30026	BK*J	BATTLEWAGON	FLYNN, ROLAND (NMI)
<b>- SORTIE CREW DATA:</b>				
POSITION	CREWMEMBER		UNIT	STATUS
PILOT	ALGAR, PHILIP MORRIS		546	COMPLETED, UNINJURED
CO-PILOT	WOLF, RICHARD VANCE		546	COMPLETED, UNINJURED
NAVIGATOR	CELENTANO, FRANK A		546	COMPLETED, UNINJURED
BOMBARDIER	MCCLANAHAN, JAMES CLIFTON		546	COMPLETED, UNINJURED
RADIO OPERATOR	GEROW, FRANCIS (NMI)		546	COMPLETED, UNINJURED
ENGINEER/TOP TURRET	LAVIOLETTE, ROLAND BERNARD		546	COMPLETED, UNINJURED
BALL TURRET	MCKAY, KENNETH MITCHEL, JR		546	COMPLETED, UNINJURED
TAIL GUNNER	SCHIMENEK, JOHN FRANCIS		546	COMPLETED, UNINJURED
WAIST (FLEXIBLE) GUNNER	MAJEWSKI, CASMER ROBERT		546	COMPLETED, UNINJURED
WAIST (FLEXIBLE) GUNNER	MILLER, LORING CORWIN		546	COMPLETED, UNINJURED

Sortie Report provided by 384thBombGroup.com

SortieEngine.php Rev. 3.1.2, 4 October 2018

it was kind of interesting. It became suddenly VERY interesting when we learned his aircraft spreadsheet contained many rows of data for each aircraft. In fact, there was one row for every mission every aircraft had flown – about 10,000 rows! It took me a little while to realize that this aircraft spreadsheet was the key – the enabling technology – that would get us started on the path to realizing the dream! This was a list of the sorties I mentioned above – and Mark shared it.

Now, nothing in computers is really all that easy, but this was a giant step. After some experimentation, Mark's sortie list was added to the database. Now the real work began: gather the data on every crew that flew a combat mission and enter that into the database. No matter how you cut it, entering close to 100,000 pieces of information into the database by hand is a BIG job. The first few I did by hand, in the process proving that what I had done was error-prone and prohibitively time-consuming, so there was a delay for a few months while I built an online form that would be quicker to use and which would defend against the most significant errors. So far, so good...

How would we connect each crewman to their sorties? Well, for each mission, each squadron would type up "Loading Lists" of who was on each of their aircraft. These were to be our Gold Standard, but we had very few of them. John Edwards said the combat records for the 384th were at NARA in College Park, so we went. The first NARA mission in 2007 included John, Paul Mantle (remember him?) and his son Trey, as well as Gail and me. Our objective was to "Get Loading Lists" for 50 missions: we got well over 100! We were off to the races, but there was still a lot of work to do. And we had to make several trips to NARA (a story in itself). Later NARA visits were done by Keith Ellefson, Gail and me, until we had all the Loading Lists.

We started adding the crewmen to the sorties they had flown and in a few years we were done with data entry. It was not a contest but Keith Ellefson entered the majority of the crewmen, followed by John Edwards. Others who helped include Chris Wilkinson, Phil Hettel, Gail and me. After that, John Edwards managed two rounds of 100% quality checks. Nevertheless, from time-to-time we detect – and correct – factual errors, which is easily accomplished by modifying the erroneous data in the database. This corrects the information everywhere it appears on the website.

Now, website visitors can easily view the Sortie Reports linked to every combat crewman's information page, every mission page, and every aircraft page (providing the aircraft flew at least one combat mission with the 384th).

So, the dream is a reality, and with good fortune the information will remain available in perpetuity so that families and researchers will know who is responsible for the "Heritage of Valor" of the 384th.

I also had another dream: an "Instant Memory Book" that collects and presents all of the database information for a single soldier in one report – but you will have to wait for the next newsletter for that one.

— Fred Preller

## 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](mailto:384thbombgroup@troycable.net)

**And now: Challenge Coins! Our first U.S. and U.K. shipments are SOLD OUT but email Keith Ellefson (see above) if interested and we will try to place another order.**



## TAPS

Given the nature of life in this 21st century, we do our best to keep everyone updated when a 384th veteran flies west. Here are the latest obituaries, as of December 2020.

**S. Sgt. Phillip William Chaperon**, waist gunner, 544th, 547th squadrons, 21 missions, 5 November 1943–19 April 1944, shot down with the Fioretti crew by fighters; crashed near Lindenfels, Germany, six POW, four KIA. Died 29 October 2020, aged 100.

**Sgt. Kenneth M. Lentz**, tail gunner with the John W. Peterson crew, 546th squadron, went down on his 21st mission near Wiesbaden, Germany, 25 September 1944. Six of the crew were KIA; four were POWs. Martin died 13 December 2019, aged 94.

**Lt. Robert H. Welsbacher**, navigator, 547th squadron, 30 missions, 16 March 1944–21 June 1944, died 11 August 2020, aged 97.

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

## December 2020



## S. Sgt. Jack W. Hunter celebrates his 100th birthday!

Fewer of our 384th veterans remain to share their stories with us, so milestones of those still with us become even more important. Such is the case with S. Sgt. Jack W. Hunter, a crew chief with the 546th squadron, who turned 100 on 1 November 2020!

Son Jeff, a veteran of the U.S. Army Medical Corps, 4th Infantry Division, 1969-73, writes that his dad *"talks quite often about his comrades in the bomber group. He wears his 384th hat proudly every day. The VFW HQ sent him a 'certificate of recognition' celebrating his 100th birthday. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 we won't be able to see him. but at least we can still talk to him to wish him well and to have many more birthdays. Also, he became a great grandfather this past February."*

In addition to serving with the 384 from 23 January 1943 at Wendover Field to 14 March 1944 at Grafton Underwood, Jack is also among the 384th veterans who signed the group's commemorative wing panel (aka "Wingy," see story, p. 2). Here's a photo from Jack's signing a few years ago and his 100th celebration.



## Remembering Those Who Didn't Come Home

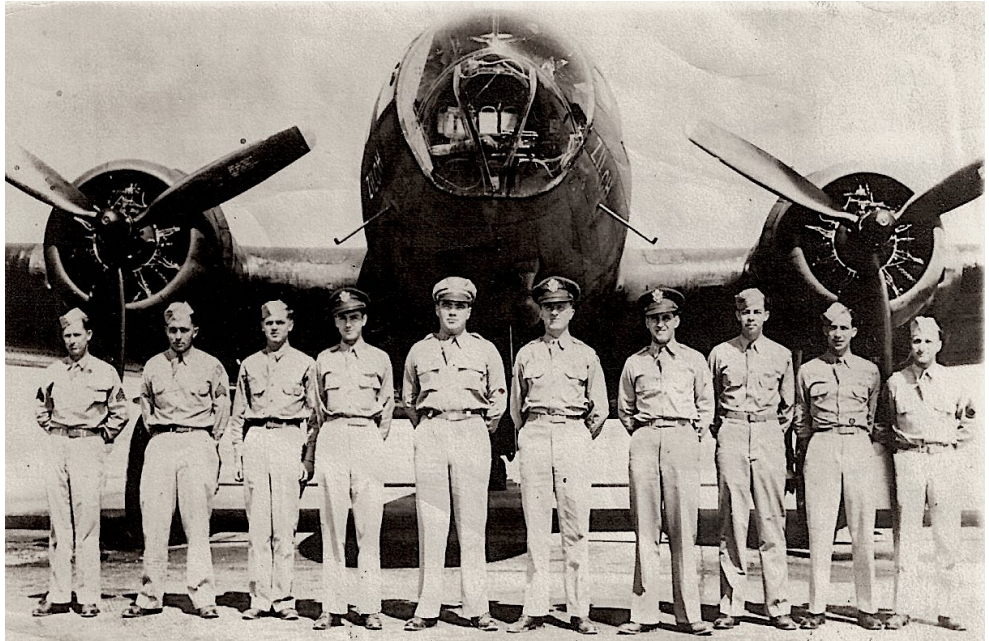
Thanks to the efforts of 384th NextGen member Cindy Bryan, we are sharing stories about 384th crews who never came home. This story comes from her website, where the original version of this story (and many more researched by Cindy) can be found. [thearrowheadclub.com](http://thearrowheadclub.com).

### ***December 30, 1943: Sgt. Aldo Joseph Gregori, who went down with the "Sea Hag"***

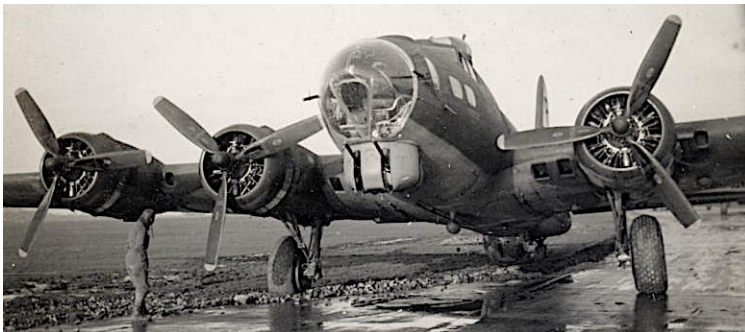
Aldo J. Gregori, right waist gunner, was on his 14th mission with the Randolph "Jake" Jacobs crew aboard B-17-G, 42-31274. The target was a chemical/synthetic rubber plant, I. G. Farben Industrie in Ludwigshafen, Germany. The B-17, on only its eighth combat flight, experienced mechanical failure just 15 minutes over France, when the number one prop ran away, threw chunks of cowling and caught on fire. Jacobs had to ditch in the English Channel. Nine of the crew were rescued at sea. Unable to free himself from control cables in the wreckage of the ditched aircraft, Gregori went down with the ship.

The olive drab B-17 bore no name before the ill-fated flight; according to S. Sgt. Jack Goetz, engineer on that mission, Jacobs remarked after ditching, "I just couldn't keep the old 'SEA HAG' in the air."

The Jacobs crew, one of the first replacement crews to reach Grafton Underwood after the group initially deployed, was hard-hit by battle tragedy. Bombardier Lt. James E. Seibel was killed on a 30 January 1944 mission to bomb a Brunswick plant at Braunschweig, Germany. Six minutes before the IP, his B-17 was attacked by FW-190s and began falling away from the formation, where it burst into flames, but continued on and dropped bombs on target; three chutes were seen to emerge; seven were KIA when the B-17, WE DOOD IT, crashed near Oberkirchen, Germany.



*The original Jacobs crew - L-R: Doy Cloud (RO), Robert Compton (TG), Lawrence Wager (WG), Eugene Boger (CP), Randolph "Jake" Jacobs (P), John Curtin (N), James Seibel (B), Donald Gorham (BT), Jack Goetz (E/TT), Aldo Gregori (Asst. Eng.)*



*The Sea Hag, apparently after running off a runway or taxiway into the infamous "Grafton undermud."*

Jacobs was killed in action while flying group lead on 8 May 1944 on an Operation Crossbow mission to take out a V weapons location in France. His B-17, RENO'S RAIDER, was hit by continuously tracking flak about 40 seconds before bomb release and received a direct burst beneath the pilot's compartment. The plane started in a steep spiral and crashed about 7 miles southwest of Valognes, France. Six were killed, four became POWs and one evaded.

Navigator Lt. John Q. Curtin was the only other original crew member flying with Jacobs that day; he became a POW.

Aldo J. Gregori is listed on the Tablets of the Missing at Cambridge American Cemetery, Cambridge, England.

In all, twenty-five men with the 384th Bomb Group were declared missing in action in 1943.

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

Chairman – Peter Bielskis (Veteran)  
President – Frank Alfter (NexGen)  
Board Member – Len Estrin (Veteran)  
Board Member – William O’Leary (Veteran)  
Board Member – Sheldon Vernon (Veteran)  
Board Member – Carol Alfter (NextGen)  
Board Member – Dennis Bielskis (NexGen)  
Board Member – Chris Wilkinson (NexGen)  
Interim Group Treasurer – Carol Alfter (NexGen)

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.

### PLEASE NOTE: TREASURER UPDATE!

Carol Alfter is again our treasurer, so please send dues to:  
Carol Alfter  
1306 Adams Way  
Beavercreek, OH 45434

Please **DO NOT** send mail to the Virginia PO box, we are closing it. We are trying to get all paperwork sent to Carol. If you mailed dues to the Virginia address, please resend a check to Carol. We will check payments to try to ensure that you do not pay twice for 2020. If a double payment is made, we will shred the check rather than mail it back. We apologize for any inconvenience and hope to get this resolved soon.

## 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 12 Bowland Drive  
Barton Seagrave  
Kettering, Northants, NN15-6TX, UK

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**384TH BOMB GROUP, INC.  
1306 ADAMS WAY  
BEAVERCREEK, OH 45434**



*“Keep The Show On The Road...”*

We’re on the Web at: [www.384thbombgroup.com](http://www.384thbombgroup.com)