



# 384th Bomb Group, Inc. News & Journal



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

March 2021

## Remembering Wendover: Where it all began for the 384th

On a desolate plain just inside Utah's western border with Nevada, the 384th Bomb Group first took shape under the command of Col. Budd J. Peaslee in early 1943, an unbelievable 78 years ago.

In his book, "[Heritage of Valor](#)," the 384th's first skipper described Wendover Army Air Field as "125 miles west of Salt Lake City and about 500 miles to the east of San Francisco, on as barren a piece of desert as any in the United States."

The 384th wasn't the first bomb group to train at Wendover, and it would hardly be the last (in early 1945, the B-29 Enola Gay crew trained at Wendover to drop the first atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima).

For 384th veterans who served with the group throughout hostilities, Wendover was the opening chapter of their story. These proud few included [Maj. Bill "Pop" Dolan](#), the group intelligence officer and a World War I veteran pilot of the Lafayette Escadrille. For the 384th's [36 original flight crews](#), Wendover forged the camaraderie and esprit de corps that took them through the group's tough early days, when fighters couldn't accompany their B-17s on long missions and the Luftwaffe seemed most ferocious.

The group was established January 1, 1943 and by March all original crews had arrived. "It was midwinter in the Rockies," Peaslee wrote. "The winds that swept across the dry lake beds that eons before had been covered by the waters of the Great Salt Lake were bitter with the cold of the ice and snowfields of the surrounding mountains ... Winter storms added to the normal hazards of flight and particularly to those long practice navigation missions that had to leave the broad lake basin and cross the towering mountain barriers reaching toward 15,000 feet."

By the time the 384th completed its training at Wendover and left for Europe in late April 1943, the group had established the character and toughness that would make it one of the Eighth Air Force's top groups.

As the illustration above shows, that character included the formation of squadron symbols that continue to define the group today, such as the 545th emblem pictured in the Wendover Salt Tablet, the group's newspaper while training there.

As Peaslee wrote, "It had not been easy. Every man in the group, now numbering well over a thousand individuals, had had to contribute his fair share. All had not been love and kisses ... But there was one thing that had not been — that was a fatal accident or serious injury of any kind ... Never before had there been a group that had completed its training without a death. The goddess of good fortune had ridden along on the missions."

Today, [Wendover is a museum and historic treasure](#) that is undergoing renovations to better preserve its important role in World War II aviation, including its pivotal role in ending the war with the most powerful bombs ever used in combat.

The 384th Bomb Group Inc. hopes to visit Wendover during our next reunion ([see below](#)).

— Paul Furiga



**384th 2021 REUNION: The tentative date for a reunion this year is late September, in Ogden, Utah. The Executive Board is monitoring the pandemic situation and will review conditions in the spring before making a final decision.**

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## 2021 Calendar

8th Air Force Historical Society 2021 Reunion, Oct. 27-31 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.*

## Contact Us

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## An update on the Grafton-Underwood museum project

The effort to establish a museum in the former ops block at the Grafton-Underwood home of the 384th Bomb Group is moving forward. The bank account application is being processed and the group has received recognition by U.K. bank Lloyds PLC. Once cleared, the bank details will immediately go into the U.K. charity application. This will take 40 days to process. So in plain English, we hope all will be in place by the end of March or beginning of April 2021. It's been unbelievably long and slow progress, but we are resilient, dedicated and this WILL come to fruition.

Boughton Estates was asked 17th February to draw up the terms and conditions for the lease of the land and buildings in Grafton Park Wood. The only detail we are quite sure of is that Boughton will own the land; Friends of the 384th will own everything on it. This is quite normal in the U.K., usually with a lease of 99 years. That would mean a museum until 2120 at least. A recent newspaper article in Northamptonshire has lots of building and groundwork contractors enquiring about this project. The interest in a museum is HUGE. We hope we will see pandemic restrictions easing here in the spring and then we can capitalize on the momentum of the energy being created.

One thing that has really come to the fore is the delight of many to have the link with the veterans and children of the 384th Bomb Group. As a complete stranger said to me one day in the woods, "We just owe these boys everything, don't we?" WE CERTAINLY DO! And soon it will be the moment for us all to stand up and make it count. — Neill Howarth

## Do you know who your friends are? Real life hands across the sea

How many of us have friends in France, Belgium, The Netherlands, or any of the European countries occupied in WWII? Today some of us do – but how about our flyers during the war? It turns out they had many friends who were willing to risk their lives to help downed flyers evade and escape back to freedom. These people, commonly now called "helpers," were living under Nazi occupation. They knew the darkest truths about the Nazis and were committed to helping defeat them in any way possible. They did that even knowing they risked their lives and those of their families and neighbors. They did this, not because they knew our flyers, or their families. They helped because our flyers were fighting to free them from oppressive occupation.

The Air Forces Escape & Evasion Society shines a light on these helpers, but if you really want to learn about them, visit our Escape & Evasion Reports page (from the website top menu, pull down the WWII COMBAT topic to PERSONNEL and select the E&E Reports), and read the reports of the airmen who were saved by their newfound friends.

If you ignore today's news headlines and visit these countries, you will meet people who still remember and appreciate what our airmen, soldiers and sailors did so many years ago. Often an inquiry by a NexGen visiting one of these countries brings forth a rush of appreciation in many forms. Those who lived thru WWII, and their succeeding generations, know the meaning of oppression, and the value of freedom. — Fred Preller

# Remembering a beloved 384th leader: Col. Robert E. Thacker

Few aviators spanned the 20th century's major advances in military flight as [Col. Robert E. Thacker](#) did.

From landing his unarmed B-17 during the Japanese raid on Pearl Harbor, to beloved leader of the 384th, to test pilot pal with Chuck Yeager and world record-setter with the P-82 named after his wife, *Betty Jo*, Col. Thacker's career helped define the emergence of American air power as the best in the world.

At age 102, Col. Thacker passed away 25 November 2020. His passing earned mentions in major media across the globe, including an obituary in [the New York Times](#).

In a long and illustrious military flying career, Thacker endeared himself to the men of the 384th by holding several leadership roles in the group and flying 28 combat missions over his nearly one-year service with the group.

Thacker, a well-experienced B-17 pilot after flying with the 19th Bomb Group in the Pacific, joined the 384th on 3 May 1944 and was detailed as the 384th's assistant group operations officer. In July, he was promoted from major to lieutenant colonel. In August, he became the 547th squadron's commanding officer. And in September, Thacker was named deputy group commander for the 384th.

Most of Thacker's missions with the 384th came while flying lead, at the squadron, group or wing level. After his service with the 384th, Thacker went on to train with B-29s and though he didn't fly them in World War II, he later flew dozens of missions in them over North Korea and flew combat in Vietnam as well.



Col. Thacker and lead crew after bombing Saarbrucken Railyards, 23 May 1944 aboard 42-38208 SO\*A Lilly Belle. **Back Row:** Robert H. Welsbacher (N), Robert Thacker (AC/CP), Russell M. Potts (N), Donald Brown (P), Floyd Pederson (B), Kenneth Warren (OBS/TG) **Front Row:** Edward R. Bretz, (BT), Robert L. Coleman (TT), Fred H. Bennett (FG), Raymond B. Jones (RO)



Col. Thacker poses with *Betty Jo* at the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Dayton, Ohio, in this U.S.A.F. photo.

member Christopher Wilkinson, [that's available on YouTube](#).

Col. Thacker's commitment and bonds with the men of the 384th are well established. The memory of his contributions to the group, and to American military aviation, will never be forgotten.

— Paul Furiga

In 1947, Thacker set a world record in the *Betty Jo*, with his copilot Lt. John Ard, that still stands. The first nonstop flight from Hawaii to New York City, it's still the longest nonstop flight (5,051 miles) ever made by a propeller-driven fighter.

That same year, Thacker graduated from the Air Force Test Pilot Academy with Chuck Yeager and both were assigned to test fly numerous early jet fighters, including the P-80.

Col. Thacker retired from the Air Force in 1970 and continued to innovate as a pilot. In 1972, he flew the first experimental solar-powered aircraft, built by Lockheed.

In his retirement, he was generous with his time and corresponded and interacted with many 384th vets and their families. In 2014, he gave a fascinating nearly 40-minute interview with 384th Bomb Group NexGen

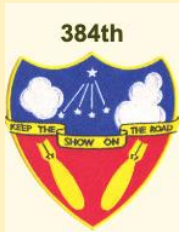
## 384th squadron patches and Challenge Coins

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

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

**Ft. O. Howard "Howie" Won Eng**, navigator, 547th squadron, 28 missions, 24 February–17 April 1945, wounded by flak 17 April on mission to Dresden. Died 3 August 2020, aged 97.

**Sgt. Alvaro Fernandez**, communications, 546th squadron, an original 384th group member, went with the group to Istres, France and participated in the 'Green Project' flying troops to Africa, and others. Died 13 March 2020, aged 100.

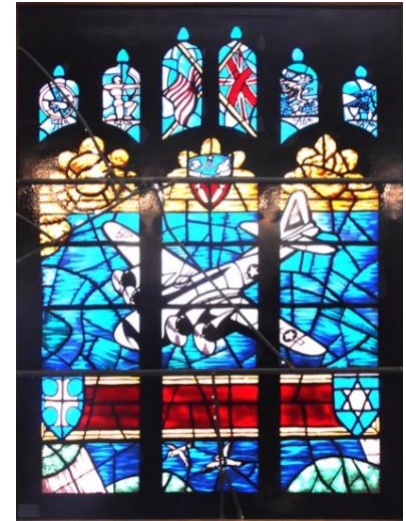
**Elsie O'Leary**, wife of **Lt. William J. O'Leary Jr.**, 547th squadron, died Dec. 15, 2020, aged 95.

**Lt. Col. Wallace A. Storey**, co-pilot with the Kenneth Gross crew, 545th squadron, completed 35 missions, 26 August 1944–8 January 1945 while a lieutenant. Continued his service, retiring from the U.S. Air Force Reserves as lieutenant colonel in 1982. Died 4 September 2020, aged 97.

**Col. Robert Thacker**, deputy group commander, 384th bomb group, 28 missions, 11 May 1944–15 April, died 25 November 2020, aged 102. **See story, page 3.**

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).

## March 2021



## Do the hover ... online at the 384th website

The 384th website displays a lot of information. Actually, our webpages only display part of the information because we don't want it to be too cluttered for ready comprehension.

That is why we make heavy use of the 'hover' interaction. Simply put, when you place your cursor over a screen item which has additional information available, or we want to offer an explanation of some sort, a small text box will pop up like a tooltip to tell you something more.

384th Home	WWII COMBAT	WWII INFO
	PERSONNEL <b>P</b>	Search Underwood
	Missions	Original Air Crews
	Aircraft	Missing In Action
	Losses	Killed In Action
	Statistics	Killed, Non-Combat
384th Bombardment Group (Headquarters) Air Force's strategic bombing campaign		Prisoners Of War
		Internees 316.com
		E & E Reports

Sometimes it is just what will happen when you click the link, and other times it will be more information about what is under the cursor, like what an abbreviation means.

For instance, when you hover over the person's name on their 'person page', you can sometimes see how his name is misrepresented in official documents!

Example: look up Angelo Ralph Delago (search for just his last name 'delago'), then hover on his name. The point of that is to identify names used to associate records with a person.

If nothing pops up on the name, then the records have his name correct. Also see this in action on the 'Stories' page. There are a lot of these aids on the site, and they are on many different kinds of items; you just have to go find them.

— Fred Preller

# A veteran memory book, created instantly!

One product of many veteran research efforts is a collection of documents, reports, photos, etc., often referred to as a Veteran Memory Book. Such a collection can provide a lasting view into the experiences of a family member and become an heirloom memento for future generations. While gathering and entering the Sortie information (described in the December 2020 Newsletter), it was rather fascinating to watch the data come alive on the individual Combat Crewman's pages. Slowly it began to occur to us that all the data in our database could be presented to tell the story of what a Veteran did in the war.

It was a good idea, but until "all" of the Sortie data was in the database, work on such a capability would have to wait. This gave me plenty of time to think about what should be in this "Instant Memory Book" (what I called it in my mind at the time). I started out with the usual "Name, Rank, Serial Number" and dates of service with the 384th, Squadron – in fact, just what is at the top of the individual Person page. Then his original Crew (if any) and a list of all missions. Wait – that is his whole Person page. So that part was easy, and it was already done! It just needed to be put together with "everything else."

Then I thought: "What else?" A lot of things came to mind, and at this point I had to start deciding on things that would NOT be included, such as photos from the 384th Photo Gallery. I hated that, but I did not see a technically feasible path to include photos in a meaningful way. On the other hand, a Sortie Report for every mission made sense – since it lists all the crewmates he flew with on that one mission — so those were in. I figured a title page would be nice, and then I got an inspiration (based on my experience in researching my Dad): how about a list of each B-17 they flew on a mission, and a list of every crewmate they flew with – this is often a revelation to family members, changing their notion of "my Dad's Crew" or "my Dad's plane!" These last two challenged my relatively elementary understanding of database searching, but it all worked out – and I learned a few things, which is never bad.

The major part of entering the Sortie data was completed in about 2014, so now it was time to get to work on the "Instant Memory Book." I worked out the database searches to accomplish all I wanted to include over a period of months. This took me a lot of time because, as I said earlier, my grasp of database searching was rather elementary. With "SELECT" statements, "JOIN" commands, and a bunch of other arcane operations, I slowly assembled the "queries" needed, that would work just by specifying who I wanted the data for. Now came the hard part: how to present this information.

The first step was to make a webpage that contained everything. It was ugly, and hard to imagine how a family member might use it — or even want to — in that form. Fortunately, about that time web browser and print drivers started to include options to generate a PDF file – print the page, not to the printer, but to a standard PDF format file that could be saved. This saved a ton of work – a TON! The ensuing work, while complicated by differences in browsers and print drivers, made it much easier to format the (ugly) page in a way that a nice PDF file can be produced.

So, on 20 September 2017, I released the "finished" product of my imagination, which I now call "Personal War Service Records" or PWSR. In truth, with the pace of technological change it seems there is always something to do, and the minor discrepancies in some PWSRs require revision of the page scripts, so it is not really "finished".

How can you access this PWSR, and what can you do with it? I'm glad you asked! For anyone who served in the 384th, just look him up in the usual way, from the website home page. When his page comes up, look for the button to the right of his name that says, "Personal War Service Records" and click. Then follow the directions to create the PDF file – and remember where your computer stores it! Unless you want to get clever by adding photos or images of other documents (as PDF pages, using readily available online utilities like iLovePDF.com), you are done. Look around on the website, on the "Stories" page for instance, to see if anything there should be included in your Veteran's story. Assemble it all into a single PDF file and you are done! Don't forget to make a page identifying who this guy is in the family, and stick it in where it makes sense (iLovePDF.com again). When you are done, print copies for everyone and be sure to make digital copies for future generations.

And please remember – if you generate one of these reports and notice something wrong, or contrary to what you think is right, please let the Webmaster know right away, using the email button at the bottom of every website page. If it affects you it probably affects many others, and it will be a great service to the record of the 384th to get it fixed.

That's nice, isn't it? But how did we get all that data in the first place – and make sure we had the right data? We just went to the National Archives and asked for it, of course. Actually, it took many trips and a variety of approaches to get what we needed. So, in a future newsletter I will explain what we did, and what we learned about our National Archives.

— Fred Preller

Personal War Service Records  
384th Bombardment Group (Heavy)  
Grafton Underwood Airfield, AAF Station 106, England  
World War II



PERSONAL WAR SERVICE RECORDS

of

FRANK DOMINIC FURIGA



547th Bombardment Squadron (Heavy)

## 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)  
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.

### 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  
BEAVERCREEK, OH 45434**



*“Keep The Show On The Road...”*

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