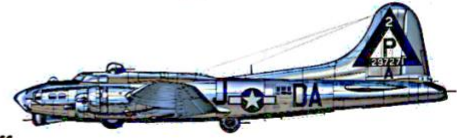




384th Bomb Group, Inc. News & Journal



"Keep The Show On The Road..."

September 2021

Reunion 2021 plans are finalized — will you join us in Utah?

A global pandemic delayed the 384th Bomb Group's 2020 reunion, but it couldn't stop us – we're coming to Utah October 6-10 and we have assembled a fantastic itinerary with the help of our members and Armed Forces Reunions Inc. (AFRI).

Here's what to know, whether you are coming or still deciding:

- [Reunion registration through AFRI ends September 6](#)
- Registration at our HQ hotel ([Hilton Garden Inn, Ogden, UT](#)) ends **September 15**
- **Covid Precautions:** We will comply with Utah law regarding the pandemic. Utah does not mandate masks, but if an attendee feels more comfortable wearing one, that is their choice. We will not require masks or proof of vaccination.
- **All details are subject to change** so your best source of information is the 384th Bomb Group [website reunion page](#). The [384th Bomb Group website](#) has all reunion information, including the registration form (and a link to online registration), detailed itinerary and a full schedule. There is a link to the Reunion page on the home page of the website in the **Reunions** section. And there is a red reunion banner on the home page.



Wendover barracks during 384th training, 1943

Here's a high-level look at what to expect for those who are able to join us:

Wednesday, 6 October — Arrivals

- We will have a small buffet and cash bar from 5-9 p.m. at our hotel, the Hilton Garden Inn, Ogden.

Thursday, 7 October — Tour of Wendover museum (where the 384th began)

- After breakfast at the hotel (included), our charter bus departs 8 a.m. for a 2½ hour ride to tour Wendover Field, original home of the 384th. (8-hour excursion). Self-pay lunch at Wendover.
- Dinner at 6:30 p.m. at Sonora Grill on 24th Street, a primo Mexican restaurant across from the hotel.

Friday, 8 October — Hill Air Force Base visit and wing panel dedication (Note: Facemasks required)



- 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.
- 12:30 p.m.: Return to Ogden. Free time in Ogden until dinner.
- 2 p.m. 384th Bomb Group board meeting.
- Banquet at Hotel: Cocktails at 6 p.m. and dinner at 7 p.m.

At left, the 384th display at Hill Aerospace Museum with "Wingy"

Saturday, 9 October — Park City visit

- Breakfast at hotel
- 9 a.m. General membership meeting
- 10 a.m. Charter bus departs for Park City, where attractions include a brewery, ski-lift ride, stores, restaurants, etc. Meals are self-pay during this trip. We will return to the hotel in the evening.

Sunday, 10 Oct 2021 — Departure

- Breakfast at hotel, then farewells and departures. Safe travels home!

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2021 Calendar

384th Bomb Group, 2021 reunion, 6-10 October, Ogden, Utah (see story, P. 1)

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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Our active 384th veterans, on the move!

With the natural passage of time, the ranks of 384th veterans still with us continue to diminish.

Among those we are privileged to have still with us, we've got some achievers and travelers. In addition to John DeFrancesco's Legion of Honour medal (see story, P. 4), we're pleased to bring you the travels of two other veterans.

Lt. Robert E. Naum, navigator, 554th Bomb Squadron, flew 29 missions with the 384th from 20 February-19 April 1945. In July 2021, he traveled with a group of fellow World War II veterans across Europe on a tour organized through the [Best Defense Foundation](#), a 501(c)3 nonprofit, all-volunteer organization dedicated to improving the lives of veterans through battlefield remembrance, education and transition programs.

The trip ended in Germany, including a meal at the Reichstag (the seat of German government) and a tour of Sachsenhausen Memorial Concentration Camp, located just outside of Berlin.

One of the highlights for Robert had to be meeting actor Matthew Modine, who played Capt. Robert Morgan, commander of the Memphis Belle, on film (see pictures, above).

While Robert traveled across the pond once again (certainly not in a B-17), **T/Sgt. William Wilkens**, flight engineer, 547th squadron, took a flight on the Commemorative Air Force B-17 Texas Raiders earlier this year, even manning the waist guns for a bit. Wilkens flew 30 missions from 24 February-25 April 1945 while with the 384th. (see picture of Bill in the cockpit, at right; and below, with family and CAF crew and in position at the waist).



New Feature: In the Neighborhood

The secret missions of Operation Carpetbagger at RAF Harrington

Beginning with this issue, we debut a new, occasional feature highlighting neighboring U.S. and British airbases in the English countryside surrounding Grafton Underwood.

During World War II, across East Anglia, 384th Bomb Group flyers joked that you could throw a rock and hit another airbase. While this was most relevant when forming up for a mission (to prevent mid-air collisions) or when nursing a crippled B-17 back home (to find a closer landing strip), there are many other reasons to take a look at the 384th's neighbors in the English countryside.

During the war, wartime secrecy prevented much scrutiny of the 384th's neighbors. Decades later, we can look back at the fascinating missions of those who flew from nearby bases. Props to Fred Peller for the suggestion to begin this feature, and to kick it off with perhaps the 384th's most secretive neighbors, at RAF Harrington.

It's only about 13 miles west of Grafton Underwood down the A14 to Harrington. During the war, that was a trip cloaked in secrecy. That's because, from this airfield, on a mission codenamed Operation Carpetbagger, the 801st/492nd Bomb Group flew dangerous, solo, nighttime missions in black-painted B-24s, equipping Resistance fighters before and during Operation Overlord, the Allied invasion of Nazi-occupied Europe that began with D-Day.

Today, a [fine museum traces the history of the unit at Harrington](#). The museum, which recently reopened after the COVID-19 pandemic, features displays within part of the old group operations building, a tearoom, souvenirs and an outdoor picnic area. It also houses a great collection of photos and memorabilia of the group's missions.

What is now known as the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency had its roots in the wartime Office of Strategic Service. The Carpetbaggers flew OSS missions that were so secret the flyers rarely knew where they were going or their mission. Often they carried spies or resistance fighters known to the crews only as "Joes" or "Josephines."

Even at night, and even flying solo, flak, fighters, and weather meant it was more likely a Carpetbagger crew could go down. For that reason, the less a captured Carpetbagger knew about his mission, the better.

The unit's B-24s were coated with 500 pounds of gloss black paint to camouflage them. Frequently, turrets and guns had been removed to accommodate the mission. For example, spies were dropped from the hole where the ball turret had been, prompting crews to rename the gap in the belly the "Joe Hole."



A B-24 taking off from Harrington — Harrington Aviation Museum



"Joes" and "Josephines" waiting to be dropped. — Harrington Aviation Museum

The unit's missions were so secret that it was decades before a full accounting of its work became public. Today we know the unit flew more than 3,000 missions, inserting 536 agents behind enemy lines and dropping 4,511 metric tons of supplies to

resistance fighters. This [2020 Business Insider article](#) has more great information on the unit. In addition to geography, the Carpetbaggers share another connection to the 384th: Lt. Col. Robert W. Fish, who had commanded the Carpetbaggers August-December 1944 became commander of the 384th, succeeding Col. Theodore Milton, in June 1945.

While the unit's work may have been unknown for decades, its heritage lives on. Today, [the U.S. Air Force 492d Special Operations Wing](#) (492 SOW) supports the missions of the Air Force Special Operations Command from its home base at Hurlburt Field, which is part of the Eglin Air Force Base complex near Fort Walton Beach, Fla. The unit flies a wide variety of aircraft to support special operations missions ("irregular warfare") around the globe. And of course, they are proud to call themselves the Carpetbaggers.

— Paul Furiga

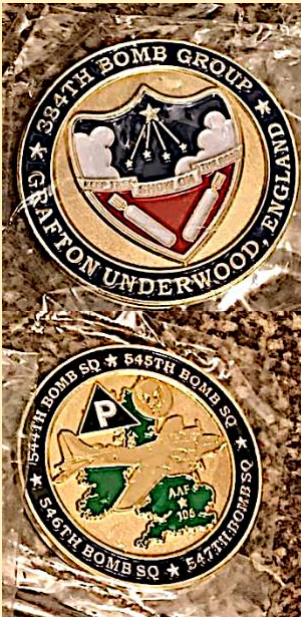
384th squadron patches and Challenge Coins

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 or member flies west. Here are the latest obituaries, as of September 2021.

Lynn Hesko, wife of flight officer (later Col.) **Alfred D. Hesko**, 544th squadron navigator, 34 missions, 28 January–25 April 1945. Lynn attended several 384th reunions and was beloved by many. Died 16 January 2021, aged 99.

Lt. Cornelius Creedon Maher Jr., pilot, 545th squadron, arrived at Grafton Underwood with his replacement crew 17 April 1945 and didn't see combat. He served with the group as it moved to Istres, France and was among those who signed the 384th Bomb Group memorial wing panel, "Wingy." Died 3 June, aged 100.

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).

September 2021



384th's John DeFrancesco earns French Legion of Honour

Lt. John DeFrancesco, an active 384th veteran at age 97, recently earned the French Legion of Honour (and a nice Ocala Star Banner story) for helping to liberate France while a pilot with the 544th squadron from 26 September 1944-6 January 1945.

DeFrancesco's B-17 and crew went down on their 35th mission, which should have been their last, and became prisoners of war. Despite that, he told the paper he considered himself "lucky" as he described his fateful last mission.



As the plane reached the target, engine No. 1 cut out and engine No. 3 caught fire. The fire spread, so the bombs were jettisoned, but one 500-pounder stuck. DeFrancesco estimated they were near Allied territory, so he ordered the crew to bail out. He told the paper he hid in the woods for about three days. As he left the woods, he was seen by a German soldier and captured.

NextGen member Cindy Bryan's father, **S. Sgt. George Edwin Farrar**, was a survivor of the 5 August 1944 tragic crash of two 384th aircraft on his 16th mission, to

Magdeburg. She met DeFrancesco at a 384th event some years ago and they've been friends since. Her website, "The ArrowheadClub.com," includes research into her father's service and is a great source of information on the 384th.

In 2017, Bryan helped DeFrancesco with paperwork to become a Chevalier of the French Legion of Honour. The medal was sent to his home in May because of COVID-19. If not for the pandemic, the award would have been presented in person.

Bryan told the paper, "My website is my honor to my dad. The French medal was all about John. He deserved to receive it. I was able to get a different French medal for my dad, the Jubilee of Liberty Medal." The newspaper article is worth a read and is available online [at this link](#).

— Paul Furiga

Look what was under all those weeds!

Grafton Underwood Ops Block reappears thanks to tireless volunteers

You can't really picture the progress of chartering and organizing a nonprofit entity to build and maintain a museum honoring the 384th Bomb Group at its former Grafton Underwood home base. It involves legal matters, banking and other tasks that carry on in the background.

It's quite visual to see what's actually happening at the airfield, thanks to a dedicated group of volunteers, who are slowly reclaiming the area around the operations block that Boughton Estates has graciously allowed the group to clear in advance of legal and banking approvals, in preparation for the eventual museum itself.

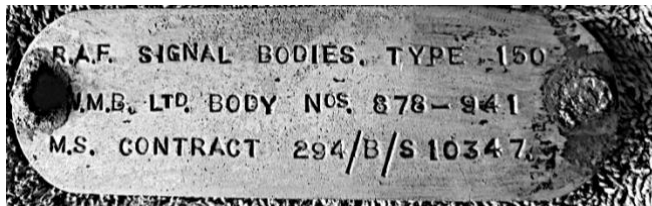
Throughout the last several months of good weather (it's all relative, we're talking about an English summer!), the group has gathered with garden tools, shovels and other implements to clear the area around the building that will be converted to house the museum, and to clear surrounding vegetation so that the ops block can be expanded with the addition of more modern buildings in the same style as the Nissen huts that covered the base during active operations.

As the volunteers clear the area, they are coming across interesting finds, including coins and other metal objects that might have been attached to ground vehicles, or bricks and other building materials from structures that have since been torn down.



Volunteers at Grafton Underwood, clearing. Neill Howarth at right, taking the "ussie."

The best way to keep up with the group is to join [the Friends of the 384th Group](#) on Facebook, if you do social media. Neill Howarth, one of the leaders of the museum effort, does a great job of thanking all those involved in making this happen. He posted this on Facebook after a 7 August day at the airfield: "Today on site at the Operations block saw another huge effort.. No matter how tough the jobs to do these people do it impressively... Graham Butlin, Shirley Butlin, Jason Butlin, Carol East, Terry East, Phil Hemming, Johnny Ellson, George Waters, Shaun Wilson, Paul Newbold, Jason Mann, Dan Richards, Keith Andrews, Nick Barton, Jamie Barton, Jim Barton, Ian Bateman, Jean Bateman and Steve Bell. Amongst our feet today we found two coins and a metal plate with lots of stamped numbers."



It turns out the metal plate found that day may belong to an RAF lorry (according to the wise respondents to Neill's post, see the comparison photos above).

[Visit this link](#) to see a great drone video of clearing efforts from Graham Butlin.

If you'd like to support the museum effort financially, please contact Neill Howarth directly at neillhowarth@gmail.com.

— Paul Furiga

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 – 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

Contacting Hangar Thirteen

In our June 2021 issue we featured Hangar Thirteen on our cover page and neglected to include a phone number for those interested. Ray Moore of Hangar Thirteen in Asheville, N.C. can be reached at 864-590-8338.

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



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