



384th Bomb Group, Inc. News & Journal



"Keep The Show On The Road..."

June 2023

Memorial Junket XII reservations pass first deadline of June 14

There's still time to RSVP for tour including airfield, museum, cemetery and air show

As regular newsletter readers know, Junket XII, our 2023 384th reunion, will return us to England 13-19 September.

Arena Travel has completed the itinerary, and it's as awesome as the Junket in 2019, with new opportunities.

At publication, we have met the minimum of 30 to make the trip a "go." We can take **45** participants. If you are reading this **after 14 June** and plan to join, don't hesitate to pay the £350 deposit. **About 10 seats remain.**

If you decide to attend **after 14 June**, and **there are**

seats available, you may reserve but will be expected to pay the full reunion fee of £1,725 per person, double occupancy. For those who paid a deposit, 14 June is also the date when the remainder of your reunion fee is due.

The reunion fee, because it's based upon two people sharing a room, means the total for two persons is £3,450. If you are **not** sharing accommodations, a "single supplement" of £625 will be charged, making the total for solo attendees £2,350.

This covers nearly all meals, transportation, and our professional tour manager, former RAF pilot Rick Hobson (who was with us in 2019). It includes five hotel nights in the Hilton Cambridge City Centre, and the final night at the Sheraton Heathrow, bus transportation for all activities – starting with pickup at the Sheraton Heathrow on the 13th and return to the same point on the 18th – and all admission/event fees.

If you wish to arrive a day early to accommodate the time change, Arena Travel has negotiated special rates of £150/couple or 138/single for an overnight stay at the Sheraton Heathrow.

Here is a summary of our schedule:

- 13 September: Assemble at Sheraton Heathrow, coach transfer to Cambridge; welcome dinner at our hotel.
- 14 September, we visit Parham Airfield & Museum (390th Bomb Group), and Great Ashfield, (385th Bomb Group). We will also have a Traditional English Tea at the historic Swan in Lavenham, with its historic Airmen's Bar.
- 15 September, we have the day to explore historic Cambridge, including the River Cam. **As an option, you may join our British hosts for an optional workday at Grafton Underwood. If you have questions or want to indicate interest in the work day, contact gu-work-party_2023-09-15@384thbombgroup.com.**
- 16 September, we spend the whole day at Grafton Underwood, including the memorial and museum site.
- 17 September, we will enjoy a Gold Experience package at the Battle of Britain Air Show at Duxford.
- 18 September, we will visit the Cambridge American Cemetery to honor 384th and 8th Air Force fallen and missing. Our last reunion activity that evening will be our dinner at the RAF Club in London, followed by transport to a hotel near Heathrow Airport. The stay at this hotel is included in the registration.
- 19 September, we bid each other farewell, whether going home or continuing travel in the UK or on the continent.

Please check [the 384th website](#), and the [384th Facebook group](#) for last-minute details. We hope you can join us!



A visit to the museum site at Grafton Underwood will be a highlight of Junket XII. Scaffolding on the Ops Block demonstrates progress made by volunteers in the last year (story, p. 4).

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2022-2023 Calendar

The 384th BG Memorial Junket XII is planned for Wednesday, 13 September through Tuesday, 19 September 2023. See page 1 story and check the 384th website and our Facebook page (links below) for updates.

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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From our president: Returning to 'Grawfton'

Carol and I are truly excited to be returning to Grafton Underwood in September, and we hope you are as well. I remember what our members said as we closed out our last Junket in 2019... WE HAVE GOT TO DO THIS AGAIN, AND SOON! Well, we are just about there and still have room for those who have not yet registered, so think about what you will miss if you do not come with us.

Let's talk about membership. Almost every



day we read in the papers or through email that another one of our Greatest Generation has passed. Their stories are passing as well and that is why it is so important to keep our fathers' stories alive so we can pass them on to the generations that come after us. You may have heard that George Hoidra, of the 8th AFHS, recently passed. He is my generation! His father flew in the Mighty Eighth, and this should be a clue about how important it is for us NexGens to recruit our children and their children.

You will find a very nice article about Bill O'Leary's passing in this newsletter, another reason to push membership. He was the epitome of GENTLEMAN, and his wife Elsie was a very personable LADY.

The first article in this newsletter has a stunning photo of the work our British folks are accomplishing in restoring the Operations Block at GU. Neill and his troops are steadfastly making huge steps in that restoration, and some of us who will be there in September are anxious to get our hands dirty helping with that building on the Friday before the planned visit to the olde airfield. See other notes about that venture in this article.

"Grawfton" Underwood or Bust!

—Frank Alfter

Know your 384th Officers and Board of Directors

Chairman of the Board	Peter Bielskis
President	Frank Alfter
Senior Vice President	Bill O'Leary (please see Taps, page 3)
Vice President	Fred Preller
Secretary/Newsletter Editor	Paul Furiga
Treasurer	Ray Lustig
Member	Chris Wilkinson
Member	Dennis Bielskis
Member	Thomas Swift

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

2023 DUES INFORMATION

Our 2023 treasurer is Ray Lustig.

Please send dues to:

Ray Lustig, Treasurer, 384th Bomb Group, Inc.
128 Ulster Avenue
Walden, NY 12586

Questions? Contact Ray at rlustig@hvc.rr.com

Thank you for your help in ensuring that group activities are financially supported.

Remembering 384th veteran and board member Bill O'Leary

Longtime board member and 384th Group veteran Lt. Bill O'Leary passed away 19 April at age 98.

Along with his wife Elsie, Bill was a frequent attendee at 384th reunions over the years. Most recently, he was senior vice president of the 384th Bomb Group, Inc. and had been a guiding force in the association for many years. Among the reunions Bill and Elsie attended were previous junkets to the U.K. (Elsie died 15 December 2020 at age 95.)

A member of the 547th Squadron, Bill flew his first mission 9 January 1945 as co-pilot on the Lt. George Francis Ruckman crew and eventually completed 22 missions before hostilities ended, with his last mission flown on 19 April 1945.

In comments shared on the 384th website, Bill wrote this:

"I'm proud to say that I flew my first Mission as a co-pilot on a B-17 while still 19 years of age.

"On my 9th Mission, (3 February 1945), as a co-pilot on Ruckman's crew, I suffered a damaged ear drum as the result of flying with a very bad cold. I was confined to the Base Hospital for thirteen days, plus a few trips to the Thrapston General Hospital.

"On February 3rd, 1945, Ruckman's crew, with a replacement for me, flew a mission to Berlin where our B-17 Stardust sustained major flak damage, and was forced to land on a Russian controlled airfield in Poland. The fate of the crew was not known for over forty days.

"When Doc Vivian, 547th Flight Surgeon, cleared me for flight duty, I had no crew or airplane to fly. Captain Shelley, 547th Flight Operations Officer, called and asked if I would like to get some missions in flying as Group Observer in the tail gunner's position in the Group Lead airplane.

"I flew several missions in that capacity, as well as a replacement for co-pilots on other crews. I completed a total 22 missions. In the interim I was commissioned from F/O, and 'checked-out' as a First Pilot. I participated in the Green Project and other minor projects, before returning to the U.S. on 21 April 1946."

Stardust and the Ruckman crew, mentioned in Bill's comments above, made an emergency landing in Poland. There they met another crew with a damaged B-17 and cannibalized parts from the other aircraft to repair this one.

Once repairs were completed, both crews returned to England by way of Italy and France, with the Ruckman crew returning to duty on 23 March, flying about ten more missions, many of them in Stardust.



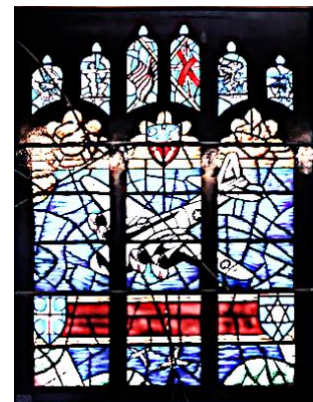
Bill O'Leary after signing "Wingy," the 384th's commemorative wing panel now on display at Hill Air Force Base (top); Bill and wife Elsie at a 384th reunion a few years ago.

TAPS: Honoring our veterans who have flown west

If you know of a 384th Veteran's passing, please write our editor, Paul Furiga (newsletter@384thbombgroup.com or 222 Courtney Place, Wexford, PA 15090), so that we may honor their service and their passing here.

T. Sgt. Paul Francis Beardshear, flight engineer, 545th squadron, 32 missions (9 February-19 April 1945). Died 13 April 2023, aged 98. A signer of "Wingy," the commemorative 384th wing panel, Paul continued in the service for 20 years after World War II, then operated an auto shop. He also volunteered for many years as a pilot with the Civil Air Patrol.

S. Sgt. Walter Lyon Portugal, ball turret gunner, 544th squadron, 35 missions (9 October, 1944-29 January 1945). Died 28 December 2022, aged 98. Originally a member of the Lt. Joe V. Galiano crew, Walter flew most of his missions in the ball and his last two as a waist gunner. After the war, he spent most of his career in aerospace. In that career, Walter worked in marketing and public education on projects including early space flight.



Donors speed progress for Grafton Underwood museum project

Warmer, drier May weather and unexpected (and appreciated!) donations are speeding progress on the 384th Bomb Group museum site at Grafton Underwood.

The 384th Bombardment Group Museum is now a registered charity in the U.K. (number 1202861), and that designation makes it possible for donations to the museum effort to be tax deductible.

Donors, some of them desiring to be anonymous, have been stepping up with contributions large and small. Among the more notable donations: a portable generator, which makes it possible to power hand tools and provide interior lighting to the main museum building, (the former group Operations Block); and a mobile pressure washer, which will see plenty of use from the onsite water storage.

With the warmer weather and news of the site progress, work parties are also growing in size and frequency, with no shortage of major tasks to be tackled. Among recent projects:

- Laying 155 meters (about 500 feet) of drainage pipe;
- Repairing the air vent for the Ops Block (which is on the roof);
- Erecting scaffolding to make it safe to work on brick facings;
- Removing render (plaster) from exterior walls to examine and if necessary, replace bricks underneath;
- Retrieval, repair and replacement of period-appropriate window frames for the museum.



Neill Howarth with the recently donated pressure washer

Those 384th members who are traveling to the U.K. for Memorial Junket XII (see page 1 story), will have the opportunity to join museum volunteers during the junket for a work party.

In addition to hands-on help, the charity group Friends of the 384th needs even more equipment, donations and assistance for the next phase in creating the museum. Neill Howarth, a museum trustee and group leader, posted this wish list on Facebook (these items don't need to be new, and then can be loaned if not purchased):

- Use of oxyacetylene
- Cement mixer
- Long hosepipe
- Bricklaying tools
- Cordless drills + drill bits
- Hand tools (Screwdrivers etc.)
- Mortar cutting discs 4" and 9"
- Heavy duty yard brushes
- Jerry cans
- Sandpaper 100 320 grit
- Lighting (various types)
- PIR lighting
- Steel tubing for fabrication onsite
- Mig welder
- Paint for windows, walls, ceilings
- Paint brushes/rollers
- Wireless Security cameras, (4G), which would provide live communication with the site (with 2 way audio) to deter vandalism and other issues.

Financial contributions can be made to:
Lloyds Bank Plc
384th BOMBARDMENT GROUP MUSEUM
Sort Code 30-98-97
Acc 53111162
IBAN GB86LOYD30989753111162
BIC LOYDGB21031



Left, some of the drainage pipe before being laid. Right, a recent work party on site pausing for a photo and refreshments.

A special tribute for a 384th crewmember lost on a tough mission

With Memorial Day just past in the U.S. and another D-Day anniversary this June, we wanted to share the story of one 384th crewmember who made the ultimate sacrifice, and the unique memorial to his sacrifice and service.

S. Sgt. Charles Harris Eyre, of Seaman, Ohio, a ball turret gunner of the 547th Squadron, is remembered in his hometown by members of the namesake Charles H. Eyre American Legion Post 633. The post remembers Eyre not only in name but with memorabilia associated with 13 April 1944, the day Eyre and three other members of the crew of Mrs. Geezil, a 545th Squadron B-17G, lost their lives on a mission to bomb the ball bearing factories at Schweinfurt.

Seven decades after the crash, pieces of Mrs. Geezil found by an aircraft historian were shipped to the Eyre post as a



S. Sgt. Charles H. Eyre, second from left, kneeling, with his original crew, the Lt. Kendall Daskey crew.

memorial to him. We learned of this unusual tribute from a story in an online Ohio newspaper published during the pandemic.

While the April and October 1943 Schweinfurt raids are more frequently remembered for the devastating losses they inflicted on the Eighth Air Force, the 13 April 1944 raid was punishing for the 384th Bomb Group, which lost nine aircraft that day, according to the sortie report.

Mrs. Geezil, flown on this mission by Lt. Edward A. Fioretti, was hit by a devastating attack of as many as 30 FW-190s and ME-109s coming off the target at an altitude of about 21,000 feet. The Missing Air Crew Report for Mrs. Geezil estimated that the attack lasted perhaps three minutes, but that all the 384th aircraft that subsequently crashed were hit during this period, which included multiple waves of head-on fighter attacks.

In addition to Eyre, copilot Lt. Sidney L. Bush, radio operator S. Sgt. Cecil G. Morton and engineer S. Sgt. Walter E. Stuhl lost their lives in the attack. The plane came down near Lindenfels, Germany, and rest of the

ten-man crew became prisoners of war.

According to the news story, Eyre and Stuhl were originally buried in a common grave in Germany, and in 1951, both were repatriated to the U.S., where their remains are interred at Arlington National Cemetery.

Eyre post commander Eric Newman told the People's Defender reporter that Thomas Baum, Jr., of Stevens, Pa. purchased the pieces of Mrs. Geezil from a reputable seller in Europe. He was unable to connect with any family members from the crew and reached out to the post. During the pandemic, when the post was frequently closed, news of the crash find came via voicemail that wasn't heard for some time.

Newman told the reporter that Baum "had acquired a piece of Mrs. Geezil and had traced it back to our post because our post is named after Eyre. Of all the crew members that had passed, he looked up all the names and found our post. He contacted me and asked if he would be interested in taking some of the pieces. He gathers relics of downed American Fortresses to use in memorial talks to schools, churches and fraternal organizations."

In addition to the crash relics on display, Newman said Eyre's family members have donated additional items, including the flag from his casket and his medals.

As Newman told the reporter, "It's wonderful to have these pieces. It's important. It's a piece of history that puts it all together. Everybody knew his name because it was attached to this post, but other than photographs, there hasn't been any personal connection to him. None of the family resides close to here. It's really important to the community."



The Mrs. Geezil crash relics on display at the Charles H. Eyre American Legion Post 633 in Seaman, Ohio.

384TH BOMB GROUP ¶
222 COURTNEY PLACE ¶
WEXFORD, PA 15090 ¶



"Keep The Show On The Road..."

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

Will we see B-17s flying this air show season? It's up to the U.S. FAA

In May, the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration issued an emergency Airworthiness Directive that has fans of the B-17 across the globe concerned that the days of seeing preserved and well-maintained aircraft fly at air shows may well be over.

The directive grounds all airworthy B-17s until specific wing spar inspections can be completed. The order to ground flying B-17s in the U.S. comes after Aluminum Overcast, owned by the Experimental Aviation Association, was voluntarily



Sally B on her hardstand with former chief pilot Peter Kuypers and Sally Ellingboe, head of the foundation that flies her.

Commemorative Air Force, operator of Sentimental Journey, performed an inspection on both right and left wings with no cracks or corrosion detected, and the parts were reassembled. While it is eager to fly Sentimental Journey, the CAF believes the FAA must approve the inspection procedure it used first.

grounded in April 2021 because a pre-flight inspection revealed an anomaly in the left wing attachment structure at the fuselage. The fear is that cracks or corrosion could cause a wing to separate in flight, causing a crash.

Even before the FAA formally grounded other flyable B-17s, other operators in the U.S. elected to park their B-17s, out of an abundance of caution. The same caution led the foundation that operates the only flying B-17 in Europe, Sally B, to ground its aircraft. In recent weeks, an inspection similar to what the FAA has mandated for U.S. aircraft appears to have cleared Sally B of corrosion or structural issues and with luck, she will be flying when 384th members on Junket XII see her in September (see story, page 1).

In the U.S., at least one operator appears ready to return their B-17 to the air if the FAA agrees. The