



384th Bomb Group, Inc. News & Journal



"Keep The Show On The Road..."

November 2023

Junket XII brings more than 40 to Grafton Underwood over five days *35 on official tour are joined by several 384th NextGens for special events during visit*



For five sunshine-filled days (OK, there were a couple afternoons of English rain) Junket XII, our 2023 reunion, brought 35 junketeers and another half-dozen family members and friends to Grafton Underwood for a series of special events.

At the heart of the trip was the opportunity to help our English friends with a workday at the future 384th Bombardment Group Museum (we pulled weeds and scraped indoor walls!). We also held a service at the memorial and raised the U.S. flag for the first time at the future museum (see **above**, a picture of the dedication ceremony; page 4 for the flag raising).

Along the way there were surprises, including a tour of the airfield that culminated with a flyover by a P-47 and P-51, which spent nearly 30 minutes performing aerobatics over the field while our group stood below among a group of ground crew reenactors wearing belts of .50 caliber ammunition as they leaned against historic jeeps and other equipment.

Other highlights included a visit to [Parham Airfield & Museum](#) (home of the 390th Bomb Group), which also has the fascinating [British Resistance Organisation](#) museum. We also visited Great Ashfield, home of the [385th Bomb Group](#). The 385th and 384th, both B-17 heavy bomber groups, are sequentially related, one digit away in group and squadron numbering. We were hosted by locals and junketeers Walter and Beverly Schulte from the 385th. We repeated our Traditional English Tea at the historic Swan in Lavenham, with its historic Airmen's Bar (see **both of our presidents' pictures, page 3**, taken at the entrance to this bar).



While many of us spent Friday 15 September working on the museum, others explored historic Cambridge, our base of operations for the trip.

On 17 September, we enjoyed the Battle of Britain Air Show at Duxford. Yes, we spent time with Sally B, Europe's only flying B-17. As you can see **at left**, our vet on the trip, Henry Kolinek, climbed back to his old office in the tail. That's his daughter Marsha Duniven, enjoying the experience.

On 18 September, it was a bit more somber as we visited the [Cambridge American Cemetery](#) to honor 384th and Eighth Air Force fallen and missing. Thanks to Rick Hobson, our tour manager and a former RAF C-130 pilot, we enjoyed a fantastic dinner at the RAF Club in London that evening.

Please visit the [384th Facebook group](#) for more pictures and posts from the junket. I have yet to finish posting and I expect I'll be spending a few days over the holiday season sharing more from this very special experience. — Paul Furiga

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2024 Calendar

The 384th Bomb Group reunion will be held 25-29 September with the Eighth Air Force Historical Society in New Orleans. The headquarters hotel is the Higgins Hotel, which is across the street from the museum. Watch the 384th website (see 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

384th President
Fred Preller
Admin@384thBombGroup.com

Editor Paul Furiga
newsletter@384thBombGroup.com
222 Courtney Place
Wexford, PA 15090
412-427-0597

Welcome to the 384th board, Nathan Bosdet

In September 2023, several days prior to Junket XII, your 384th Bomb Group board met and approved a number of exciting opportunities for the year ahead (more on all this on page 6).

This also included some passing of the batons, most especially with Fred Preller succeeding longtime President Frank Alfter (see their messages on page 3).

In addition, we welcomed to the board someone who has been a member of the association for some time, Nathan Bosdet. Nathan joined us on Junket XI in 2019, though he wasn't able to be with us on our most recent junket.

Nathan's grandfather, S.Sgt. Kenneth Weisl, was a ball turret gunner with the 547th Squadron, who flew 33 missions between 3 June and 18 August 1944.



Nathan Bosdet touring the tower at Thorpe Abbots, home of the 100th Bomb Group, on our 2019 Junket.

Nathan's grandfather also met his grandmother at Grafton Underwood. As Nathan tells the story, his grandmother was in the Auxiliary Territorial Service and they met at The Three Cocks, a bar frequented by airmen. Formed in 1938, the ATS tasked British women with a range of vital roles during the war.

Nathan's leadership and his contributions to date (he's scored us an Instagram account!) represent the future of the association, as we reach beyond the sons and daughters of our vets to the next generation of families, friends and interested supporters who we will be asking to join us as members in 2024. Please join us in welcoming Nathan to the board!

Know your 384th Officers and Board of Directors

Chairman of the Board	Peter Bielskis
President	Fred Preller
Vice President	Chris Wilkinson
Secretary/Newsletter Editor	Paul Furiga
Treasurer	Ray Lustig
Member	Carol Alfter
Member	Frank Alfter
Member	Dennis Bielskis
Member	Nathan Bosdet
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 AND 2024 DUES INFORMATION

Our treasurer is Ray Lustig. Please send dues to:

Ray Lustig, 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.

384th Bomb Group presidency: Alfter to Preller for 2024

Stepping down, alas! But not stepping away

Yes, as of 1 January 2024, I am stepping down as your president, but there is no farewell in this action. I will hang in there with the Group and help **Keep the Show on the Road**. On 1 January I will hand the reins over to one of our most capable board members, Fred Preller.



So please give Fred your utmost support during his presidency, and let's not forget our cherished chairman, Peter Bielskis. We are so fortunate to have Peter for all he has done throughout many years.

Carol and I have traveled a very long road with the 384th Bomb Group. I've said recently that I am now way older than our veterans were when we first met them in 1985 at Grafton Underwood, and I feel so lucky to have met many of those great men and their wives who are truly the gist of our history.

I shall always cherish the memories of meeting with and working with the likes of Pop Dolan, Father Method C. Billy, Arthur and Jean Guilmet, Don and Irene Thompson and Bill and Elsie O'Leary... and so many others.

I need to thank my wife Carol for hanging in there as not only secretary, but also as treasurer for all those years since 2007, until Ray Lustig picked up the treasurer torch and Paul Furiga took on publishing our newsletters.

Carol was (and is) the ultimate negotiator when it came to working with hotels and venues for our reunions. She always got us the absolute best deals and made our reunions more affordable for our attendees.

We have missed very few reunions since 1985 and missed none since the turn of the century. I enjoyed making things happen for the Group, such as the F-111E flyby in 1985, the C-130E flyby in 1999 and our daughter stirred up the 2005 reunion with two of her F-15s. And I think we all were impressed with Neill's arrangement just last September for a P-47 and P-51 flyby of Grafton Underwood during our Junket XII. Sierra Hotel, Neill!

So, no farewell here, just stepping down, but not away. Carol and I will support the group in any way we can and look forward to seeing all of you again and again in the coming years.

God Bless and help us all **Keep the Show on the Road!**

—Frank Alfter

Planning for a great year of growth and new opportunities

Well, this is an article I never thought I would be writing...



However, over the years I have become progressively more involved in Group operations, so when I was approached about relieving Frank in the President's chair, it was clear that I needed to step up and accept.

Fortunately, the Group is in good shape, our finances are sound, membership is at a sustainable level – and a big membership drive is brewing – and our Museum is being developed by our friends in the UK!

A few actions need to be accomplished in the near future and we will get these going as soon as practicable. In addition to the membership drive already mentioned, these include obtaining 501(c)(3) status, registering our new alternate name – 384th Bomb Group Heritage Association – reunion planning, Museum fundraising, website research and maintenance, and several other smaller items. These will all require volunteers to accomplish. With our diverse membership I am sure we have the ability to see all these through to completion.

Finally, I do not intend to occupy this position indefinitely. A term of two years or so seems doable, but my aspiration is to foster growth of the Board of Directors and those members willing to take an active role in Group operations so I can pass the baton when I am ready.

— Fred Preller

Remembering the 384th Bomb Group Junket XII ... in pictures

It's extremely difficult to convey the experiences we had on Junket XII in just two pages. The pictures below come from several "junketeers" and give a flavor of the trip, thank you all for sharing!



Top: These junketeers joined our English friends for a museum workday.
Left: Inside the main room in the Ops Building, which will be unique among bomb group museums when restored.

Bottom: At left, the Preller family raises the U.S. flag for the first time at the museum. Center, tour manager Rick Hobson, leading our tour for the second time, becomes an honorary 384th member. Right, Belgian author Isabelle Engels, who wrote the book "Odyssey of the Joker," presents pieces of the aircraft to Neill Howarth of the 384th Bombardment Group Museum.



A tradition: Family pictures from our Royal Air Force Club dinner

It's Junket tradition to take group pictures of vets, sons, daughters and now grandchildren at our formal dinner. This is the Junket XII edition, taken 18 September at the Royal Air Force Club, London.

Left: The ladies of the 384th – (rear) Susan Elle, Jeanne Ostnes, Linda Smith, Chris Lockwood; (front) Rosie McNair, Theresa Knight, Marsha Duniven, Stephanie Rud

Right: And the men of the 384th — (rear) Neil Maher, Frank Alfter, Don Price, Alan Bloomquist, Gordon Preller (front) Paul Furiga, Andrew Gilmore, Richard Amspacher, Andrew Gilmore Jr., Tom Swift, Walter Schulte (385 BG)



Henry Kolinek, our 384th veteran on Junket XII, was celebrated everywhere we went



Everywhere we went (and rightly so), Henry Kolinek was the center of attention as our lone vet on Junket XII. A humble man, he was often telling those who shook his hand or wanted to make a big deal of his service that he “just did my job.” When you have a vet on the trip, though, it’s hard to prevent grateful folks from saying thanks in a number of ways. Above, a selection of the many times folks said thank you. At **left**, the superintendent of the Cambridge American Cemetery presents Henry a flag that flew there as well as a commemorative pin. **Center**, Henry signs a wall at the Parham Airfield & Museum (390th Bomb Group) signed by vets of that group on previous visits. At **right**, Henry stands with a young re-enactor near the bomb dump on the former 384th airfield at Grafton Underwood. The young man is wearing a period-authentic uniform in front of a bomb tractor that would have been used to pull bomb trailers out to waiting B-17s. He is wearing a belt of .50 caliber ammo like that used in a B-17’s M2 machine guns. These shells and belts were dug out, cleaned and restored from the grounds of a former U.S. Army Air Force base.

Growing the 384th in 2024 and beyond – our exciting plans

The weekend before our Junket XII trip to England (see story, P. 1), our 384th Bomb Group board acted on several exciting initiatives for 2024 and the years ahead.

First, the board elected new officers and a new board member for 2024. We thank outgoing President Frank Alfter for his many years of service (see his column, P. 2). We are pleased to welcome Fred Preller as president (see his column, P. 3) and Chris Wilkinson as vice president. Also joining the board is Nathan Bosdet. Learn more about him in his profile, P. 2.

Then the board took several actions to help us sustain the memory of those who served in the 384th for decades to come:

- The board approved **bylaw amendments** and voted to seek **501(c)(3) Status** in 2024. This will enable donations to the group to be tax-deductible, and will encourage veterans, families and others who support the 384th to donate financially as well as contributing artifacts and mementos. Stay tuned for updates as the board works through the necessary steps.
- To protect the legacy of the 384th, **Dennis Bielskis** and **Chris Wilkinson** will investigate the steps and costs necessary to protect intellectual property such as the Triangle P logo, Keep the Show on the Road motto and squadron insignias.
- Stay tuned for more from Chris Wilkinson about an exciting 2024 membership drive. Chris already has many ideas underway to help grow our membership, especially among grandchildren and beyond.
- **2024 reunion: Patty Bielskis**, wife of member Dennis Bielskis, will chair the committee for our 2024 reunion. This reunion will be held 25-29 September 2024 with the Eighth Air Force Historical Society reunion in New Orleans. The headquarters hotel will be the Higgins Hotel, which is across the street from the museum. Future reunions are TBD.

Two ways you can help us, by volunteering for a committee and sharing your expertise

To sustain the 384th Bomb Group into the future, your participation is needed. Your board and officers are volunteers. As members of the association, each of us has an equal opportunity and responsibility to Keep The Show On The Road.

Here are two ways you can **pitch in**:

- Our Board of Directors establishes objectives for the Group: Officers – President, etc. – and helps direct day-to-day operations to achieve those objectives. For special purposes, committees are established to accomplish specific goals, such as newsletter publishing, fundraising or bylaws. There are opportunities for all members to pitch in to keep the Group moving into the future – **what will you choose to do?** Contact any board member to offer your service.
- We have one very specific need related to our goals in the story above: As a non-profit educational and charitable organization incorporated in Ohio, we need to obtain federal designation as a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization to better support the programs and activities we pursue. If you are able to help in any way, please contact Fred Preller.

TAPS: Honoring our veterans and family 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.

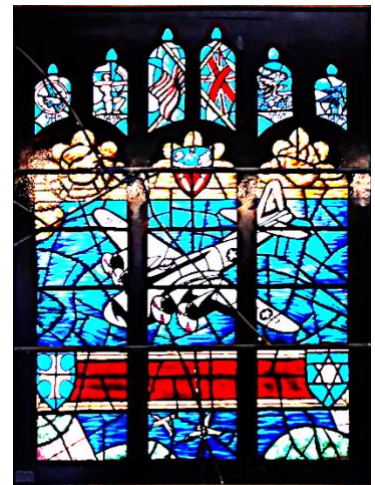
S. Sgt. Marvin Alford Belcher, ball turret gunner, 544th squadron, 26 missions (4 July 1944-17 January 1945). Died 26 November 2021, aged 96. Marvin was a signer of “Wingy,” the commemorative 384th wing panel. After his service, Marvin was a teacher, counselor and administrator with the Bakersfield, California school district for 35 years.

T. Sgt. Donald Erwin Hilliard, radio operator, 545th squadron, 16 missions (14 February-20 April 1945). Died 22 September 2023, aged 98. Donald was a signer of “Wingy,” the commemorative 384th wing panel. After his service, Donald worked for the Beeler Motor Company in Lancaster, Missouri.

Lt. Frederick Edward “Rube” Rubin, navigator, 544th squadron, 31 missions (15 February-25 April 1945). Died 4 May 2020, aged 98. Frederic flew a majority of his missions as a lead navigator. After the war, he spent the bulk of his career working for the Federal Aviation Administration. He was a signer of “Wingy,” the commemorative 384th wing panel.

Lt. Sheldon Ira Vernon, navigator, 545th squadron, 30 missions (16 November 1943-1 May 1944). Died 10 November 2023, aged 101 in Katy, Texas. He was also a signer of “Wingy,” the 384th commemorative wing panel.

Mildred Irene Thompson, widow of **Lt. Donald Elmer Thompson**, pilot, 545th squadron, 2 missions (19-20 April 1945). Died 8 September 2023, aged 94. They married in 1950 and lived on their family farm near Central City, Iowa, until 1997 when Don retired. Don continued to be active in the Air Force Reserve until 1984, when he retired as a Lt. Colonel. He died in 2014. Don also signed “Wingy,” the 384th commemorative wing panel.

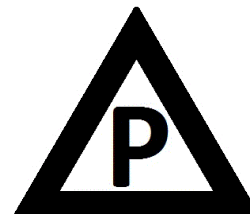


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OUR WEBSITE HOME PAGE
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**384th BOMB GROUP, INC.
MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**



DATE _____
 NAME * _____ SPOUSE * _____
 * For renewals or updates, complete starred fields and all others that have changed.

ADDRESS _____
 CITY _____
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 CHECK HERE IF YOU PREFER DELIVERY OF NEWSLETTER BY U.S. MAIL.

ARE YOU A 384th VETERAN? YES / NO IF YES: UNIT _____ DUTY _____
 IF YOU ARE A RELATIVE OF A 384th VETERAN, PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING:
 VETERAN'S NAME _____ HIS UNIT _____ HIS DUTY _____
 FAMILY RELATIONSHIP _____
 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION _____

IF NOT A RELATIVE OF A 384th VETERAN, PLEASE INDICATE THE SOURCE OF YOUR INTEREST:
 FRIEND RESEARCHER HISTORIAN WWII INTEREST UK MUSEUM FRIEND OF THE 384th
 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION _____

<input type="checkbox"/> Check here if this submission is only to update your contact information.	
<input type="checkbox"/> RENEWAL or <input type="checkbox"/> NEW MEMBERSHIP MEMBERSHIP YEAR _____	
Membership is \$25, payable annually on 1 January. Please use a separate form for each membership.	
Annual dues payment options: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remit via PayPal to Payments@384thBombGroup.com, then scan and e-mail completed form to <u>Secretary@384thBombGroup.com</u> OR <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make check payable to 384th Bomb Group, Inc. and mail to the Treasurer's address (at right) with completed form 	Mail check with form to: RAY LUSTIG 384th BOMB GROUP, INC. 128 ULSTER AVENUE WALDEN, NY 12586-1036

**384th Bomb Group, Inc.
222 Courtney Place
Wexford, PA 15090**



"Keep The Show On The Road..."

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

Our amazing veterans – how many are with us? Can you help us find them?

With each passing month, the ranks of surviving World War II veterans decreases as so many are in their late 90s and a few have even reached 100 years and beyond. Time is catching up with our vets and thus, with our legacy.

According to the [Department of Veterans Affairs](#), just 0.07 percent or 119,550 of the 16.1 million who served in World War II are still alive. Applying those statistics to the 384th Bomb Group, as many as 60 of our vets *could potentially* be looking forward to yet another birthday.

Since its inception, there have been fewer than 1,000 Veteran members of the postwar 384th Bomb Group; many didn't join for one reason or another. We know from official records that almost 8,000 served with the 384th during World War II. Statistically there should be a way to determine an approximate number of those still with us, but we need help finding them.

FIRST NAME	LAST NAME	SQUADRON	POSITION	AGE
Alfred David	Benjamin	544th	Navigator	99
Peter Julius	Bielskies	546th	Ball Turret	99
John Joseph	DeFrancesco	544th	Pilot	99
Edward	Field	546th	Navigator	99
Oscar Nathan	Gore	544th	Radio Operator	99
Clinton Lee	Henderson	545th	Ball Turret	99
Henry Joseph	Kolinek	544th	Tail Gunner	98
Henry Chester	Sienkiewicz	545th	Bombardier	100
William John	Wilkens	547th	Engineer/Top Turret	99
Albert	Williamson	545th	Radio Operator	N/A
James Larry	Yarbrough	545th	Tail Gunner	98

As the ranks of 384th veterans continue to dwindle, the opportunity to honor their service and sacrifice becomes more precious. And so does the opportunity to learn from their firsthand accounts of service with the group during World War II.

From the records and recollections available to us, we can account for only 11 living veterans (see table above). Are we missing anyone? If so, could you please let us know? See page 2 of the newsletter or the 384th Bomb Group website for contact information. As time (and history) move on, we'd like to appropriately honor the service of our remaining veterans, including in our newsletter. Thank you for your help!

— Paul Furiga