



# 384th Bomb Group, Inc. News & Journal



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

February 2024

## A Christmas present that will last a lifetime for the 384th Museum

*Purchase of museum buildings from Boughton Estate owner sets stage for the future*

On 24 December 2023, the Trustees for the 384th Bombardment Group Museum received a very special holiday gift.

Bucleuch, the private company that owns Boughton Estate, including the former Grafton Underwood home of the 384th Bomb Group, completed the necessary transfer of buildings and land rights to the museum group (a 99-year lease!) so that the dedicated volunteers can continue their efforts to transform the former Ops Building and associated areas into a museum.

For more than four years, the museum volunteers have been clearing the site, shoring up the Ops Building and the former Norden Bomb Site building to create more than just a museum – they envision an educational site and event center as well.

In a press release issued by Bucleuch, Sam Rees, Manager of Boughton Estate said: "It has been wonderful to be part of this project. The commitment (of) the local community and the families of the airmen who served at the base ... is incredibly humbling and the museum will prove to be a fitting memorial and an asset for the community of Northamptonshire."

Neill Howarth, chairman of the museum effort, said "This has been a long-held dream, to establish a museum to the Americans that were based here during World War II. We can now forge ahead in our goal to



**Left to right: Helen Childs, 384th museum solicitor, Matt Smith, museum secretary, Keith Andrews, museum treasurer, Neill Howarth, museum chairman**



**A recent look inside the Ops Building main hall, envisioned as a future event center and currently a main stop on museum tours.**

open a Visitors Center as soon as possible. I must take this opportunity now to thank his Grace, the Duke of Bucleuch, Boughton Estates Management and Forestry Team for their support for us to realize this moment. I was determined to tell the story of the initial heavy bombing raids by the Americans of the 97th Bomb Group, originating from Grafton Underwood, also the Operations Block which would have witnessed all the planning and drama of the bombing of Berlin and D-Day and then to witness the final bombs of the 8th Air Force in World War II flying from this airfield and bring it back to life for visitors to experience."

**This just in:** [A GoFundMe has been established online](#) for the museum to make donations simpler. You do NOT need to "tip" GoFundMe when you donate – uncheck that box on the online form. Also, the museum is now open for tours of the buildings and airfield. Those interested should visit the 384th Bombardment Group Museum Facebook page for more information or contact the Trustees via [384BGmuseum@gmail.com](mailto:384BGmuseum@gmail.com).

—Paul Furiga

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## 2024 Calendar

The 2024 384th BG reunion will be held 25-29 September in New Orleans in conjunction with the 8th Air Force Historical Society. Check the 384th website, our Facebook page and the 8th AFHS online (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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## Welcome to 2024, a good year for the 384th!

Happy New Year! This is shaping up to be a good year for our Group, starting with registration of a name more descriptive of our purpose and activities: 384th Bomb Group Heritage Association. We are still the 384th Bomb Group, Inc., a nonprofit incorporated in the State of Ohio. The new alternate name (also registered in Ohio)



sheds the old subtext and more accurately reflects who we are and what we do.

Elsewhere in this Newsletter you will find retrospectives that recognize the accomplishments of our fathers. My focus will be on the future of the Group. While I still use the term 'Group' to refer to us, we will primarily identify ourselves with the new name above. We are making progress on obtaining 501(c)(3) status, and the application to the IRS should be submitted before the end of February. At that point, donations (perhaps dues?) will become tax-deductible.

Membership is up with our focus on growth. I'd like to believe the new online membership form helped – and I promise to make it more

user friendly. Christopher Wilkinson and Paul Furiga are leading the effort. Many others have joined in. We need your help to spread the word with family and friends. Our friends in Grafton Underwood continue to astonish with Museum progress (**page 1**), and with the buildings' purchase, they are really energized. We are awaiting next steps and how we can help achieve the excellence they pursue. It is a bit early to loan artifacts to the Museum – Neill Howarth says he has run out of closet space – but you should look ahead and set aside anything you would consider for Museum display or teaching purposes. The Group Archive – maintained by Mark Meehl – will be another source of material we will make available when the time comes.

September 25-29, 2024 Reunion! The last time we held our reunion in New Orleans in conjunction with the Eighth Air Force Historical Society, our Group registered 56 attendees, the most of any group. Check the website for information.

I'll leave you with this thought: this is an organization of volunteers. You can volunteer your time, your expertise, and even your ideas and suggestions. OK, even your criticisms, because we have to know if something isn't right before we can fix it. We are all in this together to KEEP THE SHOW ON THE ROAD. —Fred Preller

## Know your 384th Officers and Board of Directors

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

## 2024 DUES INFORMATION

384th Bomb Group, Inc., is an Ohio nonprofit corporation, dba 384th Bomb Group Heritage Association. Membership includes this quarterly newsletter for \$25, **renewed yearly in January.**

Our 2024 treasurer is Ray Lustig. **Please pay dues online via PayPal here:** <https://384thbombgroup.com/content/pages/MembershipForm.php>

Or pay dues via check made out to **384th Bomb Group, Inc.** and send to:

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

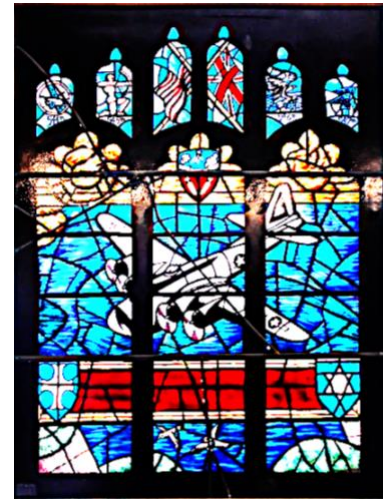
Questions? Contact Ray at [rlustig@hvc.rr.com](mailto:rlustig@hvc.rr.com)

# 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](mailto:newsletter@384thbombgroup.com) or 222 Courtney Place, Wexford, PA 15090), so that we may honor their service and their passing here.

**S. Sgt. Jack G. Garstak**, died 4 August 2016, aged 96. Radio operator, 547th squadron, 20 missions (5 January-20 April 1945). On his 10th mission to bomb railroad yards in Berlin on 3 February 1945, his B-17 made a forced landing in Russian-held Poland. With the help of another downed B-17 crew, and a downed fighter pilot, the crew repaired the B-17 and flew it out. Russian officials were won over when the pilot told them he would give them the B-17 when it was repaired. The crew had other ideas – they told the Russians they had to test the repairs. So they boarded the B-17 and took off. Using only Russian maps and charts, they navigated to Italy, then back to England. Jack was a signer of “Wingy,” the commemorative 384th wing panel. He lived in Davie, Florida.

**Lt. Edwin Dwight Ledbetter**, died 22 October 2016, aged 92. Pilot, 547th squadron, 4 missions (2 March-16 March 1944). On his fourth mission, Edwin's plane was so damaged that it crash-landed in France. Two of the crew died and eight became POWs, including Edwin. He recuperated in a hospital under German occupation for almost six months before being liberated. He was awarded the Purple Heart and European-African-Middle East Theater Ribbon with 1 Bronze Star. A Harvard Law graduate, he became a diplomat for the U.S. Department of State. During his career he served around the world. In October 2013, he was awarded the prestigious French Legion of Honor by the French Consul General in San Francisco. Fifty-three years after crashing his B-17, he returned to the small village of L'Huitre where he was joyously greeted by townspeople who provided him and a crewmember with a parade, champagne and speeches of gratitude for helping to liberate France.



**June Holfetz Miller**, widow of **Sgt. Wilfred Frank Miller**, died 22 December 2023, age 95. Wilfred Miller was involved in one of the most notable and tragic mid-air collisions involving 384th aircraft on 28 September 1944 when his plane, flown by pilot Lt. James Brodie of the 545th squadron, collided with a B-17 flown by Lt. James Buslee of the 544th squadron over the target at Magdeburg, Germany. Only one man survived from Buslee's crew (waist gunner **Sgt. George Edwin Farrar**). Miller was one of four survivors from the Brodie crew. He was a tail gunner and flew 19 missions (7 August-28 September 1944). June and Wilfred married in 1947. Wilfred, who was a farmer and carpenter before and after the war, died in 1991.

**Sgt. Charles 'Chuck' William Siffert**, died 23 December 2023, aged 100. Flexible gunner, 546th squadron, 5 missions (28 July-16 August 1944). After flying five missions, Chuck was transferred to teach at the aerial gunnery school at Las Vegas. Chuck studied horticulture at Michigan State and briefly partnered in a greenhouse and raised tomatoes. He later worked in sales. At 51 he became a serious runner. He competed in triathlons and many 5K to 15K races, some with his son, David Siffert. At the age of 85, he ran his final Cherry Festival race with his two grandsons, Tyler Sanborn and Tom Read. Chuck was a signer of “Wingy,” the commemorative 384th wing panel and lived in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

**Col. Sheldon Ira Vernon**, died 10 November 2023, aged 101. Navigator, 544th squadron, 31 missions (16 November 1943-1 May 1944). While with the 384th, Sheldon was a lieutenant. He went on to serve 26 active duty years in the Air Force and was dual rated as a Command Pilot and Navigator. He retired from the U.S. Air Force in April 1972. He was awarded the Legion of Merit, the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters, the Distinguished Unit Citation with one Oak Leaf Cluster, and the Air Force Commendation Medal with one Oak Leaf Cluster. Sheldon was a signer of “Wingy,” the 384th commemorative wing panel. He earned an MBA and Ph.D. after his service and went on to a 21-year career as a university professor at Houston Baptist University. He also became an ordained deacon. He lived in Houston.

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## Our 2024 384th reunion – some initial details so you can save the dates

Patty Bielskis, wife of board member Dennis Bielskis, has graciously agreed to coordinate the 384th's 2024 reunion. As mentioned in Fred Preller's column, we will meet at the 8th Air Force Historical Society reunion 25-29 September in New Orleans. While our planning is in early stages, we can predict some aspects of our get-together:

- By holding our reunion with the 8th AFHS, the “heavy lifting” planning is done for us (location, hotel, many meals);
- We will still gather as the 384th during the event, as we have in previous years;
- Attending the reunion **does** mean one of your party of up to four must join the 8th AFHS; membership is \$60 a year.

Among the benefits of meeting along with the 8th AFHS is the opportunity to see friends from other bomb groups, enjoy programming we could not assemble on our own, and this year, the reunion will be held at the Higgins Hotel, the official hotel of the World War II Museum. It's a walk across the street to enjoy this amazing museum. Stay tuned for more details on the 384th website, our Facebook page and of course, in the next newsletter.

## An amazing story of now and then, thanks to a chance meeting

During the 384th's Memorial Junket XII in September 2023, amazing memories came from some unexpected places, including chance encounters. Here's an example from Jeanne Ostnes, daughter of 546th squadron pilot Lt. Leif Robert Ostnes.

"When a group of us were out one evening in Cambridge at The Eagle, (an RAF bar famous for its memorabilia and the signatures of airmen dating back to World War II – including some 384th vets), fellow 384th member Isabelle Engels noticed two fellows and a lady.

"The men were wearing French Air jackets of some sort (Isabelle saw embroidery that said Force Aérienne Française)," Jeanne recalls.

Isabelle is from Belgium and is the author of a great book on the 13 April 1944 crash at Berismenil, Luxembourg/Belgium of a 545th squadron ship called The Joker, flown that day by the Lt. Herbert Swanson crew, "Odyssey of the Joker."

As a Belgian, Isabelle is fluent in French and began speaking to the group and learned they had been to the Battle of Britain air show at Duxford the day before, as our 384th group had.

As Jeanne relates: "After a bit of discussion, I mentioned my Dad had flown in France. I mentioned he flew with the 384th Bomb Group. I said he had landed on a short runway near Etain.

One of the fellows, Arnaud Beinat, said that he is from there. I told him my Dad had some pictures of his crew around the area. I told him I would send them to him and see if he could find the same spots currently. He did so and I have included it here (which we have reproduced on this page)."

In addition to the chance encounter, Jeanne has done quite a bit of work to trace her dad's story with the 384th, especially on this particular mission. As time and space permit, we'll include more about that in later issues. For now, Jeanne recommends that readers interested in this particular forced landing visit this link on the 384th website to read Lt. George Allen Purchase's story. This was his first combat mission as a navigator, and he recounts the mission in detail.



14 February, 1945 photos by Lt. Leif Ostnes



2023 Photos by Arnaud Beinat



## Pop Dolan's enduring gift to Kettering, in memory of the 384th

Paul Teal and Sam Coleman (fellow travelers in researching and preserving 384th Bomb Group history) together run a Facebook group called [RAF Grafton Underwood's WW2 Memories](#). And as many associated with the 384th know, Sam is the daughter of Quentin Bland, who was such a great friend, leader and advocate for the group over the decades.

Sam and Paul recently contacted [St. Edward The Confessor Catholic Church](#) in Kettering, England, after learning that it had a special connection with the 384th Bomb Group.

The church houses a silver chalice donated by [Lt. Col. William "Pop" Dolan](#), the 384th's intelligence officer throughout the war, and his family, during Memorial Junket II in 1979.

Fr. Gregory Marchwinski, the pastor, suggested a visit after a mid-week Mass to look at the chalice.

He and his colleague Maureen brought out the chalice so it could be viewed. It's a fine piece and has the 384th Bomb Group shield and the four squadron emblems engraved on its base.

As well, there's a cross with a diamond in its center. The actual base is inscribed (see photo).

Paul asked what the screw was for in the center of the base and Fr. Gregory suggested that we unscrew it and have a look.

Lo and behold there was a lady's ring mounted inside. It turns out that the diamond showing in the cross was the diamond from the ring, which was Pop Dolan's wife's engagement ring! We were so pleased to see this – what an honor.

Also in the church is a wooden carving of St. Christopher and a memorial plaque next to it. Apparently, it was paid for by money raised by 384th servicemen and donated to the church in 1945. The Plaque reads "IN MEMORIAM OF 384TH BOMB GROUP (H) GRAFTON UNDERWOOD 1943-1945".

—Paul Teal



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## Say "Hello!" to the Crew ID Tool on the 384th Bomb Group website

Who are the guys in this photo from our "[Unidentified Crews](#)" photo gallery album from the Ken Decker collection? It's likely the lead 384th crew after a mission in the olive drab B-17 with code BK\*J is 42-30026, "BATTLE WAGON" (from the website aircraft list). So, who are the crew in the picture?

From experience viewing 384th personnel photos, the guy standing at left – with the distinctive hair style – is Gordon K. Stallings, and the guy standing at the right is Philip M. Algar. Let's fire up the Crew ID tool and see who else we can identify:

Top Menu: [HELP](#) → [ADMIN](#) → [Crew ID Tool](#)

First, paste a link to the photo (right-click on the center of the photo on the gallery page and select Copy Image Link) into the URL box, and type Stallings in the Last Name box. Click on the Lookup button and get a list of all 157 crewmates Stallings flew with at least once, as well as a drop-down list of aircraft he flew. Select the aircraft serial number (42-30026), in the Aircraft Filter drop-down and click the Apply AC Filter button. This brings the total possible crewmates down to 20. Next select the other name we know, Algar, Philip M., and click the Select Crew Member button. This reveals loading lists for two missions, 3 November 1943 and 29 November 1943.

So, which is it? The 29 November mission has 11 crewmembers, including Colonel Smith. This photo only has 9, and no Colonel Smith. And the second from left, standing, is McClanahan, so it is the 3 November 1943 mission.

So we have identified 3 people and the date. We know the names of the rest of the crew. From here it's a process of elimination – search for photos of other crew and match the guys in this photo. Here's what I came up with – back row: Stallings (TG/Formation Observer), McClanahan (Bombardier), Celentano (Navigator), Algar (Pilot); front row: Moore (Radio), Schimenek (Waist Gun), Majewski (Waist Gun), McKay (Ball Turret), Laviolette (Top Turret). Missing is Major George W Harris, Jr., the Air Commander, who served as Algar's Co-Pilot.

We can also infer another bit of data: apparently the Air Commander (based on this photo) occasionally did not hang around for the post-mission photo. RHIP!

—Fred Preller



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

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## The 384th continues to grow – help us by sharing membership!

Christopher Wilkinson, 384th vice president, has a special mission this year: a membership campaign to ensure the sacrifices and service of those who served in the 384th Bomb Group are shared with today's generations, and those to come.

You can help by sharing the gift of membership with family and friends. Consider buying a gift membership (still only \$25, the same as 20 years ago) for siblings, children, nieces and nephews, grandchildren, perhaps even neighbors or friends!

A growing membership ensures that we continue to share the amazing stories of those who served in the 384th. We want to remember those who made today's freedoms possible and help educate tomorrow's citizens on the need to make sure that the world never needs to repeat the incredible effort required to stop fascism in World War II.

Even before we have formally begun our campaign, we have grown membership to a new modern high of nearly 100. It's important to note that, given the passage of time, nearly all of those members **are not** 384th veterans – they are sons and daughters and grandchildren and friends who learned first-hand about the 384th from our vets.

Growing membership is an important way to help us share vets' stories more broadly through new initiatives we will be sharing

in the months to come. Our friends in England and the museum they are building are fellow travelers in this effort (**page 1**). There is much to be done here in the U.S. and through tools such as the Internet.

For example, in the newsletter we often reference vets who signed "Wingy," the 384th's commemorative wing panel now in the museum at Hill Air Force Base in Utah (**see above**). Did you know that when our volunteers visited many vets for their signings, they conducted video interviews? These living history videos are just one example of the assets we hope to share thanks to the financial support of your membership and those you encourage to join us. You can gift a new membership at this page on our website (<https://384thbombgroup.com/content/pages/MembershipForm.php>). Thank you! —Paul Furiga

