



384th Bomb Group Heritage Association News & Journal

384th Bomb Group, Inc.



December 2024

"Keep The Show On The Road..."

384th attendees join more than 400 at 2024 Eighth Air Force reunion

Four World War II vets, including our own Al Benjamin, join New Orleans festivities

Any time family and friends of Eighth Air Force veterans gather is a great time to talk airplanes, flying, heroism, honor, service and valor. It's especially great when there are living examples of these characteristics in attendance.

That was the treat for the more than 400 who attended the 2024 Eighth Air Force Historical Society reunion in New Orleans 25-29 September. Nearly 30 384th Bomb Group members and friends were among those who enjoyed this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, including time spent with our own Lt. Al Benjamin, now 100, who flew 31 missions with the 384th, including several as a squadron and group lead navigator (see story, p. 5).



Four vets at the reunion: At left, navigator Al Benjamin of the 384th bomb group. Standing is Melvin Hurwitz, 493rd bomb group, radioman and gunner. Seated in the center is Clarence Kooi, 486th bomb group ball turret gunner. On the right is Maurice Berger, 398th bomb group ball turret gunner.

It's hard to match New Orleans, whether it's the food, the city itself, and of course, The National WW II Museum. We shared our hospitality suite with the friendly folks of the 96th and the 385th Bomb Groups, making for great conversations, renewed acquaintances, and making new friends.

This issue of the newsletter has several more stories and photos from the reunion and lots of references throughout. We do hope you will be able to join us for our 2025 reunion, and you can learn more about that inside this issue!

Please visit the [384th Facebook group](#) for more pictures and posts from the reunion. 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

In this Issue

Our 2024 Reunion recap	P. 1
President's Message	P. 2
TAPS	P. 3
Reunion stories and pictures	P. 4-5
Museum update	P. 6
2025 Reunion initial plans	P. 6
The Lead Banana: a poem	P. 7
An update on flying B-17s	P. 8

2025 Calendar

Planning for the 384th Bomb Group reunion for 2025 is underway. The timing and location are under discussion, and we may be meeting with the Eighth Air Force Historical Society OR independently, as in the "old days." Please see the article on p. 6 for the current status and how you can help us plan a great event!

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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Growth in 2024 is a foundation for a strong 2025

Looking back at the 384th in 2024, I see a lot to be impressed by. Foremost among our accomplishments is the increase in paid membership from 65 in 2023 to 184 this year!

Then there is the submission of our application for 501(c)(3) status by the IRS, which will permit donors to deduct all contributions made to the Group (as of 3 June 2024) once it is approved.



In addition to Museum contributions received from Members and Friends, the Board of Directors have authorized a \$5,000 contribution to the Museum from our Treasury. Then there are the "usual" things: Newsletters, an outstanding reunion during September in New Orleans with the 8th Air Force Historical Society, research assistance, the 384th Website and Facebook page, etc. None of this would have been possible without the initiative and effort of Volunteers. You are invited to step up, pitch in, and help out.

A lot has transpired since I assumed this office at the start of 2024. Through the efforts of others, we have grown

and prospered this year. I hope in the coming year we will see more of the same, as well as the initial opening of our Museum in Grafton Underwood, England. Next summer might be an excellent time to plan a trip to England and see it for yourself, and to thank the Museum Volunteers.

Finally, 2025 will be my second – and final – year in this office, a condition under which I accepted the post. We must all be asking ourselves "Who will Volunteer to lead the Group into its next chapter?" Who will step forward to "KEEP THE SHOW ON THE ROAD"?

— Fred Preller

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.

2025 DUES INFORMATION

IT'S TIME TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP FOR 2025!

Membership years run January to December, so it's time to join or re-up for 2025!

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

412-427-0597

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

TAPS: Honoring our veterans and family who have flown west

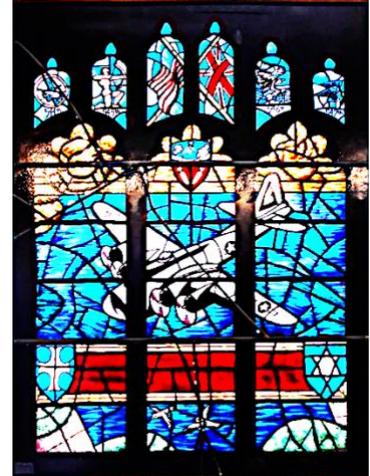
If you know of a 384th Veteran's passing, please write our editor, Paul Furiga (newsletter@384thbombgroup.com or 222 Courtney Place, Wexford, PA 15090), so that we may honor their service and their passing here.

S. Sgt. Bernard Francis Cavanaugh, waist gunner, 544th squadron, 35 missions (25 October 1944-24 February 1945). Died 19 December 1975, aged 55. Bernard Francis Cavanaugh Jr., his son, has visited Grafton Underwood along with his wife in recent years.

S. Sgt. Oscar Nathan Gore, radio operator, 544th squadron, 33 missions (8 May-11 August 1944). Died 19 September 2024, aged 100, just a month after celebrating that birthday. Oscar was a signer of "Wingy," the commemorative 384th wing panel.

Lt. Henry Chester "Sink" Sienkiewicz, bombardier, 545th squadron, 35 missions (4 July 1944-17 January 1945). Died 4 October 2024, aged 101 in Syracuse, N.Y. Hank passed away just three weeks shy of his 102nd birthday. He was a frequent attendee at 384th events, including our 2019 junket to England. He was also a signer of "Wingy," the 384th commemorative wing panel.

T. Sgt. William John "Bill" Wilkens, engineer and top turret gunner, 547th squadron, 30 missions (24 February-25 April 1945). Died 29 September 2024, aged 100. Bill was an active member of the association and attended many reunions. He was also a signer of "Wingy," the commemorative 384th wing panel.



As fall turns to winter, 384th museum volunteers continue their progress

Work has been continuing at a very steady pace at the site of the 384th Bombardment Group Museum, considering the time of year – we've seen typical U.K. autumnal weather of sunshine, wind and rain in equal measures! This makes work on the Nissen hut particularly challenging as the build has to continue a section at a time, as opposed to simply covering the whole of the area firstly in external sheeting and then completing the inside sections.

Wind is the enemy – with the site being exposed, and the sheeting relatively light, work is progressing methodically to ensure integrity of the structure. Nonetheless, great progress has been made by a very dedicated group of volunteers working over several weekend dates.



Bricklaying volunteers Ellie and John on a recent workday on site. Ellie is an apprentice bricklayer who's honing her skills on the museum project.

Basic window structures are now in place, and external and internal cladding is in place for several bays. Work will continue on this through to the end of the year, at which point the building will be wrapped up for protection through the first part of 2025 to protect it from the worst of the weather. Brickwork on the end walls will continue however as and when conditions allow. As the weather improves in 2025, work will recommence and with favorable conditions, progress to the first stage of completion should be rapid.

Our midweek team has also been extremely busy – they have been making good the external brickwork on the Operations Block (a very time consuming and tedious task!) to enable the first 'scratch' coat of rendering (stucco) to be applied. Once this is in place, the final layer of rendering can be applied ready for painting. We hope to (weather allowing!) make good progress on this ahead of the New Year, which all helps to protect the structure and work that has been done from the harsher weather conditions.

On top of these major projects, site clearance and leveling is always ongoing. The task of keeping undergrowth in check across the site becomes less of an issue as we head into the winter months as it naturally dies back – this will help us to conduct a more detailed site clearance again through the winter months – no matter how many times the site is cleared of rubble and debris from the buildings, more seems to appear! On days of poorer weather, work will continue within the Operations Block with making good the damaged

brickwork and general cleaning and tidying. Despite weather conditions becoming less favorable in the coming months, rest assured the team will still be very busy!

A huge thank you to all the volunteers who give up their time, sometimes on a daily basis, to help "Keep the show on the road"! For more, visit the [384th Bombardment Group Museum Facebook](#) page. As well, please support the work by donating to the online GoFundMe at <https://gofund.me/d4b70c99> – Keith Andrews, treasurer, 384th Bombardment Group Museum

An affair to remember (in pictures) – our 2024 reunion

New Orleans proved a great location for our 2024 384th reunion, held in conjunction with the annual Eighth Air Force Historical Society (8th AFHS) reunion. The headquarters was the Higgins Hotel, which was built after the last 8th AFHS reunion held in New Orleans in 2017. That year was also the 384th's best showing in terms of attendees. The hotel's location put us right next to the National WW II Museum, which we visited many times over the reunion. It was also a great base of operations from the hospitality suite we shared with fellow attendees from the 96th and 385th bomb group assoc's.

While our 2024 attendance didn't quite match 2017, we had a 100-year-old vet (Al Benjamin, see story and photos next page) and lots of "next gen" members as well as "next gen next gen" members including board member Nathan Bosdet, his wife Sharon and "next gen next gen next gen" members – is that a thing? – in Nathan's two sons.

All told, 25 384th members officially attended the 2024 reunion, including first-time attendees Thomas Lacey (grandson of the second 384th C.O. Col. Julius Kahn Lacey) and his wife Amanda. A few "unofficial" 384th family visited our hospitality suite as well, some who were passing through New Orleans on other trips, and some who came by to see what a reunion looks like. We were glad to see them all!



Left: 384th vet Al Benjamin (center) holds court with members Don Price (left) and Brenda Furiga (right) in our hospitality suite, which also featured displays from Hangar Thirteen and the 384th Bombardment Group Museum at Grafton Underwood.

Bottom left: Vice president Chris Wilkinson, member Cindy Bryan and board member Carol Alfter.

Below: Member Billie Swift, past president and board member Frank Alfter and board member Tom Swift. All photos on this page from informal gatherings in our Higgins Hotel hospitality suite.



More on our 384th veteran who joined us in New Orleans, Al Benjamin

When is the right time to attend a 384th Bomb Group reunion? About once every 100 years. At least, that's the joke [Lt. Al Benjamin](#), a 544th squadron navigator who flew 31 missions, made about his first reunion in New Orleans.

Al, age 100, was one of four World War II vets at the reunion (see story, photos, p. 1). Throughout the reunion, Al shared the kind of first-person stories that we hear less and less frequently as our vets pass on. Al also was able to answer the questions many of us had about any kind of minutiae related to B-17s, flying, etc. that we could conjure.

At our rendezvous dinner with the 385th Bomb Group, Al shared several stories that had diners in rapt attention, including the time on his 18th mission when he and his crew were forced to bail out over France, just inside the advancing Allied lines. Al and some of his crewmates were injured and spent time in a French hospital. While some of his crew flew no more missions after the bailout, Al went on to fly another 13, including several as a squadron and group lead navigator.

In retirement, Al has returned to his wartime flying experiences, writing several times of specific missions. His poem, [In the Dark of the Night](#), earned such praise [that Al has turned into a play, which has been performed several times](#) at the senior living community where he now resides.

That's Al (right) with one of the lead singers from the period singing group, The Victory Belles, that performed at the Eighth Air Force Historical Society gala, held inside the National WW II Museum.



Did you know the 384th has a lasting presence at the National WW II museum?



Budd Peaslee

As Commander of the 384th Bombardment Group, Colonel Budd Peaslee led the unit's first operations after the group arrived in England in June 1943. During just six missions, the 384th sustained such heavy losses that only one of the original 36 aircraft was still flying. Realizing that better knowledge of enemy targets would decrease the risk to American raiders, Peaslee advocated sending in scout planes ahead of the bombers. The suggestion proved so successful that Peaslee was placed in command of a special unit, the 1st Scouting Force, which provided reports on local weather conditions and enemy defenses during bombing runs.

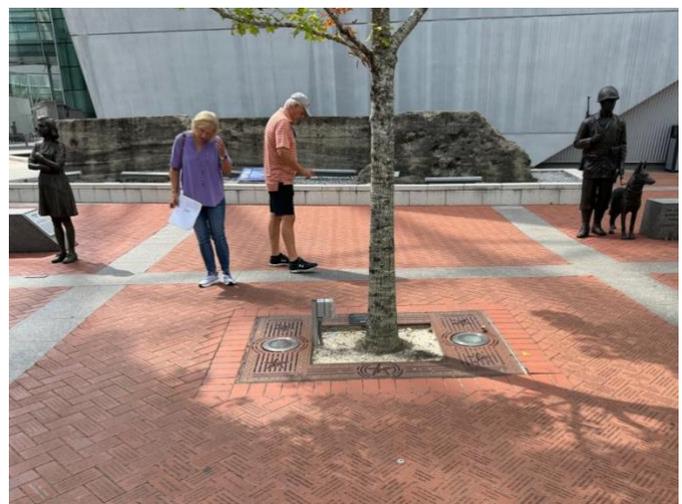
US ARMY AIR FORCES
384th Bomb Group and 1st Scouting Force,
Eighth Air Force

HIGHEST RANK: Colonel
YEARS OF SERVICE: 1926-1953
CITATIONS: Silver Star, Legion of Merit,
Distinguished Flying Cross (3)

A visit to the National WW II Museum in New Orleans can be a trip of a lifetime. It can also be an opportunity to connect with the 384th Bomb Group.

Inside the museum, in the portion of the pavilion dedicated to the air war, is the plaque at left, honoring the group's first commander, Col. Bud Peaslee. While his tenure as group commander is mentioned, the plaque honors Peaslee's pioneering idea to create scouts using P-51s ahead of bomber formations.

Outside the museum, in an area where families, friends and others can commemorate their vets, the group has its own brick (below left). You can find the brick in the memorial walkway at the front entrance of the museum, near the gift shop entrance. The photo below gives you an idea of the location, using the bronze statues of Anne Frank and a K-9 soldier as guides.



An update on the planning process for our 2025 reunion

Many association members – those who did make it to the 2024 reunion, and those who did not, have asked about our plans for our 2025 reunion. The best word to describe those plans is “evolving.”

Your board is in the process of evaluating several options for the 2025 reunion, including:

- Join with the 8AFHS Reunion in Colorado Springs, 1-5 October 2025, or
- Select a site and dates for an independent 384th Reunion, just like in the "old days," depending upon number of attendees. **If we have fewer than 30, it may be economically infeasible to hold an independent reunion.**
- Of the sites discussed for an independent event, it appears that Dayton makes the most sense. Based upon our group’s usual practice of having our annual reunions in September or October, that is our most likely window to schedule.
- Additionally, Tuesday 23 September 2025 is Rosh Hashana and we want to avoid scheduling on that date (and other holidays).

Here’s an update on planned 8AFHS reunions, from the "President's Briefing" in the September 2024 issue of 8th AF News:

- 2025, Colorado Springs, 1-5 October
- 2026, Pooler, GA, dates TBD
- 2027, San Antonio, dates TBD

How you can help in 2025: Volunteer for a committee or become an officer

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. **Note: President Fred Preller (see his column, p. 2) has already said he will not serve next year, so at least one officer’s role will be open for 2026.**
- We have one very specific need related to our 2025 reunion from the story above: Should we as an association elect to hold an independent reunion, we will need a member to coordinate the event. We have significant experience gained over the years in holding reunions, and those who have led the charge over the years (especially Carol Alfter) have earned their well-deserved retirement from event coordination. Without a member of the association to coordinate an independent reunion, regardless of how many members might indicate interest in attending, we cannot hold an independent event.

Got the picture? You can help us catalog more reunion photos from past years

Fellow 384th members, in my role as webmaster for the 384th Bomb Group website, I have reviewed and corrected all links between the Website Reunions [page](#) and the Gallery Reunions [photo album](#). If you see any problems, please bring them to my attention.

As well, there are several reunions for which we have no photos cataloged. They are:

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------|
| • 1998 (Harrisburg, PA) | • 1980 |
| • 1997 * | • 1979* |
| • 1994 | • 1978 |
| • 1992 | • 1976 |
| • 1990 | • 1974 |
| • 1986 | • 1972 |
| • 1984 | • 1970 |
| • 1982 | • 1967 |
| • 1981* | |

Years marked with an asterisk (*) indicate a Junket in England. Please let me know if you find anything to fill in the gaps.
— Fred Preller

They were flyers, mechanics and so much more – even poets!

We're putting 384th Bomb Group Radio Operator Lawrence Vallo in the spotlight here. Vallo was a member of the Paul E. Norton "Frigham Young" crew of the 544th Bomb Squadron along with crewmates Carl Guinn and John Bregant. He was a Native American and has been described as an "educational advocate for Indian youths." His wife said that his "individualism, extroverted nature and love of people set him apart from others" and "He was very proud he was a Native American." Lawrence Vallo wrote a poem about the B-17 he crewed on his first mission, [42-37822, The Lead Banana](#).

—Cindy Bryan (editor's note: Cindy first posted this on our Facebook page)

THE LEAD BANANA: A B-17 FLYING FORTRESS

by Lawrence J. Vallo

She sits on her hardstand enshrouded in fog,
Her towering tail fin almost lost in the smog,
Knock-kneed weary wings drooping,
Looking all the world like the ugly duckling.
Tin benders patch the rips in her skin,
Scars from her late trip to Berlin.
There were Frankfurt, Merzburg, Munich, and many
more,
Do you wonder that she looks weary and sore?
Yes, she does look sickly and kind'a wan
As she squats on her stand in the grey light of dawn,
But, wait till you see this old bird in the air,
She'll turn into a majestic and graceful swan.
She's carried her crew into flak filled skies
That promised deadly encounters, and someone dies,
Proudly she's burst through the treacherous shroud
Surging ever upward toward sunlit cloud.
Her place in the group formation today
Is her usual spot, number four in the low.
Some pilots have said in a halfhearted way,
"Let's leave her home, she's too old and too slow."
But a hundred missions she has under the belt,
Countless hostile blows on her skin she has felt.
Fire, flak, fighters, and bone chilling air,
None has deterred her from the enemy's lair.
Over the I.P. and holding steady,
Bombardier sighting and at the ready,
"Bombs away!" and upward she lunges,
Wheeling 'round, and then downward she plunges.
Shuddering and shaking as she makes the round,
Nothing will stop her, she's homeward bound,
All guns blazing, and you can bet all your script,
No yellow nosed demon will get her this trip.
Little brothers appear in the sky,



They waggle their wings as they zip by,
Her crew, dazed, spent and numb with cold,
Lads in their teens suddenly forty years old.
Into the pattern she'll gracefully glide,
All four turning, wings spread out in pride,
Gear down and locked, flaps coming lower,
No red flares to add to the shower.
Taxiing to her stand, her engines she'll preen,
Just look at her, she's no "hangar queen."
Clearing her stacks, she'll relax with a shudder,
Heave a sigh of relief as ground lock finds rudder.
Once more she rests, weary wings drooping,
Knock-kneed and looking like the ugly duckling.
But don't get misty eyed and put away your bandana,
The great fortress you see, is the "Lead Banana."
Yes, she's back from her war, holed like a tin can,
But mister, she's carried her load,
And brought home many a fine young man,
Who bravely went forth to KEEP THE SHOW ON THE
ROAD.

Lawrence Vallo also wrote a book, "Tales of a Pueblo Boy," [which you can still find on Amazon](#).

384th memorial, museum volunteers work to ensure the future of both tributes honoring our vets

For many visitors to the 384th Bomb Group's former Grafton Underwood home, the memorial on Geddington Road has been a frequent first stop. Often, visitors find Kevin Flecknor at the memorial. For several years, Kevin has been the primary caretaker for the memorial.

As plans for the 384th Bombardment Group Museum continue to progress, those working on the museum are working with Kevin and other memorial volunteers to ensure that both tributes to our 384th veterans receive the care that ensures their presence for future generations. To help ensure that the memorial, which is outdoors and subject to weather and changing seasons, receives additional care when needed, museum volunteers will support Kevin with additional labor when needed.

**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

Yankee Lady's last flight – for now – and 'Movie Memphis Belle' readies to fly

The ranks of flying B-17s shrunk again in 2024 (at least temporarily), as the B-17 that flies as Yankee Lady left its home of many years at the Willow Run airport at Ypsilanti, Michigan for an overseas restoration under new ownership. Yankee Lady, 44-85829 (N3193G) was the flagship of the Yankee Air Museum for nearly 40 years.

Last summer, museum leadership decided to sell the B-17 to aircraft collector Charles Somers. Museum leadership intends to



use the proceeds from the sale to improve the museum's facilities. The sale led many to fear that Yankee Lady would stop flying and instead became a static display.

Somers owns a large, airworthy aircraft collection at the McClellan Airport near Sacramento, California. Whether Yankee Lady will fly again is unknown at this point. Its next journey is disassembly and shipment overseas to New Zealand, where a restoration company renowned for its restoration of DeHavilland Mosquitos will rebuild the aircraft to wartime specifications, including working turrets and all equipment. The process is expected to take years and when complete, Yankee Lady is to be shipped back to the U.S. for reassembly and will then, presumably, join the Somers collection.

As Yankee Lady (see picture, at left) heads overseas, the B-17 known as "Movie Memphis Belle" for its role in the

most recent Memphis Belle film is expected to resume flying, probably for the 2025 season. N3703G (44-83546) is owned by the Military Aircraft Restoration Corp. and the family of the late David Tallichet.

This B-17G traveled to the Palm Springs Air Museum in November 2021 for heavy maintenance. Then came the FAA Airworthiness Directive on wing spars that added another layer of required maintenance. After three years, the B-17 is preparing to fly again. For the time being, at least, the Movie Memphis Belle is based at the museum. — Paul Furiga