



# N 96TH BOMB GROUP NEWSLETTER

November 2021

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Glenn A. Harrison

## Among The Last of the 96th Bomb Group Veterans

by Michael T. Naya, Jr.

Michael Naya, Jr. is a college student attending Kean University in New Jersey. He is currently majoring in History Education. Michael has a passion for World War II history, particularly World War II veterans. His mission is to ensure that their legacy is kept alive for future generations to come. He has written several articles for local newspapers and publications about veterans across New Jersey. Michael is currently broadening his reach of these WWII veterans to those throughout the U.S. The 96<sup>th</sup> BGA is honored to have Michael working with us to record the history of our heroic veterans.



Rocco Astrologo

Seventy-eight years ago, as the war in Europe raged, troops and manpower were needed immediately following American intervention. The first American missions flown over Western Europe were led by the 97th Bomb Group on July 4, 1942. Since the need for additional manpower was necessary, the 96th was activated in Salt Lake City, Utah on July 15, 1942. In a short time, they were moved to Boise, Idaho; Walla Walla, Washington; and later Texas. On the 4th of April 1943, components of the 96th began the northern ferry route via Presque Isle, Newfoundland, and Iceland to Prestwick, Scotland. Ground components of the 96th left Camp Kilmer, New Jersey on May 5, 1943, and arrived in Greenock, England on May 11, 1943. Within a year of its activation, the 96th Bomb Group arrived in England as a part of the 8th Air Force.

Throughout World War II, the 8th Air Force suffered losses of more than 26,000, over half of the Army Air Forces' entire deaths totalling greater than 52,000. It is unknown how many veterans of the 8th Air Force are still alive today, or for that matter of the 96th Bomb Group. The 96th Bomb Group Association has attempted to keep track of its veterans. These include, but are not limited to, Rocco Astrologo, John V. Croul, Glenn A. Harrison, William R. Meier, Nyle Smith and Seymour Topor. As we approach the 80th anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, fewer and fewer of these great veterans are alive today. These heroic airmen are vanishing from the pages of history and their ranks are thinning.

With the help of Rebecca Lutz and Susan Hinchman, four veterans -- Rocco Astrologo, Glenn A. Harrison, William R. Meier, and Nyle Smith -- were able to be interviewed. These men ranged in age from 98 to 101 years old. All four have great memories and are proud airmen. They are fine examples of how we can aspire to act as American citizens. This is Part One of a two-part series featuring the stories of these great veterans. Here they shared their stories in the hope of having their memories preserved for future generations.

*(Continued on page 5)*

It is with deep regret that we report the Final Mission of Rocco "Rocky" Astrologo on October 16, 2021 before the publication of this interview. Enjoy his thoughts as you read his comments. He will be missed.

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# President's Corner



Hello Everyone!

The Board of the 96th Bomb Group Association has chosen to hold a Virtual Meeting again this year since we knew that the attendance of 96th BGA members at the 8th AFHS reunion was going to be limited due to Covid.

We would like to invite you to attend our Virtual **Annual Meeting of the Membership** of the 96th BGA, on **Saturday, December 4th, 2021**. The meeting time is 2:00pm Eastern, 11:00am Pacific in the US. We believe this time range should also be comfortable for our members in Europe.

During the meeting, we will be voting whether to adopt the latest revision of the 96<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association Bylaws. On the facing page 3 is a copy of the Current Bylaws with the Proposed Revisions indicated. Please take a moment to review them before the meeting. Please contact either Sue Hinchman or myself if you have any questions on these items.

Below is a link that will take you to the meeting:

Mike McIlraith is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: 96th Bomb Group Association - 2021 Annual Meeting

Time: December 4, 2021 01:00 PM Central Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/91991491525?pwd=S1pocVhRZkRDM2ttVkpBUHZaMVRuZz09>

Meeting ID: 919 9149 1525

Passcode: m1Xiu4

All members are welcome, and we hope everyone will join us.

Thank You,

Mike McIlraith

President - 96th Bomb Group Association

I'd like to briefly highlight several things that are occurring.

Elsewhere in this newsletter, you will find info regarding the 96th BGA Museum in England ("Meanwhile Back at the Old Base") and news of their very successful 'Open Day' that recently occurred. It is very exciting that the Museum was able to have an Open Day this year and that it was well-attended. The great folks who keep the Museum going have already scheduled an Open Day for August 21<sup>st</sup> of 2022 - if you might have a thought of visiting England in 2022, how about considering a visit to the Norfolk area for the Open Day?

Also elsewhere in this newsletter is an article by Michael Naya. Michael is a student at Kean University. Michael has a great passion for WWII history. He has interviewed several 96th Bomb Group veterans as a part of his research. I am very excited that a member of a younger generation has interest in the veterans we all are so proud of. We look forward to reading more of his interviews!

I mention all of the items above because I am very excited about the various things happening with regard to the 96th BGA and for WWII veterans in general.

As I like to reiterate, it is up to each of us to document, record, or otherwise save the memories and memorabilia of our loved ones who served in the 96th Bomb Group. That is how we will preserve their memory and legacy, and how that legacy will be available for others to discover.

If you have a veteran with a story, or a story of a veteran or crew, how about writing an article for this amazing newsletter? Even if you only have an idea, please investigate creating a story you can share with the rest of us.

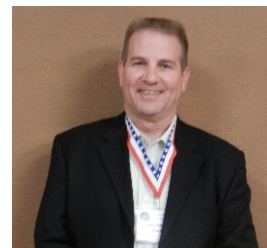
As I mention each time-if you'd really like to connect - visit or call a veteran.

Sue Hinchman has been working hard, over the past many months, to assemble a membership directory for the 96th BGA. The directory is at the printers and in the process of being printed.

Sue has asked that this message be conveyed to the 95 members who submitted data for the 2021 Membership Directory. "Thank you for participating! There were a number of members who wished to share additional information about their loved ones' service time. Due to the high cost of publishing and mailing, we were limited in space and unfortunately not able to include everything our members sent. For many of you, please consider including that information in an article for the Newsletter and you will reach a wider audience with your content. No doubt, other members would appreciate reading it and finding helpful information for their research. Copies of the **Directory** will be mailed to those included in the directory as soon as received from the printer."

Thank You for your time!

Mike McIlraith  
President - 96<sup>th</sup> BGA



**PROPOSED BYLAWS**  
**96th BOMB GROUP ASSOCIATION**

Date of Membership Approval

**ARTICLE I - ORGANIZATION**

The name of the organization shall be: 96th BOMB GROUP ASSOCIATION. The organization may at *its* pleasure, by a majority vote of the membership present at an annual Membership Meeting, change its name.

**ARTICLE II - PURPOSE**

To perpetuate the history of the 96th Bomb Group and the memory of lost comrades. To arrange annual reunions and to provide social recreational activities for its members.

**ARTICLE III - MEMBERSHIP**

Membership in this organization shall be open to all who were members of or were attached to the 96th Bomb Group, 8th Air Force, during World War II, Spouses, widows, relatives or friends of those who served in the 96th Bomb Group are also eligible for membership. Air historians and others interested in the goals of this organization may become **members**. All will receive the organization newsletter and other routine mailings. The membership year shall be the Calendar year for all members.

A membership level of Associate Member may be granted under special circumstances, e.g., for curators or administrators of WWII-related museums, or for an individual who has been helpful to the organization in a tangible and meaningful way. Associate Members shall be approved by a majority count of the Board of Directors. Associate Members are exempt from owing dues.

**ARTICLE IV - MEETINGS**

A Membership Meeting of this organization shall be held annually. Not less than a majority of members in good standing present at a membership meeting shall constitute a quorum and shall be necessary to conduct the business of this organization.

**ARTICLE V - VOTING**

**Members who have not paid their dues** for the current year may not vote. At any membership meeting, if a majority so requires, any question may be voted except those relating to changes in the bylaws.

**ARTICLE VI - ORDER OF BUSINESS**

1. Call to order
2. Reading of the minutes of the Preceding Meeting
3. Report of officers
4. Committee reports
5. Unfinished or old business
6. New business
7. Adjournment

**ARTICLE VII - BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

The business of this organization shall be managed by a Board of Directors consisting of the Elected Officers, the Editor of the newsletter, the ~~Organization Contact Person, the Group Historian, and one Representative from each major region of the United States~~, and at most three additional members in good standing.

At least one of the directors shall be a resident of the State of Illinois and a citizen of the United States to comply with the legal requirements of incorporation in the State of Illinois.

To be eligible for office, nominees for the Board of Directors must have been a member of the 96th Bomb Group Association in good standing, for **at** least one year prior to the election.

The Editor of the Newsletter, ~~the Unit Contact Person~~ and the Group Historian shall be appointed to indefinite terms by the Board of Directors by a simple majority vote. **However**, each may be replaced by the same simple majority vote.

Any vacancies in the Board of Directors between meetings may be filled by appointment of the President with the approval of the elected Officers by a mail/email vote.

The Board of Directors shall have control and management of the affairs of this organization. The Board of Directors shall commission an independent financial audit to be conducted if they deem it necessary.

**ARTICLE VIII - OFFICERS**

The elected officers shall be the President, Vice-President, Recording Secretary, and the Secretary/Treasurer. ~~The Secretary/Treasurer may also be the Unit Contact Person unless he/she desires to have the Unit Contact office be held by another person.~~

Officers shall be elected at an Annual Membership Meeting by a simple majority vote. The term of their offices shall be for three (3) years. Elected Officers may serve consecutive terms if re-elected.

• The President shall be the titular head of the organization and, subject to the control of the Board of Directors, shall exercise general supervision over the affairs of the organization with the authority to delegate such responsibilities as deemed necessary.

• The Vice-President shall exercise the duties of the President in his absence or upon the inability of the President to act, with the rights and responsibilities as if he had been duly elected President.

• The Recording Secretary shall keep the minutes and file such records as are kept or delivered into his/her possession. Copies of all minutes will be published in the group newsletter on an annual basis.

• The Secretary/Treasurer will ~~also~~ attend to regular correspondence of the organization and will execute duties incident to the Office of Secretary. Copies of all ~~minutes and~~ financial statements will be published in the group newsletter on an annual basis. The Secretary/Treasurer shall have the care and custody of all monies belonging to the organization and shall be solely responsible for such monies, or securities of the organization; ~~he/she~~ shall pay all routine bills, and make such other expenditures as are authorized by the Board of Directors; shall render at stated periods, as the Board shall determine, a written account of the finances of the organization with such reports to be physically affixed to the minutes of the Board of Directors' meetings.

**ARTICLE IX - COMMITTEES**

Committees of this organization may be established by the President. Committee members shall be appointed by the President for terms of office for a period of one year.

Standing committees may be established by the President with the approval of the Board of Directors and appointments may be for indefinite terms.

Standing committees may be changed or eliminated by the President with the approval of the Board of Directors.

**ARTICLE X - DUES**

The dues of this organization shall be **\$25.00** per year payable on the first day of January of each year. Dues may be changed by a majority vote of the members in good standing at the annual membership meeting. Life membership dues may be established by the Board of Directors.

Associate Members and veterans of World War II and their widows shall be exempt from owing dues.

**ARTICLE XI - AMENDMENTS**

Proposed changes in the bylaws must be submitted to the Board of Directors for review and approval. If approved by the Board they will then be voted on by the membership at the next annual meeting. Approval requires an affirmative vote of not less than two-thirds (2/3) of the members attending who are in good standing.

# Meanwhile Back at the Old Base



Hello and a very warm welcome to you from the 'Old Base.'

You may remember that as mentioned in the previous issue we had planned to have an Open Day at the Museum last year as we hadn't been able to have the Museum even open for the past couple of years, let alone have an opportunity for an Open Day, due to Covid 19.

Although smaller than usual, the event did take place on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August. Jill and her family did a fantastic job in giving the Museum a freshen up prior to the Open Day and moved around a few of the exhibits to create a fresh look.

It was a good turn out, although towards the end of the day we suffered with typical English weather and experienced a down pour.

It was great to have catch up with the 96<sup>th</sup> Friends and Committee members and their families on the day as mostly with lockdowns we haven't had much of a chance to meet.

We estimate there were around 150 visitors. Stands and stalls including a collection of classic cars, military and American Vehicles, a Re-enactment group dressed suitably in military uniforms which always provide an atmosphere of the history of the base, a disc jockey Andy AV8, who played all the favourite, popular war time music. Sophie Green provided a stand of unique memorabilia that was a testimony of American women's involvement in WWII.



There was various food and drink stands on offer. Thankfully our historian Geoff Ward was on hand during the day to answer questions and show some original film footage.

The raffle stand raised just over £300, and we would like to thank and mention the prizes that had been kindly donated by local businesses.

These included Snetterton Racetrack, The White Lodge Pub, Breckland Lodge, The Angel Pub, Old English Whisky company, Battle Stations, Elm Tree Beers, Penny Lindop cards, Starbucks, and Oak Villa restaurant.



Left to right Steve Wills, 96<sup>th</sup> Committee member, Randy de Mars visitor Historian, Geoff Ward and Randy's friend, Tim Harvey.

One of the visitors who had made a tremendous effort to be here for the Open Day was Randy de Mars who had travelled from Washington in USA in memory of his father Lt Col Raoul A. de Mars ,who was stationed here as part of the 339<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron and whose story is quite amazing as he was involved with many missions and particularly the one on 11 April 1944 from Snetterton to Poznan in Poland. This has been documented in a previous issue of the Newsletter. (*August 2018 Issue NO.71*)

It was lovely to meet Randy and while he was here, he was shown around the other parts of the old base including the beautiful Silver Dream Memorial by his friend Tim Harvey, from nearby Attleborough , who not only chauffeured him around and pointed out various buildings that are still standing but organised an aerial view, by arranging for him to fly over the old base in a light aircraft so he could get an idea of what his dad had experienced when he had flown from here.

Following on from this successful day we are planning another Open Day for next year which will be the 21 st August 2022 and we hope this will be bigger and better than ever.

As regards the overall housekeeping at the Museum, at some point the main doors of the Museum will need to be replaced and a new security alarm system fitted.

Jill and family have been busy removing the ivy that has been trying to climb over the museum at the back, Now the worst of the Pandemic is behind us, we can welcome visitors once again.

Rebecca has some more name plates winging their way over here and when they arrive they will be placed with the others on the railings around the Sliver Dream Memorial.

Steven has maintained the Stars and Stripes and Union flags throughout the year at the memorial site and he will remove them after Thanksgiving Day.

As we all look forward to Christmas over here I would like to wish you all a Happy Christmas and a safe and healthy New Year.



Jean Wills

Hope to see some of you next year  
Keep safe and God Bless  
Jean

# Memorial Plaques for Veterans at the Silver Dream *Continues*

An update on the plaques for the Silver Dream. So far, we have had 192 plaques made and installed or in the process of being installed.

We did have a scare with a box of 46 I mailed to England in May through regular Post Office mail. I was able to track the box all through the US before it arrived in England. We did not know which customs depot the box went to, and Geoff Ward was never notified so he could not go and pick it up. Eventually, it was returned back to the US, where again, I could track its progress around the country before it was returned to me after a six week journey. Geoff and I had been on pins and needles hoping it would be safely returned. The box did look like it had been on quite a journey.

I now had 20 more plaques to add to the box and the Board decided, even though it was more expensive, it would be safer to send this box with an international shipper. I looked at several options and we decided to use DHL. I shipped the box to Geoff, and it was safely delivered in one week.

Unlike the US, when international goods are received in the UK, a Custom's Duty and V.A.T. is added to the expense, which has to be paid before the goods are delivered. Therefore as a result of the added expense of the international shipper, which we have more confidence in, and the added Custom's Duty and V.A.T., the price of the plaques has been increased to \$25 each, which is still reasonable. Fortunately, the cost of production of the plaques has not increased.



The Silver Dream", with a section of the fence and completed plaques.

We have been delighted with the response regarding plaques and were very pleased that there were several Ground Crew and support staff included in this last batch.

The plaques are 4x6 inches and engraved with name, position, squadron, and if the Veteran was a Prisoner of War or Killed in Action. The plaques will be anodized aluminum with the background in black with white engraving and will be weatherproof since they will obviously be outside. Below are three samples of how plaques will be laid out.

Please complete one order form below for each plaque which will cost \$25.00 including shipping cost and include your personal information so you may be contacted with any questions about your order.

If you have any questions, please contact Rebecca Lutz at [rlutz4000@gmail.com](mailto:rlutz4000@gmail.com) or call 512-238-8581.

**CPT. THOMAS H. BARTON**  
**PILOT**  
**339TH SQUADRON**

**2ND LT. GLENN A HARRISON**  
**CO-PILOT**  
**339TH SQUADRON**  
**POW - JUNE 20, 1944**

**S/SGT. CHARLES P. WILDER**  
**WAIST GUNNER**  
**337TH SQUADRON**  
**KIA - DECEMBER 16, 1943**

## Veteran's Information for the Silver Dream Plaques

Please print clearly and legibly

Rank and Name of Veteran: \_\_\_\_\_

*(Rank while at Snetterton)*

Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Squadron: \_\_\_\_\_

POW----Date: \_\_\_\_\_

or

KIA ----Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to Veteran: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail this form with a check for \$25.00 payable to the **96th Bomb Group Association** at the address below:  
 Rebecca Lutz, 2104 Saint Andrews Drive, Round Rock, Texas 78664

# Among The Last of the 96th Bomb Group Veterans

by Michael T. Naya, Jr.

## First Lieutenant Glenn A. Harrison, Co-Pilot, age 101

*"My name is Glenn Alton Harrison, and I was born in Guymon, Oklahoma on March 11, 1920. The depression hit but it wasn't the depression as much as it was the drought from the Dust Bowl that affected us. It didn't rain for six or seven years, and it hit us very, very hard. The drought really took effect when I was about twelve and when I graduated from high school in 1938 money was all dried up. My father had some cattle on his land, and he had to sell all of them... it was an awfully terrible time for all of the farmers. I went to college at Oklahoma A&M, now Oklahoma State University. The draft started in 1941 when I was twenty-one. I decided not to go back to school, and instead enlisted in the Army Air Corps.*

*I was sent out to Long Island at the Republic Plant where they had just started to manufacture the P-47. I was there for three to four weeks before I was transferred to Charlotte, NC and assigned to a new group. I showed them my orders that I was going to flight training, so they had me reassigned to Santa Maria, California for primary flight training. I took all the flight tests and learned to fly the PT-17 Stearman. After I graduated, I was transferred to Bakersfield, CA for basic training. We flew Basic Trainer seventeens. From there I was sent to Yuma Army Airfield in Arizona for advanced training. We flew AT-7's and I can't think of the other one offhand. I graduated August 29, 1943, as a Second Lieutenant with the Army Air Corps, and my graduation class was called 43-G. I went to Minter Field for B-25 training.*



*I flew on D-Day morning. Nothing happened but all the planes were circling in the air. Two or three went together and after D-Day I'll jump to the last mission when we were shot down. Our last mission was deep into Germany, not too far from Berlin. We were hit by fighters and flak right over the target. I don't know what hit us more, but I know we were hit by one fighter plane and flak. I looked out on the right side and the right wing was just covered in flames.*

*You always knew that in just a few seconds the plane would blow up. We started bailing out and the engineer right behind us got out -- I saw him leave the plane. We went to a hatch on the lower side of the plane. Then I went out and the pilot was right behind me. I hit the ground pretty hard, but I was all right.*

*These men -- German civilians, six or seven older men -- ran out. They must have been WWI veterans and I threw my arms up yelling "American soldier." I went with them, and I saw one of the civilians turn around and look at somebody and there were two German soldiers walking toward us. I threw my arms up and started walking to those two soldiers. After being captured we ended up over in Poland at a place called Stalag Luft III. We were there throughout a terrible winter until January 17, 1945. We walked four or five straight days in thirty-below-zero weather. We were taken to Stalag 7-A for three months. They had about 125,000 prisoners in that camp. We slept on the floor there and had very little to eat and it was crowded. We got a little watery soup and bread. We were liberated on the 29th of April by the 14th Armored Division under General Patton.*

*We were placed in a hospital for eight to ten days. I was down to 122 pounds. After the hospital they put us in a hotel, then boarded a ship leaving Southampton. We had good food all the way across, and we landed back in New York at Camp Shanks and were there for two to three days. We went by train to Ohio and on to St. Louis. From Fort Smith I caught a bus to Tulsa, Oklahoma. That was about my experience in World War II. At the end of the war, I was a First Lieutenant, and I couldn't make it in combat since I was a prisoner for almost eleven months -- no promotions."*



**First Lieutenant Rocco Astrologo, Bombardier, age 100**

*"My name is Rocco M. Astrologo, and I was born in Italy on August 15, 1921. My father came to the U.S. around the time I was born. He took out his citizenship papers and became a citizen before he called for my mother and me to come to the U.S. in 1927. I wanted to become a pilot and was told I needed two years of college-level science and math courses, which I was able to take in high school. I enlisted in the service in 1940 and passed the exam for cadet training easily. I was an enlisted man for almost a year waiting to go to pilot training. In December 1941 we went down to Maxwell Field, Alabama with all the cadets.*



*I complained quite a bit about wanting to become a pilot, but it didn't do me any good. I went to Bombardier training and graduated in July 1942. After graduation I was sent to Dry Lake to the 305th Bomb Group and Colonel LeMay. Since those trainees were down there before me, they were ready to go overseas. But I didn't have enough training. So, I was transferred to the mortar pool for another assignment, and I joined the 96th Bomb Group in Walla Walla, Washington. We went through three months of training in Walla Walla; and later in Texas, Utah, and South Dakota. We picked up our plane in Kansas in April 1943.*

*We thought we were going to be sent to the Pacific, but instead at the last minute they shipped us to England where we joined the 8th Air Force in April 1943. In combat the fighters usually made head-on attacks. The nose people would get hit pretty hard.... we lost a lot of planes. But I was pretty lucky -- I only got a little scratch.--think I got wounded around July or early August 1943. I had a piece of shrapnel hit me. I was*

*wearing the flight cap and I had a second lieutenant's bar pinned on it. The shrapnel hit the Lt's bar, hit that off my head and gave me a scratch on top of my head. If it was a little higher, I would have been dead, so I was pretty lucky. We had quite a few wounded, many of whom I don't know what happened to them afterward.*

*I was sent to North Africa, and we led the group down there. One wing went to Regensburg, Germany, and Swineford, but we went to Africa on August 17, 1943. The group headed to Swineford got a late takeoff due to weather conditions and lost sixty B-17's and 600 men. We were in North Africa for one week. On the way back we hit Bordeaux, France before going back over the sea to England. That was a twelve-hour mission, and some men were low on fuel and had to ditch into the sea. We didn't lose a plane; we were damaged but never lost a plane.*

*I was in Snetterton from middle April to September 7, 1943. After I completed my 25 missions, I left England the 24th of September and from there I went through pilot training. I believe it was May 1945 when I completed my training. At the time I was flying bombardiers down in Texas and I was just ready to transition to B-17's when the war ended. So, I never got to fly a B-17. I was training on AT-11's, a Beech twin engine aircraft. The pilot, instructor, and others would practice dropping bombs. The B-45 is the same plane. I was discharged in January 1947 at the rank of Captain. Looking back on it, the only way I know how to describe the European theater was that I was lucky."*



Rocky with his flying B-17 model that he hopes to donate to the Armaments Museum of the 96th at Eglin Air force Base in Florida.

These last living airmen of the Second World War are our last first-hand accounts to the war in Europe. They came from humble backgrounds, were trained, and sent off to war as young men. Despite facing almost certain death they distinguished themselves in combat making a name for themselves and no matter their capacity came home as heroes. These are your fathers, your grandfathers, and great-grandfathers. Ultimately, they are my heroes and I hope yours as well.

# A Chat From Your Chaplain

## A Special Memorial Day Pilgrimage



Stan Hand and his son Joshua kneel for moment of prayer

Memorial Day 2021 was a time to remember and reflect on the sacrifices paid for our freedom! It was also a time to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Mighty 8th Museum. I was privileged to represent the 96th, pray and take pictures. You would be proud to see our area of 100 Flags. The flags that were donated by our group provided a solemn visual as part of those 26,000 who made the ultimate sacrifice.




Memorial Day 2021  
A Personal Remembrance  
The National Museum of the Mighty  
Eighth Air Force

May 31, 2021  
Pooler, GA




My son Joshua and I found our 96th Bomb Group section and offered a salute and a prayer to all those who have and who continue to serve in our military. As seen in the pictures, the display of flags throughout the grounds brought us a breathtaking pause to realize the enormity of the cost of American life. The sacrifice given to keep us free will never be forgotten!



Stan Hand as our 96th Bomb Group Chaplain salutes the Flag display

The trip to Pooler was so worthwhile. The museum provided poppies as a welcoming gesture. The flag displays and volunteers assembled provided helpful explanations, which made for a very informative and uplifting day. A special Memorial Day ceremony was held at 1 o'clock and was complete with dignitaries, presentation of the flags, special music and concluded with taps. The CEO of the museum, Scott Loehr gave a stirring address. He was taking some visitors through the museum and one of them said this is a museum of War. He replied that this was a museum of Liberation, Freedom and Sacrifice. Thank you, Scott, for your insightful perspective.

*Stan as our Chaplain will try to write a personal letter on behalf of the 96th Bomb Group to the family of all our members who have flown their **Final Mission**. You can help him and the 96th Bomb Group by letting him know in a timely manner of a member's passing and the address to which he might send the letter.*

Address your correspondence for our Chaplain to:

Dr. Stanley Hand  
1016 Ridgecrest Road  
Orlando, FL 32806

Mobile: (321)-662-3305

E-mail: [stanhand306@gmail.com](mailto:stanhand306@gmail.com)



# Rum Boogie Crew

## Sgt. George T. Gant, Waist Gunner

By Vicki Ekmark

George Gant was born on November 17, 1922, in Shelbyville, Tennessee.

At age 15 George together with his parents William and Ethel and two older brothers Paul and Winston moved to Nashville, where he attended West End High School. After graduation he enlisted on January 6, 1942, in the Air Corps at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia. He received his Training as an aerial gunner at the Las Vegas Nevada, Gunnery School, where he won his wings and was latter stationed at Pocatello, Idaho, and Salt Lake City, Utah. He was deployed overseas in April, 1943 with the original contingent of the 96th Bomb Group as a member of the Rum Boogie Crew in the 337th Squadron.



The entire crew of the “Rum Boogie” completed 25 missions against Nazi targets with only three men injured. All three returned to combat after short periods of convalescence.

In a Nashville newspaper reporting on the 21-year old T. Sgt. George T. Gant receiving the Distinguished Flying Cross for completing 25 missions over occupied Europe, it stated that:

“According to Sergeant Gant, his roughest trip was over France where his bomber was badly shot up. The hydraulic system, radio, oxygen, and several control cables were knocked out. The number one engine was also shot out, and the crew was forced to dump ammunition and everything else “not nailed down” to lighten the ship and get it home.” Having completed his 25 missions, Gant continued as gunner instructor in an Air Forces school in England,

After the war, George went to college, obtaining a degree from Peabody College in Nashville. He then worked for Aladdin Industries in Nashville, a company still in business today.

Later, he went back into the Air Force as part of the Army Occupation of Japan. His wife, Maydie Grace and young son, George Jr., stayed in the United States until February 11, 1953, when they set sail from Seattle, Washington on the USNS Simon B Buckner, bound for

Yokohama. Once in Japan, identical twins were born in the Tokyo General Hospital.

While serving in Japan, Lt. Gant received the Commendation Ribbon.



After going to Japan, the family traveled around to several different air force bases. Mr. Gant spent 30 years in the military defending our country and retired a Lt. Colonel. After his military career, he continued his service to his country by working for the State of Tennessee and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

George's wife, Maydie Grace died on March 27, 2002, at the age of 78. George died just three months later on June 6, 2002. George's father-in-law, Fred McGlohn, who was a B17 mechanic during the war, died within two days of George. The Greatest Generation indeed.



Rear L/R Sgt. George T. Gant, Gunner, Sgt. Richard J. Postier, Radio Operator and Waist, Sgt. Charles F. Goyette, Assistant Radio Operator and Gunner, Sgt. Ellis P. Savoie, Engineer and Gunner, Sgt. George P. Wyherek, Ball Turret Gunner. Front L/R Lieutenant Lloyd J. Fickler, Co-Pilot, 2nd Lt. Harry J. Miller, Navigator, 1st Lt. James H. Sanders, Pilot, Sgt. Alvin Neff, Tail Gunner, Not pictured the photographer 2nd Lt. William H. Spencer, Bombardier Snetterton Heath England 1943

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# “They Didn't Come Back!!”

(Part 2)

By Bruce Weaver II

*The search for the wartime fate and service of our author's relative continues*

On their seventeenth mission, Jim McLean's crew had been airborne for three hours. Their plane, named “Short Stride,” was the lead aircraft of group B's low position of seven B-17's flying in tight “Combat Formation” that morning as part of 96th Bombardment Group. Ten minutes before the run began, the 96th turned east towards Munster, Germany, the intended target. Radioman Lyall Taubert then fastened one side of his chest parachute. He next reached for the clip to attach the other side of his chute when a flash of intuition nudged him to look out his radio hatch.

Suddenly, he saw an out of control B-17 come crashing down from above, its right propeller violently slicing Short Stride's fuselage in two just behind the waist gunner windows. With its tail now severed, Mr. Taubert's B-17 would soon tumble to earth in a death spiral. A moment's hesitation and he would likely have been pinned down by the powerful centrifugal force of the plane's imminent uncontrolled descent. Lyall instinctively bailed out and pulled his ripcord, tenuously being held by the lone clip he had just fastened.

As his chest chute opened, the twenty-three year old helplessly watched a B-17 fall through the overcast below and disappear from view. It didn't appear to have its tail so it was likely Short Stride that he saw. He looked at his watch. It was ten minutes after 10:00 AM. The date was January 4, 1944.

Short Stride Crew



Back Row L/R: Lyall Taubert Radio Operator, John Young Tail Gunner, David Miller Waist Gunner, Richard Winn Engineer, Jerry Waldron Waist Gunner, "Red" Marling Ball Turret. Front L/R: John McGee Bombardier, Harold Zlotnik Co-Pilot, James McMcLean Pilot, John Gray Navigator. "Red" Marling was not on-board when the plane went down. He was injured on a previous mission and Thomas Keefe substituted for him.

His precarious descent lasted twenty minutes. The radioman rehearsed the horror that had just transpired, concluding that the errant B-17 had been “hit by flak and thrown out of control,” then plunged into Short Stride. He landed in the backyard of the police station in Lingen, Germany and was quickly apprehended. Two other crew members were rounded up by the next day. The three flyers, their crew's lone survivors, sat out the rest of the war together as prisoners of Stalag Luft 17-B until liberated in May 1945.

Onboard the wayward B-17 which collided into Short Stride that fateful morning was Kermit Lansrud, crew chief, top turret gunner and engineer. Kermit's grandparents had emigrated from Vestre Slidre, Valdres, ninety years earlier. His aircraft that day, “Skin and Bones,” was also flying in the B formation but in position six of seven B-17's in the “Lead” group. Lyall indicated, “Your uncle's plane flew to the left of us and back, just a little above us in a rather tight formation.” There were no survivors from Skin and Bones.

Skin and Bones Crew



Front, L-R: Pilot George L. Davis, Co-Pilot Lester L. Guderian, Navigator William J McKelvey (taken off crew), Bombardier Hamlin P. Lowery; Back, L-R: Engineer/Top Turret Kermit O. Lansrud, Radio man Al Salvagna, Asst. Armorer/Tail Gunner Edward A. Muszynski, Asst. Engineer/Waist Gunner James Golden, Asst. Radio Man/Waist Gunner Nicolas M. Tolian. Ball Turret Armorer John W. Shue in the hospital when this picture taken. Navigator Julius O. Flusche assigned to the crew in England.

Through an address listing within the 96th Bomb Group I had learned of Mr. Taubert's whereabouts and contacted him by mail. He responded on January 18, 1991, revealing in detail, as summarized above, the collision he had experienced firsthand from the vantage point of being in the other aircraft struck out of the sky that dreadful morning. It was a moving and graphic eyewitness account I could only have dreamed recovering. Lyall had graciously penned his retrospective for me forty-seven years after that tragic event, almost to the day. In irony, he pointed out that the ball turret gunner for Short Stride was in the hospital on January 4. Mr. Taubert passed away in 2007.

In the fall of 1990, the movie, "Memphis Belle" was released to theaters. Starring Matthew Modine, Sean Astin, John Lithgow and Harry Connick, Jr., this fictionalized account focused on the final flight of the first B-17 to complete twenty-five bombing missions. We watched it with great interest. I asked Lyall Taubert for his impressions. He gave it high marks as being, "Very authentic with only a little coloring up."

While the Belle's "last flight" was a conflation of what occurred across many varied missions, it appears representational of what transpired during the bombing runs. One hour and sixteen minutes into that movie, a Messerschmitt 109 fighter aircraft slices through the waist gunner portion of a B-17 fuselage, very similar to what happened to Short Stride (see DVD Scene 25: Unexpected hit). Over Columbus Day weekend in 1991, the main plane for this film stopped in Greensboro. My son and I jumped at the opportunity to walk through this B-17 and photograph it from both inside and outside.

Several letters received from Kermit while based in England have survived in the family. On November 13, 1943 he commented, "I like the country altho(ugh) it seems sort of old fashioned to me. The camp is good and so is the food." His perception on the antiquated ways of the English was one held by many Yanks arriving in England. On December 21 he reported on having received a pass and heading south: "I visited London a few days. (I have) seen most of the old buildings and landmarks. It seems a shame such buildings should be blown to bits. I also saw the Tower of London. I remember you told me something about that....got a raise—Tech Sgt. The reference was to his father having briefly touring those historic sites when he was with the 187th Aero Squadron in 1918.

Concerning the missions, he was nonspecific under the watchful eyes and of censors. Kermit made three brief comments: On December 21 he wrote, "I can't tell you how many missions I've made but I have made some. They're plenty exciting!!" Six days later he mentioned, "Missions aren't too bad. (They are) plenty exciting at times, too." In his final communication on the 29th he summed it up as, "Missions are O.K. Kinda exciting tho(ugh)."

In March 1991, I returned to the National Archive branch in Suitland. This research foray into Record Group 18 proved more effective. One of the surprises was to find the existence of "Loading Lists." These documents informed as to which crew members were aboard a given flight on a respective date, crew positions and the tail number of the assigned aircraft of the day. Thus, I could verify that my uncle had flown on six bombing missions divided among three different B-17 aircraft during his short tenure at Snetterton Heath: three times on 42-5953, also known as "Skin and

Bones;" twice on 42-3442 ("Hell's Chariot") and once on 42-30810. On that fatal day of January 4, 1944 all three of these aircraft were utilized by the 96th during that mission to Munster.

More surprises awaited: The first five missions were not directed by George Davis, the original pilot for Kermit's crew! He inexplicably served instead as co-pilot for these five. In the pilot's seat was a James W. Dunlap. Moreover, I confirmed that that crew's trained co-pilot, Lester L. Guderian, accompanied other crews as co-pilot in their respective B-17's during this apparent "break-in" period. Lester rejoined his original crew for its sixth mission, that of January 4. George Davis resumed as pilot.

The missions flown by the Davis crew that December were as follows: December 13, 1943 to Kiel, Germany; the 16th to Bremen, Germany; Mission 3 was to Munster on December 22. The fourth sortie on the 30th was to Ludwigshaven, Germany while the final mission of the year was on New Year's Eve to Paris. Returning crews that day reported extended views of the Paris skyline including seeing notable historical landmarks such as the Eiffel Tower, the Arc de Triomphe and the famed Avenue des Champs-Élysées.

As Ed Muszynski, the original tail gunner had indicated, the Loading Lists show he flew on the first three flights. On the 22nd of December, Ed apparently succumbed to a bad case of frostbite and did not return with the Davis crew. His place on the remaining three missions was taken by Edward O. Matthews, W. H. Brower and Alexander Korolchuck, respectively. Since my second visit, Record Group 92 has been relocated from Suitland to the National Archives facility in College Park, Maryland.

In July 1992, we planned to visit Mr. Muszynski at his home near Chicago on the return leg of a cross country family vacation that included the Black Hills, the Nordic Fest and a Lansrud family reunion in Decorah. While in Decorah we visited my late grandfather's only two surviving cousins, Esther Hegg and Signe Ruen. Signe presented me with a Norwegian Bible (dated 1848) that had belonged to my great grandmother, Ambjør Olsdatter Røvang Lansrud who emigrated from Vestre Slidre in 1852.

Ed Muszynski was pleased to meet us. He sat down at the table and read to us excerpts from his wartime diary that someone had saved for him and returned after the war. The frostbitten tail gunner expressed great remorse in his journal entries following the loss of his crew, commiserating that he had not gone down with his crew. Even as we sat at the dinner table nearly half a century on, it appeared evident that he still seemed burdened by latent survivor's guilt.

I reassured Ed that his surviving and being able to fill in some vital gaps in Kermit's wartime experiences was healing to his siblings and other relatives. I expressed thankfulness that his knowledge of time together with Kermit from long ago gave our surviving family members some closure. Ed was very appreciative that I'd provided him with an enlarged color copy of Kermit's grave marker from Custer National Battlefield. He reported struggling with recurrent pain in his feet which he attributed to the severe case of frostbite he succumbed to in December 1943. Ed passed away in 1999.

My corporate business travel exploded through the decade of the 1990's as I traveled across eight to ten states routinely and destinations across the country as needed. That placed family history on the back burner for the most part. Yet, from time to time, there would be opportunity to add to the historical storyline. The February 1993 issue of the 96th Bomb Group Newsletter printed a letter from Major Karl Flusche requesting information about his cousin Julius Flusche, navigator with the Davis crew. I contacted Major Flusche, sharing what I had found to date including the loading lists discovered at the National Archives.

At the time, Karl was based in the Washington, D.C. area and working for an investigative unit of The US Air Force. Thus he had access to certain files like "Report of Burial" records and "Area Investigations" of downed aircraft in WWII. He forwarded to me what he had uncovered about Julius and other Davis crew members from these specific records.

Aircraft 42-5953 (Skin and Bones) had reportedly crashed with one bomb still onboard. The four-engine plane had exploded and there was a fire onboard. German soldiers had removed the remains of five from the wreckage and buried them in separate graves (no casket) in a Catholic cemetery in Grand Hesepe on January 11. The German military hauled away the plane's rubble and confiscated the ID tags for four of the bodies. Those identified were Julius Flusche (the navigator), Lester L. Guderian (co-pilot), Nicholas M. Golden and James W. Tolian (both waist gunners). The fifth was nameless. Who was it? The radio man or tail

gunner? The bombardier or pilot? The ball turret gunner? Or, more of a personal mystery, where was Kermit? What happened to him?

The 96th Bomb Group Association published a small pamphlet in July 1983 called, "Memorial to Our

Fallen Comrades." It listed men from the 96th who were killed in action or died during wartime and were buried in several American Military Cemeteries in Europe. The listing for the 338th Squadron of the 96th Bomb Group for the American Military Cemetery in Ardennes, Belgium reveals the names of four Davis crew members. They are George L. Davis (pilot), Julius O. Flusche (navigator), Lester L. Guderian (co pilot) and Alexander Korolchuk (tail gunner). Kermit O. Lansrud was buried at this same cemetery until his remains were relocated to Custer National Cemetery in Montana at his parents' request. This would suggest that remains for these individuals were



probably ultimately confirmed and identified.

In the spring of 2000, I flew to London to meet my son who was taking French studies at the University of Renne at the time, northwest of Paris. Among my personal goals for the week long trip was visiting the site of Snetterton Heath where my uncle was briefly stationed and meeting Geoff Ward, the 96th Bomb Group Association's historian. In a series of transatlantic telephone conversations with Mr. Ward we arranged schedules. He volunteered to pick us up at the train station in Diss, Norfolk, East Anglia and take us for a thumbnail tour of the former site of that airfield and WWII base.

Geoff Ward was a wide-eyed youth when the American fliers first came to his area in 1943. Like many his age, he was taken by the airmen, the ambiance of base activity and the roar of B-17's flying in and out of Snetterton. He and his family along with local schoolchildren have made it a labor of love to keep the spirit of Snetterton alive by setting up and maintaining a small museum of related artifacts and publications on the grounds of Eccles School. Geoff patiently answers many questions from the curious. He takes the veterans, their families and loved ones for strolls onto the hallowed ground of an era long vanished while gracefully declining compensation for his time.

The former Snetterton Heath airfield is now part racetrack with parking lot and part farmland. Portions of the original runway are incorporated into the racetrack where Formula Two and Three cars or even motorcycles often zoom. Eccles school maintains the museum within one of the few fully intact surviving structures, the former base hospital and temporary morgue. Other outbuildings have been put to various industrial uses.

Our tour began at the 14th century chapel of St. Andrews Church in Quidenham where a pair of stained glass windows honoring the fliers of the 96th was dedicated as the first World War II memorial in England. Today, a replica of these windows is in the "Chapel of the Fallen Eagles" at the Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum in Savannah, Georgia. As the men were returning home from their missions, when they spotted the steeple of St. Andrews, they felt assured they were going to make it safely back home.

Geoff next took us to the site where the 338th Squadron barracks had once stood. Today there are weeds, trees and scrub brush. I walked along part of the same road my uncle had taken, following a gentle incline from the barracks area to the mess hall and other places on base. Farmer's fields covered the areas where the 338th kept its aircraft. He showed us the ruins of the base headquarters, overtaken by trees, bats and scrub brush. We drove along one of the original runways and stopped to watch two racecars practicing laps on another former runway. A widened circlet of concrete off to one side was the remnant of a hardstand formerly used by the 413th Squadron, where a B-17 was parked, serviced and secured as well as turned around, awaiting its next chance to ascend airborne. There were once fifty such "frying pan" shaped hardstands at Snetterton.

Following lunch at a local pub that has been a local establishment for over 150 years we visited the museum that was formerly the hospital for the base.

That November and December, business took me to Maxwell Air Force Base just north of Montgomery, Alabama. The site also houses the Air Force Historical Research Agency. On both of these occasions I reserved a three hour block of time at the end of one day to research their archives for records on the 96th Bomb Group. These records were heavily consulted for Roger Freeman's definitive *Mighty Eighth War Diary*.

Among items I found and photocopied were 25 Mission Club, promotion to Tech Sgt.

When the February 2001 issue of the *96th Bomb Group Newsletter* arrived at the end of that month I was elated to find a "New Member" listing for James Dunlap, who flew the first five missions as pilot for the

Davis crew. I wrote him a letter, enclosing copies of a set of five loading lists showing him as pilot of the Davis crew in late 1943 and a picture of the Davis crew that Ed Muszynski had shared with me. Additionally, I included a copy announcing his attainment in the "25 Mission Club" from the Maxwell AFB archives obtained just three months earlier. Jim resided in California.

It didn't take long for Mr. Dunlap to respond. On March 9 the phone rang. As I answered it, the voice on the other end responded, "This is Jim Dunlap. Where did you get your information?" He said, "It was quite a shock to receive (the material I had sent)." As we spoke further, Jim was already considering flying east and visiting the National Archives to uncover similar information documenting his twenty earlier flights.

Jim confirmed that it was policy to place a new crew with a seasoned pilot for the first five bombing missions. Naturally, the Davis bunch was put out about this rule. Jim elaborated, "It was a disappointment. They wanted to fly with the (entire) crew. They weren't too fond of me. I never really got to know them. They went back to their own." He reported, "They were a 'Gung Ho' crew" so determined to "Shoot down (enemy) airplanes that they'd "Start shooting," as soon as they saw one. He reminded them to watch for the tracer, "Every fifth bullet," and "Wait until they were close enough to hit." Moreover, he added that they were so enthusiastic after a raid, "They could continue to do another raid."

Confirming what I had read, Mr. Dunlap indicated the engineer, "Stood up for the rest of the flight...(Right behind the pilot) and never left the pilot" unless manning the top turret or addressing a mechanical failure. This may have been as long as, "Eight hours (as it took) two, three, four hours to get formed after take off." He also said the Davis crew didn't wear their parachutes. They instead put them on the floor beside them as these items were bulky and restricted movement in that small cramped interior.

Jim reported that one of the crew members had been in the hospital on the day the Davis crew went down and looked up Dunlap to tell him the news. We now know that person was Ed Muszynski. He said, "The whole group goes down to the airfield," and was especially distressed when crews, "Hadn't returned." This practice was called, "Sweating out the mission" and was depicted in the *Memphis Belle* movie. Having earned his 25 Mission Club status (Jim called it by its more colorful term expressed by many of those who attained it, "The Lucky B\*\*\*\*\*d Club). "(Jim) was gone from the base the next morning," (on January 5, 1944) for his earned return home.

Before concluding our telephone conversation, the veteran pilot turned poignant. He bristled at the characterization that the fatal collision was caused by being blinded in a run toward the sun. It was inconsistent with what he knew from flying five bombing missions with that crew. Jim then paused in reflection. "I have often wondered what happened to that crew. Was that the case?" He clearly wasn't buying that theory.

Three years later came the details that appeared to finally settle the cause of the collision to my satisfaction. If there is ever a reason to be tenacious and keep subscribing to a publication like the 96th Bomb Group Newsletter or Budstikken it is for instances such as this. The February 2004 issue of the 96th Bomb Group Newsletter carried an article humbly titled, "The Air War as Seen through One Waist Gunner's Eyes." It was an edited transcription of the wartime diary of waist gunner George Meshko by Charles McGlynn. George completed twenty-five missions with the 339th Squadron of the 96th Bomb Group on March 6, 1944. He was still active with the 96th BG Association as a board member. When I opened this issue and began to read his account of the mission to Munster on January 4, 1944, his twelfth, I was absolutely floored. Here is his account:

"The New Year started with a diversionary mission to Munster, Ger. We were to draw the enemy fighters away from the main force going to Frankfurt. I saw two B-17 aircraft collide off of our right wing. One had its wing sheared off resulting in a violent spin with no visible survivors. The other had its tail section sheared off. Equipment and two crewmembers came tumbling out of the whole. One crewmember had a chute on and bailed successfully. The other had no chute and perished along with the other eight members of the crew who were trapped in the plane. We survived the mission without damage; however, the collision and resulting losses are hard to forget and I am quite jittery just thinking about it. Following the mission I went on a pass to London. On my return to base I found out that several crewmembers that lived in my barracks were missing since a mission on 5 January. The barracks is really empty now."

There can be no doubt Mr. Meshko was describing the collision of Skin and Bones with Short Stride as they were the 96th Bomb Group's lone casualties for this particular mission. It should lay to rest the official surmising that the collision was the result of being blinded by the sun. Moreover, from his specific description it is likely that Skin and Bones was out of control as a consequence of being hit either by flak or precise rocket fire and its wing sheared off. The latter

seems more probable, given that this aircraft was at the back of the formation, making it an easy target for being shot at from behind and that the force of the hit spun the one winged airplane fuselage forward to hit another aircraft flying at the lead position in the tight formation of the day (George agrees with this). Turning into the sun does not sever wings of aircraft, Icarus notwithstanding.

After rereading this riveting account I rang Mr. Meshko, who resides in the Denver area. We had an extended phone conversation and a second one which also lasted for more than an hour. More recently, I rang him yet again to fact check my details. George was initially reticent to recall further particulars of this collision beyond what was written in his diary. However, later on he warmed to the dialog and began to remember additional specific detail not reported in his initial entries. I have pieced together his comments from my notes. The words and phrasing are all his. My additions for clarification are placed in parenthesis:

"I was only eighteen and wrote it down exactly as I saw it, as soon as I could after debriefing at the 'Hot Desk.' It happened pretty fast. The plane (with the wing sheared off) came right over the top of us. That's how close it was. It was pretty close. (Short Stride was severed) just about ahead of the waist gunner door. The nose went right up, rotated straight up--close to vertical. His angle went straight up. (With its tail detached) the pilot (Jim McLean) turned his head and was sitting there looking at me. It was like the pilot was laying on his back, looking at me, as if nothing happened.

"Equipment and ammunition was tumbling out of the back end. Two guys fell out. One had no (parachute) pack with him, just a harness. We were at about 24,000 feet and flying 150 miles per hour. (The plane) stopped going forwards. It just stopped. We passed it. The last I saw it, the nose was still vertical. I didn't follow the plane with its wing sheared off. It moved through the formation so quickly. A lot of things I forgot (about the missions) but this stuck in my head. It happened so close. It remained in my memory. I don't think the sun had anything to do with it."

"War is such a tragic thing. I didn't want nothing (more) to do with it. There was so much carnage. I quit taking the machine gun to bed with me. I spent fifty years forgetting. I put (my diary) in the closet for fifty years and forgot about it until someone came up to me at the Tulsa Reunion and asked about the Amsler crew. He said, 'I can't find (anyone from) Amsler's crew.'"

"I was a member of Amsler's crew. He was searching for information about his missing (older) brother. Chuck had found that four crews reported seeing his brother's plane go down. One crew was gone,

they went down. Mr. McGlynn would contact the pilots of the other crews, make appointments to meet and they would have a heart attack and die before he got to see them. I was the first person he met who he could talk to about seeing it. That's how my diary came to be published in the *96th Bomb Group Newsletter*. He convinced me to have it published."

"I was pretty successful forgetting this stuff. Now people like you are asking questions. I am being debriefed. Now my guard is down. It doesn't bother me anymore to talk about it. Everybody was mixed up in it: you had a brother, an uncle, a cousin; someone else in your family was touched by it. We were all in it together, not like now."

While still eighteen years of age, Mr. Meshko completed his 25th mission on March 6, 1944--over Berlin. "Fighters were all over the place. Dogfights were all over the sky with both sides taking a beating. Everywhere I looked, B-17's were going down with enemy aircraft strafing them as they fell. In just a few moments I counted thirty-five parachutes...and our bombardier counted 140 chutes in one section of the sky, both color--American and German. Four B-17's at a time dropped out of formation and blew up. We lost 69 aircraft that day. What a way to finish." Echoing Jim Dunlap's note of accomplishment he quipped, "I'm a Lucky B\*\*\*\*\*d."

A recheck of his day to day diary reveals he was awakened at 3 AM, breakfast at 4 AM, briefing at 5 AM and ultimately suited up for sixty missions but the other thirty-five were called off for various reasons such as weather or lack of fighter escort. He reiterated his disappointment when this happened, being, "Awakened by flashlight, all hyped up, getting ready to go and not going. I was called out sixty times. Emotionally, you're going." George went on to fly for 35 years as a pilot for Frontier Airlines. He passed away in April of 2014 at 89.

With so many loose ends finally resolved, there remained one final mystery: What happened to twenty-two year old Kermit Lansrud? I filed a Freedom of Information request with the US Army Human Resources Command in Alexandria, Virginia. I requested his Individual Deceased Personnel File (IDPF) and Report of Burial. "This Command maintains IDPF's on individuals from all branches of service who died while overseas during World War II and Korea; and for Army personnel who were killed while overseas in Southeast Asia." Several months later, a packet of 100 pages arrived. Some pages were duplicates which is a godsend as invariably certain copies tend to be of greater legibility than others.

From the "Report of Investigation, Area Search"

we learn that my uncle's disarticulated remains were found in Torf Werk at Grand Hesspe, Germany by "Germans digging in the peat bog." He was buried on January 24, 1944 in the New Cemetery in Lingen, Germany and eventually rediscovered in 1948 by a British Graves Registration team. Official cause of death was listed as, "Fell from a plane."

While the balance of his clothing was ripped apart during the force of the aerial fall, there were remnants of the following as documented in the Identification Check List (dated 27 August 1948): coveralls, wool undershirt and drawers, an electrically heated flying suit, a leather helmet with earphones, and a parachute. Identification was verified on June 1, 1950. It is possible that Kermit was knocked out of the plane from either of the two forceful hits and unconscious so may not have been able to open his chest chute.

Kermit's remains were recovered from British Graves registration in August 1948. Identification was ultimately established through two ID tags found, dental records, a leather belt bearing the description "K. Lansrud" and the near proximity to where his plane crashed. After identification was carefully determined, my uncle's remains were interred in the US Military Cemetery at Neuville-en Condroz, Belgium.

Other corroborating records were part of the file, including a letter from Kermit's father dated July 4, 1950 which said in part: "Thanks very much for the information you sent me about my boy Kermit. Oh! How I've (been) waiting for that. I tho(ugh)t sure he was at the bottom of the ocean, being I never heard anymore, as he was bombing in Kiel, Germany at the time he went down. That's all the information I have had, so naturally I tho(ugh)t he disappeared in the ocean as is right on the coast." Emotional closure is of enormous benefit for the family members of their wartime deceased loved one.

More than a quarter century after my 1983 visit to that grave marker at Montana's Custer National Battlefield I feel I have honored my uncle's life and service to our country through careful, methodical research and synthesis of findings. I took upon myself the mantle of telling his story as thoroughly yet as delicately as possible, given the substance of the material I located. Along the way, I realized that the veterans who shared their wartime memories were also healed in the process of coming to grips with these dark areas and granted a certain measure of closure in their own lives. They were in a position to know from personal, direct experience and I cannot thank them enough for sharing it with me.

How many untold narratives similarly wait telling and release? Today, we are straddling the threshold between the survivors of these campaigns who are nearing the end of their lives and their relatives and descendants who feel it important to flesh out the story, granting some sense of permanence that will inform present and future generations.

This was my journey in honoring one of my veteran relatives. Who will be next in highlighting their own Valdres relative's contribution to our country?

A footnote: A very recent find came to light that could not have been made without utilizing resources obtained from BOTH traditional research methods and web browsing. Through an 8th Air Force internet message board, I recently found a reference to a 96th Bomb Group ground crew member being pictured in a *Life Magazine* article in February 1944. Sight unseen, I ordered a copy of that number of *Life* via eBay and was delighted to find, upon receipt, that apparently several if not all of the accompanying pictures in that particular article from that specific issue of *Life Magazine* appeared to have been taken at Snetterton Heath, just not attributed as it was obviously during wartime.

But that's not all. Of specific interest to me was that one of the pictures shows the tail of a B-17 and its number. My uncle flew on that very aircraft for two of his six missions! Furthermore, there is a photo showing the back of a leather flight jacket worn by a tail gunner who also flew one mission with my uncle on that very same plane! How could I know possibly that??

*Life Magazine February 1944* - Photo AC 42-3442



Boys measure Mike's waist with steel tape, decide "She's a perfect 42, fellas!" They do much ribbing at girls' expense but compensate by mending lighters, washing cups, cleaning boots.

Remember the Loading Lists I discovered at the National Archive in 1990? From them I confirmed my uncle flew six missions: three were on one aircraft, two on another and one on a third. All were B-17F versions. While we all like to think every crew had their own B-17

aircraft decorated with nose art that might have featured a pin up girl from Varga or maybe emulating artist Gil Elvgren's style, there weren't enough aircraft to go around—and, at least in late 1943, those aerial gladiators were likely shot down by their seventh mission. Crews flew whatever craft was available, repaired and flight worthy on a particular day.

B-17 Aircraft were traced by tail number. The tail of each craft recorded the serial number of each plane, minus the leading digit "4" and the dash between. Hence, the designation of aircraft "42-3442" was shortened to "23442." The tail gunner, whose jacket was shown in the other photo, is the Brower who flew on that



Mike talks with Bill Brower, Fortress tail-gunner. Boys say: "You're wrong if you think we're just after doughnuts. We're here to see and hear some American girls."

same plane on 31 December 1943—the last B-17 to return my uncle's crew safely back to Snetterton.

On page twenty-five of this issue of *Life*, I learned the name of the photographer who took those snaps of interest: Bob Landry. Through web search I happily discovered that these pictures are currently available at [www.gettyimages.com](http://www.gettyimages.com) and I will ultimately arrange to purchase one or more in the near future. I requested the 96th BG historian, Geoff Ward, to review these photographs at the Getty Images website. His conclusion was that all eleven pictures were taken at Snetterton and that several were obviously located along the 338th Squadron Flight Line.

Now, here's the clincher: These two associations—the aircraft number on a specific plane my uncle actually flew with the *Life* photographs--would not have been made possible at this time were it not for my previous research at the National Archives. I would have no way to identify which B-17 my uncle flew during a given mission solely via internet research, nor be aware that Bill Brower flew one flight with Kermit. It's the perfect instance of the marriage between traditional archival research and internet browsing. Both avenues of research are important today. It's dramatic proof that the blend of BOTH is crucial to rounding it out.

# BULLETIN BOARD



## *Snetterton Falcons* and *Snetterton Falcons II – In the Nest And On The Wing*

It gives us great pleasure to make both of these out of print books available to our members, family and friends who are interested in the lives of our veterans and the history of the 96th Bomb Group at a reasonable price. This was not done to be a fund raiser but to make the books that many wanted available to all without hardship.

(This order form and the one for European orders as well is available for download on our web site at: <https://www.96bg.org/>)

## 2021 ORDER FORM SNETTERTON FALCONS CD/FLASH DRIVE

The 96th Bomb Group is very excited to announce the "long-awaited" digital version of the Snetterton Falcons book, as well as Snetterton Falcons II – In the Nest And On The Wing, in either CD or flash drive format. Upon receipt of this form and payment, we will send your choice of either the CD or flash drive. Reproduction of this prized book collection has been with the permissions of the authors and the publisher. Net proceeds (after reproduction and postage costs) will be used to support the Snetterton Heath 96th Bomb Group Museum at New Eccles Hall School and the St. Andrews Church, located in Quidenham, England, where the Memorial Window is located.

To order this two-book digitized collection, please complete the form below and mail with your check payment.

**Please make checks payable to 96th Bomb Group Association.**

**Please mail form and payment to:**

Susan Hinchman, Sec'y/Treas.  
96th Bomb Group Association  
706 Miami View Court  
Loveland, OH 45140

**Snetterton Falcons – Digital\***

**Please print clearly and legibly**

- \$25.00 CD for current paid 2021 members
- \$25.00 Flash Drive for current paid 2021 members
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- \$50.00 2021 Membership Renewal & Flash Drive \*
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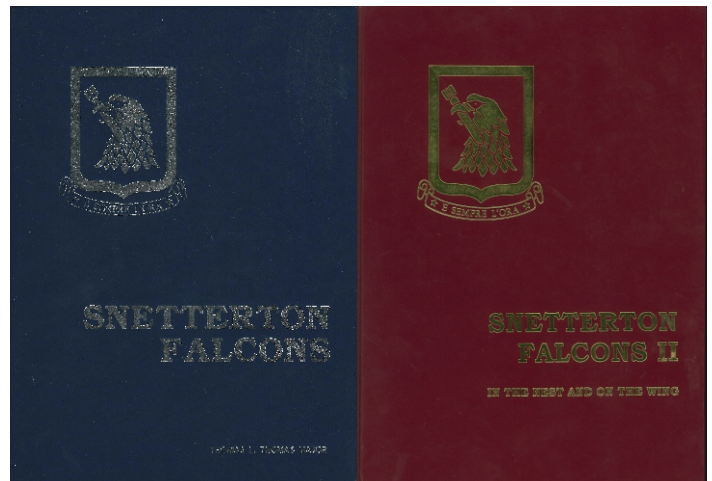
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\*We realize there are those who would like to make a copy for a family member; however, we would ask that you be respectful of the 96th Bomb Group, and other purchasers, by only making one additional copy from each purchase. If you wish to make more than one additional copy, please purchase an additional CD or flash drive for each additional copy.



I would like to become a member of the 96th Bomb Group Association (dues are \$25 per year). I have included below information regarding my connection to the 96th Bomb Group:

**Service Member's Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Squadron** \_\_\_\_\_ **Number of Missions** \_\_\_\_\_ **Position** \_\_\_\_\_ **Ground Crew** \_\_\_\_\_

**Other crew members or information you feel might be useful to the 96th:** \_\_\_\_\_

\* For new members, first year's dues are included in the price of the CD or Flash Drive.

# WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Since April, 2021



Richard D. Allen      5322 N. Dobbs Rd. Harrah, OK 73045      *Son of S/SGT Billy Allen 413<sup>th</sup>*  
 Laura Dove      3151 MC 4021 Everton, AR 72633-8084      *Niece of Clyde Liles 339<sup>th</sup> P*  
 Michael Nelson      959 Harbor Springs Dr., Frisco, TX 75036-3472      *Son of LeRoy Nelson 339<sup>th</sup> TG*  
 Karen Stafford      1222 Tralee Ln. Garland, TX 75044-3442      *Daughter-in-law of Leland B. Apperson, Jr. 337<sup>th</sup> P*  
 Jerry M. Satterfield      1918 South Center Blvd., Springfield, OH 45506      *Cousin of Harry E. Johnson, Jr 337<sup>th</sup> P*

All of our members are encouraged to invite their family members, relatives and friends to join us. They will receive two issues of our Newsletter each year. We hope they will find them informative as well as give them an understanding of what the 96th Bomb Group and its members contributed to World War II.

## 96th Bomb Group Association Membership Application / Dues Remittance

Dues are \$25.00 per year payable to: 96th Bomb Group Association, 706 Miami View Court, Loveland, Ohio 45140

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Spouse's Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone # A/C \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail address\*: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Squadron \_\_\_\_\_ Number of Missions \_\_\_\_\_ Position \_\_\_\_\_ Ground Crew \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other crew members or information that you feel might be useful to the 96th: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Check here if you would like to receive the 96<sup>th</sup> BGA Newsletter via email rather than hard copy via US Postal Service.  
 \*- Please provide your email address so that you can receive important updates about the 96<sup>th</sup> BG Association during the year.  
 Email addresses are private information and the 96<sup>th</sup> BGA does not share them with any non-members.



## YOUR 2021 DUES SHOULD BE PAID NOW

This may be your last *Newsletter!* unless you are a Life Member  
 Send your **\$25 annual dues**

To: **Susan Hinchman**  
 96th Bomb Group Association  
 706 Miami View Court  
 Loveland, Ohio 45140

(Make checks payable to 96th BGA)

(Annual Dues were raised to \$25 at General Meeting October 18, 2019)  
 Due January 1st each year.

**SNOWBIRDS, VACATIONERS BEWARE**  
**BE SURE TO LET Susan Hinchman KNOW**  
**YOUR WHEREABOUTS**  
**To Insure YOU RECEIVE YOUR**  
**NEWSLETTER.**



## UPCOMING MEETINGS



### 96th Bomb Group Reunion 2021

Our Annual Meeting will be held Virtually  
**December 4, 2021**

**01:00 PM Central Time**  
 (US and Canada)

See Presidents Corner Page 2 for details

### 8th Air Force Historical Society 48<sup>th</sup> Annual Reunion

**Washington, D.C. - October 19-23, 2022**

Crystal City Gateway Marriot, Arlington, VA  
 1700 Richmond Highway Arlington VA

*Pending Confirmation*

Complete program and reunion information will be available on line at: [www.8thafhs.org](http://www.8thafhs.org)  
 and in future Issues of 8th AF NEWS

# WHERE TO CALL OR WRITE



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<https://www.96bg.org/>

\* Denotes Deceased Past Presidents

Texts and/or photos are sincerely solicited. If requested, photos will be returned. The Editor reserves the right to edit text. December 31, 2021 is the deadline for the February 2022 issue.

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## Final Mission

Those Who Served Their Country  
With Honor and Distinction

Astrologo, (Rocky) Rocco M.	413th	B
Edwards, Tim		<i>English Associate</i>
Gorman, George A.	339th	G
Hughes, William C.		Telephone Operator
Justin, Howard (Juskowitz)	339th	N
Nickel, John F.	413th	CF
Psarolis, Rene		<i>French Associate</i>
Schneider, Jodie		<i>Spouse of John F. Schneider, 337th N</i>

*We will print the names of all deceased 96th airmen sent to us whether or not they are current members of the 96th BGA.  
We will also print the names of members of other Bomb Groups if they are current members of the 96th BGA. Written notification is required.  
Send to: Susan Hinchman Secretary/Treasurer, address on this page.*

**96th BOMB GROUP ASSOCIATION**  
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