



# 95<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Newsletter

**THE 95<sup>TH</sup> BOMB GROUP MEMORIALS FOUNDATION, INC.** is a 501(c)3 organization whose purpose is to educate the public regarding the history of the 95<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group (H) and its role in the air campaign over central Europe during WWII.





◀ COVER IMAGE

© Denver Public Library, Rocky Mountain News,  
 photographer Marc Piscotty

You can read the feature story about Joe DeLio  
 on page 10. A special thanks to Diana Vickery for  
 writing and submitting this story.



95<sup>TH</sup> BOMB GROUP

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8<sup>TH</sup>  
AIR FORCE



13<sup>TH</sup> COMBAT  
WING



334<sup>TH</sup>  
SQUADRON



335<sup>TH</sup>  
SQUADRON



336<sup>TH</sup>  
SQUADRON



412<sup>TH</sup>  
SQUADRON

**"There is no better way or time to promote your family's engagement with the 95<sup>th</sup> than by attending our upcoming Reunion in Savannah."**



**TOBY MUMFORD**  
PRESIDENT

# Notes from the President

As we march towards our Reunion in November in Savannah, GA, we look forward to being with each of you and those veterans who are able to attend.

Remembering the sacrifices and heroic deeds of the airmen of the 95<sup>th</sup> during WWII and educating the public about their sacrifices is paramount. Attracting 95<sup>th</sup> families is essential in our efforts to fulfill our Foundation's Mission. We can be an integral part in fulfilling that Mission by encouraging our family members and family friends to become involved with the 95<sup>th</sup> BGMF. Each one of us has a key role in that engagement.

We were recently introduced to a 95<sup>th</sup> veteran, Ed Rasko (formerly Ed Rashokovsky), who is just now engaging with the 95<sup>th</sup> BGMF. His involvement was encouraged and supported by the efforts of his daughter, Stacey Rasko. We are hopeful that Ed and his family might join us in Savannah. Keep your fingers crossed.

To me the significance of Ed's engagement with the 95<sup>th</sup> BGMF is the support of his family members who have been encouraging their father to become involved. It is this family involvement that is so rewarding and aids us in our efforts to promote the mission of the 95<sup>th</sup> BGMF. There is no better way or time to promote your family's engagement with the 95<sup>th</sup> than by attending our upcoming Reunion in Savannah.

If you have not registered for the Reunion, please do so. Vanna has put together a great program and the location is fabulous. Savannah during the fall will be wonderful and there are a number of great things to do and see. The 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force Museum will certainly be a highlight. And of course being with fellow members and our vets is always fun and heartwarming.

I am happy to report that your 95<sup>th</sup> BGMF is doing well in all aspects. Our memorials are in good shape, we are solvent financially and have monies available for the maintenance of these memorials. While we can always push for more members, we continue to be grateful for the involvement of our current membership.

We are giving the 95<sup>th</sup> BGMF website a "makeover" and I know that everyone will find the new site to be one that they will enjoy visiting. The website serves as a great memorial and tribute to our veterans and their sacrifices on our behalf.

I hope to see each of you at Savannah. If you have a family member who does not receive this newsletter, forward your copy and encourage them to help us in our Mission.

Cheers and best regards,

**HG (Toby) Mumford**  
President

JOIN US AT THE  
95<sup>TH</sup> BGMF FAMILY REUNION 2019

# Savannah GEORGIA

Don't miss this year's reunion to be held in Savannah, Georgia on Veterans' Day weekend, November 7<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup>, 2019! Reconnect with old friends and meet new ones as we gather to honor the beloved veterans of the 95<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group (H). We'll stay in the heart of the historic district at the beautiful Hotel Indigo. Our group price is \$129 per night, breakfast is not included.

## STEP ONE: REUNION REGISTRATION **(Required)**

Mail the Registration Form (page 5) & payment to:  
Beth Rosenzweig, Assistant Treasurer  
95<sup>th</sup> BG Memorials Foundation  
P.O. Box 55032  
Seattle, WA 98155

## STEP TWO: RESERVE YOUR HOTEL ROOM

Hotel Indigo  
201 W. Bay Street  
Savannah GA 31401  
Phone: 912-236-4440  
Online: <https://tinyurl.com/yxlpppfa>  
\*Please use the block name "BMF" when booking your room.

## CANCELLATION POLICY:

Full refund prior to October 1<sup>st</sup> or medical/family emergency. After October 1<sup>st</sup>, refund will be less the Registration Fee.  
**LATE FEE:** Registrations received after October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019 will incur a \$25 late fee.

\*Veterans, wives and widows are exempt from paying the registration and late fees.

## HAVE QUESTIONS?

Contact Vanna Walker, Reunion Chair  
214-725-1942 (Mobile) or [reunions@95thbg.org](mailto:reunions@95thbg.org)



**HOME OF THE  
MIGHTY EIGHTH  
AIR FORCE MUSEUM**

## SCHEDULE & HIGHLIGHTS:

### Thursday (November 7<sup>th</sup>)

6:30pm: Meet and Greet  
7:30pm: Fireside Chat

### Friday (November 8<sup>th</sup>)

8am – 10:30am: Memorial Breakfast  
11am – 4:45pm: Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum (Lunch included. There will also be an early shuttle to the hotel. Dinner on your own)  
7:30pm: Fireside Chat

### Saturday (November 9<sup>th</sup>)

10am – 11:30am: Narrated group trolley tour of historic downtown, highlighting Savannah's beautiful squares, monuments, churches, architecture, City Market, River Street, and Forsyth Park  
3:30pm – 5pm: Fireside Chat and Ed Charles slide show led by historian Phil Samponaro  
6:30pm: Reception, Dinner, and Dance

### Sunday (November 10<sup>th</sup>)

11:30am: Group lunch at River House Restaurant, and then enjoy exploring Savannah on your own.



95th BG Memorials Foundation Reunion  
Savannah GA November 7 - 11, 2019



Guest 1 (Please Print)	Guest 2 (Please Print)
Name	Name
Street	Street
City, State, Zip	City, State, Zip
Email	Email
Phone	Phone
Relationship to 95th (Include Vet's Name, Squadron, Position)	Relationship to 95th (Include Vet's Name, Squadron, Position)

Guest 3 (Please Print)	Guest 4 (Please Print)
Name	Name
Street	Street
City, State, Zip	City, State, Zip
Email	Email
Phone	Phone
Relationship to 95th (Include Vet's Name, Squadron, Position)	Relationship to 95th (Include Vet's Name, Squadron, Position)

DAY	ACTIVITY & TIME	COST pp	GUEST 1	GUEST 2	GUEST 3	GUEST 4
Thu	Meet & Greet Reception 6:30pm – 7:30pm	\$30				
Fri	Memorial Breakfast & Service 8am – 10:30am	\$30				
Fri	Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum 11am – 3:30pm or 4:45pm (Includes transportation lunch, and docent tour)	\$50				
Sat	Historic Savannah Trolley Tour 10am – 11:30am	\$26				
Sat	Cocktail cash bar and Dinner Dance 6:30pm – 12am	\$65				
Sun	Group lunch at River House Restaurant 11:30am	\$30				
Per Person Reunion Registration (Required) Veterans, their spouses/widows are exempt from paying registration fee This fee covers additional hotel costs (i.e meeting rooms, AV equipment, etc.)		\$50 (before Oct 1) \$75 (after Oct. 1)				
Total for each guest		\$281 (by Oct 1) \$306 (after Oct 1)				
<b>TOTAL FOR ALL GUESTS</b>		\$	Special needs: wheelchairs, dietary requirements, etc.			
Not a member yet? Join us! ____ Individual: \$35 ____ Household: \$55		\$				
Donation: ____ In Loving Memory ____ In Honor Of Name:		\$				
<b>TOTAL DUE by OCTOBER 1</b> Cancellation Policy: Full refund if prior to Oct. 1 or medical/family emergency If after Oct. 1, refund will not include the registration fee						

Make checks payable to  
**95th BG Memorials Foundation**  
Mail to:  
Beth Rosenzweig, Asst. Treasurer  
95th BG Memorials Foundation  
P.O. Box 55032  
Seattle, WA 98155



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## NEWSLETTER EDITOR

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Granddaughter of Ray B. Waters  
Tail Gunner, 335<sup>th</sup> Squadron



# We Need You

To help in updating and refreshing the 95th Bomb Group Memorials Foundation website

*A new and improved site will help educate and inform younger members and prospective young members about the Mission and history of the 95th Bomb Group at Horham, England, during WWII*

**We Need Website Design and Build Savvy**  
Sons/Daughters/Nieces/Nephews and Grandchildren of Vets or any 95th BGMF member with those skills  
We Want YOU and We Need Your Help!!

Contact the BGMF President - Toby Mumford at [toby.mumford@gmail.com](mailto:toby.mumford@gmail.com)  
or call 415-887-8556, to learn more about how you can help.

# TREASURER'S REPORT

SUBMITTED BY Russ McKnight

As the new 95<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Memorials Foundation Treasurer my reaction is, "What an Organization! What a superb Crew!" Even as a retired guy, I could never have earned my wings without the experience and coaching from Nancy Freemantle for our Financial Management, John Mollison for Membership, Beth Rosenzweig for Reunion accounting, Ann Cook for PX and a dozen other crew mates who have navigated me through the first five months. THANK YOU!

During this interim we have completed our annual Membership campaign under John's leadership. Membership dues and donations are the primary funds which sustain our Foundation's upkeep and Educational outreach. We deeply appreciate your ongoing support for these vital missions. For instance, our Memorial Room in Tucson and the Red Feather Club in Horham each have thousands of visitors navigating the interactive screens featuring flight records of brave airmen and the ground crews of the 95<sup>th</sup>. The maintenance costs and upgrades for these physical locations and for our website require our constant attention and care. With your help, we will continue to carry these missions forward.

**amazon**smile

Another source of income is AmazonSmile. AmazonSmile is the same Amazon.com you know and love (same products, same prices, same service) but now Amazon will donate 0.5% of the price of your eligible AmazonSmile purchases to the **95<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Memorials Foundation**. Simply sign in at [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com) to get started. Every dollar helps sustain our proud Foundation!

## REQUEST FROM THE RESEARCH TEAM

SUBMITTED BY Rod Hupp  
[rodhupp52@verizon.net](mailto:rodhupp52@verizon.net)

We are looking for help identifying the men in these crews: **Leo C. Francis Crew** and the **Norman S. Rothschild Crew** ▶



### ▲ LEO C. FRANCIS CREW, 336TH BOMB SQUADRON POSSIBLE CREW MEMBERS (STATESIDE):

Leo C. Francis – Pilot  
Arturo G. Ortega – Co-Pilot  
Thomas V. Cronin – Navigator  
Harvey E. McDonald – Radio Operator  
Richard R. Fosdick – Top Turret/Engineer  
William C. Jehlen – Ball Turret Gunner  
Henry N. Elliot – Waist Gunner  
David B. Unsell – Waist Gunner  
John C. Maclay – Tail Gunner



### ▲ NORMAN S. ROTHSCHILD CREW

SEATED AROUND TABLE (L-R): Unidentified, Norman S. Rothschild – Pilot & 95<sup>th</sup> BG Interrogator, Unidentified, Unidentified, Unidentified, Edward M. Praisner – Bombardier

STANDING (L-R): Unidentified, Unidentified, Unidentified, Unidentified

"UNIDENTIFIED" MAY BE: Paul E. Perceful – Co-Pilot, Robert L. Mytinger – Navigator, Russell L. Sparks – Radio Operator, Russell L. Barnes – Top Turret/Engineer, Earl B. Bennett – Ball Turret Gunner, Harry Moore Jr – Waist Gunner, George E. Pratt – Waist Gunner, John C. Thomas – Tail Gunner





Follow Us @  
95<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group  
Memorials Foundation

# You Too

## From Our Members & Facebook Friends

### TO A CAPTURED BOMBARDIER

By Ellen Smith

No more briefings, no more flights,  
Swiftly winging through dawn's dim light.  
No longer free to sail the skies,  
No clouds to search with anxious eyes.  
No target to hit for today,  
No more to shout, "Bombs Away."

A prison hospital replaces the plane,  
Bars, not blue skies form your windowpane.  
They have clipped your wings,  
They hold you fast,  
And in clipping made sure that flight was your last.

But another flight you will surely make,  
Soon, it is hoped for your dear sake.  
An easy mission to add to your score,  
That target that day—your own front door.



▼ John K. Smith and his sister, Ellen. © Betsy Cowan



### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:

## A Sister's Poem

Hello Sara,

I've been going through some of my dad's things. I came across this poem written by my aunt, my dad's sister, Ellen Smith. She wrote this poem and sent it to my father when he was a POW in Germany. I think it's beautiful and I thought maybe you would like to use it in a future newsletter.

My cousin, Sara Donovan, Ellen's daughter, read this at my father's funeral at Arlington Cemetery. My Aunt Ellen just passed away in November at the age of 98. I included a picture of my dad and his sister, Ellen.

My dad shared lots of information with me. I took notes but need to put it in order and type it up. I have boxes of papers, pictures, letters and keepsakes that my dad saved from the war. Little by little I'm going through it, it's still hard because I miss him so much. He lived with me for 8 years until he passed away two years ago at the age of 100.

I hope this might be something nice to include in a newsletter.

Sincerely,

Betsy (Smith) Cowan  
Daughter of John K. Smith





# A Request for Help from Across the Pond

## LOOKING FOR STORIES OF USAF CREWS THAT DITCHED IN THE SEA AROUND THE UK DURING WWII

I am the Chairman of Operation: Scramble 441. We are a team of 10 ex-Royal Air Force Air Sea Rescue (ASR). We are planning a circumnavigation of the UK in 2020 to coincide with the 75th anniversary of VE Day in an original WWII Seaplane Tender that saw active service during the hostilities and took part in several rescues around the UK, including an unknown B-17.

The vessel has been completely restored back to her original condition (preserving the bullet holes). Please see the accompanying photographs (above).

We are the last generation of the RAF ASR and feel that we need to give something back. We have the full support of the RAF Benevolent Fund, who will at a later stage be coordinating the charitable side of things with the goal of raising funds to support homeless veterans.

The motto of the RAF Air Sea Rescue is "The Sea Shall Not Have Them". The motto for Operation: Scramble 441 is "The Streets Shall Not Have Them".

What we are looking for are links to either USAF crews or relatives of crews who can recall family members rescued by the RAF ASR after ditching in the sea. The idea is to bring to life the heroic deeds



carried out by not only the brave aircrews but also members of the ASR who are credited in saving the lives of over 13,000 personnel (some estimates put this figure as over 20,000).

My father is one of the few that survived the war as an air engineer and mid upper gunner on Lancasters. Thankfully, he always made it home from the Continent when still others crashed at sea.

If there is some interest amongst the Veterans and their descendants to share their stories, this will allow us to build the picture of the important role the ASR played in saving thousands of lives, hopefully to generate the sort of interest that we have seen in the UK with the recent D-Day commemorations.

We are planning to have our website up and running over the coming weeks, along with social media, and would love to include real stories from real heroes.

Thank you in anticipation.

Kind regards

Nigel Kitt, kittnigel@gmail.com



# FROM MARCHING TO MAGIC: The Life of Joe DeLio

BY Diana Vickery, Researcher



▲ Cover of Joe DeLio's WWII Journal

The camera zooms in on Joe DeLio's hands. They're holding a small journal, fashioned from Chesterfield cigarette wrappers and pipe cleaners in 1945. The careful, draftsman-like printing lists the 114 towns and villages in northern Germany through which Joe and his fellow POWs were forced to march, starting in January 1945.

The forced march extended into April, through temperatures that reached well below zero. Joe's group started at Stalag Luft IV at Gross Tychow in Pomerania, and trekked 487.8 miles in 82 days with little food, inadequate clothing, not much sleep and no medical care. Frostbite would earn Joe one of his two purple hearts. The American GIs who survived called it the Black Hunger March.

Keeping a journal was dangerous; it was evidence. And this forced march was not something the Germans wanted documented. Had the journal been discovered, Joe could have been severely beaten or worse. But the journal, small enough to fit inside a man's wallet, was kept secret and was among the mementos Joe brought home with him in the fall of 1945 upon discharge.

The images of Joe with his journal are from a video interview of him by Wings Over The Rockies Air & Space Museum, in Denver, where Joe was born and lived most of his life. Joe's story is also well documented in the book *The Young Ones: American Airmen of World War II* by Erik Dyreborg. The 37-page chapter, written by Joe and edited by the author, is entitled, "So We Walked and Walked and Walked Some More." It makes for compelling reading. It could be argued, however, that Joe's life after the war was as interesting and meaningful as his military career.

Joe said that he learned, while in the service, that those with the most education got the best jobs. So, when Joe returned to Colorado after discharge, it wasn't surprising that he continued his education using the G.I. bill. Joe was a smart boy, being asked to join the Honor Society as a sophomore and graduating from high school at age 16. Joe took college classes, mostly in math and science, at Santa Monica Tech while he lived with his aunt in California before he began his military service in January 1943.

In college, Joe – known then as P.J. – joined Lambda Gamma Kappa, a social fraternity at University of Northern Colorado, where he majored in history and industrial education, with an eye toward high-school teaching. He was also president of the Blue Key Honor Society during his senior year. Joe earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from University of Northern Colorado in 1949. Joe's undergraduate yearbook photo shows an intense-looking young man (he was 26) with dark curly hair and Hollywood-leading-man good looks – a bit like the movie star Farley Granger.

The next year, he earned a master's degree, also in industrial education. Then, Joe embarked on what would become a 37-year career with Denver Public Schools, first as teacher, then as counselor. (In 1966, he earned a second MA in Psychology Counseling and Guidance.)

In 1955, Joe married Peggy Darlene Prokesh, who was a recreational figure skater; she taught their three little girls to skate, starting when they were three years old. Joe would flood the back yard to create a skating surface for the girls and other neighborhood children.

Kitty, Heidi and Becky all became competitive ►



◀ skaters, eventually turning professional and performing in the Ice Capades. At this time, Denver was the center of the figure-skating universe and many skaters who would become national, world and Olympic champions – and household names – were lured there by the quality of the training facilities.

Joe, Peggy and their daughters would become the First Family of Skating in Denver – and their exploits were chronicled regularly in Colorado’s large metropolitan newspapers, including the Denver Post and the Rocky Mountain News.

In 1972, Joe and his wife Peggy were founding members of Colorado Skating Club and over the years she served in various leadership positions in the sport’s hierarchy. Peggy was most famous for producing an annual ice show, Showtime On Ice. And the girls’ names were often found in sports-section stories detailing their ice-skating careers.

But when judged by newspaper stories about the family through the years, Joe would become the most famous – but not for skating. Joe was not a skater. Peggy was quoted in a newspaper article in the Denver Post in 2007, saying “Our daughters would have to tell him which foot to be on.”

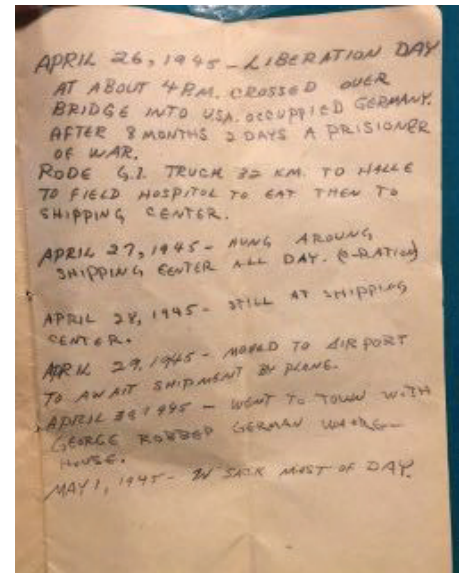
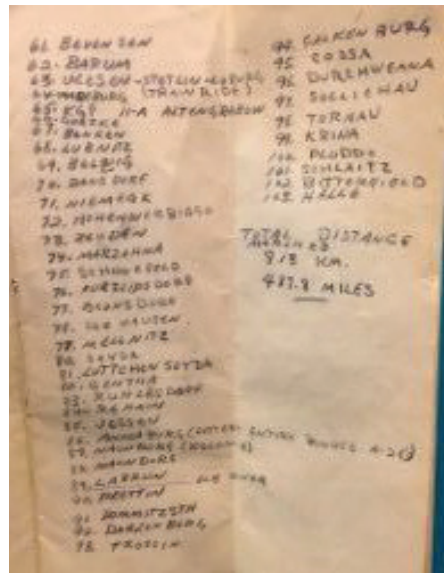
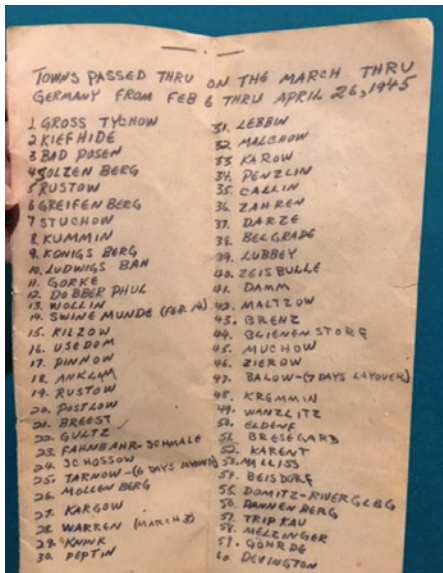
Joe himself was a founding member of the Colorado Skating Club and served as its first president. He was a U.S Figure Skating Judge for over 25 years, judging competitions and tests. But it was for blade sharpening that Joe’s name became legend.

In the late 1960s, Joe began sharpening skating blades to earn extra money to pay for skating lessons and rink time. He called his business Joe’s Skate Services. Starting in 1972, he worked out of the Colorado Ice Arena in southwest Denver, then in about 1981 he moved to South Suburban Ice Arena in Littleton. He perfected his sharpening technique with equipment previously used while teaching gem polishing and silversmithing. His reputation and renown grew.

Peggy, interviewed by a reporter for the Denver Post in 1998, said that he once received a package from a French skating coach addressed simply to: Colorado Skate Sharpener, Colorado, 80123. In a miraculous moment, a bit like the climactic scene in the movie “Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street,” the U.S. Postal Service delivered the blades to Joe.

Skaters all over the world sent their blades to Joe; over his entire career, he sharpened 75,000 pairs of blades. He sharpened skates for ice-skating’s elite: Dorothy Hamill, John Curry, Robin Cousins, Paul Wylie, Scott Hamilton. But he was also known for his special way with the littlest skaters.

Scott Hamilton related a favorite story to a reporter for the Rocky Mountain News in 2007. After Joe sharpened the skates of a little girl in a local competition, Joe whispered to her, “Do you want me to put the magic on them?” She whispered back, “Oh, yes, please.” After that there was an engraved sign at his ice-arena workbench: “No Extra Charge for the Magic.” ▶



▲ Excerpts from Joe DeLio's WWII Journal, chronicling his time as a POW.

◀ There was also magic in the family home: Christmas magic. Peggy DeLio loved Christmas, and in 2003, the Rocky Mountain News printed a front-page story in its “Home Front” section headlined, “365 Days of Cheer – Every Day is Christmas in Englewood Home.”

The reporter wrote, “The family’s wintertime passions are evident inside the home. A pair of carved wooden doors, the chimes of six antique clocks and the aroma of pine-scented potpourri quickly set the mood inside the front door. Past a foyer and small seating area, a dining room sports pale green walls, warm wood floors, and beige and mauve upholstered chairs. In one corner, the main Christmas tree is adorned with Santas, angels and snowmen gliding through the boughs on ice skates.” It might be surmised that Peggy was making up for the bleak 1944 Christmas Joe spent in a German POW camp.

By 1984, when Joe retired from Denver Public Schools, he was known worldwide as the “Blade Doctor,” a moniker bestowed by Scott Hamilton, 1984 Olympic Gold Medalist and dear friend of Joe’s.

And when Joe retired from his job as “Blade Doctor,” just before his death from leukemia on March 24, 2007, a Rocky Mountain News writer penned this lede.



▲ Joe DeLio by his workbench © Denver Public Library, Rocky Mountain News, photographer Marc Piscotty



1923 - 2007

Name: Pepe Joseph DeLio  
Rank: S/Sgt  
Serial #: 19100775  
Status: POW, Lost aboard 44-6085  
Lili of the Lamplight (B-17G),  
25 Aug 1944  
Liberated: April 1945.  
Missions: 10  
Purple Hearts: 2

“The magic has always been free, but now the magic is gone. Joe DeLio, the man who once dropped from the sky and lived to tell about it, the man who knows more about blades than Zorro, the man who sharpened the ice skates of four Olympic champions, seven world champions, and so many national champions that he has lost count, is packing it in.”

On April 1, 2007, the day of Joe’s funeral, Scott Hamilton was among the friends who eulogized him.

The packed church heard another eulogist, Kristin Goss, call Joe a superb craftsman, wise judge and counselor, courageous patriot, loyal husband, loving father and grandfather... a profoundly decent man who always had “a wink and a grin for everyone.”

In the lede of a Rocky Mountain News story right after Joe died, the writer began, “While it’s hard for mortals to know what goes on in heaven, it seems a good bet that the angels are executing their double salchows and triple axels with a lot more magic these days thanks to a newcomer. That would be Joe DeLio, who, for a lot of folks, was to ice-skate sharpening what Stradivarius was to violins—a master who lovingly plied his crafts. That would be Joe DeLio... but Mr. DeLio was more than a master craftsman.”

The writer went on to quote Scott Hamilton, “Joe was just a spectacular human being... He gave the best he had to everyone, regardless of whether you were a world champion or a beginner.” Joe’s “official” obituary, largely written by Peggy with input from the family, was a testament Joe DeLio’s character. ▶



◀ “When those whose lives he touched with his gifts reflect on the kind of person Joe DeLio was, they inevitably mention his kindness and his integrity. Joe believed that there was right and there was wrong, and he never expected less of himself than to do the right thing even if it was the more difficult of the choices.

“Along with his characteristic kindness and concern for all those who knew him, his integrity and honesty was the real ‘magic’ that he sprinkled on our lives. That magic will live on in his children as they celebrate the privilege of having such a tremendous father, in his grandchildren as their hero is now also

their angel, and all those who loved him who will remember him as a person of character. His family meant everything to him, and he was a devoted husband and father.”

“We only die if we are forgotten,” said another of Joe’s eulogists, John Holland, paraphrasing a Native American proverb.

He ended by saying “No one will forget you, Joe.”

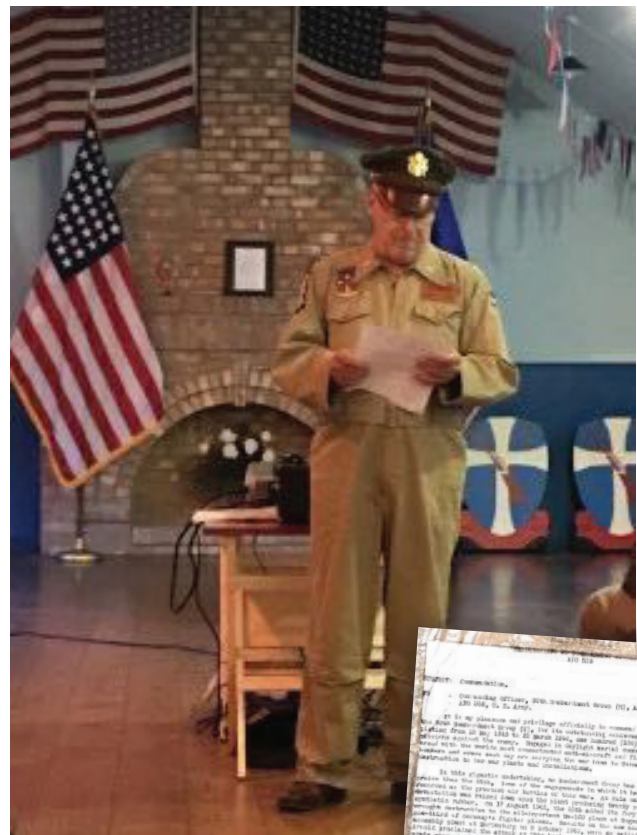
## Curtis LeMay’s Commendation of the 95<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group

SUBMITTED BY Phil Samponaro & Russ McKnight

“In this gigantic undertaking, no Bombardment Group has earned more enthusiastic praise than the 95<sup>th</sup>.”

Major General Curtis E. LeMay penned these words in a letter of commendation to the officers and men of the 95<sup>th</sup> in the spring of 1944. In the document dated 31 March 1944, LeMay applauded the group for its role in the air war against Germany, in particular for having completed 100 successful missions. At the time of writing, LeMay commanded the Third Bombardment Division of which the 95<sup>th</sup> was a member unit. LeMay, known for not using words lightly, recognized in his commendation that not only had the 95<sup>th</sup> received the most “enthusiastic praise” of any group but it also had “won world renown” for leading the first daylight raid over Berlin by US bombers on 4 March 1944.

The son of group air operations officer Dave McKnight, Russ McKnight found the LeMay letter among the personal papers of his late father in April 2019. Russ read the document to US and British attendees at the 95<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Heritage Association’s biennial reunion in Horham later that month. LeMay’s words were well received by the audience, perhaps by no one more so than 334<sup>th</sup> pilot Ray Hobbs. Hobbs, the one 95<sup>th</sup> veteran present at the UK reunion, was visibly moved by hearing such a commendation of his group. ▶



▲ Russ McKnight reading LeMay’s letter (right) to reunion attendees in the Blue Lounge of the Red Feather Club, Horham, 26 April 2019.

◀ Following Russ' lead, I recently shared LeMay's words over the phone with Mort Harris, 334<sup>th</sup> squadron commander. Mort was on base when LeMay sent his praise and so expressed strong interest in the general's regard of the 95<sup>th</sup>. He called the commendation "a wonderful thing." Additionally, I sent a copy of the letter to John Luckadoo, a personal friend and a pilot of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group for which

"Lucky" also served as the operations officer for two of its squadrons. Luckadoo flew many of the same sorties cited and holds LeMay in the highest regard. He responded favorably to the text, noting its mention of missions he "remembers vividly." In Lucky's mind, "LeMay's commendation ranks with or above a Presidential Unit Citation." That is a fitting assessment of the letter below.

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HEADQUARTERS 3RD BOMBARDMENT DIVISION  
APO 559

31 March 1944

SUBJECT: Commendation.  
TO: Commanding Officer, 95th Bombardment Group (H), AAF Station 119, APO 559, U. S. Army.

It is my pleasure and privilege officially to commend the officers and men of the 95th Bombardment Group (H) for its outstanding achievement in successfully completing from 13 May 1943 to 23 March 1944 one hundred (100) heavy bombardment missions against the enemy. Engaged in daylight aerial combat against a mighty foe armed with the world's most concentrated anti-aircraft and fighter defenses, our bombers and crews each day are carrying the war home to Germany with increasing destruction to her war plants and installations.

In this gigantic undertaking, no Bombardment Group has earned more enthusiastic praise than the 95th. Some of the engagements in which it has precipitated will be recorded as the greatest air battles of this war. At Hulls [Germany] on 22 June 1943 great devastation was rained down upon the plant producing twenty percent of the enemy's synthetic rubber. On 17 August 1943, the 95th added its fury to the assault which wrought destruction to the all-important Me-109 plant at Regensburg, then producing one-third of Germany's fighter planes. Results on the new and most vital fighter assembly plant at Marienburg on 9 October 1943 were so satisfactory that General Arnold proclaimed the attack as "the best precision bombing of the war". Accuracy again characterized the Schweinfurt raid on 14 October 1943, when the largest ball-bearing works in Europe was blasted. Requiring expert navigation to strike a small, distant target, on 16 November 1943 this Group combined with others in crippling seriously the plant at Rjukan, Norway, manufacturing nitrogen and other chemicals used for explosives. On 4 March 1944, this intrepid Group led the first daylight bombardment of Berlin by American heavy bombers, a feat for which already it has won world renown. Other deadly blows in which the 95th has contributed significantly to the success of our aerial invasion of enemy territory are the raids on La Pallice, 4 July 1943, on Paris, 3, 9, and 15 September 1943, on Bremen, 16 and 20 December 1943, and on Berlin, 6, 8, 9 and 22 March 1944.

The success of the Group's bombing operations testifies indisputably to the meticulous care with which its missions have been planned and executed and to the discipline, skill and gallantry of its combat and ground personnel, not only in the Group but in the related attached units of the station.

Commended alike are the officers and men now present for duty and those whose absence is keenly regretted. To you and to them are due eternal praise and gratitude for heroic accomplishment in battles well fought, worthy of the highest traditions of the United States.

I am confident that you will bring added honor to yourselves and your country in the future great air battles which must be fought to bring our common endeavor to a victorious conclusion.

CURTIS E. LE MAY  
Major General, U. S. A.,  
Commanding



# Marienburg Mission: A Tail Gunner's View

BY Durland E Abbe, Sr., Chief Master Sergeant, U.S.A.F, Retired

ARTICLE COURTESY OF Durland E. Abbe, Jr. and SUBMITTED BY Diana Vickery, Researcher

The morning of 9 Oct 1943 dawned clear and crisp, as I was suddenly awakened from a sound sleep. I looked at my watch; it was three a.m., time to prepare for another combat mission over Europe. As I slipped into my flight suit and boots, I wondered where we were going today. The day before we had returned from a long hard mission over the Bremen shipyards. The Germans were not happy about our visit, and put up quite a fight.

I washed my face in cold water to remove the sleep from my eyes and headed for the mess hall. No fog this morning, that's good! We would have fried eggs this morning. Fried eggs were only served to combat crews prior to combat missions. Even though they were cold-storage eggs, they were a treat compared to the green powdered eggs served on non-combat days. After breakfast, I head for the Operations Briefing Room. Everyone is seated, looking at a large curtain at the front of the room. No one speaks.

The Operations Officer enters the room. Everyone is wondering where we are going today. The Operations Officer pulls the curtain back. There it is, a huge map; the thin red tape is stretched out across the map to the target. The Operations Officer says, "Gentlemen, today's target is Marienburg, East Prussia." It's a long way to Marienburg.

The Officer says, "Today's mission will be eleven hours." That's a long time cramped in the tail of a B-17. The Officer continues with his briefing, but everyone's eyes are glued on that narrow red line. It stretched from our air base, up the eastern coast of England and out over the North Sea, across Denmark. It continued on over the Baltic, then a right turn inland toward Marienburg.

The Operations Officer is saying, "You'll be flying this mission today at low altitude." The bombing altitude would be 11,000 ft. According to him, this was possible because there would be no anti-aircraft guns and no fighters. Normally our missions were

flown 20,000 feet and above. The reason there would be no resistance was because, when the Germans built the aircraft factory, they thought it would be out of range of allied bombers. Maybe we would prove this to be a fatal mistake.

The briefing is over, I head for the armory to pick up my twin 50-caliber machine guns. Then on to our B-17. We would not be flying our regular B-17 today—it had maintenance problems. Our B-17 was named "I'll Be Around." Today we would be flying "Louise II." As the tail gunner I had the additional duty of crew armorer, to see that all the guns and adequate ammunition were aboard. I'm thinking we won't need too much ammo today. An ample amount was loaded, just in case. ►



▲ Durland E Abbe, Sr.

**"As we move away from the aircraft factory, it is engulfed in flames and smoke! It is no longer quiet and peaceful on that flat landscape. The Germans thought they were out of range. That was a fatal mistake."**

◀ All of the enlisted crew are at the aircraft checking their equipment. Then Captain (John Peter) Caspers arrived with the co-pilot, navigator and bombardier. They had been attending a detailed briefing on all the aspects of the mission. As they arrive, everyone grabs a prop blade and turns the engines through several revolutions. This is to prevent a liquid lock in the lower cylinders during starting.

Captain Caspers and the flight engineer make a walk-around inspection of the aircraft. This completed, Captain Caspers says, "O.K. men, climb aboard." Everyone boards the aircraft. I go forward to the bomb bay, enter and proceed along the narrow catwalk. I have to check all the arming wires to make sure they are in place. Today we are carrying incendiary clusters. The Nazis will get a taste of fire today! This completed, I go to the waist area and take my place with the two waist gunners and the ball turret gunner. We must sit with our backs to bulkheads, since we do not have seats to buckle into.

It's engine start time. The pilot slowly cranks over the first engine. It is slow to start at first, but suddenly springs to life with a roar and puffs of blue smoke from the exhaust. The other three quickly follow suit. All four engines are now running smoothly.

Suddenly the co-pilot's voice crackles over the intercom, "Ready to taxi." The pilot brings up the engine r.p.m. and Louise II reluctantly starts to move. We taxi toward the end of the runway followed by the other planes in the squadron. It is still dark, but stars are shining overhead. Thank God there is no fog! We are lucky this morning. "Maybe this will be a milk run," I think.

We reach the end of the runway, the pilot lines up, and waits for the green flare from the tower to begin takeoff. It is a very dangerous time in the mission. The B-17 is heavily loaded with bombs, fuel and ammunition. You pray that you don't lose power on



an engine. If you do you have probably bought the farm. Your thoughts are suddenly interrupted as the pilot brings up the power on the engines. You know that he has gotten the green flare for takeoff.

While holding the brakes, the pilot slowly brings up the power on the engines to take-off manifold pressure. The engines are roaring and the superchargers have a high-pitched whine. The pilot releases the brakes. We are on our way. The B-17 lunges forward and starts to gain speed, slowly at first, then gaining speed, faster and faster. The pilot lifts the tail off the runway. We continue on for what seems like forever. "Is it going to get off the ground?" I wonder. The B-17 starts to bounce; it comes off the runway and then settles back. Boy, we are heavy! After what seemed like an eternity the pilot pulls the column back, she leaps into the air, and stays. We are climbing out over the English countryside leaving our base behind us. We have an eleven-hour flight ahead of us.

As we climb, I make my way back to the cramped confines of my tail-gunner's position. It is too dangerous to be in the tail during takeoff. I climb onto the bicycle type seat behind the twin 50-caliber machine guns. It is still dark so I pick up an Aldis lamp and hold it against the bulletproof glass, in front of my face. I call the pilot and tell him that I am in position. I turn on the lamp and start flashing Morse code for the letter "B." Our group, the 95<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, was identified by a square B painted on the tail. We were flying squadron lead that day, so the Morse code was necessary so that the other aircraft could get into formation. Each squadron of the group used a different lens color. We slowly circled around our marker beacon as the other planes came up and took their place in the formation. All the while I am flashing the Morse code for "B." At the same time other groups nearby are taking off and circling their marker beacons. This is another very dangerous time in the mission. With all those aircraft forming ▶





◀ into groups, a mid-air collision could easily happen. Finally, the squadron and the group are formed. As the sun comes up, we head up the English coast, then turn out over the North Sea.

Things are going very well. The drone of the engines has a kind of hypnotic effect. As the white caps pass slowly beneath us, I realize that I am tired. I adjust the temperature on my heated suit. The temperature is not too bad today, about 20 degrees. On our missions 25,000 feet and above, the temp would drop to 60 below zero! Severe frostbite was a major problem with bomber crews. I rest my head on the armor plate in front of me and doze off. My nap is interrupted by the pilot's voice crackling in my headset, "Is everything OK back there, tail?" I assure him that it is.

The flight across the North Sea has been uneventful. I look out the window to my right and see the coast of Denmark. Slowly the coast edges behind us. We fly on across Denmark, then over the Baltic. I think, "If you had to bail out in the Baltic, you wouldn't last very long. That's something you surely won't want to do."

I look out to the right, toward the distant coastline. A lone B-17 is flying with our formation. It surely was not part of our group! I reported this to the pilot. He said, "We are being followed." It was a captured B-17 being flown by a German crew. "Jerry" wanted to know where we were going. He was radioing back our altitude, speed and heading. By then I'm sure they had a pretty good idea where we were headed. Hopefully, it was too late. We continued our flight on over the Baltic. Then the pilot made a 90-degree right-hand turn. We were headed directly toward our target!

As we proceeded toward the coast, the formation tightened up. Our wingmen tucked their wings closely behind our wing tips. Everyone is now alert.

Slowly the coast of Prussia passed beneath us. As we flew inland, the winding roads and villages passed beneath us. The countryside was very flat. It was a beautiful day, not a cloud in the sky. Everything looked quiet and peaceful. We fly on toward our target. Everyone is keeping a sharp look-out for "Bogies." So far, so good. Soon I hear the navigator say, "I.P. coming up." We are getting close!

A short time later the bombardier's voice crackles over the intercom, "I've got it." He will now take control and fly the aircraft to the target and release the bomb load. After a bit, I feel the aircraft suddenly lurch upwards. At the same time the bombardier says, "Bombs away." The incendiaries are streaming back under the aircraft, wobbling like small sticks of firewood. They are also streaming from the other aircraft in the group.

No flak! No fighters! It's time to head home. The pilot makes a sweeping 180-degree turn to trace our flight path back to the Baltic. As we move away from the aircraft factory, it is engulfed in flames and smoke! It is no longer quiet and peaceful on that flat landscape. The Germans thought they were out of range. That was a fatal mistake. It would be a while before they produced any more aircraft here.

We fly out over the Baltic, then make a 90-degree left turn. The flight over the Baltic is uneventful. We reach the coast of Denmark and proceed on. We cross over Denmark. Having almost reached the western coast of Denmark, I see black specks in the distance! I yell to the pilot, "Bogies 6 o'clock high!" In they come, like a swarm of angry bees, with nasty little flashes from their wings. They sweep through our formation. Our 50-caliber machine guns are shaking the aircraft. We have taken a hit! The pilot tells the co-pilot to feather the number four engine. The ME-109s climb and turn for a head-on attack. They come charging back. I see one of the 109s pass under our tail. He's been hit! He turns his belly up towards the ▶

**"I jumped out of the escape hatch, as did the rest of the crew, and ran like the devil away from the aircraft, then collapsed in the Brussels sprout field we had crashed in."**

◀ sky and plunges straight into the North Sea. By now we are well out over the North Sea. We can't keep up with the formation. The 109s do not return. Their fuel supply was getting low. We are alone over the North Sea with the exception of our right wingman. Maybe he's also been hit. We are now sitting ducks. This is not good. This is very dangerous.

I see another fighter approaching from 6 o'clock. I warn the crew. He does not come in for an attack. He stays out of the range of our guns. Then I see smoke come out from under his belly. I yell to the pilot, "pull up!" We have a rocket-firing ME-110 on our tail! He misses. Then I see the smoke trails again. I repeat to the pilot to again pull up. He does, with evasive action to the left. He misses us again, but there is an explosion in the aircraft of our wingman. He's on fire! Slowly he loses altitude; the crew starts bailing out into that cold unforgiving North Sea. Then the aircraft goes into a death spiral and plunges into the sea. The ME-110 fires one more salvo at us, misses, and turns back to his lair. I'm sure he was very proud of himself.

It was very hard to fly on and leave our fellow airmen in the cold waters of the North Sea, but there was nothing we could do. Their fate was sealed. They would not last long in those cold waters. Meanwhile our problems were increasing. We had another damaged engine. I could hear it backfiring as the pilot tried to get all of the power out of it that he could. Altitude is slowly being lost. We do not want to ditch in the North Sea. The pilot's voice comes over the intercom, "Jettison all guns, ammo, and unnecessary equipment." Anything loose and not required for survival went overboard. We had to lose some weight.

Captain Caspers was a very skillful pilot. He was using all of his skills to keep the aircraft flying. I was lucky to be on his crew. As we inched closer toward the northern coast of England, we continued

to slowly lose altitude. Would we run out of altitude before we reached the coast? After what seemed like an eternity the coast of England was passing beneath us. I thought, "Maybe he will order us to bail out now."

After flying a short distance, the aircraft went into a violent right bank. I was standing in the waist compartment. I grabbed the handle on the escape hatch, jettisoning it, preparing to bail out. Too late, the ground was racing up to meet us. The pilot managed to get the wings level, then we hit the ground. The impact threw me forward; luckily, I was not hurt. I could hear the sound of the aircraft striking objects. At the time I had no idea what. Suddenly all motion ceased. I was on friendly soil and alive!

I jumped out of the escape hatch, as did the rest of the crew, and ran like the devil away from the aircraft, then collapsed in the Brussels sprout field we had crashed in. No one speaks, we just sit, each man engrossed in his own thoughts. "Louise II" had done her job. She delivered the bombs and brought us safely back to friendly soil. She would never again be asked to take on that responsibility.

We get up and slowly walk away, glancing back at the wreckage of our aircraft. We had no way of knowing that in five short days, on 14 Oct 1943, we would be heading for the ball bearing factories at Schweinfurt, Germany, and into one of the greatest and hardest fought air battles of World War II.

It should be noted that the Luftwaffe was controlling the skies over Europe at this stage in the war. The Luftwaffe had good fighters and highly experienced pilots. Some of the best were concentrated in Goering's Flying Circus, the Yellow Nose Squadron and the Abbeyville Kids. We encountered them more than once. They were groups that you didn't want to meet.

Our losses during this period were very high, ►





◀ running up to 50%. Out of every two bombers that left England only one would return. For example, on our mission to Schweinfurt, the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force sent 120 bombers to the target; only 60 returned. On one mission over Germany, the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group lost every B-17, except one. As I recall he had aborted before reaching the target.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force could not tolerate these heavy losses, and the commanding generals were considering giving up the daylight raids and going to night bombings, as the RAF was doing. This never occurred. Instead large numbers of long-range P-51s and P-38s entered the air war. They were able to escort the bombers deeper into Germany. The bomber losses dropped to an acceptable level, and the American fighters went on to dominate the skies over Europe.

This is an account of just one mission out of 34 that I flew over Europe. At that time, I was a 19-year-old S/Sgt tail gunner. At the time of this writing (February 1998), I am 74 years old. The events of that day and others are still very clear in my mind. As I wrote, the events unfolded in my mind, as if they were on film, long ago recorded. In closing I must say that the only reason I survived over Europe was lots of luck, a skilled crew, and the B-17 Flying Fortress. It was truly a great aircraft! The conversations written here may not be verbatim, but is a general representation of a typical mission. I chose to write this account, because it shows how quickly things could change in the war over Europe.

**NOTE: Durland Edward “Tex” Abbe (1923–2012) flew 26 missions as a tail gunner with the 95<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. After that combat tour was finished, he flew nine additional missions with the 94<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group in a Pathfinder Squadron, not as a tail gunner, but as a toggler. Marienburg is now known as Malbork, Poland.**



All photos © Waters Family Archive

## Do You Have:

- **PICTURES & STORIES**
- **WARTIME LETTERS**
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- **UNSOLVED MYSTERIES**
- **PROJECTS OF REMEMBRANCE**

Contributing a submission to the newsletter is a great way to memorialize your loved one and create lasting connections with the 95<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group community. We are happy to assist with editing stories, scanning pictures or documents, etc.

### **2019 SUBMISSION DEADLINES:**

SPRING: **MARCH 1<sup>ST</sup>**

SUMMER: **JUNE 1<sup>ST</sup>**

FALL/WINTER: **NOVEMBER 15<sup>TH</sup>**

Sara R. W. Olson,  
Newsletter Editor  
editor@95thbg.org



# Left Formation

**IN RECOGNITION AND HONOR OF ALL THE 95<sup>TH</sup> BOMB GROUP VETERANS WHOSE STORIES WERE NEVER HEARD.**

VETERAN	SQUADRON	POSITION	PASSED
Joseph Cihon	336 <sup>th</sup>	Top Turret Gunner/Engr.	15 Apr 2018
Henry W. Bloch	412 <sup>th</sup>	Navigator	23 Apr 2019
Wilfred Guy	336 <sup>th</sup>	Unknown	04 Jun 2019
Frank P. Barbour	335 <sup>th</sup>	Co-Pilot	04 Jul 2019
Gordon Redtfeldt	334 <sup>th</sup>	Navigator	04 Jul 2019
Roger D. Thorngren	334 <sup>th</sup>	Bombardier	16 Jul 2019
Clayton Emerson	334 <sup>th</sup>	Radio Operator	31 Jul 2019
Dr. David Frank Wolter	335 <sup>th</sup>	Co-Pilot	15 Aug 2019



Military Funeral Honors express our nation's gratitude to the veterans who gave so much to defend our freedom. To make arrangements for Military Funeral Honors, call your nearest Air Force Base and ask to be connected to their Honor Guard. More information can be found at:

[HTTPS://WWW.CEM.VA.GOV](https://www.cem.va.gov)



# We Will Remember Them

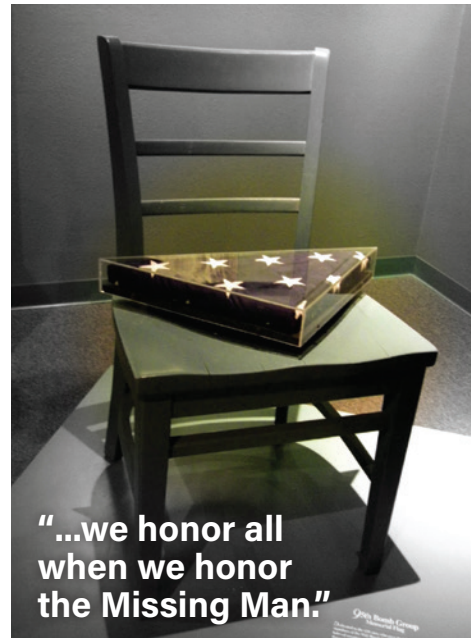
Since our last newsletter, the Foundation has received the following donations “In Honor Of” living veterans, and “In Loving Memory” of those who have Left Formation. To make a donation, contact Russ McKnight at 717-887-4075 or email [treasurer@95thbg.com](mailto:treasurer@95thbg.com).

## IN HONOR OF

No Donations Received

## IN LOVING MEMORY

Adam and Annie Hinojos



## Top 10: Keeping the Legacy Alive



1. REMEMBER A VETERAN EVERY DAY
2. SEND BIRTHDAY AND VETERANS DAY CARDS
3. DONATE 95<sup>TH</sup> BG BOOKS TO YOUR LOCAL LIBRARY
4. GIVE A GIFT MEMBERSHIP (FORM ON BACK PAGE)
5. SHARE OR DONATE 95<sup>TH</sup> BGMF MEMORABILIA
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7. JOIN THE 95<sup>TH</sup> BGMF FACEBOOK PAGE
8. SUBMIT A STORY TO THE 95<sup>TH</sup> BG NEWSLETTER
9. ATTEND A 95<sup>TH</sup> BOMB GROUP REUNION
10. \*SELECT THE 95<sup>TH</sup> BGMF ON AMAZONSMILE

\* Learn more about AmazonSmile program in the Treasurer's Report on page 7 or go to [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com) to get started.



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7	<b>First B-17's Over Berlin Patch</b> (Small Rectangle)	\$6		
8-10	<b>Enamel Pins</b> (Circle your choice): Red Feather Crest <del>Original Red Feather Shield</del> Red Feather	\$10		
11	<b>B-17 Pin</b>	\$5		
12	<b>Red Feather Crest Window Cling</b>	\$5		
13	<b>"We Flew For You" Bumper Sticker</b>	\$3		
14	<b>95<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group (H) Notepads</b> (package of 5)	\$10		
15	<b>"You Can Make It, Friend" Notecards</b> (5 notecards with envelopes)	\$8		
16	<b>95<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, Station 119 Horham Pen</b>	\$2		
17	<b>Red Feather Crest Coffee Mug</b>	\$10		
18-19	<b>Low Profile Canvas Hat</b> (Circle preferred color by the selected style): <b>Square B:</b> OLIVE or KHAKI <b>B-17:</b> BLACK or KHAKI	\$20		
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