



NASHVILLE REUNION

There was an exceptionally large turnout when the 8th Air Force Historical Society met in Nashville, Tennessee, from 9-13 Oct 2014. The 392nd BG was one of the larger Groups, with nearly 40 attendees—ten of them veterans.

Roger Freeman Award

The reunion highlight occurred at the Gala Banquet. On behalf of the 8AFHS, Bob Books presented the Roger Freeman Award to John Gilbert. This honor was bestowed "with appreciation and recognition for years of dedicated service to honor and preserve the history and legacy of those who served in the 8th Air Force."

In the 34 year history of the 8AFHS prior to this reunion, only 8 other people had received the award.

Bob told the over 300 attendees that "John devotes hundreds of hours each year to perpetuating the legacy of the 8th Air Force and has worked tirelessly for decades to keep the history of the 8th Air Force alive during his many presentations at schools and events in England. He is doing what the Society was commissioned to do: preserve the history and perpetuate the legacy of the Mighty Eighth."

"He has provided 8AF veterans and their loved ones with comprehensive tours of the bases where they served in

World War II. It is important to John that anyone interested in the 8th Air Force see where the men worked, where they lived, and in some cases, where they crashed. 'Taking a relative to the very paths where their loved one walked is a tremendous feeling for all of us,' he says.

"John has displayed his 8AF memorabilia, 8AF/Bomb Group newsletters and WWII photo albums at many one-, two- and three-day festivals throughout Norfolk; the Queen's Diamond Jubilee commemoration in Cawston, where he lives; the Theatre Royal in Norwich; a fund-raiser for the Air Ambulance Service; and the annual ceremony to honor Norfolk soldiers killed in the WWI battle of Gallipoli which is attended by military representatives from the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and Turkey.

"He has represented the 8AF at annual wreath-laying ceremonies and at dedications for new memorials in England and participated in lectures and other events at the Second Air Division Memorial Library in Norwich.

"These are but a few examples of what John Gilbert has been doing year after year for the 8th Air Force Historical Society. In my opinion, no one is more deserving of the Roger Freeman Award than John Gilbert."



Above. Standing L-R: Jack Rotzien, Jim Goar, Charles Dye, Harvey Naber, Aubrey Burke. Seated L-R: Joe McNiel, Tom Perry, Bill McGinley, Will Davis and Robert Harned. Top right. Bob Books presents the Roger Freeman Award to John Gilbert. (Photo from Debra Kujawa.) Bottom right. Bill McGinley and Yvonne Brusselmans reminisce about how her parents helped him evade capture in Belgium. (Photo from Donna Neely.)



A video of the award presentation is at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-5XnocHrfs>.

On page 9 is a personal account of what John's guided tour meant to one visitor.

Escape and Evasion Seminar

579th Sqdn veteran William C. McGinley featured

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FROM THE EDITOR

Friedrichshafen. I got many comments about the article in the last issue on the 18 Mar 1944 mission. 465th Sub Depot Instrument Technician Dick Giesing said he could tell something bad had happened as soon as the few returning planes came in sight.

David Brooks, son-in-law of Col Lawrence G. Gilbert (the 392nd BG's last commander), wrote, "The stories about the circumstances faced by the individual bomber crews are a sobering reminder of the incredible service and sacrifice by these young airmen. I was particularly taken by the last story about the Everhart crew and the reference to the white cliffs of Dover. In my introductory oceanography courses, I always tell my students about those white cliffs (of marine sediments) and how important they were to the crews of severely damaged bombers hoping to make it back to England."

This issue describes the mission to Berlin on 29 Apr 1944. Six crews who flew that day (Bell, Bridson, Kamenitsa, Ofenstein, Rogers and Sabourin) were ordered to the 392nd on 21 Mar 1944, undoubtedly as replacements for crews lost three days earlier. Bud Guillot, left waist gunner on the Kamenitsa crew, emailed, "After the 392nd's costly mission to Friedrichshafen, there were lots of empty bunks in the huts. The enlisted men's huts were set up to accommodate 12 men. The enlisted men in the Rogers and Kamenitsa crews were assigned to the same hut. We were pleased with that arrangement because we were good friends for many months as we went through training in the states together.

"When we first entered the hut it was musty, cold and gave one an uneasy feeling. There were a dozen maps of Europe hanging on all the walls and each map had a name on it identifying the previous resident's crew. Each map had lines drawn on it from the 392nd's base in Wendling to their target on a given date. Count the lines on each map and you knew how many missions each crew had completed. Some maps only had 2 or 3 lines to targets. Twelve was the most we counted, which indicated the crew was shot down on their 13th mission. That was chilling news to a new crew who knew the requirement was to complete 35 missions before you could be rotated back to the states. The odds were that few would be lucky enough to make it."

Three of those six replacement crews were shot down during the Berlin mission.

Remembrance. Earlier this year, Dutch author Mark van den Dries' book, *Holland Drop Zone: The crash of an American bomber in a Dutch polder*, was published. Mark

is the grandson of Piet van den Dries; during WWII, Piet was the headmaster of a primary school in Heinkenszand. A German unit was billeted in his school and an officer in his house. Despite this, he was a member of the resistance.

Inspired by his grandfather's files, Mark wrote the book, first in Dutch and then in English, to tell the story of the German occupation of Zeeland province, the dangerous work undertaken by the Dutch resistance to thwart the enemy whenever possible, the missions flown by 579th Sqdn 2/Lt James A. Gerow and crew, and what happened when their plane was shot down on 18 Sep 1944 during the low-level resupply mission in support of Operation Market Garden. Two men were killed, six were taken prisoner, and two were able to evade capture, thanks to Piet and other members of the underground.

When the men were buried in the local churchyard, the burgomaster made a speech thanking them for giving their lives to make the Netherlands free; he hoped that the village would never forget it. Overnight, their graves were covered with flowers.

In September 2014, Mark, relatives of the Dutch resistance fighters and many others gathered to dedicate memorials to the two casualties. Also present were Bob Hebert (nephew of tail gunner S/Sgt Normand B. Hebert and the man who translated the book into English) and his wife Paula; John Sulkowski (son of bombardier 2/Lt Joseph T. Sulkowski) and his son Tom; and 392nd BGMA Director/our representative in England, John Gilbert.

The first memorial was for engineer T/Sgt Eugene J. Kieras. When the bailout order was given, he was in the back of the plane trying to repair its rudder cables. Without a parachute, he clung to waist gunner S/Sgt Benjamin E. Brink's back and they jumped together. Gene was dislodged when Ben's parachute opened and fell to his death. The memorial was unveiled by John Gilbert and Mark's daughter Daphne. A wreath was laid by Leny Klompe-van Iwaarden, whose parents hid 2/Lt Sulkowski in their barn for several days and helped him evade.

The second memorial was for Pvt Edward Yensho, a US Army cargo master whose job was to ensure the bundles of supplies were correctly dropped. On his first mission, he went down with the plane. Before the unveiling, Bob Hebert read a letter from Ed's niece Becky Hornbeck. In part, it said, "Today we stand on this land where the crash occurred and where Ed Yensho gave his life. Our duty is simple. We must remember what brave men like Ed Yensho did here. We must remember what the courageous people of this village did here. You have honored Ed in a way that brought great comfort to his family, under the watchful eye of an enemy. Now you bring great comfort by remembering him seventy years later and the cause for which he gave his life, liberation and freedom. We Americans are so thankful for your enduring friendship."

The memorial was unveiled by John and Tom Sulkowski. Wreaths were laid by Riet Beukert-Rijk, whose mother sheltered many Allied evaders during the war, and Willem Visser, who conducted

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President's Message



Due to an unexpected illness, I am unable to prepare a column for this issue. Annabelle and I wish everyone a merry Christmas and a happy new year.

Blue Skies,
Jim Goar

Editor's note: Jim is now feeling much better!

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many interviews and was the driving force behind the construction of both memorials.

To get a copy of Mark's book, contact Annette Tison or Bill McCutcheon (addresses/phone numbers on page 2).

During ceremonies throughout Norfolk, England, on Remembrance Day in November, the 392nd Bomb Group was in the hearts and minds of many English friends. Jill Scott, a trustee of the Wendling Memorial, says, "Although we had rain early in the morning, it was fine here for our services. There was a good attendance at your service. Wreaths were also laid by the Brownies and Rainbows (young Girl Scouts in your country) and by two brothers on behalf of the village and the 392nd BG Memorial Association.

"Sadly, I was told that this is probably the last time we shall have the British Legion Standard in the procession. The Litcham Branch (Litcham is approximately 3 miles from Beeston) is being closed this year (lack of members) which means their Standard/Colour will be laid up. The nearest will be at Dereham, Swaffham and Fakenham and, of course, the British Legion are heavily committed to services and parades in those market towns. Many years ago we used to have a goodly number of Legion members from Litcham coming to the Service at your Memorial. Over the years the number has dwindled and dwindled until now we only have the Standard Bearer. He will be missed."

At St. Mary's Church in North Tuddenham, Norfolk, a plaque honoring 2/Lt Louis F. Bass (577th) and crew was unveiled by Senior Master Sgt John McAllister (USAF, Ret.) and dedicated by The Reverend Mark McCaghrey. On 21 Apr 1944, the 392nd was forming up for a mission to Zwickau. With very bad weather conditions over England, the mission was cancelled after the planes were airborne. Before the word reached 2/Lt Bass, a wing iced up and then broke off his plane. Two men were able to bail out, but eight were killed in the crash.

In May 2010, a commemorative plaque was dedicated near their crash site. Pat Baldwin, instrumental in having both plaques placed, wrote, "The memorial on the common is still visited a lot, especially by children, but having a plaque in the church as well means that even more folk will remember the crew and their sacrifice."

Doug Willies reports, "Due to extensive structural repairs to Upper Sheringham Church, we could not lay the usual posy and crosses on the Memorial to 2/Lt Colby Waugh's crew, but instead put a dedicated cross on the village War Memorial, alongside those remembered from the local community. Of course we read out the names as usual, and the five casualties from the crew, killed January 4, 1944, were not forgotten."

From Cheshunt, Hertfordshire, David Parnell tells us that about 80 people attended the remembrance service at the Memorial to 2/Lt John D. Ellis and crew, killed 12 Aug 1944. A US Air Force Honor Guard from the 100th Force Support Sqdn at RAF Mildenhall carried the colors of both countries and fired a rifle volley to honor the crew.

Four wreaths were laid at the Memorial, including one placed by David, a 392nd BGMA member and Trustee of the Memorial.

For more information about these crashes, see the Missions section of www.b24.net.

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prominently in the seminar "Behind the Wire and Mask." Yvonne Daley-Brusselmans described how her mother Anne Brusselmans worked tirelessly, under very dangerous conditions, to help 130 Allied soldiers and airmen evade capture. One of them was Bill McGinley, tail gunner on the 579th's 1/Lt John Stukus crew.

On 29 Jan 1944, while returning from a mission to Frankfurt, their plane was shot down near Waterloo, Belgium. Two men were killed, four were captured, and five evaded. Thanks to the valiant determination of Anne and others in the Belgian underground, Bill was able to evade capture for several months before getting back to England. For details, see <http://www.b24.net/stories/mcginley.htm>.

392nd BGMA Business Meeting

After welcoming remarks from President Jim Goar, Secretary-Treasurer Annette Tison noted that our treasury continues to hold steady.

Bob Books reported that he is working closely with the 8AFHS to reduce costs for future reunions. He thanked member David Nowack for his service to the 8th as Treasurer. (David was later elected as the new President-Treasurer by the 8AFHS Board of Directors. Congratulations!)

Our website consistently gets over 1,000 visitors a day. An important feature is the crew load lists (CLLs), which give the names of every man who flew a combat or diversion mission for the 392nd. Bob says he has always been haunted by a question asked years ago by 578th pilot Bob Vickers: how many airmen flew for the 392nd?

To get the answer, Bob and Annette carefully reviewed all 77,000+ names on the CLLs and spent months correcting 4,901 misspellings and typos from the original CLLs. Final analysis reveals that about 3,937 airmen flew missions for the 392nd BG out of England from 1943-1945.

Jim Goar thanked the members who make the organization run so smoothly: Bob and Annette, the Board of Directors, PX Manager Bill McCutcheon, and Ben Jones, who always makes our hospitality suite feel more like a pub than a room in a hotel. Jim was happy to report Ben's recent promotion to Master Sergeant in the USAF.

President's Awards

Jim presented the President's Award for "extraordinarily meritorious achievement" to Charles Dye, former 392nd BGMA treasurer and Director; George Michel, who gives regular presentations about the 392nd and 8AF to schools, churches, and civic groups near New Berlin, Wisconsin; and

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to English Friends Edor Rowland, John Rupp, and David Coleman in "grateful acknowledgement of their hospitality."

John Gilbert pointed out that he has guided fourteen families around the base this year and most of what he is able to show visitors is through the kindness of these Friends.

John Rupp is manager of Ben Burgess Beeston, a John Deere dealership built over and around the Operations building. The room where the airmen were briefed before missions can still be seen. David Coleman is manager of JagSpares International, which was once the Combat Officers Mess. Still visible there is a magnificent mural of flying B-24s and portraits of Betty Grable and Rita Hayworth. Edor Rowland's farm, once Site 8, includes an original Nissen hut, some washrooms and two bomb shelters.

Members reelected Oak Mackey, Jim Goar, Ben Jones and Bill McCutcheon to the Board of Directors.

First Time Attendees

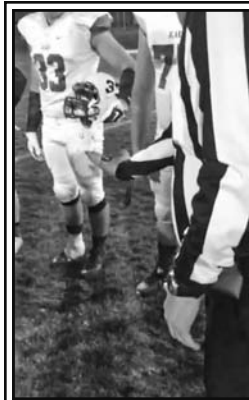
Tina Spriggs is the daughter of 465th Sub Depot Commander Col James W. Wall, who never talked much about his duties. During the reunion, she spoke at length with Jim Goar, who knew her father, and with Aubrey Burke, a welder in the 465th. Tina said this "was a great experience. Mr. Burke's explanation of how the 465th fit into the Group and the repair work they were responsible for was so enlightening. The Hospitality Room was superb and meeting Mr. Gilbert was a bonus. Just being there with all of you was a privilege. The knowledge that you all share is amazing!"

576th Sqdn armorer and 392nd BGMA Chaplain Tom Perry has attended many reunions. This time, though, he was accompanied for the first time by his son Kevin.

Every fall, Kevin is a referee at high school football games near his home in Champlin, Minnesota. At the reunion, he

bought a 392nd BG coin with a unique purpose in mind.

On October 21, he used it during the pre-game coin toss when the St. Anthony Village High School Huskies played the Blake School Bears in the first round of the Section 6AAAA playoffs for the Minnesota State High School League Championship.



Referee Kevin Perry uses a 392nd BG coin prior to a high school football championship playoff game. Photo by Julia Matthews, student football team manager at St. Anthony Village High School.

Prior to the coin toss, Kevin explained what the coin represents and named the Crusader "heads" and the B-24 "tails." Home team St. Anthony won 34-21.

Charles Dye, Station Ammunition Officer in the 1825th Ordnance Co., brought daughter Char and her husband Doug Heim. She had heard a lot about past reunions from her father and mother Helen (a Navy nurse in WWII) and said she was "humbled to be among you. You're all heroes."

Our outstanding hospitality suite manager, Ben Jones, brought an able assistant this year, Krista Nicolaisen.

William K. Prater, son of 577th pilot Willis K. Prater, visited the hospitality suite and enjoyed looking at the memorabilia that Ben displayed throughout the room.

2015 Reunion

The next 8AFHS reunion will be in Omaha, Nebraska, from 14-18 Oct 2015. The focus will be on the 8th Air Force role in the Strategic Air Command during the Cold War. Offutt AFB is nearby as well as many western history museums. See you there!

392nd BGMA MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please look at the mailing label. Your membership status is shown directly after your name. **"14" means your membership expires THIS MONTH AND SHOULD BE RENEWED NOW!!!!** LM means Life Member and FRND means that you receive the News with compliments of the 392nd BGMA. Send this form and your check (payable to 392nd BGMA) to Annette Tison, 9107 Wood Pointe Way, Fairfax Station, VA 22039. You may also join or renew on-line at <http://www.b24.net/392nd/join.htm>.

The Board of Directors has ruled that no Crusader will be denied membership because of financial difficulty, so if you're in straitened circumstances, check the Hardship Waiver box. If you feel that you can help the 392nd BGMA treasury with a donation, there is a provision for it below.

Name _____ Ground [] Air [] Sqdn/Unit _____

Mailing address _____

Email address _____ Telephone number _____

If a spouse, friend, or relative served in the 392nd, please give us his name and unit: _____

Dues: [] \$25/year if you want to receive the News by postal mail OR [] \$20/year for receipt by email
Please feel free to renew for multiple years! Just let us know what your wishes are.

Hardship Waiver [] DONATION \$ _____ TOTAL ENCLOSED \$ _____

BERLIN: 29 APRIL 1944

8AF called for a massive strike against the Friedrichstrasse Railroad Station in Berlin—751 bombers from eight B-17 and four B-24 Combat Wings—arranged into three forces. The 252 Liberators were the third force.

Per the Intelligence Annex, the mission was “a concentrated effort on this target alone with the idea of striking a really damaging blow at these facilities. This target is a key point in the city’s passenger traffic system. The city is ringed and crossed with elevated and underground [lines]. This target is one of the few places where passenger facilities may be considered an important target for air attack. Tremendous dislocation would be caused to employees of war industries by disruption of these facilities. At this point these facilities are most vital, for the main East/West-North/South lines cross.”

Fighter support by sixteen groups from 8th Fighter Command (593 planes), four groups from 9th Fighter Command (183 planes) and two RAF Mustang Squadrons (24 planes) would ensure continuous escort for all units while over enemy territory.

Most of the first force had a fairly routine mission, except for the 385th and 447th BGs. Radar equipment in one of their Pathfinder aircraft failed completely and it only worked sporadically in the other. As a result, they veered to the south on their way to Berlin. Off-course and unescorted, the Wing was hit hard for over 30 minutes in the Brunswick area by an extremely determined and aggressive force of about 125 enemy aircraft.

Except for that Wing, the B-17s had ample fighter protection to the target. The B-24s were not so fortunate. They met 60-80 enemy aircraft northeast of Hanover. These fighters attacked for 10 minutes and then, after reforming, attacked for another 20 minutes as the bombers neared Berlin. They finally broke off after the formation made its final turn to the target. In less than 25 minutes, five B-24s had crashed and many more were damaged.

The B-17s were generally protected on the withdrawal. Again, it was the Libs that suffered. None of the Fighter Groups assigned to protect the B-24s on the return trip located the Libs when scheduled. As a result, nearly 100 enemy fighters found them near Hanover and hit in strength until the P-47s assigned to sweep the withdrawal route arrived in the Dummer Lake area. Sporadic attacks were then made until the bombers reached the Zuider Zee.

On the Continent, 8AF lost 26 B-24s, 38 B-17s, and 14 fighters. Several more crashed in England. The 580 Liberators and Fortresses that made it to Berlin dropped over 1,408 tons of bombs with “fair to good” results.

The 392nd Bomb Group

The 392nd provided 18 ships, with four flying as part of the 44th BG formation per 8AF orders. The bomb load was five 1,000-pound General Purpose and three 100-pound incendiary bombs per plane.

The gunners briefing was at 4am, the officers briefing at 4:30, and the navigators briefing at 5:30. Crews were at their stations at 6:25, started engines at 7:05 and taxied at 7:10. The first plane, #42-52642, Short Round, under the command of 577th lead pilot **Capt Robert D. Copp**, took off at 7:25.

2AD’s Liberators departed the English coast at 9:23 and

almost immediately began falling behind schedule due to an unpredicted wind shift.

When 579th plane #42-100261, Sweet Chariot, was north of Amsterdam, a large oil leak in the #3 engine was spotted. Pilot **2/Lt Dewey L. Gann Jr.** turned back, landing at Shipdham. Inspection revealed that an empty shell case, ejected when ships in front of him test-fired their guns, had severed the propeller feathering line. The line was replaced and the crew landed at Wendling at 11:22.

The First Attack

At about 11:04, 50 German fighters in double line abreast attacked the 392nd’s formation while it was north of Hanover. The P-47s could not engage as they were running low on fuel. Most of the P-51s that were supposed to replace the P-47s had mechanical problems and turned back at 11:16 without ever finding the B-24s.

#42-100100, Double Trouble, with 578th pilot **2/Lt Gerald E. Rogers**, was already falling back due to engine problems. German fighters scored a direct hit on the nose with a 20mm shell, demolishing the nose turret, killing bombardier 2/Lt Fred J. Kane and sending a line of bullets down the middle of the plane. It caught fire and the bailout bell soon sounded.

Eight survivors were captured almost immediately. The fate of 2/Lt Rogers remained a mystery until 1947, when his remains were found in a forest some distance from the crash site with his parachute still intact.

When the fighters attacked, 576th pilot **2/Lt Leo E. Ofenstein**, in #42-110062, was flying just to the left and slightly behind **2/Lt William T. Kamenitsa**, also 576th, pilot of #42-100371, Doodle Bug.

Sgt Oliver R. “Bud” Guillot, Kamenitsa’s left waist gunner, recalls, “We had just gone through heavy anti-aircraft fire and I could see heavy flak up ahead of us that was shooting at the first wave of heavy bombers that were over Berlin. Suddenly, a German fighter’s shells hit the Ofenstein plane. It lifted #062 up, maybe ten to fifteen feet, and blew it forward! Pointed in the nose up position above us, it rolled over, came down and hit our wing. The last time I saw them they were in a steep descent to the left with their left wing much lower than the right.”

Ofenstein’s #1 and #2 engines were gone and a third engine was on fire. Left waist gunner Sgt Hyman J. Hatton was first out the escape hatch between the waist and tail positions, expecting gunners S/Sgt Arthur M. Smith, Sgt Robert W. Rowlett and Sgt Oliver G. Schmelzle to quickly follow. Both Hatton and Smith remember that as Schmelzle was putting on his parachute, it unexpectedly opened up; he was gathering it together when they jumped.

Smith got out just as the plane jerked into a tight spin. In his last glimpse around the plane, he saw Schmelzle and Rowlett stuck to the bulkhead by centrifugal force. Both went down with the plane.

Navigator 2/Lt David J. Purner sat on the edge of the nose wheel hatch and jumped as soon as he heard the bailout bell. Ofenstein had lowered the landing gear as a sign of surrender, so when Purner slid out the hatch he ended up astride the mudguard just above the wheel. Centrifugal force kept him pinned there. At less than 1,000 feet, he

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was blown free when the ship apparently exploded; he didn't remember pulling the ripcord but suddenly saw his parachute open above him.

After landing, he buried his chute and then lay in a grain field until right waist gunner S/Sgt Smith joined him. Together, they watched the B-24s fly away. Purner and Smith evaded capture until German civilians found them at 10:15pm on 1 May.

On 29 Apr 2000, Purner told the *Johnson City* [Tennessee] Press that "Civilians captured me, and that was not a pleasant situation... They had a rope around my neck, and we had resigned to the fact that we were going to be hung. Two older German men armed with Luger pistols managed to persuade the young hotheads in that mob that we should be held for military interrogation."

While standing between the pilots, radio operator S/Sgt Roy L. Kennett saw 20-30 fighters attack, starting a fire that quickly spread into the bomb bay—a frightening sight with 5,300 pounds of bombs still on board. Kennett tried to put the fire out but realized it was futile. As he stood on the catwalk, the bomb bay doors opened. Kennett looked toward the flight deck and saw copilot 2/Lt John J. Wall motioning for him to get out.

Kennett went to the flight deck, snapped on his parachute and tugged at engineer S/Sgt Vitold P. Krushas' feet where they dangled from his top turret. Finally, he recalled, "I gave up and figured [Krushas was] going to ride the ship down. I didn't know what [he] was doing and I had to bail out. Things were getting pretty risky there." The pilots were still working furiously at the controls when Kennett went out the bomb bay.

Krushas had climbed down from his turret when he heard Ofenstein yelling over the intercom for the crew to bail out. He went forward to the flight deck and witnessed the pilots' Herculean efforts to keep the ship flying. Then, he thought, "Hey...we're in battle! I've left my post!" He was back UP in his turret when Kennett grabbed his legs.

When he descended from his turret for the second time, Krushas saw the top of one wing was on fire. At the flight deck, the gas in the fuel sight gauge was also ablaze and burning gasoline was falling on his parachute pack. He yanked the chute out, snapped it on and, with no other options, dived off the flight deck, slipping neatly between the bottom thousand-pound bombs. He landed in a tree where some parachute cords wrapped around his neck and left him unconscious. His life was saved when an old German climbed up and cut him loose.

Hatton and Krushas were quickly captured and eventually put in a large room with many other American airmen. Krushas vividly remembers German fighter pilots walking through the room asking, "What plane were you in?" as they tried to find someone from the planes they had just shot down.

Ofenstein's right wing broke off about ten feet of Kamenitsa's left wing and his entire left aileron. Copilot 2/Lt George E. Graham Jr. immediately salvoed the bombs while Kamenitsa fought to keep the plane under control. Because of the missing wing section, the plane kept circling to the left. To compensate, Kamenitsa put

full power to the left engines and reduced power on the right engines. This did not let them fly straight, but it did prevent their going into a full spin.

Guillot recalls, "Kamy came on the intercom and announced he had some control of the airplane but couldn't get the air speed to maintain flight. 'I see a field below us and I am going to attempt a landing in it. You can bail out or you can ride it in with me.' We chose to stay with our pilot and the plane. He made a high speed bumpy landing but during the rollout there was a dirt farm road crossing our path that took out our nose gear and stood our B-24 on its nose. Navigator 2/Lt John J. Caulfield, bombardier 2/Lt Gene A. Miller and radio operator S/Sgt Joseph R. Trivison were killed in the crash landing."

The survivors were eventually taken to an air raid shelter in Hanover where someone commented that their friends on the Rogers crew were probably already back in England drinking beers in their honor. Then the door opened and the captured members of that crew walked in.

Meanwhile, men in **2/Lt Roland E. Sabourin's** crew saw **2/Lt Robert R. Bishop**, aboard #42-110105, pull away from the formation; his "right elevator was shot up badly. No chutes." Both crews were in the 578th.

Guillot remembers that when the dust settled after his own plane crashed, he saw a huge fire and black smoke near a farm house a few hundred yards away. He was sure it was a bomber from his own Group, perhaps Ofenstein's.

That plane was actually Bishop's. German witnesses remember the dogfight between the fighters and the bombers and then the B-24 spiraling down toward the horse pasture below. They confirmed that no one bailed out. About an hour after impact, at least one bomb exploded in the wreckage, destroying most of the plane and sending debris far and wide through the little town.

After the war, the remains of bombardier 2/Lt Thomas Digman and engineer Sgt James T. Blong were identified and buried per their family's wishes. Names of the other eight men were listed on the Tablets of the Missing at the Netherlands American Cemetery.

In 2003, German researcher Enrico Schwartz investigated the crash site and found bone fragments and the name tag from ball turret gunner Sgt John P. Bonnassiolle's flight jacket. Digging by the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command in 2005 and 2007 unearthed more bone fragments.

DNA testing eventually identified remains of 2/Lt Bishop, Sgt Bonnassiolle, waist gunner Sgt Michael A. Chiodo and tail gunner S/Sgt Ralph L. McDonald. In 2010, they were buried with full military honors in their home towns.

On 26 Oct 2011, the other remains were interred at Arlington National Cemetery. Identified remains of navigator 2/Lt Donald W. Hess and radio operator S/Sgt Joseph J. Karaso were buried in individual caskets. Per his family's wishes, the identified remains of copilot 2/Lt Arthur W. Luce were buried in a third casket with all other remains that could not be individually identified.

Nearing Berlin

As they left Hanover, the bomber formation was widely scattered. Several Groups approached Berlin simultaneously from different headings, causing more disorder.

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When 577th deputy lead **1/Lt Floyd Slipp** was about 75 miles from Berlin, #42-7495, Axis Grinder, was hit by flak and he had to feather the #3 engine. Fifteen Me-109s came from above and the east, forcing the gunners to look directly into the sun as they fired. The Lib was hit by five 20mm shells, seriously wounding navigator 1/Lt Robert J. Beatson and left waist gunner S/Sgt Walter J. Kolczynski.

Ball turret gunner S/Sgt James M. Buzick later recalled, "One of the explosive shells had hit the ammo can of my ball turret and the ammo started to explode. The explosion was so strong it broke the inch thick Plexiglas on the ball turret that I used to sight through. I'm not sure what happened next but I found myself out of the turret and in the waist area ... trying to help the wounded waist gunner, and putting on my parachute. We later found the butt end of a 20mm shell lodged in my left machine gun, which was situated only inches from me when I was in the turret. I did not have a scratch...

"I tried to get [Kolczynski] to lie down so that I could take over his guns. Blood was running down his legs from a wound... He refused, saying, 'No damn German is going to shoot me and get away with it!' He stayed at his gun the whole way back."

Slipp salvoed his bombs and left the formation. Soon after, two Me-109s spotted them and attacked. Slipp dived for the cloud cover below, staying in the clouds for miles. They flew so low across Holland that two crewmen remember that German soldiers in a windmill shot at them with rifles.

Axis Grinder crossed the English Channel just above the water and actually had to gain altitude to get over the English cliffs. The Slipp crew landed at Wendling at 1:16pm.

2/Lt John W. Reed IV, 577th, was flying on Slipp's left in #42-7546, Alfred II. His plane was also badly damaged during that attack—the hydraulic system was knocked out, gas tanks punctured, controls shot out, #2 engine shot out, #4 engine bad, right rudder shot off, and there were hits in the bomb bay, cockpit, and radio compartment as well.

Reed made a sharp turn out of the formation and jettisoned his bombs. A crew check revealed everyone was okay.

The pilot got the plane back to England, realized he couldn't land the plane safely and ordered the crew to jump. At about 1:20, eight bailed out and landed near Beccles, Suffolk; another jumped out moments later and landed near Ingham, Norfolk. Reed then set the automatic pilot and bailed out. The plane flew on for several miles before it finally crashed and burned near Walcott, Norfolk, at 1:29.

The only casualty was 2/Lt Reed; it was believed he hit the plane while exiting and was unable to open his parachute.

Berlin

Copp approached Berlin with just four planes; the rest had merged with the 44th.

Because the winds were both stronger and more northerly than predicted, the bombers were considerably behind the established time schedule. As a result, the B-24s had no fighter escort from just west of Berlin on the way in, through the target area and for more than 200 miles on the withdrawal. German fighters harassed the B-24s all the way to the coast. Attacks were particularly strong in the Dummer Lake area and the German focus on stragglers caused two

more 392nd BG losses.

2/Lt Bert W. Wyatt, 579, was flying #42-7510, El Lobo. It crashed at 1:45 in a forest near the small town of Dinklage, Germany, about 230 miles due west of Berlin with all ten men killed. Several residents remember hearing the sounds of a gun battle but could see nothing because of the clouds. Another saw El Lobo in the air just before it impacted; neither right engine was working and thick black smoke was coming from the forward part of the fuselage.

577th pilot **2/Lt Fred Shere**, aboard #41-28759, crashed about 15 minutes after Wyatt and just 15 miles west.

They were hit by flak just after bombs away. Shere feathered one engine but could still keep up with the other planes. A short time later, German fighters came through the formation, knocking out two planes above Shere's and causing another engine to windmill. No longer able to stay with the formation, he headed toward England alone, steadily losing altitude.

Sgt Joe B. Maloy's ball turret had been raised; as soon as he climbed out, he took over the right waist gun of wounded Sgt Thomas L. Hampton. Maloy recalled the last attack was by three fighter planes: The crew shot one down, another abandoned the assault and the third, which caused the fatal damage, attacked from below and to the left.

In his story, *Mooning Frankfurt*, navigator 2/Lt Patrick J. Ryan says the nose turret was out and the intercom was silent. He knew the flight deck had taken a lot of damage and wasn't sure if the pilots were even flying the airplane.

Then the bailout bell sounded and Ryan went out the nose wheel hatch. As he hid his parachute in a bush, Maloy came "hot-footing across the field... There were a lot of people chasing him and by the time he got to me, he was gasping and wheezing, blood was streaming down his face, and I thought he must be seriously wounded. In the minute or so it took to convince me that his wounds were slight, the German people were on us...

"We were surrounded by people from a nearby village. A young boy was acting as interpreter. The first question he asked was, 'Do you want to go to Berlin?' We said, 'Hell, no, we just came from there.' That probably was not a good thing to say because they immediately shook a few pitch forks at us.' The two men were taken to the village jail where they found three of their gunners.

Engineer S/Sgt Orlando Friesen had a tough time escaping the plane. When the hydraulics went out, his top turret was stuck in an awkward position. He tossed his parachute down (he had been sitting on it) and squeezed out of the turret as quickly as he could. A glimpse onto the flight deck revealed copilot F/O Milan R. Zeman and radio operator Sgt Fonzy M. Wilson Jr. were already dead and the pilot was dying.

Friesen then sounded the bailout bell. After putting on his parachute—a difficult job since the plane was in a steep dive—he jumped. The B-24 was quite low and he hit the ground hard. He didn't really become coherent until he was in Stalag 17B.

Tail gunner Sgt Marvin O. Morris spent about two months in a German hospital and later told Maloy that the downed German pilot came to visit him there. He'd been hit during their gun battle and the two men compared war wounds.

See BERLIN on page 8

BERLIN from page 7

Back to Wendling

At some point, 579th pilot **2/Lt Bernard Fryman's** plane, #41-29427, Ready Willing and Able, was severely damaged. Fryman nursed it back to Wendling and began a landing-pattern circuit over the field. At 3:22pm, the plane suddenly exploded and then crashed two miles south of the base, killing the entire crew.

Next to return was 576th pilot **1/Lt George E. Jones** in #42-110097. Bombardier 2/Lt Harry E. Thomas recalled that about 11am, he saw a dozen enemy aircraft attack a B-17 formation two miles away. When the friendly fighters went out to engage, 40 German fighters came in from above. About 10 or 12 seemed to target Jones' ship. Thomas, in the nose turret, fired at an FW-190 until it caught fire and exploded about 150 yards off the left wing. S/Sgt Henry E. Marvin then destroyed another FW-190 from the right waist.

Jones released his bombs on Berlin while under attack by 50 enemy fighters. During the melee, a bullet cut through his oxygen line and he had to use portable oxygen bottles for the rest of the mission. Another bullet came through the left side of the nose turret between Thomas's neck and shoulder, passed by navigator 2/Lt Jack C. Morris's head and hit copilot 2/Lt Richard R. Sandoz in the right ankle, nearly severing his leg.

Radio operator T/Sgt Ralph E. McAdams pulled Sandoz onto the flight deck. He cut away the bloody flying suit and applied a tourniquet to the mangled leg. McAdams sprinkled sulfa powder, the only antibiotic available, onto the wound and tended to Sandoz the rest of the trip.

Jones was attacked again by four enemy aircraft that swooped down from 11 o'clock high. S/Sgt William C. Surber, who had moved from the ball turret to the left waist gun, shot the right wing off an Me-109 as tail gunner S/Sgt Vincent H. Rossi fired at four more Me-109s.

As they neared the Zuider Zee, Thomas said seven Me-109s began "playing around and picking on stragglers. We were all nearly out of oxygen at this time and were really sweating out the coast and leaving so we could drop down below the formation. I was worried about George giving out of oxygen, as there was no one to keep an eye on him. We finally saw the clouds break and the beautiful Channel."

When they got back to Wendling, Thomas fired three red flares, signifying injured on board, and they landed without flying the traffic pattern. They pulled off the runway into a revetment as soon as they slowed down and Sandoz was quickly taken away by ambulance. The doctor later told Jones that Sandoz would have died if it had taken even 15 minutes longer to get him medical attention.

The Jones crew was later credited with destroying three enemy fighters, the most of any 392nd crew that day.

576th pilot **2/Lt Donald D. Prell** landed #41-29433 one minute after Jones. Bombardier 2/Lt Hervey E. Stetson and engineer T/Sgt Donald G. Backus drove three Me-109s away as they turned toward Berlin; they experienced intermittent attacks from Berlin all the way to the Dutch coast.

Five planes then touched down within four minutes.

At interrogation, Capt Copp's men reported seeing five B-24s go down but only 10 parachutes.

2/Lt Walter S. Brunn's crew, 579th, had flown 12 missions with the 15th AF in Italy before being transferred to the 392nd in mid-March 1944. They enjoyed living in Nissen huts rather than tents, as they had in Italy! While returning from Berlin aboard #41-29448, Carol Ann, enemy fighters put a hole in the #3 gas tank. As engineer T/Sgt Thomas R. Hassett hurriedly transferred the remaining gas to another tank, copilot F/O Henry L. Reinbold prayed that they wouldn't get hit again while all that fuel was pouring out. Their luck held.

579th pilot **2/Lt Charles L. Bell**, flying #42-7472, Bull Bat, reported smoke rising up to 18,000 feet from Berlin.

2/Lt Roland E. Sabourin recalled, "The German fighters had a field day with our formations. The timing for our fighter cover replacements was off perhaps 10 or 15 minutes. Evidently, the German ground radar picked up this delay and directed their fighters, so enabling them to strafe the formation, and they literally did strafe them. You could see them up ahead. They looked like little birds, swallows. The next thing you knew they were coming through the formation firing at you." His crew, 578th, flew in #42-110028.

578th copilot 2/Lt James A. Green, on **2/Lt George L. Bridson's** crew, recalls that after getting out of Berlin "there were many single ships trying to re-gather into a semblance of protective formation. This was not as easy as it would seem because if your aircraft couldn't be positively identified the formation just wouldn't let you join up... On the long flight back we finally did manage to get close enough to another formation for some protection, but not near as much as we would have liked. After crossing the English Channel we made our way back to our home base alone and didn't find out until the next day who in our Group didn't make it."

#41-29131, Flying Patch, with 576th pilot **1/Lt Edward F. Wittel**, was the last plane to land, at 3:44pm. Right waist gunner Sgt Bert Prost remembers watching Ofenstein's plane hurtle over Flying Patch and hit the ship on his other side.

According to radio operator T/Sgt Cletus M. Jeffcoat, this mission "was the longest time over enemy territory. We had a big headwind and it took us a long time to get out. We made it back to the field and couldn't get the wheels down. After a while we got them down, but not locked. We began to think we were going to have to bail out. We finally got them locked and came in on three engines. We were all in the back for crash landing. We thought we had no brakes, but our auxiliary system worked. Everyone was sweating us in, had lots of other crews to come out to our plane. Really drew a crowd. No one hurt, thank God."

Fortunes of War

Of the 181 men who departed Wendling on 29 Apr 1944, 71 did not return. Four of their 18 planes were survivors of the Friedrichshafen mission. Three of them—El Lobo, Double Trouble, and Doodle Bug—were shot down.

There was no photo coverage of the 392nd's lead section, but those flying with the 44th BG hit 7½ miles southwest of the primary target.

Much of this article comes from research by Greg Hatton, whose father Hyman was a survivor from the Ofenstein crew, and Annette Tison, whose uncle 2/Lt Douglas N. Franke was killed with the Wyatt crew. See the WWII Stories section of www.b24.net for more accounts of the Berlin mission.

A Tribute to John Gilbert

by Ralph Winter

Ralph's father, 579th pilot 1/Lt Ralph E. Lamma, was killed in action on 13 Nov 1943. Ralph traveled to England in May 2014 with the Heritage League and was part of a group that John took around Wendling, Beeston and Station 118.

I'm sure that for many of you, it will be "preaching to the choir" when I write about what a great treasure we have in John Gilbert. Anyone who has had the privilege of being escorted around Wendling by John will surely agree that he is a tireless champion of the 392nd BGMA.

John was born in Norwich in 1937, where he was living when the German Luftwaffe began their Baedeker raids on England. In 1942, 4-year old John and his family took refuge in the community bomb shelter near their home. When the bombing ceased and his family emerged, they discovered that their home had been completely destroyed.

They, along with other families, had to take refuge in a schoolhouse two miles away where they spent the next week. John's father was already at Wendling as he was working for Taylor Woodrow helping to construct the base and he found a cottage for them there.

John came to know the area and was able to witness the activity associated with building the airfield at Wendling. It is his eyewitness to events that enable him to provide a rich and colorful description of what was taking place during this time, a time that for many of us has great meaning.

John's father continued to work on the base and in the surrounding area; his mother took in laundry for the airmen. Consequently, John got to know many of the American airmen who befriended him. When the Bomb Group left Wendling in June 1945, John says that he cried for days.

For the next year, RAF/USAAF Sculthorpe used the runways to practice landings and takeoffs. With a shortage of housing at the end of the war, the British government/local council converted many of the buildings on and around the airfields of East Anglia to housing. John's family was moved into the building that had been the Combat Officers Mess and Club, where the beautiful 392nd BG murals can still be seen.

Drawing from these rich experiences and vivid memories, John provides veterans of the 392nd and their families with a comprehensive tour of the base. As a rule, John devotes an entire day to showing his visitors around the base and

nearby sights where the airmen spent their time. Most of the land has been returned to private ownership and what buildings remain, frequently are utilized by local businesses. John has obtained permission from these owners to let him bring in visitors to see these places where they or their loved ones once lived and worked while serving in the 392nd. Without John's diplomatic relationship with these people, a tour of Wendling would be far less rewarding and meaningful.

John's tour includes a stop at the Wendling Village Hall to see a mural painted by a local artist and two schoolchildren, Craig and Lee Banwell, and at the outdoor Memorial obelisk at Beeston dedicated to the 392nd BG airmen who lost



Ralph Winter (left) and John Gilbert at a Nissen hut like the one where Ralph's father lived at Station 118.

their lives fighting for America and defending England against further invasion. The day generally ends with a visit to John's home where he shares his collection of photographs and memorabilia.

Another example of John's devotion to the 392nd and its legacy is the hundreds of hours each year that he spends making presentations at schools and other event venues which this year, will result in his having made over 40 presentations.

And so it is with this great storehouse of knowledge that John so graciously and willingly shares the history of Wendling with visitors from the U.S.A., England, Europe and other countries. On a personal note, it is impossible to express how thankful I am for John Gilbert and what he was able to impart to me as a result of his thorough and caring devotion to the history and legacy of Wendling.

As someone who never got to know my father, having John Gilbert to show me around and give insight into what I was seeing was an experience that I will always cherish. I was able to walk where my father had walked and see things my father had seen—all thanks to John Gilbert. And so I say, "Thanks John, from the bottom of my heart."

FOLDED WINGS REPORT

Please report the death of a member or spouse and provide a copy of the newspaper obituary if possible.

Name of deceased _____ Unit/Sqdn _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Date of death _____ Survivors _____

Reported by _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

The 392nd BGMA is engaged in a fund-raising effort to financially support our website, www.b24.net. It contains the history of the 392nd Bomb Group. You could make no greater tribute to your loved one than a donation for this living and ongoing memorial to the 392nd. Please send this report, hopefully with your check payable to the 392nd BGMA-Website, but send it with or without it, to: Annette Tison, 9107 Wood Pointe Way, Fairfax Station, VA 22039

PHOTOS FROM



Dee and Will Davis at the Grand Ole Opry



Carol and Bob Books



Joe McNiel and Annette Tison



Krista Nicolaisen and M/Sgt Ben Jones, USAF



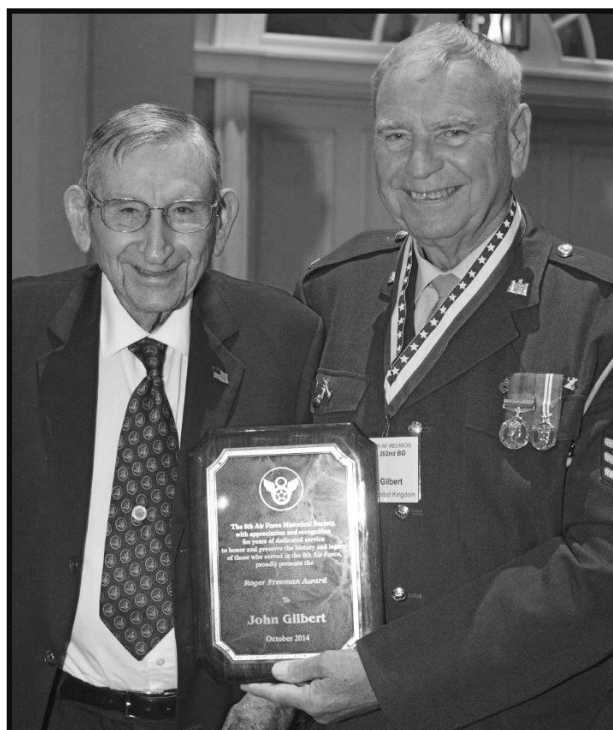
Mac and Linda Cassell



Ralph Winter



Cyndy and BrigGen Bobby Efferson, USAF Ret.



Jim Goar, John Gilbert and the Roger Freeman Award



Jim Marsteller



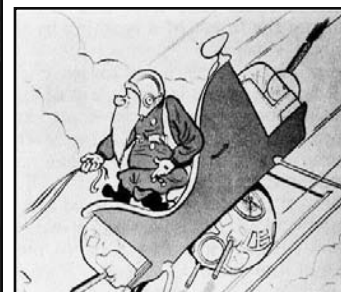
Santa reports for winter duty at the North Pole



Jack Rotzien and Christine Messer



Beverly, Aubrey and Josh Burke



Santa is prepared for hijackers

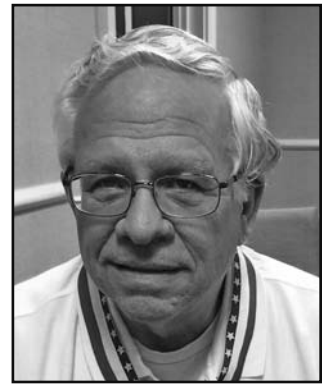
THE REUNION



Charles Dye with Char and Doug Heim



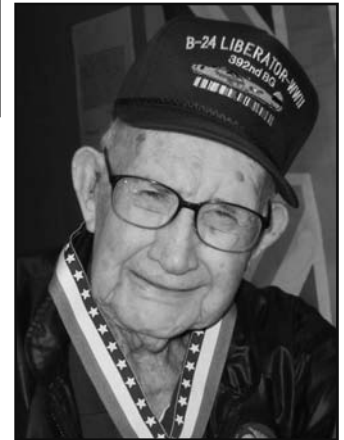
Clockwise from top left: Debbie Goar Beigh, Bob and Janet Goar, Jim Goar



Bill McCutcheon



New 8AFHS President-Treasurer David Nowack and wife Lois



William C. McGinley



Tom and Kevin Perry. In background, Mark and Harvey Naber



Jim and Bob Harned. Not shown is Bob's daughter Ginny Turner.



Tina Wall Spriggs



Doreen Ballinger-Harris and Laurie Bedus



Enjoying the hospitality suite. Standing L-R: John Gilbert, Ben Jones, Annette Tison, Ralph Winter. Sitting L-R: Bill McGinley, Tom Perry, Jim Marsteller, Kevin Perry



Harvey and Mark Naber



CHAPLAIN'S CORNER
by Tom Perry, 576th Sqdn Armorer

The first verse in the Bible tells of a miracle. Genesis, chapter 1 verse 1 reads, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

We are approaching the season of the year when the Christians of the world celebrate another miracle—the virgin birth of Jesus Christ the savior of the world, recorded in the Bible in the Gospel of Luke, chapters 10 and 11. "Then the angel said to [the shepherds], do not be afraid for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a savior; who is Christ the Lord."



**THE 392ND MEMORIAL
AT WENDLING**

But we...shall be remember'd;

~

**We few, we happy few,
we band of brothers.**

~

**For he to-day that sheds
his blood with me
Shall be my brother...**

William Shakespeare
Henry V

392nd Bomb Group Memorial Association
9107 Wood Pointe Way
Fairfax Station, VA 22039
USA

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

First Class Mail

Almighty God, Who has blessed us with the will and courage to do our duty, we praise You for our comrades whose death kept freedom living. We praise You also for giving us the years we have lived since their departure. We pray that You will strengthen and sustain our devotion to truth and justice, so that we may be faithful beneficiaries of their sacrifice. Continue Your mercy to our comrades; keep them in Your care; and bring us all at last into Your presence there to rejoice Eternally. Amen. — Composed by 576th pilot the late Very Reverend Robert C. Martin, former Dean of the Cathedral at Erie, Pennsylvania.

∞FOLDED WINGS∞

Everett J. Isakson, 576, October 11, 2014
Edward J. Gienko Sr., 578, September 15, 2014