

The 1944 Wartime Crash of a B17

*Plane # 43-37763 - Crew #3712 – Pilot: Frank B. Toftness
First Gunner George Edward Wilson – Ferndale CA*



*Prepared by the Families and Friends of the Crewmembers
First Draft Dated: September 1, 2002*

This Modified Report Prepared by Ed Wilson on August 27, 2014

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FOREWORD - March 2002

During World War II approximately 400,000 American servicemen and women were killed. Most of these individuals were reported Killed In Action, KIA, or Missing In Action, MIA. Due to wartime censorship, very few family members know how their loved ones were killed or where they were missing in action. Perhaps, the Crash of a B17 over the North Sea on July 21, 1944 is a typical example of what happened to these individuals and their families during and after the war.

There were nine crewmembers on the B17 when it was downed in 1944. Seven were reported MIA and one reported as KIA. The telegrams received by their “next of kin” were of the following impersonal form:

WASHINGTON DC AUGUST 2 1944

**MRS JOSEPHINE WILSON
FERNDALE CALIFORNIA**

**THE SECRETARY OF WAR DESIRES ME TO EXPRESS IN DEEP
REGRET THAT YOUR SON SGT. GEORGE E. WILSON WAS KILLED
IN ACTION ON TWENTY-ONE JULY OVER GERMANY. LETTER
FOLLOWS.**

ULIO, THE ADJUTANT GENERAL

For the seven MIA the phrase “killed in action” was replaced by “missing in action”. The form letter that followed gave no additional information. During the next several months, several family members of the crew, who had exchanged home addresses, started to communicate. Some families were able to receive some of the details from the one crewmember that survived the crash.

It is over 57 years since the crash of the plane; however, many family members are still haunted by the fact that they *do not know the details and location of the crash and what happened to the families of the crewmembers*. The search for these answers started on August 15, 2001. After 5 months and 17 days, communication with all nine crewmembers’ families was established. This document is an attempt to consolidate and summarize the information that has been obtained during the last six months. In most cases it was only necessary to transfer copies of Emails into this document. As expected, after 57 years, some of the information is inconsistent.

As a result of this search, it was our objective is to have a group memorial service for the crewmembers and their families at Arlington National Cemetery.

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THE SEARCH FOR FAMILY MEMBERS

Gerard O'Regan of County Cork, Ireland, founded the War Plane Research Group, which is a nonprofit group that specializes in the reconstruction and documentation of plane crashes during WW-II of both the German and Allied Forces. Gerard is 49 years old and a captain in the security forces of Henkel Chemical Corp. and conducts these searches, with the assistance of a few friends, as a hobby. He is shown at Patsy Pines Grave, Winehester, VA Nov. 2000. He starts every search by writing the Postmaster at the last known address of the crewmember.



The search of the crash of the B 17G Flying Fortress, was initiated by the family of the Plane's Pilot, Frank Toftness, nephew Dick Toftness and his wife Donna Whitman.

At this point in time, the "family" has located relatives Jim Hendershot, nephew of Wilbur Hall and daughter Judy, Ed Wilson, brother of George Wilson, Joy Carlson daughter of Frank Toftness, Louis Lenti son of Adolph Lenti, Lloyd Peacock and his wife and daughter Matha, John Stachowiak, Brother of Robert. Sandra Meredith, daughter of Robert Shearer and the wife of Harry Beasley, Barbara Scaggs/Beasley from Beverton, Oregon who is 86 years old.

In addition to the hard work of Gerard, Jim Hendershot devoted a significant amount of time and energy to make contact with the relatives of the crewmembers. Prior to this search, Lou Lenti, son of Adolph Lenti, conducted an independent investigation. During the past several years Ed Wilson has collected, from his older brothers and sisters, a large number of letters written by George to his mother and other family members while he served in the military. Also, he has several letters, written after George's death, between his mother, the U.S. military, and the relatives of other crewmembers. We have incorporated a significant amount of this information into this document.

THE CREW

Shown below is a photo of the plane and the crewmembers that George Wilson mailed home, prior to their flight to England. Jim Hendershot, from the names on the back of his photo, has identified the other crewmembers and their positions. The name of the Training Aircraft shown is not known; or, it may have been FoxyLady or MissGI.



B 17G -Crew #3712 - Taken in late April, 1944 Alexandria, Louisiana

Front Row – Left to Right: *Frank Toftness, Pilot – R. Blaner, Co-Pilot- Robert Stachowiak, Navigator, and Harry M. Beasley – Bombardier*

Back Row – Left to Right: *Ray Orr- Engineer - Wilber Hall-Radio Op. – Wayne Shrader, Armorer – George Wilson, 1st Gunner - Lloyd Peacock 2nd Gunner - Adolph Lenti- 3rd.Gunner*

At the time of the crash on July 21, 1944, Lt. Robert Shearer had replaced Lt. R. Blamor, and Sgt. Shrader was not on the flight due to an ear infection.

THE PLANE

The reference number for the Plane that crashed was 43-37763. Records indicate that that it was first delivered to Cheyenne Airfield on May 19th 1944, then to Kearney Airfield on June 2nd 1944. George Wilson wrote on May 29, "we were supposed to leave here a few days ago but we are getting our plane overhauled." This may indicate why the new plane, that required repair, could have been named MissGI. However, the name of the plane could have been the FoxyLady.

After departing Kearney AAFB and landed at Dow Field, Bangor Maine where they were equipped with rafts, Mae Wests, and other equipment. They departed Dow Field and stopped at Gander, New Foundland for refueling. Their departure for the British Isles had to be delayed because of bad weather. George Wilson wrote two letters home, from Newfoundland, dated June 5 and June 6. The two letters were in the same envelope - on the outside of the envelope it indicated that it was *censored and approved by Lt. Harry Beasley*. They subsequently left Gander and may have landed at Nutts Corner, adjacent to Belfast in Northern Ireland. George wrote on June 11 – well here I am in England.

THE MISSION AND THE CRASH

On July 21, 1944, the crash occurred on their 7th mission, on the way to Wurzburg Germany. to bomb a Synthetic oil refinery. The plane took off on the daylight mission from Chelveston, England. The general weather over that part of England was as follows: At 7am on Friday 21st July 1944, the weather (from the Midlands to the south coast) was blowing from the east, bringing low cloud (below 1000feet) and light drizzle. The temperature was in the mid 50's deg F, wind 15-20knots. At 1300 GMT, the cloud had cleared to half cover with Cumulus cloud about 2000 feet, the temp - about 60deg F.

The wartime intelligence report on the loss of the plane and with the assistance of the Sgt Peacock is as follows:

This aircraft was hit by AA gunfire about ten minutes inside the enemy coast and was forced to turn back. It was plotted by air-sea rescue as being 65 miles off the English coast on a bearing of 120 degrees. It was given a heading to try to get to Woodbridge. Friendly fighters were following the aircraft and reported that some of the crew were bailing out. The fighters followed the parachutes down and radioed in the position reports on them. Later in the afternoon, one man a Sgt Peacock was brought to England after being picked up, he had been swimming naked in the North Sea for forty five minutes, and is now in the 91st American Hospital. Later in the day a body was found, that of Sgt George E Wilson. Sgt Peacock reported that the aircraft blew up shortly after he bailed out. So far as is known, he is the only survivor.

Peacock stated: **“our aircraft was hit by flack and engines one and four were knocked out of commission. Three of the crewmembers bailed out of the plane. The three men were Sgt. Wilson, Sgt. Lenti and myself. The parachutes of Wilson and Lenti opened and they**

landed in the sea close to each other. I landed some distance from them and did not see them again. Friendly fighters followed us down and probably radioed our positions to Air-Sea Rescue, as shortly after two amphibious aircraft arrived over our position, but were unable to land because of the very rough seas. However, one of the planes dropped me a one-man life raft, but I was unable to inflate it as there was no Co2 cylinder in the raft. About 45 minutes after I had landed in the sea an Air-Sea Rescue launch arrived and I was taken aboard. The body of Sgt Wilson was picked up by the same launch, but there was no trace of Lenti or anyone else. Just prior to bailing out I glanced towards the forward of the ship, yelled to the radio operator to hurry and saw the pilot and co-pilot leaving their seats. Just as soon as I had left the ship, and passed the tail surfaces, the aircraft exploded and went down in a ball of fire. I watched the ship until it hit the water, and no one else got out of that ship except Wilson, Lenti and I. The engines one and four were knocked out over Germany, so we turned back, salvoed (dropped) our bombs, and we were making good progress until got over the Frisian Islands, where another barrage of flack was loosed at us, and that barrage knocked out number two engine, and that was the cause of us going down. We had an escort of friendly fighters all the way back from Germany, until our ship was hit over the Frisian Islands."

THE CRASH LOCATION

In the official "Summary of the Investigation" of the crash of the plane, dated 28 January 1949, stated: "The last known position of the subject aircraft was plotted as being 65 miles off the English coast on a bearing of 120 degrees, by Air-Sea Rescue. This point was further plotted on maps in this office is about 35 miles southwest of one of the Frisian Islands. The nearest land to the area of the crash is the English coastal towns of Suffolk."

Nick Sanchez, in a letter to Lou Lenti, indicated that he was in another damaged plane off Toftness Plane right wing as they were returning to England. The plane was heading straight for England and got shot up again over Dunkirk so that their airplane blew up over the channel. Only the waist gunner escaped.

Frank B. Toftness, Pilot – Missing in Action

Summary by Donna Whitman and Dick Toftness- December.7

Franklin Bartlett Toftness, pilot of Foxy Lady, was the son of Henry J. Toftness and Effie (Bartlett) Toftness of Minneapolis, MN. He was born in Hinsdale, MT about 1915. (Here, I hope that Joy can help. I have been unable to find Frank's exact date of birth anywhere.)

Henry had moved from Minnesota to Montana in 1910 with his father, a brother, uncle, and several cousins to homestead land. He married Effie Bartlett, a teacher, in Hinsdale, MT May 29, 1912. Frank was the 2nd of three sons. His brothers also served in WW II. His older brother, Robert, was an Army Staff Sergeant for the Signal Corp and his younger brother, Henry (known as Bart), was a grade seven Warrant Officer in the Air Force. Frank graduated from Washburn High School in Minneapolis, MN.



Frank and Elizabeth Irene Jacobson married on Saturday, September 3, 1938 in Minneapolis. Their daughter Joy was born June 27, 1944. Frank worked for Joy's grandfather, who owned Jacobson Trucking Company.

Dick's mother, Adeline, has told me: "Bob and I always enjoyed a night out with Frank and Betty. If a dance called for hand clapping or feet stomping, Frank was always the first or loudest on the dance floor. He was a lot of fun to be around. Even though Joy did not know her father, I hope she can add some detail to the family history.

FROM A NEWSPAPER ARTICLE

Frank was 27 years old at the time of his death. He entered the service in November 1942. He had previously attended the University of Minnesota.

Robert Roy Shearer – Co-Pilot - MIA

After a difficult search, Jim Hendershot located Robert Shearer eldest daughter, Sandy. She provided the following information:

He was a substitute co-pilot on his sixth mission the day his plane and crew were lost. He was in the hospital awaiting surgery to remove his tonsils when he was released to fly this mission. Also, Sandy has a letter from Lloyd Peacock indicating the plane was named Miss G.I.

We have not been able to determine the reason that why Lt. R. Blanor, who trained with the crew in Louisiana, was replaced.



Submitted by Sandra F. (Shearer) Meredith January 2002

My father was born in April of 1921 in Kittanning, Pennsylvania, the only child of Roy A. Shearer (1901-1975) and Florence N. (Bish) Shearer (1902-1997). He was born in the farmhouse of his paternal grandparents and lived there, for the first 5 years of his life, with his parents, grandparents and five aunts and uncles. When it was time for him to enter school his parents moved into the small town of Kittanning. I know very little about my father and his life during his school years except that he loved hunting and fishing with his father and uncles and played the trombone in the Kittanning Boys Band. He was apparently rather good because some years later when I took flute lessons from the same instructor, he informed me that I had inherited none of my father's musical talent. He was a member of the First Baptist Church and attended services regularly with his mother.

After graduating from Kittanning High School in June of 1939 he went to work for the Joseph S. Finch Company at Schenley Distillers Corp. in Ford City, PA and in his spare time, helped out at his father's Gulf Service Station.

My parents were married on January 2, 1941. My mother, Betty Jane Flick, was from Pittsburgh and the granddaughter of the Shearers next-door neighbor. I was born, Sandra Florence, on May 13, 1942 and we lived in Ford City near my dad's place of employment.



***Robert and Betty Jane Shearer
and Daughter Sandra – May***

He enlisted in the Army Air Corps. in November 1942 and left for Cadet training in Miami FL the following February. From there he was transferred to Center College, Danville, KY for preflight training and earned classification for pilot training in Nashville, Tenn. He then reported to Army Air Forces Preflight School at Maxwell Field, Ala., spent 2 months in Camden, Ark. for primary pilot training and went to Walnut Ridge, Ark. for 2 months of basic flight training. In December of 1943 he was transferred to Blythville, Ark. for advanced flying school. He wrote to his mother that he was hoping for twin engine fighter training but would be contented if assigned to bomber training.

During my father's months of training my mother and I followed him from town to town, often living in only one room, just so we could be together on the weekends. I have no memory of my father, but am grateful for that time together because, in the letters he wrote home to his parents, he described the delight he took in being with me. My mother and I returned home to Kittanning when my dad left for Blythville, Ark. because she was expecting their second child. Carol Sue (Susie) was born on January 30, 1944.

On Feb. 8, 1944 my father was commissioned a 2nd lieutenant and received the silver wings of a pilot at Blythville Army Airfield in Arkansas. He returned home that month for his first and only leave.

2nd Lt. Robert R. Shearer reported for duty in England with the 422nd Bomber Squadron 305 Bomber Group. He died on July 21, 1944, at the age of 23, while flying his sixth mission.

My mother remarried in 1946 and with her 2nd husband, Paul D. (Bucky) Buchanan, had six more children. They lived in or around Kittanning, PA until 1962 when they moved to Tampa, Florida. Mother died in November of 1999 in a Nursing Home in Atlanta, GA after a ten-year illness.



Betty Jane Shearer Buchanan and Eight Children – Photo Taken in 1995

Row 1 - Betty Jane and Richard Buchanan

*Row 2 – Patricia McRae, Deborah Whisner, Paula D’Avanza, Susan Steinberg,
Sandra Meredith, Penny Schendler and Kimberly Bearden*

I married William G. Meredith in 1960 and we have three sons. Robert lives in Eastern Ohio and has two daughters, Tricia (a second year student at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington) and Mallory. Douglas lives in Western Pennsylvania and has two children, Marissa and Matthew. Timothy lives in Northern Florida and is not yet married. Bill and I moved from New Castle, PA to Virginia Beach in 1998.

Susan (Carol Sue) lives in Atlanta, GA with her husband, Dr. David Steinberg. She has one daughter, Jennifer, and two granddaughters, Caroline and Virginia.

Sandra Meredith

Robert Stachowiak – Navigator – MIA

John Stachowiak, who was two years old at the time of his older brother's death, has indicated that he will attempt to find more information on his brother.

Updated by Anthony Stachowiak (June 6, 2012) My uncle was the navigator on the B-17G in your report, I wanted to thank you very much for providing us so much voluble information, it helps to find out what happened,

Robert F. Stachowiak was the oldest of 3 boy's Robert, William (my farther) and John, the older boy's were from south bend Indiana, they moved to L.A. Calif.in the 30's and John was born in LA ,

Robert enlisted into the Army air corps on Dec. 30th. 1941 in LA, John married later divorced & had no kids.

William married to Danuta Bachowicz and had 14 kids 10 boy's & 4 girls (I'm one of the 10 boy's) most still live in the LA area I moved to Oregon & one of my brothers moved to battle ground Wa. my Farther (William) is now 85 yr. old & is doing well living in Reseda Ca. ... if there is anything you need just let me know ... Thank you very much, Tony



Updated by Breck Dockstader (June 16, 2012). Hello, I wanted to thank you for the information on The Crash of a B-17. My father is the biological son of Robert Stachowiak. My father, Dennis Dockstader, was adopted at birth in 1942. He knew his birth parents name and had some information on his death. I don't think any of us ever typed his name in the internet until last week. That is when we found your article. I couldn't thank you enough. I'm amazed! Sincerely, Breck Dockstader (***Grandson of Robert Stachowiak - elw***)

Harry M. Beasley – Bombardier – MIA

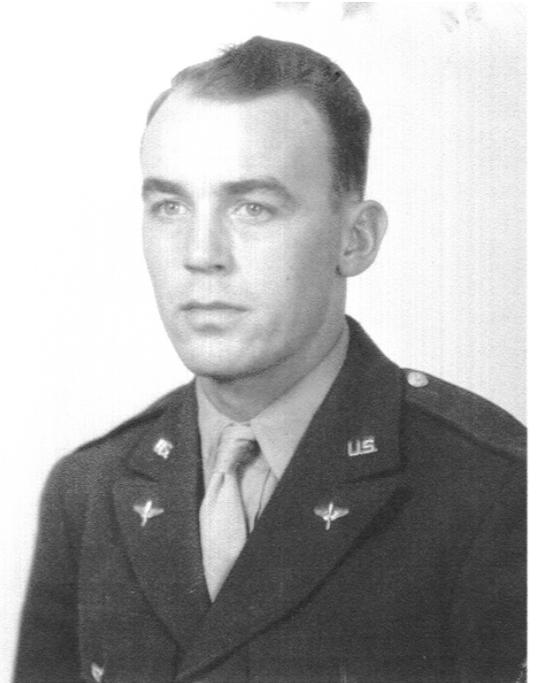
From: [George Wyatt](#)

To: jimh@neobright.net

Sent: Friday, November 16, 2001 10:50 AM

I live in Medford, Oregon and do B17 research. I read your request this morning in the paper and have compiled the enclosed information for you. The following is from the Medford Mail-Tribune, 8 August 1944.

Second Lt. Harry M. Beasley, bombardier of a B17, has been declared missing in action over enemy territory in Europe, according to information received by his wife, the former Barbara Schmidt, Riverside, Cal and his parents-in-law, Mr and Mrs E.F.Schmidt, 325 West Fourth Street, Medford. Lt Beasley had been in England since March (not possible) and in the last letter from the officer, dated July 20, he stated that he had just returned from his fourth mission, with the plane full of flak holes and one dead motor.



From: James Hendershot: Sent: Thu 2/7/2002 3:55 PM

Barbara Scaggs/Beasley called me today from Beverton, Oregon. She is 86 years old and I would of thought I was talking to 40 year old. Barbara, will be sending me copies of Lt. Beasley and her taken in Louisiana, along with pictures of Harry in his uniform.

Barbara ask that we not send her anything, she said if Harry and her had children it would be different. She had given all of Harry's personal affects, letters, etc. to Harry's parents after she remarried. His parents are deceased, but she will call Harry's brother who lives in Seattle. She thinks he might have more information and might like to see what we have.

I don't know Barbara's address yet, but I do have her phone number. I will not post that at this time because she really doesn't want to be involved on a first person basis. What a pleasant lady she is though.

Lou, Barbara gave us permission for the memorial in Arlington, if we need written proof she will provide it. Well, that makes all of them. Hopefully we can find out more information on Beasley and Orr. Any questions, feel free to ask.

Ed, didn't George say in one of his letters that Beasley had taken them all on a picnic while they were in Louisiana. I asked Barbara that question and she didn't remember.

That's all form Ohio. Regards, Jim

February 16, 2002
13735 S.W. Hargis Road
Beaverton, OR 97008

Jim Hendershot
7689 Spencer Lake Road
Medina, OH 44256

Dear Jim

I am enclosing a picture I still have of Harry while he was in the service. As I mentioned to you in our conversation, Everything else was sent to his parents when I remarried.

I have sent a copy of your E-mail to Dave Beasley, Harry's younger brother. You may hear from him about any other pictures etc. he may want to share. I talked to the lady who was in charge of his sister Ruth's estate and she was not sure just what was sent to Dave.

Sorry I don't have anything else to share with you. As I stated, we traveled with the cadets who were in Harry's class. I worked at the PX in Carlsbad, NM and went with him to Salt Lake City and Alexandria, Louisiana and then again to Lincoln, Nebraska. I have no recollection of any picnic!

Best wishes

Barbara Skaggs

RAY ORR – ENGINEER – MIA - Serial Number 42-37763

Ray Orr's next of kin was listed as Mr. Willis R. Orr (Father)
Jean, Texas.

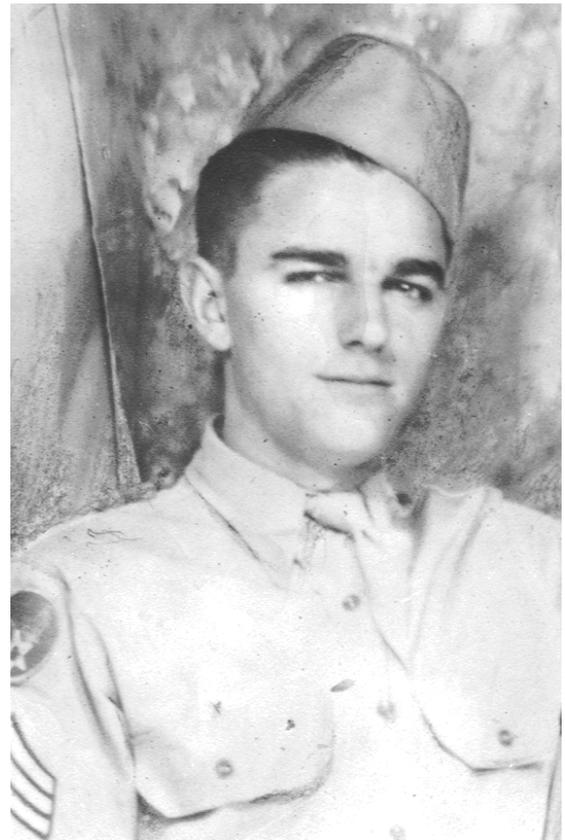
Contact has been made with a friend of the Orr family in
Graham, Texas. We have found that he was a single man.



George E. Wilson – Killed in Action

Serial # 39122850 (Prepared by brother Ed, Dec. 2001 and updated 2014)

George Edward Wilson was born on January 9, 1924 in Ferndale, California, the fourth of seven children of Josephine Christen (1892-1970) and James C. Wilson (1883-1962). Ferndale, a small dairy farming community and the birthplace of the Wilson family, is approximately 250 miles north of San Francisco on the Pacific Coast. It is the most Westerly city in the first 48 US States. His older brother Jim, 81 years old, and many of his other relatives and friends still live in the Ferndale area. George and Alice Wilson, RN (1922-1991), served in WW-II. Blanche, RN, Wilfred (1930-2007) and Ed Wilson served during the Korean War.



George was, perhaps, the most adventurous of the Wilson children. He made many friends in his short life. There were not enough hours in a day to accomplish all of the activities that he loved to do. His mother often warned George - *you are burning the candle at both ends*. He loved to drive cars, very fast, on the county roads at a very young age. He was an avid hunter and was an excellent shot. It was not surprising that he become the ball turret gunner on a B17. He was accepted for duty with the U.S. armed forces during the first week in February, 1943 and was directly transferred by train to Florida for basic training.

In his last few letters to his mother, George indicated that he was enjoying England and he said *not to worry and that he could take care of himself*. However, in a letter, dated July 19, 1944, to his older sister Margaret, who is now 83, he indicated that he did not care what she did with his car and implied that he may not be returning. At a memorial service for George Wilson in 1992, Robert Lee from the Ferndale Area, who was in another plane at the same base in England, indicated that all crewmembers realized that their days were numbered. Lee returned home after 28 missions, including two on D-Day (June 6, 1944).

On August 3, 1944 George's family was notified that he was *killed in action on July 21 over Germany*. Within the next few months, the families of several crewmembers started to communicate. Most of the crew was missing in action – only George was killed. Finally, in December 1944 Lloyd Peacock, the only survivor, wrote the family a very kind letter indicating the details of the plane crash. In this letter he stated that George had completed seven missions.

At first, the Wilson family thought the news that George was *KIA* was the ultimate disaster. Later, after correspondence with the *MIA* families, they realized they were fortunate to *know* what had happened to George.

Staff Sergeant George E. Wilson was awarded the Purple Heart and the Air Medal posthumously (these medals are presently in the custody of his brother Ed). His remains are interred in the Cambridge American Cemetery, England, Plot C, Row 4, Grave 52.

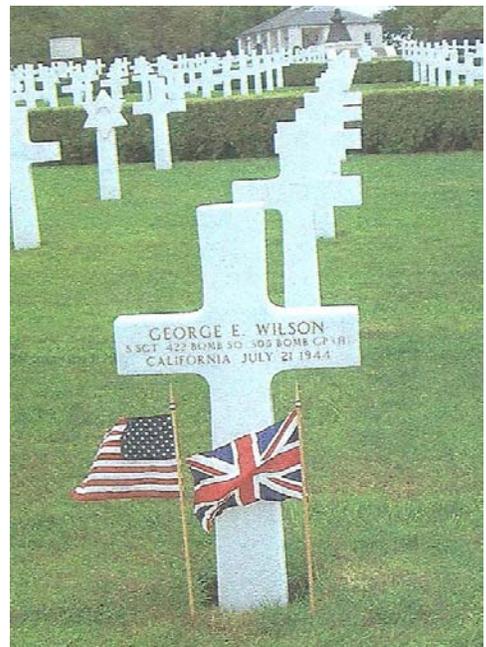
In 1992 his relatives and friends held a memorial service for George in Ferndale and placed an engraved stone, in his remembrance, on the plot of his Grandfather, Edward Christen. Brothers Jim (1920–2003) and Ed Wilson are shown at the service in the photo to the right.

In 2009 Richard Christen, George’s first cousin, visited Cambridge and removed a small amount of soil from George’s grave site and then replaced it with soil from Ferndale. He then returned to Ferndale and placed the soil under the engraved stone.

In March 1945 Mrs. Margaret King (1918 – 2008), shown on to the left, accepted the Air Medal awarded posthumously, to her younger brother Staff Sergeant George E. Wilson, Air Corps, who made the supreme sacrifice in defense of his country on July 21, 1944.

In 2007 George’s family established a scholarship fund in his memory for graduates from Ferndale High School.

George died over 70 years ago; however, we have not forgotten him. (Ed Wilson 2014)



While in the service George wrote almost daily. The following information may be of interest to all crewmember families:

March 8 – We arrived here at Alexandria this afternoon and will be here at least three months. Sure was glad to get away from all that snow and cold of Salt Lake.

March 9 – I met with the rest of the members of the crew and they seem to be a bunch of swell guys.

March 20 – We had a new plane today and it was sure nice. We also had a Major along and he said we were doing OK. Our pilot can really fly the plane.

March 25 – Last night we were up for 5 hours and dropped 12 bombs. We really have a good bombardier. He put all bombs in the middle of the lighted target.

April 8 – We have been flying every day and going to school also.

April 21 – I talked to my pilot last night and he is trying to get me promoted to Sergeant.

May 1 - I made Sergeant and my new pay will be \$117 a month.

May 2 - We had a picture taken of the crew and you should receive it in a few days.

May 6 - We went on a long trip to Big Springs, Texas today and got back at 8 pm. We have to get up at 4:30 AM in the morning and fly again.

May 13 – Yes, I expect to go overseas when we are finished here, which is the 20th of the month.

May 15 – All of us in our crew had a picnic last night and had a great time (I had three beers). The pilot and the bombardier had their wives, and the navigator had his girlfriend. The picnic ground was about 10 miles from here. We went in the pilot and bombardier's cars.

May 16 – We leave at noon on the 20th. It should take us about 3 days by train to go to Nebraska.

From Kearney Army Air Field, Nebraska George wrote:

May 25 – We will leave here any day now, as soon as we get a plane. Today, I took out an allotment for \$50 a month made out to you. Put it in the bank and if you ever need some, use it yourself. When I get overseas I will be making \$150 a month. (His mother and invalid father continued to receive the \$50 allotment for the rest of their lives.)

May 27 – We got our new plane all loaded and ready to go when we get the word.

May 29 – We were supposed to leave here a few days ago but we are getting our plane overhauled.

From Newfoundland George wrote:

June 5 and 6 – Two letters from Newfoundland in one envelope – George said that he did not know how long they were going to be there and where they were going. On the outside of the envelope the letters were censored and approved by the signature of Lt. H. Beasley, the Bombardier.

George wrote from England:

June 11 – Well here I am in England.

June 17 - We have good food over here and the sleeping quarters are OK. I went to Church last night with Lenti, the tail gunner on our crew, and we always go to church together every chance we get.

June 22 - Everything is rationed. I am really happy when chow time comes. Each week I get three candy bars, two razor blades, a package of cookies and seven packs of cigarettes. I have a great appetite and am getting fat.

June 30 – Guess who I met today? You remember the Lee family that live up Williams Creek (near Ferndale). I met the oldest boy, Robert Lee, in chow line today. He has been here for a while and we had a “big talk” together.

July 5 – Received four letters from you today – all old ones – but was glade to receive them. I plan to buy a bicycle – I sure need one over here.

July 8 - I am glad to hear that you pray for me – I sure can use them.

July 14 – We sure have a swell time over here and really like it fine so far.

July 16 – I received eight letters from you yesterday. You asked if Stack was a Catholic. Yes he is and we sure have a lot of fun with him. (Ed Wilson assumed he was referring to Lenti, however, it could have been one of the other crewmembers. George always gave his friends nicknames.)

July 19 to his Mother – Just a few lines to let you know I am fine. I just got back from a 48-hour pass.

July 19 to his older sister Margaret - I just got back from a 48-hour pass. I met a cute little English girl and had a swell time. Do whatever you want with my car – I don't give a damn.

Lloyd Marvin Peacock - The Survivor – Draft Dated: Nov.28, 2001

Prepared by his family

Lloyd Peacock was born on July 20, 1924 in rural Ohio. He lived on a farm between the towns of Ludlow Falls, his mailing address, and Pleasant Hills, where he attended high school. His high school girl friend was Quida who was born August 10, 1924 in Hernando County, Florida. After graduation, Lloyd left for Army service one month after Quida entered the Cadet Nurses Corps



On the final mission of the Foxy Lady, after the plane had lost three engines and was on fire, it was apparent to Lloyd that the plane was on the way down over the North Sea. At that time he helped George Wilson, who could not swim, put on a life jacket and to exit the plane. After the other gunner, Adolph Lenti, bailed out, he yelled at the other crewmembers to hurry as he left the plane without a life jacket. A fraction of a second later the plane exploded and Lloyd was injured.

However, after landing in the water he had the presence-of-mind to remove his heavy flying clothing and to start swimming and treading water. After approximately one hour of swimming in freezing water and 40 feet high waves, a rescue boat picked him up

Lloyd was hospitalized in England for several weeks and then was transferred back to the States. His mother wrote to George Wilson's mother: "He (Lloyd) sure had the blues when he was home because they were all gone. The first thing he asked for was the picture of all of them. I am sorry that you lost your boy. I know how you feel because I have two boys in the Army. One is married and has two children. I have another son who is ready for the Army, he is 17."

While on leave, Lloyd married his high school sweetheart Quida on October 20, 1944. He returned to the Army and she returned to nurses training.



The Peacocks have three children. Martin (age 47) is a senior Pastor, Matha (age 48) is an Associate Professor at a community college and Marcia (age 53) is a registered nurse. They also have seven grandchildren and four great grandchildren

Matha recently wrote: “We know our father, as so many others, made great sacrifices during the war. It is a miracle he survived when all the other crewmembers were lost. He has been an amazing father, husband and friend. He is a hero to us. We love him dearly.”

Lloyd and Quida Peacock are living in Brooksville, Florida, located approximately 70 miles Northwest of Orlando. Quida recently wrote “He is a survivor in many ways. He had a very bad stroke in 1988 but what a spirit. It has been about 14 years since that stroke and he is full of life, ready for each day. We have had a beautiful happy life. We now live in Florida where he can be outside year round on his tricycle. Everyone here knows and loves him. Lloyd is still in good health in spite of his disabilities. If he only could talk?”



Quida and Lloyd on their 57 th, Anniversary – October 29, 2001

SSGT. Adolph R. Lenti, KIA Serial #: 11045524

Written by his son: Lou Lenti

My father, Adolph Lenti, was born in the Tuscan town of Monte San Savino, Italy on June 6, 1912. He was two years old when WWI began. His father, Luigi, decided to leave for America, because he feared that he would be drafted into the Italian Army. He didn't want to leave his family fatherless in the event of his death.

Consequently, the family left for America sometime during 1915. During his early years, my father pursued the activities that most children do. He played baseball, rode his bicycle, and hunted and fished with his father and friends.

When it came time to attend secondary school, he chose technical school (what we today know as vocational school). He had great manual skills from an early age, and he decided to become a carpenter. His father was a cooper turned carpenter- this apparently influenced his choice of trades. Early on, he also showed a passion for things mechanical. I'm told he could always be found tinkering with machines, especially automobiles. From this base, he also discovered the love of speed and racing. I understand that he raced motorcycles on dirt tracks, cross-country, and also made a trip to the Daytona Race Track, where he successfully completed his one and only race.





He built a racing car from the ground-up. Those who knew him tell me that it was the fastest car in Litchfield County. He named the car the Winfield Special, after a famous Indy racer of the 1930's. This car was his pride and joy. My aunt told me that he spent quite a lot of time making improvements on it.

In his late teens, he enrolled in a correspondence course in architecture. He spent two years completing this course by mail, and finished with an A. I saw his Drawings - they were nothing short of magnificent!

Finally, he was a very competent musician (as was his Father). He was proficient on the clarinet, trumpet, and the accordion. He and his Father played at many weddings and house parties.

From what I have seen and heard, it appears that my dad was a man of great intelligence and abilities. I see him as a Renaissance man with a wild streak. His loss is very hard to bear because I believe that he would have been very successful throughout his life.

Dad began building our family home in 1934, at age 22. He worked on it with his father and finished it a year later.

When he enlisted in the A.A.F., he was assigned to ground crew duty as an engine mechanic. Eventually, he was made a ground crew chief. He wanted to fight, and after battling his C.O. for months, he was assigned to a bomber crew. One of the ironies of this time period is that he encountered a very dear friend from our hometown, who argued that he should become an aerial gunner. As luck would have it, Chet Depaoll survived the war. Every time I saw him he would cry, because he felt my dad's death was his responsibility. When I grew up I finally told him that the responsibility was solely my dad's. He alone made the choice to go into combat.

One final fact, and one of which I am inordinately proud- he enlisted at age 29, even though he did not have to. His job at the time was important to the war effort, and he was granted a 4A Defense deferment. He pondered enlistment for six weeks after Pearl Harbor, and finally decided that as an American, he absolutely was required to serve his country. This choice cost him, and his family, dearly. But from what I have learned of him, he would make the same choice a second time. He is listed on the Wall of the Missing at Cambridge American Memorial Cemetery in Cambridge, England.



I am an only child, and have two children. My son, Louis, is a sales and marketing manager. He and his wife Pam, have three daughters who we love inordinately! My daughter, Catherine, is recently married, and as yet has no children. She is a lawyer, and currently works for The Hartford Financial Group in Hartford, CT.

Lou Lenti is shown in the photo to the right that was taken on November 18, 2001. Lou was born on July 20, 1944 - the day before his father was MIA.



Appendices

Cambridge American Cemetery in England

The Cambridge American Cemetery in England, located 60 miles north of London, is a very beautiful, peaceful place. The grass appears to be trimmed or mowed ever few days. It is maintained by The American Battle Monuments Commission and is one of 14 cemetery memorials erected on foreign soil after World War II.

Most of the 3,812 Americans currently buried at Cambridge were crew-members of American aircraft. The Wall at the cemetery contains the names of 5,126 MIA including the seven names of George's fellow crew-members. After the war in 1945 approximately 9,000 Americans had been buried at the cemetery. In 1948, the next-of-kin were given the option to move the remains of their loved ones to any military or private cemetery in the United States. .



Wall at Cambridge American Cemetery Where the Seven MIA Crewmember are Listed



Ed at brother George's grave on September 15, 2002

THE HISTORY OF THE B-17

From B-17CombatCrewmen.Org

The development of the B-17 Flying Fortress was unique to aviation history. In 1933 the Boeing Company assumed the expense of the design, and production of the bomber prototype that led to the B-17. The first prototype flew on July 28, 1935. By 1938 Boeing started delivering B-17s to the US Military. The imminence of war brought numerous Fortress modifications, with the B-17C as a result. Later, the D, E, F, and the B-17G appeared with the chin turret in large numbers. Boeing, Douglas and Lockheed Aircraft Companies built some 12,731 Fortresses before production ended in late 1944.

A total of 4,750 B-17's were lost on combat missions, more than any other type of aircraft. This was because the Fortress did so much of the fighting. Forts shot down an average of twenty-three fighters per thousand-plane raid, compared with eleven shot down by US fighters. During the war, B-17's dropped a total of 640,036 tons of bombs on European targets. This compares with 452,508 tons dropped by B-24's and 436,544 tons dropped by all other US aircraft.

The B-17 Combat Crewmen & Wingmen organization is dedicated to preserving the memory of the gallant airmen, both living and dead, who served in the mighty Air War of WW-II and to the memory of their vehicle, the famous B-17 Flying Fortress. Known as "QUEEN OF THE SKIES", she earned the love and respect of all who flew, serviced, or

just admired her, along with those who tried to destroy her in aerial combat. She stayed in the air and brought her crews home safely against all odds. We are proud to be a part of her great heritage.

The purpose and objectives of this organization are to preserve and perpetuate the memory of the B-17 Flying Fortress high altitude bomber and the heroic men who flew, serviced, or contributed in some manner to the epic role the Flying Fortress played in bringing World War II to a final conclusion. The Flying Fortress carved for itself an ever-deepening niche in the history of military aviation.

The many roles of the B-17 may never be completely recorded. Every man of the thousands who flew them, every man of the handful who still fly them, hold something of her great story in his memory. Most did not fly for pleasure, nor as their chosen vocation; the Fort was their transportation to places they never dreamed of seeing, let alone destroying. The Flying Fortress was a heavy bomber designed to destroy the places it visited. Destroy it did, and was often itself destroyed in the effort.

Like all machines, the B-17 is mute and the men who flew her, or flew in her must speak her for. When her name was a familiar term, she was regarded with admiration, or with dread, throughout the world. The organization was formed to perpetuate her glorious name and reputation. It is not our intention to take away any of the praise from the Liberator and her crews, she too earned a place of distinction in history, and we have the same respect for the gallant and courageous airmen who served with her. However, we have a romance with the Flying Fortress and many can recall seeing them make it back to base with tail sections gone, noses blown away, wings with large sections missing, and engines on one, or both sides not operating. Most of them did come home - some living long combat lives, many topping the one-hundred mission mark - "Nine-0-Nine" of the 91st, "Thunderbird" of the 303rd, and "Jamaica Ginger" of the 388th bomb group, to mention a few.

Today, only a small percent of the American people are old enough to remember the years from 1939 to 1945. The other know very little about the years, which are probably the most significant period in American history since 1776. They don't know of the events that plunged the world into war or the horrors endured by millions of people, soldiers, and civilians alike. Nor, do they know of the great accomplishments of American industry or the great victories achieved in the air, on the land, and on the sea by civilian soldiers and seamen who, only a few months earlier, had no military training and no intention of going to war. We want to help tell the story of the accomplishments of this nation, and other free people of the world during the period from 1941 to 1945.

From EVOLUTION OF ALLIED AIR WAR By Brian Todd

On October 14, 1943, the air over Europe reached a critical turning point. On that Thursday, the United States Eighth Air Force mounted Mission No. 115 against the city of Schweinfurt, the center of the German ball bearing industry. Sixteen bomber groups from

the 1st and 3rd Air divisions participate in the strike. In all 291 Boeing B-17 Flying took off from bases in England and headed east toward the border. As the bombers formed over the Channel, short-range British Supermarine fighters climbed to escort the heavies to the Continent. There Republic P-47 Thunderbolts took over, escorting the flying armada to the German border. But insufficient range prevented the Thunderbolts from keeping the bombers company all the way to the target. Turning somewhere around Aachen, just inside the German border, the P-47s left the unescorted bombers to a catastrophic fate.

Out of 291 bombers dispatched, 257 actually entered German airspace. Sixty were shot down, just over 20 percent of the total number. Two hundred twenty-nine B-17s reached Schweinfurt and dropped their bombs. Only 197 returned to England. Of those, five planes were abandoned or crashed on landing, while 17 others landed so damaged that they had to be written off. Altogether, 82 of the 291 original bombers that left England were lost, more than 28 percent of the entire force assigned to the raid.

Moreover, the Schweinfurt raid was the climax of a week of strikes against German industrial targets. Between October 8 and 14, 1943, the Eighth Air Force flew 1,342 heavy bomber sorties, losing a total of 152 bombers (11.3 percent), with another 6 percent receiving heavy damage. During the entire month of October, the Eighth lost a total of 214 heavy bombers, almost 10 percent of the total number dispatched. Lost and damaged planes constituted more than half the sorties flown during the month.

At that rate of attrition, an entirely new bomber force would be required every three months in order to maintain the Allied bomber offensive. After the prohibitive losses sustained in October 1943, the Eighth Air Force suspended deep bomber strikes into German territory. Two premises of daylight strategic bombing--that bombers would be able to get through enemy defenses and back without escorts, and that destroying the enemy's industrial base would cripple its war effort--appeared to be greatly mistaken.

American air leaders, recognizing the inability of unescorted heavy bombers to get through and bomb German industry without excessive losses, questioned the very foundation of American air strategy. But why did American air leaders initially believe their heavy bombers would always get through, and what were the consequences of the American strategic doctrine when applied in the skies over the Third Reich? How has American air doctrine changed as a result.

The airplane, initially used during World War I in a reconnaissance role to locate enemy troop and artillery movements and concentrations, evolved throughout the conflict to perform all of the roles identified with modern air power - including strategic bombing. Although it was an immature weapons system during the Great War, the airplane's enormous potential fueled the imaginations of interwar air theorists, foremost among them Italy's Giulio Douhet.

Assuming that population and industrial centers would be vulnerable to fleets of heavy bombers, Douhet advocated attacking an enemy nation's urban areas and factories with explosives, incendiaries and poisonous gas--with no distinction being made between combatant and noncombatant. Douhet believed that the impact of strategic bombing would simultaneously demoralize and enemy's civilian population and destroy its capacity to wage war.

During the 1920s, Douhet's theories and those of air power advocate Brig. Gen. William "Billy" Mitchell gained champions within the U.S. Army Air Corps, and strategic bombing doctrine began to be reflected in its field manuals. Chief among this new generation of bomber advocates in the late 1930s was the leader of the Army Corps, General Henry "Hap" Arnold. As the commander in chief of American air service, Arnold surrounded himself bomber men," disciples of daylight strategic precision bombing. According to Arnold and his top commanders, the primary purpose of air power in Europe during coming conflicts would strategic bombing. bombing was the only major contribution the airmen could make to the war effort that was independent of the Army and Navy. If air power was to show its capabilities as an equal partner to ground and naval forces, it had to be done through the successes of strategic bombing.

Because of the prohibitive cost creating a bomber fleet on "Douhetian" scale in the fiscal environment, the U.S. Air Corps Tactical advocated only the precision bombing of an enemy nation's vital centers--its factories, sources, transportation and materials. Advocates believed goal could be achieved through use of the new, fast, long-range "precision bombers" coming service late in the 1930s, B-17 Flying Fortress and the Consolidated B-24 Liberator Powered by four engines, the B-17s and B-24s were, at the time of their test in the mid-1930s, faster than most of the world's interceptors. "If the speed of the bomber was such make interception improbable, or at worst, infrequent, then provision need be made for fighters to accompany the bombers on their long range missions said one modern analyst of the 1930s air doctrine. Moreover, new heavy bombers flew above 20,000 feet, too high to be reached most ground-based anti-aircraft.

The Air Corps bomber men the American heavy bombers fly high and fast into territory, eluding interceptors and anti-aircraft defenses. Once above the target area, "self-defending" American bombers would utilize the world's sophisticated bombsight – Norden - that allowed for such factors as speed, course, wind direction and distance to target. Under favorable conditions, trained aircrews were able to place payloads within a few hundred feet of their target from over 15,000 feet, prompting an Army Air spokesman to boast that aircrews could "drop a bomb into a pickle barrel at 25,000 feet." But for the Norden bombsight to work well, American pilots had to deliver their payloads daylight hours, in good weather and in level flight.

Additional Remarks on the B17 by Ed Wilson

The B17 aircraft was modified extensively during WWII. In addition, the role of the crewmembers changed during the war. For example, in Alexandria, Louisiana the Toftness crew trained with 10 members including three gunners, armorer and radio operator. Also, by the time the plane and crew flew its first mission in June 1944, German fighters were no longer a threat to the plane. Lloyd Peacock told Lou Lenti that in the six missions they completed, no German fighters were encountered. Therefore, the German anti-aircraft flack was the major threat and was capable of downing planes flying at 25,000 feet. Therefore, near the end of 1944 and early 1945, some B-17 flew missions without gunners with fighter support. Most of the crew were trained to do several different functions. For example, George Wilson had gone to school to be the alternate radio operator in addition to being the first gunner.

The B-17 was not a comfortable aircraft. It was not pressurized and the temperature within the aircraft at high altitudes was well below freezing. Flying above 20,000 feet, crew members were required to wear oxygen masks. After a few 8 to 12 hour missions many crewmembers suffered from ear, throat and other medical problems in addition to the possibility of being wounded. Hence, very few planes, with the same crew, completed 25 missions.

Jim Herdershot pointed out that in the early days of the air war over Germany, if a B-17 went down and the crew members were captured all crew members under the rank of sergeant were treated very poorly. Therefore, by 1944 all of the crew members in a B17 were deservedly promoted to the rank of Sergeant before they were sent into combat. This accounts for the fact that 20 year old George Wilson, who was in the service less than two years, was promoted so rapidly. *(Whereas, his younger brother, 23 year old Ed who was drafted in 1955 with a BS in Engineering from UC Berkeley, with luck, good behavior and a **bad attitude**, managed to be promoted to PFC after spending 15 months in Korea after the war- 1955 - 56).*

<http://www.deltaweb.co.uk/sallyb/latestnews.htm> Fortress G-BEDF Sally B is the only airworthy B-17 in the UK, where she has flown regularly at airshows for over 23 years as a flying memorial to the USAF in Europe. Based at the Imperial War Museum at Duxford from where she is maintained and flown by a dedicated team of professional volunteers. Operated by B-17 Preservation Ltd, backed by one of the largest supporters clubs in the world, and painted in the colours of Memphis Belle for her leading role in the recent film of the same name, DeltaWeb are proud to welcome this famous aircraft and her loyal crew to our pages. *November 2002*