

FORTRESS FOR FREEDOM

388th Bombardment Group (H) Association



8th Air Force, 3rd Air Division, 45th Combat Wing
Station 136, Knettishall England, 1943–1945
333 Total Missions



306 Combat Missions, 19 Aphrodite Missions, 5 Chowhound Missions, 1 POW Mission, 2 Revival Missions

388th Bombardment Group Headquarters

Station 136 Weather Detachment, Fersfield Air Base (Aphrodite Project), 434th Headquarters Squadron, 860th Squadron, 684th Squadron, 434th Air Service Group, 1211th Quartermaster Company, 1284th Military Police Company, 273rd Medical Dispensary, 1751st Ordnance Supply and Maintenance Company, 2019th Engineering and Fire Fighting Platoon, 452nd Sub Depot, 29th Station Complement, 587th Postal Unit, 877th Chemical Company, 214th Finance Detachment
560th Bombardment Squadron, 561st Bombardment Squadron, 562nd Bombardment Squadron, 563rd Bombardment Squadron

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From the President's Desk

What can be said that has not already been said about the predicament that the COVID 19 virus has put on all of us? One of the better messages I heard lately came from our pastor who used historical challenges to point out, "This, too, shall pass". We will bravely weather this storm.

Now our beloved and well-planned reunion will be delayed for a year just like most other organizations have postponed public events, gatherings, professional trade shows, and the like. We now have the opportunity to use all the great ingenuity of our Board of Directors and Association members, and other resources, to bring a virtual reunion celebration to our WWII veterans and their direct families. Our first alternative reunion-planning meeting created an outline that will offer the gift of a dinner to our veterans and a YouTube presentation of modest length that should be an enjoyable tribute to them. Lovingly-made. The thought is that we have this ready-to-go near the original reunion date, and each family can conduct their celebration on their own schedule. Please share photos and stories with us as this new type of virtual gathering and tribute unfolds as a remote adventure for our group.

On other fronts, during our monthly board meetings, topics for discussion have recently focused on getting our membership list and all our Association financials in order, helping with the update of the 388th Bomb Group display at Hill AFB and tightening up connections with our U.K. Knettishall Memorial committee lead by Ben and Sally Hogg, who are overseeing the maintenance of the 388th Memorial and grounds. New additions are on the way to hopefully include signage and benches for visitors. This year, a Memorial Day Service will be held at the Knettishall Memorial with the laying of the wreath ceremony for the 388th BG. The Madingley American Cemetery and Memorial site near Cambridge, England where the ceremony is normally held is currently closed. This site contains the remains of 3,812 of our war dead and 5,127 veteran names re-



corded on the Walls of the Missing.

I'd like to turn our attention to the "why" of what our organization is all about for a moment. I recently read again a part of my old letter as President in Spring of 2013. It was the year before my father, ball turret gunner S/Sgt Ben Forrest Sr., passed on to a better place. It is a story about how much these heroes and their spouses meant to us.

My Reflections in Spring 2013

"It is interesting to reflect on those of us that have the good fortune to still have a 388th veteran to talk to and spend quality time with. My Dad, Ben Sr. is now a nonagenarian having had a very well attended family celebration in January where he was jovial, thankful and as animated as he has been since his stroke last summer. He is now a resident at a fine care facility in Edmonds, WA staffed by a very patient, friendly group. Dad is located a short distance from family giving us the blessing of unfettered access and ability to visit and talk anytime we wish. There is even a bar that allows us to share one of Dad's joys, an afternoon martini. He can still describe the procedure to enter the ball turret and prepare his beloved dual air cooled fifties for battle and tells the story of Lt Chuck Neff, bombardier, who flew and navigated their plane home after being hit over Berlin, both pilots severely wounded.....and the miracle of returning to base two hours after the rest of the group landed and Chuck Neff touching down five times before coming to a safe stop in the grass, after performing the first ever landing of a B-17 on autopilot. I can hear that story a hundred times, and others, and not grow weary. Of course, that is not a problem, because Dad will keep re-telling.

We are all blessed to still have these survivors with us and so thankful. We are humbled when we hear of their passing. Dad, for one, has said for some time that he is just happy to wake up and still be alive, and he is completely at peace

and happy with a full life. One of my favorite experiences is to visit Dad in the morning and wake him up. He has this great smile on his face. If you are lucky like me to still have your hero around, stop by to say hi as often as you can".

Now it's 2020. Our mission continues. We reflect and are filled with thanks. Take a moment to reach out to an original vet member, a widow, their sons and daughters, grandchildren, or a friend in the association during these difficult times. We are family. Please support the 388th BG Association and those we work for and hold close to our hearts with your prayers and gifts.

Stay well,

Ben Forrest

Scholarship Update

Dear Ms. Hayes,

My name is Aaron Frish. I was the essay contest scholarship recipient from last year. I hope you are doing well. I wanted to send a quick update and to let you know how the generous scholarship is being used. I am finished with my first year of college receiving a degree in music education. So far, college is going incredibly well. I have learned so much, and I have had so many wonderful musical opportunities. This summer I will be taking some classes online. The scholarship from the 388th Bomb Group Association is what is being used to pay for these classes. I cannot thank you enough for this amazing opportunity. I cannot fully express my gratitude for your generosity both in monetary scholarship but also in allowing me to be a part of such an amazing organization in this way. I am so grateful for everything. Without this scholarship, I would be unable to pay for these summer courses. The attached file shows what classes the scholarship is funding. Thank you!

With Gratitude, Aaron Frish

"Music is about a message,
not the musician."





Calling all 388th Bomb Group Veterans!

Due to the coronavirus influence on just about every scheduled event in the country, and with great concern for our veterans, our Seattle reunion will be suspended until next year. **While nothing could ever replace our cherished face-to-face time, we hope you'll plan to participate in our "Remote" Reunion this fall! Your Board of Directors is in full planning mode to bring a 388th Reunion experience directly to you!** Designed for our WWII vets and spouses whom we are blessed to have with us, this will feature a dinner with immediate family provided by the Association in the comfort of your home, accompanied by a special reunion banquet program starring family and friends from across the country and from Coney Weston near the Knet-tishall Memorial. The video will be available on YouTube by late summer, around the time of our previously scheduled reunion. We hope you will enjoy our virtual tribute to you as you gather around your table. REMEM-BER TO TAKE PHOTOS!

Please complete the following registration form and be sure to include ANY EMAIL ADDRESS where you would like the Reunion link to be sent. We will follow up with additional information – via Newslet-ter, 388th Website, phone calls and directly to emails provided in this form.

REGISTRATION for the 388th Bomb Group Association "Remote" Reunion, September 2020

NAME _____

PHONE _____

EMAIL ADDRESS _____

STREET ADDRESS _____

CITY/STATE/ZIP _____

ANTICIPATED GUEST (S): Full names please: _____

Return registration form by JULY 10th to: Kim Klein by Email, Online or Mail

Email: 388reunion2020@gmail.com Online: <https://2020.388thbgamembers.org/signup>

Mail: 13232 Squak Mountain Rd. SE, Issaquah, WA 98027

German city to honor WWII airmen executed after surviving B-17 crash

SCRANTON, Pa. — For more than seven decades, the story of Staff Sgt. Joseph Eugene Prokop's life ended the same way: The Scranton airman died when Germans shot down his B-17 bomber near Frankfurt in the waning months of World War II. It's the story the War Department told his parents and the public when Prokop's body returned to the city for burial in 1949, and it was the only story Ann Spearmint, 91, ever heard about her brother's death.

As the city of Hanau, Germany, prepares to honor the memory of Prokop and two other Army Air Forces members later this month, details have emerged that are rewriting that story, adding a new layer of tragedy.

What historians in Hanau discovered — and what has been disclosed to Spearmint and the rest of her family for the first time — is that Joseph Prokop, then 22, survived the downing of the bomber only to be captured by the Germans and summarily executed after a Gestapo officer learned one of his crewmates was Jewish.

As Spearmint deals with the eruption of emotions the unexpected revelation has stirred, the Covington Twp. woman can't help but wonder what might have been.

"To think that he was alive and could have lived how many more years," said Spearmint, Prokop's last surviving sibling. "He was only a kid then. For them to shoot him right there, it's unbelievable."

On Feb. 17, Hanau will mark the 75th anniversary of the killings of Prokop and his two fellow airmen — Tech. Sgt. Charles Bernard Goldstein and Tech. Sgt. Warren George Hammond — by erecting a memorial plaque with the names of the three Americans at the site of their executions.

Simultaneously, North Scranton-based Gen. Theodore J. Wint Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 25 will conduct a remembrance service for Prokop at his gravesite in Cathedral Cemetery.

Flying out of Knettishall airfield in Suffolk, England, on Feb. 17, 1945, Prokop was the waist

gunner aboard the B-17 Flying Fortress when the four-engine bomber took anti-aircraft fire while pulling away from Frankfurt airspace and went down at Hanau.

The fifth of eight children of John and Anna Prokop, the airman was born in 1922 and grew up in the St. Ann's section of West Scranton. His father worked for the railroad, while his mother tended to the family. The parents were no strangers to tragedy as two of their five sons died before age 3.

Prokop joined in the Army in 1939, setting his sights on the Air Corps. Because her brother was only 17, Spearmint said, their parents had to sign off on his enlistment.

"My parents knew about the war in Europe and all, and they figured that one way or the other we were going to get into it," she said. "When it happened, he was already in the service."

Prokop was a seasoned gunner when the B-17 took off that Saturday in February with the objective of bombing freight rail yards in Frankfurt. It was his 50th mission over enemy territory.

Although there are some discrepancies in the historical accounts, it is believed Prokop and Goldstein — along with a third airman who became separated from them and spent the last months of the war in Europe in German captivity — managed to parachute from the doomed B-17 before it crashed. The rest of the plane's crew perished.

Prokop, Goldstein and Hammond, who apparently had been aboard a different bomber, were picked up by the police in Hanau and turned over to the Gestapo, or the Secret State Police of the Nazi regime.

While questioning the men, Gestapo director Hermann Fehrle discovered Goldstein was Jewish and became enraged, according to one account. He cursed and slapped the airman, calling him a murderer before ordering a subordinate to have all three Americans shot.

About 90 minutes later, the men were



brought to a courtyard and executed one after the other.

The three German nationals subsequently convicted of war crimes for killing the unarmed prisoners all told their tribunals they knew their actions were wrong but believed they would be killed if they did not carry out the executions.

Spearmint, who was still in high school when her parents learned in March 1945 that her brother had been declared missing in action, said her family did not receive any details.

Even when the military finally acknowledged in January 1946 that he was presumed dead, it was mostly generalities.

"I was young and I guess there's a lot they didn't want to tell me, but as far as I remember they said he was shot down and he was in the plane and there was one survivor," Spearmint said.

After their deaths, Prokop and other airmen were initially buried in Hanau before their bodies were exhumed in the summer of 1945 and reinterred at the Lorraine American Cemetery in St. Avold, France. Prokop's remains were repatriated and buried at Cathedral Cemetery four years later.

Hanau officials uncovered the long-forgotten information about the killing of the airmen while planning "Life in War," an exhibition to commemorate 75th anniversary of the end of World War II and the city's virtual destruction in March 1945 ahead of its liberation from Nazi control.

More research identified where two B-17s crashed in Hanau that February and the exact location where the American prisoners were slain, Mark Marrano, deputy consular chief with the U.S. State Department's Consulate General in Frankfurt, said in an email.

When Hanau decided it would memorialize the three airmen with a plaque, organizers in the German city reached out to the consular office in Frankfurt for assistance in locating any surviving next of kin. Marrano's office in turn started making inquiries, contacting local veterans organizations in the United States.

When he took the call Jan. 17 at VFW Post 25, post commander Jim Kuchwara misunderstood at first, wondering who was calling him from

Jermyn. No, he was told, not Jermyn — Germany. He contacted a couple of Prokop families who were not related to the airman before another veteran remembered receiving an email about Joseph Prokop three years ago while collecting the names of servicemen for inclusion on a monument at Scranton Veterans Memorial Park that Post 25 will help dedicate in July.

The email, which was sent by Spearmint, included her phone number.

Kuchwara said he called Spearmint and told her about the Hanau commemoration before gently breaking the news about what the city's historians had learned about her brother's death.

"She was quiet for a little bit," he said. "It was emotional."

Kuchwara, who has since met with Spearmint and other family members, said he anticipates representatives of the German government will attend the remembrance service at Cathedral Cemetery. The post is also trying to arrange for the ceremonies in Scranton and Hanau to be livestreamed between the cities.

Hanau deserves credit for honoring Prokop and the other airmen instead of sweeping a dark episode in its history under the rug, Kuchwara said.

"They could have brushed this off, but they are trying to make everything right," he said.

Although Hanau has invited the Prokop family to send a representative the Feb. 17 plaque dedication, it was unclear as of last week whether anyone will make the trip to Germany.

Spearmint said the details about her brother's death leave her with many questions. One thing she'd like to know is why the military never shared those details with her family.

"Why didn't they tell us what happened then?" Spearmint asked. "They would have known."

Spearmint, whose brothers John and Frank also served in World War II, said she wishes the full story had been revealed earlier.

All of her siblings deserved to know the truth about their brother Joe, she said.

"I never thought I'd live this long, and I kept asking why," Spearmint said softly. "I think this is the reason — for me to find out about him."



TAPS



Raymond Walter Baethke

Lieutenant Colonel Raymond Walter Baethke was laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery, along with his wife of 70 years, Marjorie Marion Doolittle Baethke, on April 29, 2019. He and Marjorie both lived to the age of 95.



Raymond joined the U.S. Army Air Corps on June 3, 1943 after his ROTC service in Morgantown, West Virginia. During training, he qualified for pilot, navigator and bombardier, electing to continue his training for the position for which he qualified the highest... bombardier.

He was assigned to the 388th BG, 562nd Squadron as the Bombardier with the Noah (Tommy) Thompson crew. Raymond had 17 missions, including the bombing of Berlin on February 3, 1945.

The crew had been assigned to the "Group Deputy Lead" position on Raymond's 16th mission, to Zietz, to take out the oil refineries, when he was wounded by flak that entered his cheek and exited through his mouth. His final non-combat missions were two Hunger Relief Missions to Amsterdam on May 1, 1945 and May 3, 1945. Medals earned include the Air Medal with two Oak Leaf Clusters and the Purple Heart.

Originally from Kenosha, Wisconsin, he and Marjorie started their family in Antioch, IL. He owned his own grocery store until deciding to move his family to Phoenix, Arizona in 1965 where he had a career with Allstate insurance as well as a building supply company. Raymond was an active member at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church. He and Marjorie are survived by sons Jeffrey and Kurt and daughter Christine. They were preceded in death by their son, Leonard.

James L. Cotton

James Lee Cotton, age 95, of Apex, N.C. went to be with his Lord on Monday, January 6, 2020.



He was born on December 29, 1924 in Washington, D.C. the son of James Luther Cotton and Mary Catherine Maloney. He had 3 brothers who predeceased him: Bob, Dick and Paul. He was married on September 20, 1952 to Julia Joyce Chambers. They were blessed with 7 children: Christine (Dana), James (Erin), Marie (Don), Loretta (Ben), Richard (Gina), Barbara (deceased) and Bill (Cindy); and 16 grandchildren: Randy (Jamie), Andy (Paula), Becky (Phillip), Colleen (Chris), Kelly, Connor (Aleis), Keegan, Rachel, Ricky, Renee, Mason, Madelyn, Ethan, Julia, Samantha, Joe and Noah (deceased); and 7 great grandchildren: Raine, Isaac, Iden, Wyatt, Allie, Robin, Dani Grace.

He was proud to have served as a Page and Assistant Librarian for the U.S. Supreme Court. He served as a Navigator on a B17 during WWII and enjoyed reunions with the 388th Bomb Group. He was graduated from Catholic University with a degree in Mechanical Engineering and went on to a career as a Cost Systems Analyst for the Federal Government and a contractor in the private sector. He retired in 1989. Upon retirement, he and Joyce enjoyed world wide traveling from their home bases in Northern Virginia and Orlando, Florida. He and Joyce later settled in North Carolina.

His Catholic faith was paramount to him and he served as a Lector and Eucharistic Minister in every parish of which he was a member.

Eugene Forti

Eugene Forti, born March 6, 1924 in El Paso, Texas, to the late Eugene L. Forti and Mary Talamantez, passed away peacefully on May 24, 2020 at Ambrosio Guillen Texas State Veterans'



Home, following a brief illness. He was a WWII veteran of the Army Air Corps. He is preceded in death by his wife of 68 years, Kathalea, and brothers David and Ray. He is survived by his son Guy Forti (Debra); daughter, Mary Kay Dieterich (Jeff); grandson Evan Dieterich; granddaughter, Becky Crawford (Nick); and three great grandchildren, Alysha and Ian Rowzee, and Ava Hardin. Eugene will be best remembered for his devotion to family, kindness and generosity to all, sense of humor, zest for life, and compassion for animals. Due to the current pandemic, there will be no formal service. Please consider a donation in his name to the USO at <https://www.uso.org/donate/donate-in-honor/>



Raymond L. Plassmann

Moosup - Raymond leaves a daughter, Ellen (Paul) Durand, a son, Carl (Cheryl) Plassmann, grandsons Booth O'Connell and David Plassmann, step-grandchildren Jennifer Leonard, Jessica Pegurri and Brad Favreau and eight great-grandchildren. He was predeceased by his wife of 59 years, Janette, their son Thomas, also two brothers, Ernest and Harold Plassmann.



Raymond served in WWII in the Army Air Corps navigating a B17 bomber as it flew 30 missions over enemy territory. After earning the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster, 1st Lieutenant Plassmann was honorably discharged in October of 1945. His marriage to Janette Wibberley followed and as he pursued his degree at Willimantic Teacher's College, daughter Ellen was born. Raymond taught elementary school for many years, earning his Masters' Degree in 1962 and becoming principal of Moosup Elementary shortly after. He held various part-time jobs during summer break and on evenings and weekends to support his growing family. In addition to his military service and his service educating the children of the community, he also volunteered as a Sunday

School superintendent, a 4H leader, in the Civil Air Patrol, a volunteer at Pierce Baptist Home and Village Manor (currently Colonial Rehab) driving patients to appointments and presenting travelogues and slide shows for the patients' entertainment. He volunteered at Aldrich Free Library, was a member of the Plainfield Historical Society and donated 16 gallons of blood to the American Red Cross over many years.

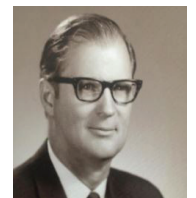
Raymond enjoyed a long retirement and had many hobbies and interests, including riding his BMW motorcycle. He was a lifetime member of the Central Cycle Club. He enjoyed playing ping pong and worked preparing breakfasts at the club, even after his riding days were over. He was a lover of classical music, a photographer including a full dark room and a gardener. He mastered many crafts, including stained glass, basket making, chair caning and blacksmithing.

Raymond lived his life with quiet dignity and competence. Whatever challenge life sent him, he did his best, always doing a good job and rarely complained. Raymond always tried to follow the philosophy of his father, Ernest, who said "If you can't say something good about someone don't say anything"

William Alfred Pope Jr

William Alfred Pope, Jr., age 98, resident of Farmington, NM, passed away March 4, 2020.

Bill was born September 24, 1921 in Carson, NM to William A. and Essie Shupe Pope.



Bill was a WWII Veteran and served in the Army Air Corp in Europe as an Engineer in a B-17 Bomber. His plane was shot down and he was a POW for 14 months before liberation.

Bill was an active member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. He served as a Bishop, Stake President, Regional Welfare Agent, and Patriarch.

Bill loved his family and was concerned with each of his posterity and expressed his love for them often. He left a great legacy.



Bill married Marjorie Talley on April 17, 1990. He adored her and only spoke in the highest admiration of her. She was his sweetheart. Their combined family has 18 children, 92 grandchildren, 220 great grandchildren, and 3 great-great grandchildren.

Bill is survived by his wife Marjorie, children: Bill (Susan) Pope, Randal (Arla) Pope, Doris (Dan) Sherwood, Pat (Jim) Hatch, Mary (Hal) Cornum, Terrel (Terry) Pope, Charles (Gloria) Pope, Deidra (Stan) Smith, Richard Pope, Rob (Jana) Pope, Pixie Larsen, Theodore (Rachel) Pope, Letitia (Ty) Brackeen, Taylor (Cathy) Pope, Sharon (Kirk) Peine, Debra (J. Paul) Brown, and Del (Rebecca) Talley.

Bill was preceded in death by his daughter Tammy Robins, DIL Anne Pope, SIL Blane Larsen, 2 grandchildren, and 1 great grandchild.

ALFRED J PRICE

Alfred "Fred" John Price, 94, of Lake Forest, died Friday, May 18, at JourneyCare Hospice in Woodstock, IL.

He was born March 10, 1924, in Streator, IL, to Fred and Mary Price. He married the love of his life, Mary Lou Hamann, on June 7, 1947, who was by his side at the time of his passing.

Fred served as superintendent of Avoca Elementary School District 37 in Wilmette for 18 years. Following his retirement from Avoca, he shared his love and knowledge of the education field by serving as an adjunct professor at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago for nine years. Previously, he was an assistant superintendent of Elementary School District 41 in Glen Ellyn for 13 years, and a teacher and superintendent for Community Unit District 250 in Ontarioville, IL, for six years. He earned a bachelor's degree in philosophy from Wesleyan University in 1949, a master's of science in education from Illinois State University in 1953 and a doctorate in education from Northwestern University in 1961.

Fred served his country honorably in the U.S. Army Air Force from 1943-1945. He entered the service as a musician and played the

saxophone in one of Glenn Miller's AAF bands for 10 months before applying for active duty. He then served as a radio operator/gunner on a B-17 crew and flew 34 missions with the 8th Air Force, 561st Squadron while stationed in Knettishall England. He finished his service as tech Sergeant (5 Stripes) and was awarded the Air Medal with four Oak Leaf clusters and the European Theatre Ribbon with four battle stars.

He was past president of the Illinois Association of School Business Officials and past president of Superintendent's Round Table of Northern Illinois. He was passionate about his involvement in Rotary Club and served as past presidents of the Rotary Club of Glen Ellyn and Rotary Club of Wilmette.

He was preceded in death by his parents and his sister, Marion Hook. He is survived by his wife of 70 years, Mary Lou, and his children: Greg, Highland Park; Patti (Ken) West, Woodstock; Brad (Pam) Price, Cedarburg, Wis.; and Geoff (Stephanie) Price, Crystal Lake. He leaves behind eight grandchildren: Justin (Brittany) and Alex West; Amy Ann (AJ) Burton; Heather (Andrew) Erickson; and Jeremy, Trevor, Colin and Benjamin Price; and two great-grandchildren, Bodhi Burton and Grayson West.

ALFRED YUEN SOO

Our Dad passed away peacefully early on Sunday morning. He was born in Berkeley, CA to Bing Yue Soo and Ivy Dang and was the youngest of eight children. He was a third generation Chinese-American and lifelong resident of the East Bay Area, living in El Cerrito for 64 years.

Al grew up in Berkeley, attending public schools and Chinese school. As a youngster he sold newspapers in the summer and delivered them while in Junior and Senior High School. He helped his father sell trees at Christmas to earn money.

His sister, Marie, remembers her younger



brother always counting and saving his money. Describing himself as “an average student in classes of better than average students”, Al graduated from Berkeley High School intending to continue his education by majoring in engineering. At San Francisco City College, he earned money with a part-time job as the school’s basketball team manager.

When the United States entered World War II, Al dropped out of school but took maximum advantage of his engineering training to work as a ship-fitter to build Victory ships. He chose the swing shift so he could earn more money than the day shift and because “the graveyard shift would mess up the whole day if you had to work and then sleep all day.” He worked at the Kaiser Shipyard #3 in Richmond, CA commuting with friend, Woo Fee Gee, who owned a model A car.

In February, 1943 Al was drafted into the Army and began his basic training before being assigned to Weather Observer School in Chanute Field, IL. He requested an assignment for meteorology training, but was told that only applications for pilot, bombardier, and navigator were being accepted. Applying his engineering skills, he trained as a navigator. 2nd Lieutenant Alfred Soo was assigned to a bomber crew that flew a B-17 out of Knettishall, England. The plane was hit by flak during his third mission over Hamm, Germany. He survived after being blown out of the plane, had three operations, and was a POW for the last six months of the war. Al was awarded a Purple Heart. In later years, he participated in several oral history projects to share his WWII experiences, including the Rosie The Riveter/World War II American Homefront and the World War II Museum in New Orleans.

Through the GI Bill, Al completed his civil engineering degree from U.C. Berkeley and then was employed by CalTrans working on the construction, design, and operation of the California highway and freeway system. He was registered as a licensed Professional Engineer and as a licensed Traffic Engineer. Working as the Senior Traffic Engineer member of the Multidisciplinary Accident Investigation Team (MAIT), a program be-

tween CalTrans and the California Highway Patrol, was particularly interesting to him. Al contributed to his El Cerrito community serving as a Public Safety Commissioner and as its Chairman. He also served as the foreman on several juries. His family was first and foremost in his life. He married Nettie (Wong) in 1949, who predeceased him in 2005. Al is survived by his children Linda Rains (Lyle), Charmaine, Cynthia Lew (Tim), Rodney (Ling), and Nancy; four grandchildren Nathan (Suzie), Megan (Bryce), Madelyn, and Gary and one great-granddaughter Xyla; sister, Marie Fong; four in-laws; and numerous nieces and nephews. Al and Nettie enjoyed traveling, including car trips and cruises with family and friends. Special to Al were attending 388th Bomb Group annual reunions, visiting his children in Southern California, Hawaii, and Washington State, and cruising in China and Alaska and through the Panama Canal.

Highlights included visits to national parks with his son and grandson, his grand children’s high school and university graduations, a plane ride in a restored B-17 Bomber with his eldest grandson, weddings of two grandchildren, and the birth of his great-granddaughter. Al looked forward to all family gatherings, especially the recent Soo Family Chinese New Year celebrations, where five Soo generations gathered for food and conversation. Al will be remembered by family and friends for always having engaging conversations about their interests, careers, basketball strategies, U.C. Berkeley Bears, Golden State Warriors, WWII experiences, and for his love of Chinese food. The family wishes to express thanks to his caregiver, Uinita, and to the SFVA Medical Center staff for the thoughtful and dignified care of their father.

William W. Worthen

Our dad, a member of the Greatest Generation, climbed one more time into the cockpit of a B-17 and departed the surly bonds of Earth for his final mission Thurs-



day, February 27, 2020. Daughter Gail, son Bradford and son-in-law Chris were there to see him on his way.... off to the heavens.

At the young age of 20, Bill enlisted in the Army Air Force. With the rank of first lieutenant, Eighth Air Force, he earned the right to the copilot seat in a new B-17 Flying Fortress headed to Europe to assist the Allies in defeating Adolf Hitler.

Stationed in Knettishall, England, Dad's initial commitment was to fly 25 bombing missions. He volunteered for 10 additional missions. Returning from his 35th and final bombing run on Christmas Eve 1944, Dad's B-17 was badly damaged by enemy flack, injuring his captain, the pilot. Three of the aircraft's four engines had been hit and failed. Dad took control of the plane, crash-landing in a field in Belgium. All were rescued by Allied Forces. All survived.

Bill and his wife, Rae, traveled annually to the Mighty 388th Bomb Group reunions held around the United States and England to reminisce and rejoice with lifelong B-17 veterans and their families.

Perhaps one of Dad's most famous missions was not a bombing run at all but a highly top-secret flight. His crew was selected to escort Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. on what was an ill-fated attempt to deliver a lethal blow to the enemy. Dad's crew was to provide escort coverage for Kennedy. Positioned 500 feet off the right wing of Kennedy's plane when it blew up, Dad's B-17 became inverted due to the violent explosion. He and his pilot had all they could do to control their Flying Fortress.

Soon after the war, Dad was in Hyannis, Mass., for a weekend getaway. John and Bobby Kennedy heard Dad was nearby and met up with him on the beach near the Kennedy Compound, thanking Dad for his bravery and wanting to learn more about the fate of their oldest brother.

William W. Worthen was born in Springfield, Mass., on December 20, 1922, the son of Ernest N. and Emma L. (Merrill) Worthen. His mother nicknamed him Birdie, as he was always happily singing and whistling — a quality he shared throughout his life.

Bill spent his younger years traveling to the family farm in Worthington, Mass., as well as summers on Chebeague Island, Maine. The family cottage on Chebeague was one of his favorite places to be. Dad was a highly proficient gardener growing an amazing variety of vegetables, and he could dig a bushel of clams as fast as any native islander.

Dad was always comfortable in the kitchen cooking and baking, a confidence inherited by Gail and Brad.

Bill was a natural outdoorsman. He spent summers in his formative years exploring wildlife on the family farm and traveled by train to the Rangeley Lake Region of Maine for boys' camp. He attended Williston Academy and graduated in 1950 from the UVM College of Agriculture. Dad enjoyed immensely his lifelong friendship with his Delta Psi fraternity brother, hunting buddy and best man John Kubin and his wife, Sally.

Dad was a graceful fly fisherman casting the headwaters of the Lamoille River. He canoed regularly on the Winooski River and Waterbury Reservoir, often during hunting season looking for the unsuspecting buck stopping by water's edge. At UVM, Dad was a member of the Varsity Nordic Ski Team, specializing in ski jumping. Dad continued to ski his entire life. Whether it was skinning up Camel's Hump midwinter or teleskiing Stowe's Front Four, Dad always enjoyed the Vermont winters. He took his final runs at the age of 90.

Bill is survived by his daughter, Gail Worthen, and her partner, Rick Hale; his granddaughters, Emma Rae Todd and Addie F Todd; his son, Bradford J Worthen; and his son-in-law, Christopher Copley. He leaves behind nephews Willie, Stevie, Scott and Billy; nieces Susan, Mary Ellen, Nancy, Mary Beth and Helen Rae; and great-niece Christiane. He also leaves behind family friends Linda Doane, Andrew Todd, Trudy Stanley and Christopher LaCroix.

Bill was predeceased by his loving and devoted wife of 65 years, Rae M. Worthen; his parents, Ernest and Emma; his siblings Merrill, Katherine and Judith; and his niece Judith Maud.



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