



# 451<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group Newsletter No. 25 August 2024



Published for the preservation of our 451<sup>st</sup> heritage.

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## MANAGERS MESSAGE

In this edition of our newsletter, we are pleased to present a wealth of content.

Firstly, we provide a follow-up on the recent ceremony in Vis, dedicated to establishing a memorial center.

We also spotlight two new books referencing the 451<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group. "From One War To Another" by John Lanza offers a comprehensive narrative spanning both World Wars, with a focus on a distinguished crew from the 451<sup>st</sup>. Additionally, 451<sup>st</sup> veteran Achilles Kozakis shared his experiences in "Bombing Hitler's Hometown" by Mike Croissant, providing his firsthand insights.

The 15th Army Air Force Reunion is scheduled to take place in Tucson, AZ, from October 26-29. This gathering promises to be a poignant occasion for reflection and camaraderie among families of veterans.

We also highlight "Ted Rogal's WWII Story" by Chuck Rogal, which chronicles the wartime experiences of one of our living veterans, preserving his legacy for future generations.

Furthermore, we include a recent press release from the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) concerning 451<sup>st</sup> veteran Kenneth McKeeman, who was missing in action. This update underscores the ongoing efforts to account for our brave servicemen.

Lastly, we republish an article from the San Diego Tribune, dated May 26th, 2024, which features the story of 451<sup>st</sup> veteran James Reily Sr., adding another layer to our collective history.

We trust that you will find this edition both informative and inspiring. Enjoy the read!

*Jonathan*

# Vis WWII Memorial Center



An international group is in the process of establishing a permanent WWII Memorial Center on the island of Vis in Croatia and adjacent to the emergency airstrip that saved over 4,000 lives of Allied airmen during the war.

By the beginning of 1944, the only free territory in the middle of Nazi occupied Europe was the island of Vis in then Yugoslavia which was defended by a combined force of Partisan British and US troops. Vis airfield played a key role in saving Allied airmen whose bombers and fighters, damaged in fierce battles over occupied Europe, were unable to reach their bases in southern Italy.

On July 5<sup>th</sup> of this year, a ceremony was held at the site of the future Memorial Center to commemorate the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of the first Allied airman, 2Lt. John J. K. C. Kim, on the airstrip as well as the Partisans also killed in that crash. Wreaths were laid by the families of Kim and the Partisans, along with representatives of the U.S. and Croatian governments and the Mayor of Vis. A Black Hawk helicopter of the Croatian Air Force did a fly over and landed at the site, and aboard was the head of the Croatian Air Force, Major General Michael Krizanec and U.S. Defense Attaché Colonel Scott McLear from the U.S. Embassy in what was the first landing of an American military aircraft since 1945 on Vis!

At the ceremony, attended by over 200, the story of Captain George Tudor's landing on Vis on October 7, 1944 was featured along with stories of Lt. George McGovern and Lt. Lloyd Bentsen. Captain Tudor of the 725 BS, 451<sup>st</sup> BG was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, Silver Star and Purple Heart for his actions to save his B-24 crew that day.

His story and that of Lts. McGovern and Bentsen are just a few of the hundreds of stories of Allied airmen landing or attempting to land on the airfield. These stories are being collected and will be an important part of the new Memorial Center.

We are now proceeding with plans for the permanent Vis WWII Memorial Center and are seeking support and donations from individuals and organizations.

Please join the Facebook Group “Vis WWII Memorial Center- the Last Hope” to get informed on the center. There is information there on tax deductible donations.

Contact me for further information: James Peck, Historian, Advisory Team, Vis WWII Memorial Center, [jpeck206@gmail.com](mailto:jpeck206@gmail.com) Cell/Text: 617-571-3198

Recently, a book was published about a crew from the 451st Bomb Group. The name of the book is *From One War To Another* and the author is John Lanza.

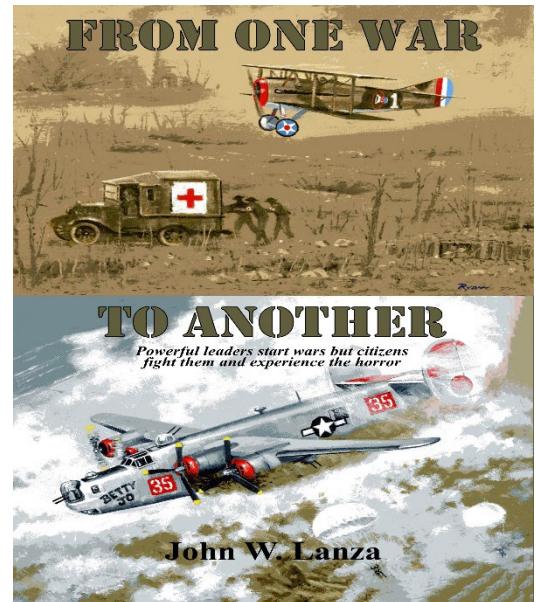
When giving a book talk at a veteran’s home on his first book, *Shot Down Over Italy*, the author met John Cooney, a veteran airman from the 451st Bomb Group, who went down in a B-24 over Italy and who sparked his interest in spending ten years writing *From One War To Another*.

Cooney’s father served in World War I with the medical support forces which cared for war casualties, while he served in World War II with the 451st Bomb Group which created or were casualties of war.

The book analyzes two world wars—how they were started, mobilized for, fought, supported, ended, and more. It explains the role of the United States in both wars with a focus on medical support in World War I, which cared for the sick and wounded, and airpower in World War II, the factories that made weapons, oil fields that fueled them, facilities that stored them, and the transportation networks that brought them to the battlefield.

The book shows that powerful leaders start wars, but citizens fight them and experience the horror. It describes the process of changing from a peacetime economy producing goods and services that help people to a wartime economy producing goods and services that harm people. War is hell, and the book pays tribute to those who experienced this hell by courageously doing their duty as citizens.

The book can be purchased on the author’s website at <http://www.FromOneWarToAnother.com> for \$29.95 with an autograph, a bookmark, and free shipping. It is also available on the Amazon and Barnes & Noble websites.





The 2024  
Fifteenth Army Air Force Reunion  
Tucson, Arizona  
Saturday, October 26  
Through  
Tuesday, October 29, 2024



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- An all suites hotel with one bedroom and a pull out couch in every suite. Rooms are well appointed and thoroughly comfortable.
- Suites are \$135 plus tax for single/double occupancy, \$145 for triple and \$155 for quad. *(This is more than we have paid in the past. That is where the hotel market is at. Many more people are travelling and hotels are very busy in the post-pandemic era and thus hotel prices have risen like everything else. While it's regrettable, this is actually a pretty fair deal.)*
- Group rates are available from October 23—November 2, 2024
- You must reserve your suite no later than Midnight, October 4 2024
- A full, hot breakfast buffet is included
- Consider staying extra days as there is much to see and do that we won't have time for.
- Parking is plentiful and complimentary, including RVs.
- 24 Hour airport shuttle—2 minute ride—10 minute walk if you prefer.
- The hotel is pet friendly with a fee and size restriction. Contact the hotel for details.

Questions? Call Dave Blake at (913) 523-4044 or E-Mail: [reunion@461st.org](mailto:reunion@461st.org)

**Helpful Links:**

[Available Rooms - DoubleTree Suites by Hilton Hotel Tucson Airport](#) or call 1-800-445-8667.

[ITINERARY 2024 Reunion SECOND DRAFT.pdf \(461st.org\)](#)

[Registration Form Instructions.pdf \(461st.org\)](#)

[2024 Registration Form.pdf \(461st.org\)](#)

**Registrations must be received no later than October 11, 2024.**

**No changes can be made to tours or meals after that date.**

The Reunion Registration Form in the link above has been updated to be fillable. When you bring it up you can type your information in the fields, save the completed form to your device, and send it electronically to Dave Blake at [reunion@461st.org](mailto:reunion@461st.org). If you want to print the form to fill out manually and mail to Dave, that option is still available.

Once you send your completed registration form to Dave, you will still need to pay for your registration. A number of banks now support Zelle that provides the ability to send money electronically at no cost to you or the reunion. This is the best way to pay for your registration. If you choose to mail a paper check to Dave, that's okay too.

- Send your Zelle payment to Dave at [reunion@461st.org](mailto:reunion@461st.org) or 9135234044.
- If your bank doesn't support Zelle, you can still send a check to Dave at his address on the Registration Form. If you need help using Zelle, call your bank.

Additionally, you can pay registration fees through Venmo. Here are the "rules" for using Venmo:

- Send payments to: @Fifteenth-Air-Force-Reunion
- To avoid paying an additional fee, payment must be made with a bank account number or debit card.
- Credit card payments will incur a 3% processing fee. If a credit card is used, add 3% of the total to the payment.
- If Venmo asks for a four-digit code, it is 4044.

## BOMBING HITLER'S HOMETOWN – Mike Croissant

In April 1945, Linz was one of Nazi Germany's most vital assets. It was a crucial transportation hub and communications center, with railyards brimming with war materiel destined for the front lines. Linz was also the town Hitler claimed as home and had long intended to remake as the cultural capital of Europe, filling its planned Führermuseum with world-famous art stolen from his conquered territories.

Inevitably, Linz was also one of the most heavily defended targets remaining in Europe. The airmen of the Fifteenth Air Force were a mix of seasoned veterans and newcomers. As their mission was unveiled in the predawn hours of April 25, audible groans and muffled expletives passed many lips. The reality of that mission would prove more brutal than any imagined.

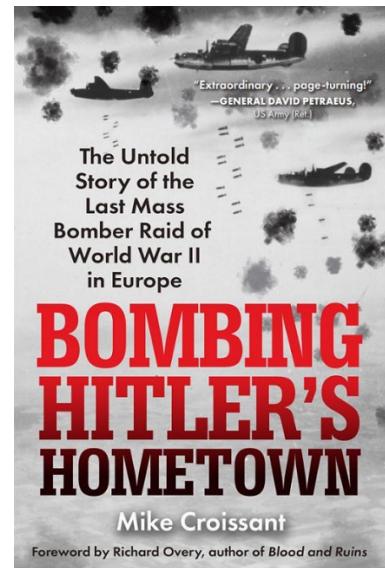
In the unheated, unpressurized B-24 Liberator and B-17 Flying Fortress heavy bombers, young men battled elements as dangerous as anything the Germans could throw at them. When batteries of German anti-aircraft guns opened fire, the men flew into a man-made hell of exploding shrapnel. Aircraft and men fell from the sky as Austrian civilians on the ground also struggled to survive beneath the bombs during the deadly climax of Hitler's war.

Drawing on interviews with dozens of America's last surviving World War II veterans, as well as previously unpublished sources, Mike Croissant compellingly relates one of the war's last truly untold stories—a gripping chronicle of warfare, the death of Nazi Germany, and the beginning of the Cold War. It is also a timeless tale of courage and terror, loss and redemption, humanity and savagery.

Book is available on Amazon -

<https://www.amazon.com/Bombing-Hitlers-Hometown-Untold-Bomber/dp/0806543027>

Note – 451<sup>st</sup> BG member Achi Kozakis 726<sup>th</sup> Sq, Nose Turret Gunner was interviewed for this book.



Mike Croissant – Retired CIA Officer



Achi Kozakis – 451<sup>st</sup> B.G.



## TED ROGAL's WWII STORY – Chuck Rogal

Ted Rogal was one of three brothers who were born in the 1920s, grew up in the 30s and went to war in the 1940s. Ted's older brother Harry was in a P-47 on D-Day. Ted followed Harry into the Army Air Corps. Ted's younger brother Bob spent his war time in the Navy in the Pacific.

When Ted was 16, he and a friend traveled to Fort Meade (Camp Meade at the time) for a month in the summertime to attend a Citizens' Military Training Camp (in 1942). Ted and his friend were sponsored by Major Oliver, a friend from their small town of Chinchilla in Northeastern PA. They took a train from Scranton to NY then from NY to Baltimore, then on to Fort Meade.

Ted enlisted in August of 1942 and then was called to report in March of 1943.

Ted's service has been documented in a newspaper article that appeared in The Morning Call on August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1990 as well as a full account of Ted's WWII experience is documented by the **Veterans History Project Service Summary at the Library of Congress** – you can watch the recording here –

<https://www.loc.gov/item/afc2001001.103006/>

A few excerpts from Ted's interview with the Library of Congress appear below:

**Cross Country Night Flight Training** - At Basic Flight School in Bainbridge Georgia, we had to complete a night cross-country flight as part of the training. One of the experiences...I often think about, we had a night cross-country flight from Bainbridge Georgia over to Dothan Alabama and then from Dothan Alabama down to Marietta Florida and then from Marietta back up to Bainbridge.

We were supposed to call in at those locations. So, I took off and started, everything was fine. I got over to Dothan and tried to call in, my transmitter wasn't working. I could hear everything, but I couldn't transmit. Well, I thought, that's okay. They told us on the way from Dothan down to Marietta, on the right-hand side you will see all the lights of Fort Rucker, which I did. And I thought, hey I am doing okay. Before I got to Marietta I was at about 3500 feet, flying down southeast, one of the things I thought of is that I don't want to miss Marietta as I don't want to go out over the Gulf. Well about halfway down, the front of the airplane has a big red light called the running light which is supposed to illuminate you for other aircraft. Well, all of a sudden, I could see a cloud and the cloud was lighting up and I could see the red illumination from my running light. I thought oh gee, they are sending search lights up at me. I am looking around, and I don't see any search lights at all. Then it dawned on me that I was starting to run into the clouds. Well, I had had a little instrument training but I wasn't fully equipped to do instrument flying so I figured I would drop down and get out of the clouds and got down to Marietta. I could hear other guys calling in Marietta. It was a training air base. I could hear them calling in, so I circled it a couple of times. I couldn't transmit and tell them that I am here so I just turned back north east to go back up to Bainbridge. How am I going to find Bainbridge? Then it dawned on me again, Bainbridge had a circular flashing beacon with double beams. The only double beam light in the area. I am going along, going along and I finally see the double beam. Hey, that's Bainbridge. So I landed and everything was okay. I made a successful night crossing without a transmitter.

**Ted Rogal Cadet**



**Arriving in Italy** – From Algiers...we took off in our B-24 and flew it over to our base in Italy.

Our base in Italy was on what they called the Foggia plain which was a big flat area over on the east side, the Adriatic side and we were in a little town called Castelluccia.

It was just a metal strip that they put down for the runway and they had a little tower, a prefabricated tower. ...We had tents. I was in the 726 squadron and there were 4 squadrons on the base plus group headquarters...

...We flew 2 practice missions up in northern Italy and then we started flying our combat missions. We take off and circle and get into a lose formation and start heading off and start climbing towards the target. At 10000 feet of course we all put our oxygen masks on. I did that for 30 combat missions.

**Ted Rogal in B-24**



**Tough Targets** - Five of my 30 missions were to the Ploesti refineries in Romania which was the heaviest defended target in Europe. They had over 200 Ack-Ack (a.k.a flak) guns surrounding the refineries. It was a real tough target.

The other tough target was a German Messerschmidt manufacturing base up in Wiener Neustadt. It was the first time we saw red flak. We thought it was like the 4th of July. They're sending up red flak. Well, it was very accurate flak. On one of our missions our group lost 13 airplanes at that target, Wiener Neustadt. That was a very tough target. I think that was even tougher than Ploesti, though Ploesti was pretty tough. I saw a lot of parachutes.

On my last mission to Ploesti, the first pilot said to me as we were coming in towards the target, he said I'm going in the back cause I want to get some pictures. So, I said OK no problem. He knew I had flown a pattern before. So, I'm alone in the cockpit, coming from an initial point into where we're going to drop the bombs. I looked over to the right and I saw maybe like a 1/2 mile away was quite a bit of flak. I thought oh gee that's swell they think we're over there. Well, the next thing I knew the wheel wasn't working correctly. The engineer was of course sitting back behind me up in his upper row gun sighting. I could take the wheel and turn it, but nothing happened. I thought oh, oh, we really got a problem. Well then at about the same time the nose of the plane started coming up. I used all the strength that I can muster to keep pushing it forward to keep the nose down. I thought if we ever go sideways and start into a spin, we are finished. Because without any ailerons we couldn't get out. So, I reached around to grab the leg of the engineer. I pulled on his leg. He hopped down when I told him to get into pilot's seat and help me push forward on the controls to keep the nose down, which he did. The rest of the flight was swung off to the left we kept going straight like we are going back up into Germany because we couldn't turn. If you pushed on a rudder, the plane would skid but it would still go in the same direction, it wouldn't turn. So, after not too many minutes the pilot came back from the back, and he sat in his seat. The engineer got up in his area and we're trying to figure out how we are

going to turn this thing? It was stable, it wasn't jumping around or anything. The front of it stopped coming up. So, we were flying normally but we couldn't turn the airplane. So, we thought well what we'll do if we want to turn left? We'll pull back on the 2 left engines, push up on the 2 right engines which we did and then push on the left rudder and let it sort of swing that way and then we just make the nose go up-and-down and that's how we finally found we could turn the plane very very slowly. So, we got the plane pointed back to our base in Italy. We kept dropping down-and-out of altitude to get off our oxygen masks. From then on, we made it OK. We made it back to our base. We called the tower and told them we're coming in without an aileron and they said well ask your crew if they want to bailout? We asked them and they said no, no, they didn't want to bailout, we'll take a chance on getting in. So, we did about a 45 to 50 mile straight in approach to the runway because we knew we can't turn. We made it okay, we landed. So, we were really happy about that. We had dropped the bombs, so it was like a normal bomb run.

**Ted Rogal (with officer hat) & Crew**



The following article appeared in The Morning Call newspaper on August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1990. It has been reformatted to fit the newsletter:

### B-24 Crew remembers the fear and the closeness



HARRY FISHER / The Morning Call

**WWII B-24 crew is reunited in front of vintage planes at A-B-E Airport: Co-pilot Rogal (left), nose gunner Kohler, pilot Haubert, gunner Ul, flight engineer Rossi and gunner Hernandez.**

"They felt their knees shake, their stomachs turn to knots. They said their prayers and tried not to feel the piercing cold that drives through a man's skin at 22,000 feet.

And through it all was the incessant noise of flak cracking against the walls of their B-24 bomber, a sound Ted Rogal would later compare to driving rain on a car roof.

Leo Ul said, "We were more like a family than a crew... It was better that way because if we spent a lot of time with another crew, if they went down we'd feel real bad."

"And a lot of them went down," Rogal said.

This is the talk of survivors—Rogal, Ul, Al Hernandez, Phil Haubert, Charles Kolar, David Rossi—six men who flew together behind Axis lines during World War II to bomb German factories and oil refineries.

Yesterday, the crew members got together at Rogal's Wescosville PA home for a reunion they hold every five years. They joked and swapped memories, like the one about how they used to carry beer up in the plane for the ground crew; at 22,000 feet the beer got cold.



**TED ROGAL / Special to The Morning Call**

Above - Ted is on the left followed by the pilot and the rest of the crew as they pose in front of their plane in this shot taken during the war.

"They always put the beer in [a plane] with someone who they thought was going to be lucky," Ul said. If the plane was shot down, the beer was lost along with the crew.

Rogal organized this reunion, which include crew members from Texas, Georgia, New York and California, so he and his friends could see the L-B40/B-24 Liberator that's on display in a Confederate Air Force show through Sunday at Allentown-Bethlehem-Easton Airport. Four crew members from those days are gone, killed not by enemy fire but by time and disease.

Yesterday, Haubert, who was the pilot, was kidding about taking the old bomber up for a spin. A friend gave him and the others a cake decorated with a B-24 and bearing the inscription, "The best crew in World War II."

"When we get together, we reminisce about what we went through. We think about, bring things up about it. With other people, you try to tell them about it," said Hernandez, who lives in Houston.

Maybe it's hard for some people to understand what it was like for Rossi to walk the 8-inch catwalk around the open belly of a plane to fix a hydraulic line ruptured by flak, or how Kolar felt when the enemy shot out a plate glass window inches from his head. A few of the men took on the dangerous task of jiggling loose the

bombs that sometimes got stuck in the plane's belly: trying to land with a bomb on board would have been disastrous.

"We've seen German pilots going down in parachutes. And we never fired on them. Some crew might have, but we never did," Ul said.

In 1944, each man flew 50 missions. Their targets were valuable instruments of the Axis war machine including the oil refinery at Ploesti, Romania, reputedly the most heavily defended enemy target. Because flying through hostile territory was so perilous and demanding, they had the option of requesting a transfer to a less risky assignment.

"But if you did that you were kind of considered to be on the yellow," said Ul, who lives in Erie. "You kind of made up your mind that you're going to get through it."

After they completed 50 missions, the military let them stop flying, Rossi said his last mission was the toughest just because he wanted to be done with combat. "It was a rough day. I kept counting the minutes until it was over," he said.

When he was finished, he kissed the ground and swore that he'd never set foot in another plane. But when the war was over, he bought a plane and earned his pilot's license.

Rossi and the rest haven't forgotten what it was like to fly hostile skies. During one mission, German flak poked a hole in one wing and took out the ailerons which allow a pilot to steer his craft. Rogal, who was co-pilot, remembers that the ground control crew at their makeshift base in Italy radioed and asked if they wanted to bail out.

"But they stuck it out," Rogal said.

And Haubert said, "An airplane is an amazing machine, really. You read about what a crew can do even when it's disabled. Either God or luck played a part that time."

At left, Ted Rogal in his co-pilot seat in the L-40/B-24 Liberator on display at the 1990 Confederate Air Force show at the Allentown-Bethlehem-Easton Airport.



## MIA KENNETH MCKEEMAN

**Note** – Note the press release below was issued on April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2024, regarding 451<sup>st</sup> member Kenneth J. McKeeman, 724<sup>th</sup> Squadron, Bombardier.

### Airman Accounted for from WWII (McKeeman, K.) – April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Washington –

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) announced today that U.S. Army Air Force Tech. Sgt. Kenneth J. McKeeman, 23, of Brooklyn, New York, killed during World War II, was accounted for Sept. 18, 2023.

In early 1944, McKeeman was assigned to the 724th Bombardment Squadron, 451st Bombardment Group, 15th Air Force in the Mediterranean and European Theater. On March 11, McKeeman, a bombardier onboard a B-24D “Liberator”, was killed in action when his plane was hit by heavy anti-aircraft fire over Toulon, France. An eyewitness from another aircraft reported seeing McKeeman’s plane on fire and plummeting out of the sky, before eventually breaking apart and crashing into the sea. All 11 crewmembers were killed in the incident. German forces garrisoned in the area documented the crash site near Cape Cépet and recovered several sets of remains, which were then interred them in the Lagoubran Cemetery, France. Beginning in 1945, the American Graves Registration Command (AGRC), the organization that searched for and recovered fallen American personnel in the European Theater, exhumed 25 graves from the Lagoubran Cemetery.



Among the recovered remains were some of McKeeman’s fellow crewmen, and four unknowns designated X-84, X-85, X-86 and X-92 Luynes. These unknowns were ultimately interred in Rhône American Cemetery in Draguignan, France.

In June 2019, DPAA historians and [American Battle Monuments Commission](#) personnel, exhumed X-85 from Rhône American Cemetery and transferred them to the DPAA Laboratory for analysis where it was later determined the remains belonged to McKeeman.

To identify McKeeman’s remains, scientists from DPAA used anthropological analysis. Additionally, scientists from the [Armed Forces Medical Examiner System](#) used mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) analysis.

TSgt. McKeeman’s name is recorded on the Walls of the Missing at Rhône American Cemetery, France, along with others still missing from WWII. A rosette will be placed next to his name to indicate he has been accounted for.

TSgt. McKeeman will be buried in Middletown, Connecticut, on June 7, 2024.

For family and funeral information, contact the Army Casualty Office at (800) 892-2490.

For additional information on the Defense Department’s mission to account for Americans who went missing while serving our country, visit the DPAA website at [www.dpaa.mil](http://www.dpaa.mil) or find us on social media at [www.facebook.com/dodpaa](https://www.facebook.com/dodpaa) or <https://www.linkedin.com/company/defense-pow-mia-accounting-agency>.

McKeeman’s personnel profile can be viewed at <https://dpaa-mil.sites.crmforce.mil/dpaaProfile?id=a0Jt000001kgHt8EAE>.

## JAMES REILY SR. WAS A POW by Patricia Reily

*Note – The following is an article that appeared in the San Diego Tribune on May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024. It has been reformatted to accommodate the newsletter size.*

### James Reily Sr



At top left, James Reily Sr. is shown in his dress uniform after completing flight training. At top right, Reily is shown in a photo taken by German authorities after he became their captive.

When my mother-in-law passed away in 2012, my husband was serving as a docent on the USS Midway Museum. He convinced his father, a World War II veteran and prisoner of war camp survivor to move to San Diego. My father-in-law had no reason to stay in Philadelphia. Most of his close friends had passed away. So, he sold his home and joined us.

The Midway had a World War II desk where veterans could share their experiences with visitors. My husband thought it would be good for his dad to recount his experiences.

So, for four years, he did just that. He especially liked chatting with children and having his picture taken with pretty young women who thought he was cute.



Above, Josip Markovic and James Reily Jr. talk in 2019 outside the city of Brinje, Croatia, near the site where Markovic took James Reily Sr. into custody after his plane crashed in 1944.

### JAMES REILY SR. WAS A POW

Unfortunately, his feet never totally recovered from being frozen in the war. They would become numb without warning, making it difficult for him to keep his balance.

One day he took a bad fall, hit his head and never recovered. He passed away in 2016 at the VA hospital in La Jolla. It was not long after he passed that my husband received correspondence from his father's bomb squadron that some World War II historians had located what they thought was the crash site and the remains of the bomber he went down in. They were trying to connect with any of the crew who might still be alive. He explained that his dad had recently passed, but my husband had learned a lot about the crash over the years and wanted to connect with the historians investigating the crash site. My husband's father, Lt. James Reily Sr., was the 19-year-old bombardier of a B-24 Liberator nicknamed 'Mairzy Doats' stationed in Southern Italy near the end of the war.

The raid on May 10, 1944, began well before dawn. It was a crisp spring morning, redolent with the aroma of blossoms of all kinds in stark contrast with the acrid smell of a smoldering refuse pile near the airbase



Above, James Reily Jr. and James Reily Sr. pose in 2015. **REILY FAMILY PHOTOS**

For four years James Reily Sr. share his World War II stories with visitor to the USS Midway Museum in San Diego shown below. **GETTY IMAGES**

**FOR MEMORIAL DAY, WE LOOK BACK AT HIS REMARKABLE STORY.**



As Markovic rolled over to try to get comfortable in his lumpy cot, he heard a distant whirring and sputtering sound. The sound was out of place in this bucolic outpost. He ran to the barracks window and saw an Allied

mingled with fuel fumes as a dozen bombers started their engines. The young bombardier huddled with the pilot and co-pilot as they reviewed the mission in the pre-dawn light. The target was an aerodrome in Vienna. Meanwhile, 500 miles away, in the same pre-dawn, an 18-year-old Croatian Army private – Josip Markovic – shivered under a threadbare blanket in the barracks of an Army camp outside of Brinje, Croatia.

He was the oldest son in a family of 12 children, without a father. His mother did not want him to join the army. She depended upon him. Markovic countered that he could help his family more by joining the army. Markovic was not an idealist, but he was a proud Croatian. Like most Croatians, he was tired of seeing his country overrun by rising powers coveting the beauty and bounty of this strip of fertile land stretching from the mountains to the sea. So, against his mother's wishes he joined the Croatian army – a scruffy collection of boys and men – led by a cadre of German officers. It was that or join the communists – Tito's “Partisans” – in the mountains.

bomber approaching. He scrambled to put on his uniform and headed for the door. When he emerged from the barracks, he heard a sharp shriek and saw a bomber was damaged and descending rapidly. A German Messerschmitt fighter aircraft flew above the Allied bomber, strafing it as it plunged. Black dots like small spiders popped from the plane's underbelly and white puffs emerged as the dots drifted into a clearing far below.

Markovic started to make sense of what was happening. The fliers in the sputtering aircraft had bailed out. It was then that he heard a rumble like thunder. Orange flames shot out of the aircraft and black smoke billowed skyward as it plowed into the foothills on the eastern side of the valley. The Messerschmitt circled above the crash and flew off. Markovic knew the countryside like the back of his hand, and this was his opportunity to finally see some action. He hopped on his motorcycle and careened down the hill into the valley. He knew exactly where the wind would take those parachutes. Reily had successfully dropped the bomber's 5,000 pounds of ordinance on its target, but the plane was hit by heavy flak and was pursued by a German Messerschmitt as the pilot in command attempted to rise above the flak and return to base. It became apparent that the bomber would not be able to make it back. They would need to bail out. None of them had bailed out of a plane before – there was no time to practice that before shipping out. If luck was on their side, they could evade capture in the foothills and make it into the rugged mountainous area where the friendly Croatian insurgents were entrenched. By the time Markovic reached the clearing in the foothills, the first of the aircrew was down. It was then that he realized that in his haste he had forgotten his rifle. For a moment, he felt supremely stupid but decided that he would need to do his best until the others from his unit arrived. Markovic approached the first airman to land. Markovic tried to look tough as he could.

The airman saw him, threw his arms into the air, and said "Amerikaner...don't shoot!" In a stroke of luck for Markovic, all the Americans survived the crash and were captured. They were herded into the back of a truck and transported to an interrogation site. The interrogations did not take long. The prisoners did not know much more than the interrogator already knew. They were loaded back into trucks and transported on to POW camps. The war in the Pacific was still raging when Reily returned home in 1945. When sufficiently recovered, he requested to be trained as a fighter pilot and deployed to the Pacific. After completing training, he was sent to Guam to fly P47 Thunderbolts in the fight against Japan.

Markovic stayed in the army until the end of the war in Europe. Shortly after the German surrender, Tito was elevated to power and Croatia was absorbed into a collection of Eastern European countries that would come to be called Yugoslavia. The Croatian soldiers who had fought on the German side were pursued and jailed and most of them were executed. Markovic and his family spent the next nine years in European refugee camps before they were able to successfully emigrate to Cleveland.

In the summer of 2019, on one of his extended stays in Croatia, Markovic received a call from a member of the group researching WWII crash sites in Croatia. The historian explained that they had uncovered what they thought was the location of the remains of an Allied bomber outside of Brinje. Markovic was told that the son of one of the fliers was visiting Croatia and was interested in meeting him.

Markovic was thrilled that finally after all these years, perhaps he would learn what happened to the Americans he captured in 1944. He met the senior Reily's son in Brinje in October 2019 and caravaned to a rural overlook where they could see where the bomber crashed. Reily was respectful and friendly. He chatted with Markovic as a local TV crew filmed their conversation. My husband confirmed that – to his knowledge – all the crew members of the Mairzy Doats had passed away. Markovic invited Reily to visit again in Croatia or Cleveland. He would like him to meet his family and talk more about the war. But COVID-19 intervened. Markovic passed away in 2021 in his beloved Croatia, from COVID-19 complications. He was a proud, courageous Croatian American until the end. As is so often the case in wars, in retrospect Markovic and Reily were more alike than they were different. Both men were survivors. Both had positive attitudes despite their

hardships. Both were tough and ambitious. Both were a lot of fun. Both were devoted to their families. Both were married for 62 years. Both of their wives passed away in 2012. Both had sons who went to college in Ohio. Both had grandsons named Michael who were physicians. Both loved drinking beer.

Both suffered in silence from post-traumatic stress. Both self-medicated on occasion with alcohol. In advanced age, both reveled in telling war stories and having their picture taken with pretty young women. Reily and Markovic were not extraordinary. They shared commonalities shared by many who fought in WWII. What Reily and Markovic uniquely shared was one day in the spring of 1944 that they could vividly recall to the end of their lives. No doubt if they had the opportunity to meet in their senior years, they would have transcended the label "enemy" and embraced the label "friend."



James Reily Jr. and James Reily Sr. and two others are shown while on the USS Midway in 2016. **REILY FAMILY PHOTO**

## LAST FLYBY

Here are the death notifications since our February 2024 Newsletter:

451st Member	Squadron	Duty Position	DOD
Emery, Leo	726th	Nose Gunner	02.22.2023

## THANK YOU, DONORS!

Donor	In Tribute To
Jones, Gene Joseph	In memory of Joseph Jones, 725 <sup>th</sup> Squadron, Nose Turret Gunner
Kaczmarek, Michele	In honor of Edward Kaczmarek, 726 <sup>th</sup> Squadron, Radio Operator/Gunner
Reise, David G.	In memory of Alvin G. Reise, 725 <sup>th</sup> Squadron, Bombardier
Rushing, Robert	In memory of 2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt. Lawrence Rushing, 727 <sup>th</sup> Squadron, Co-Pilot
Witherspoon, Bill	In memory of E.D. Witherspoon, 727 <sup>th</sup> Squadron, Gunner

Should you desire to honor a crew mate or family member, please send the full name and duty position of the person being honored. Please send to:

451<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group  
c/o Jonathan Tudor  
12605 Goldenrod Avenue  
Bradenton, FL 34212

OR

Zelle® to 207-730-0465

OR

Venmo to <https://account.venmo.com/u/jontudor>

## FINANCIAL REPORT

The 451st Bomb Group Association does not charge annual dues. Your generous contributions help cover expenses for printing mailing the newsletter, and for maintaining the website, [451st.org](http://451st.org). Please let us know if an electronic version of the newsletter is acceptable in lieu of a paper copy, as that helps lower costs.

451st BG Association Financial Report

## Beginning Balance

February, 2024 \$11,126.67

## Income

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Donations	\$450.00
Interest	\$291.35
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$741.35</b>

## Expenses

Gmail 100 GB	\$19.99
February Newsletter	\$388.51
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$408.50</b>

**Ending Balance July, 2024** **\$11,459.52**