

398th Second and Third Generation Honored Veterans in the UK



Several of our gang gathered in front of the Cambridge American Cemetery's Wall of the Missing for a group photo after the Memorial Day Service. Back row, left to right: Andy Bartlett, Jim Ledlow, Lee Bradley, John Goode, Toni Gardner, Brett Gardner, Bob Swearingen, Audra Gardner, Tyler Shipstad. Front row, left to right: Beth Howard, Karen Bartlett, Mellisa Ledlow, Pamela Goode, Cheryl Swearingen, Marilyn Gibb-Rice, Linda Finn. Other 398th attendees not pictured here: Cathy Jo Yarmoski, Olivia Petrocco, George LeDoux, Mike Haase, Carolyn Widmann, Geoff Rice.

May 28 – 29, 2022 marked the 398th BGMA's biennial return to Station 131. Even though none of our veterans were able to attend, several of the second and third generation made the trip 'across the pond' to honor them. Events attended were the Memorial Service for the 398th BG and 55th FG in Nuthampstead, a special service dedicated to our men held at St. George's Church in Anstey, a tour of Duxford Air Museum and the Memorial Day Service held at the Cambridge American Cemetery in Madingley.

2022 UK REUNION RECAP

by Mellisa Ledlow

The long-anticipated, Covid-delayed UK 398th Reunion finally happened! The 2022 Memorial Day weekend, May 28-30, was spent in the Cambridge, England area honoring veterans who gave their lives protecting democracy and much of the world's freedom.

A Service of Commemoration was held on Saturday, May 28 at the 398th Bomb Group and 55th Fighter Group Memorials adjacent to The Woodman Pub in Nuthampstead, England. Rod Finn, of the UK *Friends of the 398th Bomb Group*, welcomed those in attendance and spoke of the day's ceremony being in honor of the men of the 398th Bomb Group and the 55th Fighter Group, who lost their lives during World War II. The National Anthems of Great Britain and the United States of America were sung followed by an Opening Prayer and Hymn. After a reading from John 15:9-13, flowers were laid on both Monuments and Taps played. A Moment of Silence began and then Reveille and a Commendation Prayer was read by those gathered.

Pamela Croce Goode, daughter of Leo Croce, a 398th Bomb Group Veteran, shared stories of the impact on Leo of his first trip back to Nuthampstead in 2018. Like many modest and humble WW II vets, Leo had not expected the respect, adoration and gratefulness shown him by those in attendance during that Memorial Day weekend—Brits and Americans both. It ultimately led to Leo's sincere desire to help the Nuthampstead Airfield Museum grow and expand, both monetarily and also by donating many of his personal belongings related to his time in the 398th. The Croce family's contributions have been a wonderful addition to the Museum and its future.

Also speaking at the Commemoration was George LeDoux, the son of 398th veteran, Raymond LeDoux. Raymond was the Navigator with the Delancey Crew and was on the infamous October 15, 1944 mission where the entire nose compartment was shattered. The plane limped back to Nuthampstead with just one casualty—Bombardier, George Abbott—George Abbott LeDoux's namesake. An emotional George, asked Marilyn Gibb-Rice to read some very poignant letters from George Abbott's sister.

After the Service, The Woodman Inn opened its doors to feed and fuel a hungry crowd. There was a wonderful chance to visit with British Friends and museum Volunteers. When not eating or drinking, the crowd was able to visit and browse through the Nuthampstead Airfield Museum and its newest building—the Leo Croce Building. Whether affiliated with the 398th BG or not, the museum is an impressive display of WWII memorabilia and personal histories of airmen, airfields and the massive organization of the air war.

Another solemn ceremony took place in the late afternoon. Attendees made their way to the Station 131 flagpole that continuously flies an American flag. Traditionally, the flag has been donated by families of 398th BG veterans. On this weekend, three flags from deceased veterans, Leo Croce, Raymond LeDoux and Frank M. Thomson Jr. were raised, lowered and saluted. Families have the option of leaving their flag with the Friends of the 398th to be flown for three months



Pamela & John Goode at the Nuthampstead Airfield Museum, inside the Nissen Hut named for Pam's dad, Lt. Leo Croce

and then returned to the family, or having their loved ones' flag flown to destruction. The Croce and LeDoux flags were returned to Pamela Goode and George LeDoux, respectively, and the Thomson flag was left on the pole and will be flown to destruction per his family's wishes. (For more information about donating a flag to the group, contact Karen Neff, www.secretary@398th.org)

As the flag ceremony came to a close, with Frank Thomson's flag atop the pole fluttering grandly, a familiar sound was heard. As it became louder, we all looked to the sky and there in all its glory was the B-17, "Sally B", making a wide turn high above the end of old Station 131. What timing and what an amazing sight! We all stood transfixed as she slowly flew over the trees and out of sight. This had not been planned but it could not have happened a more appropriate time. Perhaps Leo, George and Frank sent her.

Sunday morning found the attendees headed to St George's Church in Anstey, England. Anstey literally borders Station 131 and the church narrowly escaped a 398th B-17 crash landing in 1944. The church and community have maintained close, warm ties with the group and have a lovely stained-glass window in the church dedicated to those 398th BG airmen who lost their lives during WWII.

UK REUNION CONTINUED...



Marilyn Gibb-Rice with Toni & Brett Gardner in St. Georges Church, Anstey, admiring the stained-glass window honoring all 398th BG men who were KIA.

The Imperial War Museum, Duxford was the next stop for the Reunion group. The IWM is the largest aviation museum in Britain and houses over 200 military aircraft, military vehicles, artillery and naval vessels. The RAF base was significant in the Battle of Britain and some of the original hangars and buildings still exist. The IWM is also home to the beloved B-17, "Sally B", which is occasionally flown in air shows or for special occasions.

The Sunday evening gathering for the group was at the renowned Eagle Pub in Cambridge for food and beverages. Originally frequented by RAF airmen in WWII, the pub became a favorite for the "Yanks" as well. The Eagle is famous for its ceiling. During the war, airmen used candles, lighters and even lipstick to write names, squadron numbers and other doodles on the ceiling. Our own "398" can be found and fortunately, pub owners have maintained and kept the display intact for all to see and enjoy.

A solemn Memorial Day 2022 began at the Cambridge American Cemetery. After a USAF fly-over, Presentation of Colors and National Anthems, local dignitaries spoke followed by keynote speaker Brigadier General William L. Marshall (USAF in Europe, USAF in Africa). The audience was reminded of the tremendous respect and devoted friendship between the two nations. The valiant, combined effort of all the Allies saved the world from Fascism. And no one should ever forget the "boys that didn't go home."

Over 100 wreaths from different organizations, Bomb Groups, RAF groups, etc. were ceremonially laid against the Wall of the Missing. This was followed by a Moment of Silence, a twenty-one-gun salute and Taps. A lone bag-piper played a poignant lament. The Service ended with a Benediction.

There are over 3,800 American war dead from World War II buried at the cemetery. Seventeen of those buried there and fourteen listed on the Wall of the Missing were from the 398th Bomb Group. Reunion attendees laid flowers on their graves in recognition.

A bright spot on this Memorial Day was an amazing fly-over by the B-17, "Sally-B". The weather cooperated and it was an amazing tribute to everyone who participated in WWII. The efforts of those from the IWM in Duxford to fly her that afternoon was greatly appreciated.

The Reunion wrapped up at a Farewell Dinner at the Red Lion Inn. It was a great time to reflect on the weekend, the ceremonies and tributes to our 398th veterans. It seemed everyone enjoyed the common interest and respect for all veterans and especially our own 398th airmen. Plans and promises to attend the 2024 Reunion were made as everyone was wished safe travels and "See ya soon!" Hopefully, in Dayton!

Many thanks to Marilyn Gibb-Rice, Friends of the 398th and all NAM volunteers who provided a wonderful, memorable weekend. Speaking for the Reunion group, we are most grateful.



Cambridge American Cemetery as seen from the Sally B. Memorial Day, 2022. Photo courtesy of the B-17-Preservation-the-Sally-B page on Facebook.

UK Reunion Photos thanks to Marilyn Gibb-Rice, Beth Howard, Mellisa Ledlow and Lee Bradley



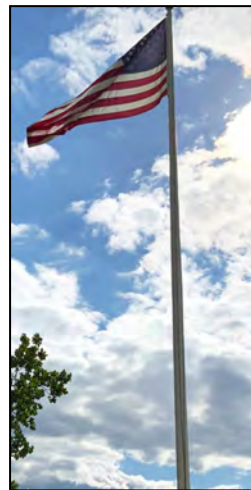
L-R: Tyler Shipstad, Toni and Brett Gardner with daughter Audra Gardner at the Eagle Pub in Cambridge.



L-R: Mellisa Ledlow, Beth Howard, Pamela and John Goode, Elaine Tyler at the Eagle Pub.



Robert and Cheryl Swearingen enjoying soup and a pint at the Eagle Pub.



Left: Lt. Raymond J. LeDoux's flag atop the flagpole at Station 131.



Left: Pamela Goode and Mellisa Ledlow presented a wreath on behalf of the 398th BG at the Memorial Day Ceremony at Madingley.

Below: George LeDoux (right) and Mike Haase honor George's dad.



Left: Carolyn Widmann and Geoff Rice at the Woodman Inn.



Our Farewell Dinner at the Red Lion Inn. L-R: Jim Ledlow, John & Pamela Goode, Mellisa Ledlow, Beth Howard, Lee Bradley, Audra Gardner, Tyler Shipstad, Toni & Brett Gardner, Carolyn Widmann, Geoff & Marilyn Rice, Cheryl & Robert Swearingen, George LeDoux, Mike Haase. See you all back at Station 131 in 2024!



A Proud Daughter and Granddaughter of the 398th

Cathy Jo Yarmoski and her niece Olivia Petrocco made the trip to Nuthampstead in May to honor S/Sgt. Frank A. Yarmoski, 601st SQ. Frank was Cathy Jo's dad and Olivia's granddad. This was Olivia's first time visiting the site where her grandfather was stationed during WWII and thoroughly enjoyed the 398th BG & 55th FG Memorial Service, the Flag Ceremony on the old airfield and of course, the Nuthampstead Airfield Museum.

In addition to Olivia, we had two other 3rd generation 398-er's join us on this trip; Beth Howard, granddaughter of Sgt. Robert L. Howard, 603rd SQ, and Audra Gardner, granddaughter of S/Sgt. Raymond A. Gardner, 603rd SQ.