

2024 Biennial UK Reunion Recap

It was the 80th Anniversary of the arrival of the 398th BG in Nuthampstead

Relatives gathered in the UK to honor all 398th Veterans

by Lee Bradley

Throughout the long 2024 Memorial Day weekend, May 25-27, relatives of 398th BG veterans gathered in Cambridge, England and the surrounding area for the 21st UK Reunion. Our UK Reunions began in 1982 and have been held every two years, with the exception of 2020 when the event was cancelled due to Covid.

A Service of Commemoration was held on Saturday, May 25 in the pastoral village of Nuthampstead at the 398th Bomb Group and 55th Fighter Group Memorials, which are adjacent to both The Woodman Inn and the Nuthampstead Airfield Museum. Marilyn Gibb-Rice, President of the 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association, welcomed those in attendance and spoke of the day's ceremony being in honor and memory of the men of the 398th Bomb Group and the 55th Fighter Group, who lost their lives during the Second World War. The crowd proudly sang the National Anthems of Great Britain and the United States of America. We had the special honor of having the service conducted by Lt. Col. The Reverend Canon Paul Wright LVO, Domestic Chaplain to The King and Sub Dean of the Chapels Royal. After the opening Prayer, a Hymn, and a reading from Micah Chapter 4, verses 1 - 5, flowers were laid by 398th BG and 55th FG relatives on both Monuments. Taps played, a Moment of Silence began, and then Reveille and a Prayer of Commendation was read by those gathered.

Six speakers then came up in turn to the podium and spoke of their dad's experiences at Station 131 during WWII. First up was Parke Wright, IV. His father was 2nd Lt. Parke Wright, III, a pilot in the 600th SQ. On the September 10, 1944 mission to bomb the Heinkel Aircraft Engine Factory in Stuttgart, Germany, Lt. Wright lost his ship, 42-107103 K8-A "Maria Notre Dame" to a direct flak hit. This was the Wright Crew's second mission. Five of his crew, the co-pilot, engineer, radio operator, ball turret and the tail gunner, were KIA. The remaining three of his crew, the bombardier, navigator and right waist gunner became POW's. Wright was also captured and spent the rest of the war as a POW in Stalag Luft I, Compound North 2. Also of note, Canon Paul Wright is Parke's (IV) cousin.

Next up was Mary-Sonja Aasen Beasley who spoke fondly of her dad, S/Sgt. Donald R. Aasen, assistant engineer and tail gunner on the 601st SQ Robert O. Taylor, Landrum, and Andrews Crews. S/Sgt. Aasen flew 35 missions with the 398th BG. He re-enlisted after WWII and served in Korea.

Tom and Paul Mailloux each spoke about their dad, T/Sgt. Lawrence O. Mailloux, radio operator on the 602nd SQ VanOpdorp Crew. He flew 30 missions from October 6, 1944 through April 7, 1945.

Also speaking was Peter Walters, son of 2nd Lt. Arthur J. Walters, 602nd SQ. Lt. Walters was in charge of the Officers Club at Station 131. He was one of the first to arrive at Station 131 to help process the initial group of men arriving to populate the base. Unfortunately, on May 31st 1944 he was accidentally run over by an English Lorry, severely injuring his



Parke Wright, IV speaks about his father at the Service of Commemoration while his cousin, Canon Paul Wright LVO, looks on.

right leg. He then remained at the 49th Station Hospital in Diddington until about July 14th when he returned to duty. On September 15, 1944 he was transferred to the 92nd BG, 325th SQ where he remained until the end of the war.

Last up was Ken Underwood who spoke about his dad, 1st Lt. Kenneth H. Underwood, who was a fighter pilot with the 55th Fighter Group. The 55th was originally based at Nuthampstead before the 398th BG arrived. Lt. Underwood was killed while on a training mission May 18, 1944. Due to mechanical failures, his P-38 Lightning (serial number 42-104334) crashed into an oak tree in Little Saxham, just outside of Bury St. Edmunds. He left behind a wife, Alice, who was 7-1/2 months pregnant at the time with their son Ken. In a tribute to his grandfather, Ken's son now serves as a fighter pilot in the USAF and proudly wears the same WWII wings his grandfather once wore.

At the end of the Commemoration Service, the crowd was treated to a big surprise. The B-17 "Sally B" appeared, making numerous passes over the Woodman to the delight of everyone there. The Museum Trustees came up with the Sally B idea several months ago and museum Volunteer Michael Hutchins made it happen by entirely funding the flyover in memory of his late wife, Suzanne Hutchins. Suzanne had also volunteered her time at the museum taking care of the Memorial Garden. Thank you, Michael, we all very much appreciated your kindness and we know Suzanne was smiling down that beautiful day.

Following the Service, The Woodman Inn opened its doors for lunch and a brew. Their special 398th BG Ale was on tap as it was two years ago and it was definitely a crowd pleaser! During this time the 398th BG relatives had a chance to mingle with our British friends and museum Trustees and Volunteers.

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After lunch the highlight was visiting the Nuthampstead Airfield Museum. What a gem to see! The museum is constantly growing and evolving, featuring very impressive displays of memorabilia, artifacts and personal histories of 398th BG & 55th FG air crews, ground crews and the airfield itself. Another 'must see' were the WWII vintage vehicles on display parked outside of the museum and the many WWII vendor displays inside the Woodman's marquee. To top it off, the Royston Town Band played 1940's tunes all afternoon!

Later that afternoon, attendees made their way to the Station 131 flagpole, where an American flag continuously flies over the old airfield. Traditionally, a flag has been donated by families of 398th BG veterans. On this weekend, four flags from deceased veterans Lawrence O. Mailloux, Arthur J. Walters, Robert W. Dittmer and Edward C. Jordan were raised, saluted and lowered. Families have the option of leaving their flag with the Museum Trustees to be flown for three months and then returned to the family, or having their loved ones' flag flown to destruction. The Mailloux and Walters flags were returned to Joe Mailloux and family and Peter Walters, respectively. The Dittmer flag was returned to Lee Bradley who in turn mailed it back to the Dittmer family after returning to the USA from England. The Jordan flag was left on the pole and will be flown to destruction per his son Dave's wishes. For information about donating a flag to the group, contact John Blackwell, www.secretary@398th.org

After the flag ceremony came to a close, museum volunteers drove the 398th relatives to St. George's Church in Anstey for a special service honoring all those brave men from Station 131 who were killed in action during WWII. Anstey bordered Station 131 and the church itself 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 beautiful stained-glass window in the church dedicated to those 398th BG airmen who lost their lives during WWII. After the service the Rector invited us all to stay for tea and biscuits. It was quite a spread with many homemade delectables! Thank you, Rector James Sawyer and your Ministry Team, for welcoming us Yanks from 'across the pond'.

Then it was time to head back over to the Woodman Inn for their 1940's Dance. Once again everyone piled into the volunteer's cars and headed back across the old airfield. Natalie, Robyn and the staff at The Woodman Inn pulled out all the stops for us. The marquee was decorated beautifully with huge American flags hanging vertically along each side, and there was a nice outside bar set-up and a big buffet table full of tasty dishes. The *Miss Jones Jazz Band* performed '40's music throughout the evening. Several people dressed in 1940's outfits and Peter Walters dazzled in a full USAAF dress uniform. He looked really great swing dancing to the tunes.

It was a grand day for sure, thanks to all associated with the Nuthampstead Airfield Museum and the Woodman Inn. They really went above and beyond for us visitors and we will always remember how much effort and hard work was put into it to make that day so absolutely special for us.

The next day, Sunday, everyone gathered at the famous Eagle Pub in Cambridge for lunch and beverages. Originally frequented by RAF airmen in WWII, the pub became a favorite for the "Yanks" as well. The Eagle Pub is famous for its unique ceiling. During the war, airmen used candles, lighters and

lipstick to write names, squadron numbers and other doodles on the ceiling. Our own "398" can be found if you look hard... and long enough!

On Monday the poignant Memorial Day 2024 Service began at the Cambridge American Cemetery. After a USAF fly-over, Presentation of Colors and the National Anthems of both Britain and the United States, local dignitaries addressed the crowd including Vice Lord-Lieutenant of Cambridgeshire, Brigadier Tim Seal TD DL, Captain Gregory Leland, from the US Embassy and Col. Ryan J. Garlow, commander of the 100th Air Refueling Wing with the Royal Air Force at Mildenhall. This service was especially solemn since 2024 marks 80 years since the D-Day landing. The ABMC states that approximately 1,000 visitors attended the service.

Over 115 wreaths from various organizations, Bomb Groups, RAF groups, etc. were ceremonially laid against the Wall of the Missing. Ken Underwood, son of 1st Lt. Kenneth H. Underwood, had the honor of laying the wreath for the 55th FG. The 398th BG wreath was laid by brothers Tom and Paul Mailloux, sons of T/Sgt. Lawrence O. Mailloux, 602nd SQ, and the Nuthampstead Airfield Museum wreath was jointly laid by Maddyn DuPerrieu and Piper Sealey, both granddaughters of S/Sgt. James C. Crouch, 601st SQ. The laying of the wreaths was followed by a Moment of Silence, a twenty-one-gun salute and Taps. Iain Hildreth, sponsored by the 8th AFHS, played a poignant lament on his bagpipes. The Service ended with a Benediction and closing remarks.

There are 3,812 American war dead from World War II buried in the cemetery, a further 5,127 names are commemorated on the Wall of Missing. Fourteen of those listed on the Wall of Missing and eighteen of those buried were from the 398th Bomb Group. Marilyn Gibb-Rice and Lee Bradley laid flowers on their graves in recognition of their sacrifice.

A bright spot on this Memorial Day was another incredible flyover by the B-17, "Sally-B". The weather was beautiful and it was an amazing tribute to everyone who participated in WWII. The efforts of those from IWM in Duxford, and Elly Sallingboe to arrange for her to fly that afternoon was greatly appreciated. As a side note, the *Sally B* has been operated by Elly Sallingboe of B-17 Preservation with the help of a dedicated team since 1982. The "Sally B" is the last remaining airworthy B-17 in Europe.

The Reunion wrapped up at a Farewell Dinner at the Cambridge Hilton City Centre, where most of the reunion attendees had been staying. It was a perfect time to reflect on the long weekend and 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 2025 Stateside Reunion in Colorado and the 2026 UK Biennial Reunion were made as everyone wished each other safe travels.

Many, Many thanks to Marilyn Gibb-Rice, the Nuthampstead Museum Trustees & Volunteers, and to Natelie Duncker, Head of Marketing and Events for the Woodman Inn (Nutwood Pubs), and also to *all* of the hardworking staff at the Woodman Inn. Thank you all for creating such a wonderful, memorable weekend honoring our veterans. Speaking for the American UK Reunion attendees, we are most grateful for everything you did for us.

UK 2024 Reunion Photo Journal

Photos by Natalie Duncker (Woodman Inn), Marilyn Gibb-Rice and Lee Bradley



Above: Ryan Kennedy checks out memorabilia on display in the Jame's Building at the museum. Ryan's granddad was 1st Lt. Robert Kuchta, 600th SQ navigator.



Above: Two young WWII reenactors. Left: Timothy Duncker (son of Natalie from the Woodman Inn) and George Abbey (son of Russ from the Nuthampstead Airfield Museum).



Above: Paul Mailloux (seated) and his brother Joe (back) fill out forms to donate their dad's WWII memorabilia to the museum.

Below: Ready for lunch at the Eagle Pub. L-R: Myra and Tina Lustick, Karen Walters, Kaelin Lustick, Peter Walters, Joe Lustick.



Above: The Sally B, flying over Nuthampstead.

Below: Elly Sallingboe, owner of the Sally B, and Mike Hutchins. Mike funded the flyover in honor of his late wife, Suzanne.





Above: At the Eagle Pub, L-R: Bill Beasley, Kellen McManus, Carolyn Widmann, Piper Sealey, Morgan Bennett, Mary-Sonja Aasen Beasley.



Above: Lunch at the Eagle Pub in Cambridge. L-R: Darryl Hewitt, Eric Wright with his parents Shirley & Leon Wright. Leon's dad was 1st Lt. Warren H. Wright, co-pilot, 601st SQ.



Above: Ken Underwood (right) with daughter Naomi and her husband Rob Armstrong. Ken laid the wreath for the 55th FG at Madingley. His dad was 55th pilot, 1st Lt. Kenneth Underwood.



The BEST beer in the UK!



Right: Karen and Peter Walters looking sharp in their vintage outfits at the 1940's Dance.

Right: Amadeus Dale, George LeDoux, Darryl Hewitt. Amadeus' granddad and George's dad was 1st Lt. Raymond LeDoux, navigator 601st. Darryl's dad was T/Sgt. Arthur Hewitt, 602nd flight engineer.



MEMORIAL DAY AT MADINGLEY



L-R: Tom, Joe & Paul Mailloux, Sarah Gray & Matt Gray



L-R: Tina Lustick, Kaelin Lustick, Karen & Peter Walters, Joe Lustick and Myra Lustick



L-R: Chris Morrison, Janet Morrison, Bill & Mary-Sonja Beasley, Morgan Bennett, Kellen McManus, Heather Wyatt, Robin Sealey, Piper Sealey, Maddyn DuPerrieu, Carolyn Widmann

A Note of Thanks

July 14, 2024

Dear Marilyn,

I'm hoping it's not too late for some sincere thank yous! Upon reviewing memories, I'm asking you to express appreciation to all the people surrounding the museum who contributed their time and various forms of memorabilia for us to view! From the 3 side-car motorcycles, through all the other vintage vehicles, including that mobile air raid siren on the auto to all the artifacts in the museum. (I've never seen so many 50 cal. machine guns in one place!) The brass band was so good I wanted to sit in and join that talented trombone player!! The dance ensemble, complete with correct era songs and dress were all praise worthy. Coffin flag flying was very emotional, as well as the memory window at the Anstey church tugged at my tear ducts, as well. I realize I'm asking a lot of you, so feel free to scan this and send it to all appropriate entities. I'm grateful for all those young airman, maintenance and support individuals as well as the staff at the Woodman Inn for their part in preserving our freedom! I'm 75 years old and am SO thankful for the opportunities provided by you and all the others. (This is turning into a novel - -sorry!).

All our very best to ALL!!

Charles Morrison



Charlie & Janet Morrison with their son Chris in the Nuthampstead Airfield Museum. Charlie's dad was 1st Lt. Russel J. Morrison, 601st SQ Pilot (his portrait photo can be seen above Janet's head).

Family and friends gathered in the UK this past May for The 398th BGMA's very special 2024 Biennial Reunion



Three wreaths honoring our veterans were laid by representatives of the Nuthampstead Airfield Museum, the 398th Bomb Group, and the 55th Fighter Group during the Wreath Laying Ceremony at the Memorial Day Service at the Cambridge American Cemetery in Madingley,

On the Memorial Day weekend of May 25 – 27, 2024, second, third and fourth generations traveled to the UK to honor their veterans during the 398th BGMA's' Biennial return to Station 131. This was a very special reunion as it marked the 80th anniversary of the arrival of the 398th Bomb Group to Nuthampstead. Events on the docket 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 1940's dance sponsored by the Nuthampstead Airfield Museum and the Woodman Inn, and the Memorial Day Service held at the Cambridge American Cemetery in Madingley.