



# Flightline



Newsletter of the 780<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron of WWII

December 2016

## B-24 Liberator movie coming soon

Coming to a theater near you!

The Collings Foundation (CF) is in the final stages of making a film about the B-24 *Liberator*.

*The Last Liberator* will be a 40-minute IMAX-type film and will anchor CF's multi-platform educational program.

If you don't know about The Collings Foundation (CF), it is an educational non-profit based in Stow, MA. Its purpose is to connect Americans to their past through the "living history" of antique automobiles and aircraft. Its major focus, however, is World War II aircraft.

CF maintains and operates one of only two flyable B-24 heavy bombers from World War II. The Collings aircraft is a B-24J model known as "Witchcraft." For the past 26 years, *Witchcraft* and her flying companions - the B-17 *Nine-O-Nine*, and a P-51 Mustang nicknamed *Betty Jane*, with other World War II aircraft rotating in and out - have made the rounds around the country during the foundation's *Wings of Freedom* tour. To date they have completed more than 3,000 stops, flying into airports large and small to give the public an immersive experience that no static display can do. Visitors can explore the aircraft inside and out, and even get a real flight experience for a fee. The tour also gives Army Air Force veterans another chance to see their beloved "boxcar," and to share it with their families and the public.

Film viewers will see exciting footage of the *Liberator* in flight, from both today and during the war. Veterans, like Ray Lemons of the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force's 445<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, will share their stories of flying into combat in what is widely regarded as the workhorse bomber of World War II.

CF is producing *The Last Liberator* with a budget of \$2.5 million. The Foundation welcomes financial support to help bring the film to completion.

According to the 2015-2016 issue of The Collings Foundation's 2015-2016 newsletter the film will be completed in late 2016, but you can see a movie trailer of the film right now at [www.thelastliberator.com](http://www.thelastliberator.com).



Special thanks to squadron member Richard Finck for providing the CF newsletter and other information in this issue to *The Flightline*.

### 780<sup>th</sup> has a movie, too!

Did you know there is a movie about the 780<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron? *On the Wing: A Story of Courage, Survival and the B-24*, was produced by Brad Branch, son of squadron member Bart Branch, in 2006. Find about more about *On the Wing*, inside.

# Your News & Letters

Dear Kathy,

*I am writing to tell you how much I enjoy Flightline. You say you have learned a lot from the fellows who write you but I assure you we have learned just as much or more from what you write.*

*I am enclosing a number of items which I hope you will find interesting. The picture of four guys in front of the B-24 Witchcraft are my two sons, my son-in-law, and me. This is the second time my son, Roger, and I have taken a ride on the B-24 which belongs to The Collings Foundation, which travels around the country with well over a hundred stops where people can go inside the B-17 and B-24 and can also take a ride, all for a fee. I also ride in the two-seater P-51 (one of six) where the pilot lets me fly it for ten minutes of the half-hour flight.*

*Find enclosed a Collings Foundation booklet, which is located here in Massachusetts, and has many other things of interest. They have a car collection, a tank collection (someone gave them over 200 tanks he had in his collection), and they have other World War II planes, including German and American jets which they are working on in their Texas station.*

*I am also enclosing information on the Commemorative Air Force, and the final item is a list of surviving B-24s. Hope you find something of interest*

*in this material.*

*Sincerely,*

*Richard W. Finck*

Editor's note: This issue is filled with Dick's materials. I should have renamed it *The Finck Report!* Thank you!



Dear Kathy,

*You will not know me because I have only attended one reunion of the 780<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron. That was, I believe, the first official reunion in Chicago in 1964. I was there with my wife, Claire, and our three kids as an ending to a three-week camping vacation to Yellowstone and many other outstanding sights along the way.*

*Also, in 1947 we were on our way to a gathering of squadron members in New York City when Claire and I ended up in the roadside ditch when the brakes on our 1937 Ford Tudor failed.*

*Although I only attended one reunion, I was always there in spirit and read every Flightline word for word. You do a terrific job.*

*It is with sadness that I want to report that my wife, Claire, passed away on September 4, 2016. We were married on June 22, 1946 and thus had 70 years of a happy, loving relationship. For the last ten years or so she suffered greatly with Alzheimer's, and the last four or*

*five years she could not walk, talk or recognize me or anyone else. I could not possibly say enough about how much I loved her and she loved me.*

*Most squadron members probably don't remember me but I was a Classification Specialist. My main job was to maintain the personnel records of all officers and enlisted men. I was a member of the squadron basketball team at McCook and the squadron volleyball team which was defeated only in the finals of the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force tournament. You will see me in the squadron history book.*

*Keep up the good work.  
Best regards,*

*Harold W. Miers*

Editor's note: My condolences regarding Claire (see TAPS, page 6). It sounds like you had many adventures together. My family went to Yellowstone and six other national parks this summer. I'm so glad *The Flightline* is as meaningful to all of you as it is to me.



Dear Kathy,

*The convention sounds wonderful, but I'm sorry I cannot attend.*

*When the 465<sup>th</sup> was activated I was a Flight Leader along with Zewadski, Teagarden (me), Blackburn and Growden. I completed my 50 missions*

and returned home to raise my two sons.

I am 97 years old and in good health. I am sorry that I cannot attend the convention in my home town of Dallas, Texas.

More later,

Frank Teagarden

Editor's note: Thanks for checking in, Frank. The 2017 reunion will be in New Orleans. Maybe we can make that one together! Photos from this year's reunion, courtesy of

the *Pantabella News*, are on page 5.



Kathy,

*You are a true great! All these years you have volunteered for this Flightline task is out of our normal expectations.*

*Thought you might enjoy the back side of this note.*

*Love you gal!*

Jim Long

*P.S. I think you know my wife passed away in 2014, one day before our 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary. And here's a wee bit of help for the cause.*

Editor's note: Hi Jim! Your *Irish Mother's Letter* appears below. And thank you for your "wee" donation to *The Flightline*. I think of you and Aileen often. Every address label I stick on the newsletter reminds me of the fun times at squadron reunions.

## An Irish mother writing her son in New York

Dear Son,

Just a few lines to let you know I'm still alive. I'm writing this letter slowly because I know you can't read fast. You won't know the house when you come home. We've moved. I won't be able to send you the new address as the last Irish family that lived here took the numbers with them for their next house so they won't have to change their address.

About your father: he has a lovely job. He now has 500 men under him. He is cutting the grass at the cemetery.

There is a washing machine in the new house, but it isn't working too good. Last week I put 12 shirts into it, pulled the chain and I haven't seen the shirts yet!

Your sister Mary had a baby this morning, I haven't found out if it's a boy or a girl, so I don't know if you're an aunt or an uncle.

Your Uncle Dick drowned last week in a vat of whiskey in the Dublin Distillery. Some of his fellow workers dived in to save him, but he fought them off bravely. We cremated the body and it took three days to put the fire out.

Your father didn't have much to drink at Christmas. I put a bottle of castor oil in his pint of beer. It kept him going until New Year's Eve. I went to the doctor on Thursday and your father came with me. The doctor put a small tube into my mouth and told me not to open it for ten minutes. Your father offered to buy the tube from him.

It only rained twice this week. First for three days and then for four days. Monday was so windy that one of our chickens laid the same egg four times.

We had a letter from the undertaker yesterday. He said if the last installment wasn't paid on your grandmother within seven days, up she comes.

Your loving mother.

P.S. I was going to send you some money but I had already sealed the envelope.

# Liberator, 77, still making her mark in the world

Happy birthday, Libby.

Consolidated's B-24 *Liberator* turns 77 years old on December 29, 2016. In her youth she was at the top of her game, if not always recognized for it.

According to Aviation History Online Museum, more than 18,400 *Liberators* were built, making the *Liberator* the most-produced American aircraft in World War II (Germany produced more Messerschmitts and Focke-Wulfs, and Britain the *Spitfire*). The B-24 operated in every theater of the war - Europe, the Pacific, Africa and the Middle East, and China-Burma-India - but its distinguished war record is usually overshadowed by its big brother, Boeing's B-17 *Flying Fortress*. Two reasons for this are that the B-17 is "sexier," - who can stand up to being called "The Flying Boxcar, or "The Flying Coffin," after all? - and the *Fortress* handled better.

But the B-24 had several things going for it, over the B-17:

- A longer range
- A higher top speed
- A heavier bomb load
- Tricycle landing gear
- A quantum leap in wing design and performance

Today, less than two dozen *Liberators* survive. Here's a list of B-24s still in existence, according to Wikipedia.com. Thank you, Richard Finck, for this information:

- Australia – B-24M, under restoration by the B-24 Liberator Memorial Restoration Fund. Completion expected in 2020.
- Canada – B-24L, in National Aviation Museum in Ontario.
- India – B-24J, in Indian Air Force Museum in New Delhi.



From left: Roger Finck, Richard Finck, John O'Leary and Douglas Finck visiting B-24 Witchcraft.

- Libya – B-24D, *Lady Be Good*, crashed 4 April 1943 in desert, found in 1958. Crew remains found in 1960. Wreckage in storage at the Jamal Abdelnasser Air Force Base in Tobruk.
- Papua New Guinea – B-24D, crashed on 18 October 1943, wreckage situated north of Gona.
- Turkey – B-24D, *Hadley's Harem*, crashed 1 August 1943, wreckage in Rahmi M. Koç Museum.
- United Kingdom – B-24L, in RAF Museum, Hendon.
- United Kingdom – B-24M, *Dugan*, in Imperial War Museum, Duxford, England.
- United States – B-24A, *Diamond Lil*, number 18 off the line, only surviving A model, flying, Commemorative Air Force, Addison, Texas.
- United States – B-24J, *Witchcraft*, only fully-authentic B-24J still flying, flying, Colings Foundation, Stow, Massachusetts.
- United States – B-24D, in Hill Aerospace Museum, Hill AFB, Utah.

...continued on page 5

780th BS/465th BG



*Eugene Caputo is standing in the back row, far left, in this crew photo. Does anyone recognize the others?*

- United States — B-24D, *Strawberry Bitch*, in National Museum of the United States Air Force, Wright-Patterson AFB, Dayton, Ohio
- United States — B-24J, *Bungay Buckaroo*, in Pima Air & Space Museum, Tucson, Arizona.
- United States — B-24J, *Louisiana Belle II*, in Barksdale Global Power Museum, Barksdale AFB, Louisiana.
- United States — B-24M, *Shady Lady*, in Castle Air Museum, Atwater, California.
- United States — B-24D, *Hail Columbia*, nose only, in Fantasy of Flight Museum, Polk City, Florida.
- United States — B-24D, *Fightin' Sam*, recreation, nose only, Mightly Eighth Air Force Museum, Savannah, Georgia.
- United States — B-24D, *Grumpy*, in Virgin-

ia Air and Space Center, Hampton, Virginia.

- United States — B-24J, *Joe*, last flown in 1997, in Fantasy of Flight Museum, Polk City, Florida.
- United States — B-24D, wreckage, part of the World War II Valor of the Pacific National Monument, Atka Island, Alaska.

**THANK YOU**

**Jim Long**

**For your donation to  
the FLIGHTLINE**

# TAPS



Eugene G. Caputo Sr., 93, of Elizabeth City, NC, passed away October 18, 2016, at his residence. He was born in Bronx, NY, on September 1, 1923, to Vincent and Elvira D'Angelo Caputo, and was the husband of Margaret Mary O'Harry Caputo. He was a retired technical salesman in aeronautical engineering. During World War II he served as a first lieutenant in the Army Air Corps, earning the Air Medal and the Distinguished Flying Cross. In addition to his wife he is survived by a daughter, Margaret Mary Caputo of Timonium, MD; a son, Gene Caputo (Mary Pat) of Cheshire, CT; and granddaughter,

Sarah Caputo.



Claire H. Miers, 93, of Mt. Laurel, NJ, passed away September 6, 2016, at her home. She was born in Phillipsburg, NJ, on July 12, 1923, to Frank and Leila Carey Hawk. Claire was a teacher, homemaker, and an accomplished pianist and organist. She is survived by her husband of 70 years, Dr. Harold W. Miers; son, Gary Miers (Barbara); daughters, Gail Elmore (Andrew) and Nancy Breece (companion William Fest); six grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

## Vets, son tell 780<sup>th</sup> story *On the Wing*

The 780<sup>th</sup> Squadron may have played a small role in the effort to end World War II, but it is center stage in a 2006 film produced and narrated by squadron son, Brad Branch.

*On the Wing* is a 90-minute movie, on DVD, that tells the story of the 780<sup>th</sup> moving from McCook, Nebraska, to Africa and, later, Italy, with the objective of cutting off Germany's oil refining capabilities which, in turn, would shut down its war machine. The movie alternates between the big picture of the war and vignettes of Pantanella airfield activities, showing how one affected the other. Viewers learn how the war took its toll on the 780<sup>th</sup>, and how the squadron kept on fighting.

Many 780<sup>th</sup> veterans and others appear in the film, describing life on the ground at Pantanella, Italy, and at 30,000 feet over a heavily-fortified target. Branch and his co-producers thoughtfully and artistically mix 780<sup>th</sup> war photos and films with their own modern footage of Pantanella. The producers also travel to Austria where they find the wreckage of a 780<sup>th</sup>

bomber, meet witnesses to the air battle that brought the plane down, and visit the house where the lone crew survivor was taken before he was apprehended by the German SS.

The film also includes interviews with veterans from sister squadrons of the 780<sup>th</sup>, from the 464<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, Tuskegee airmen who escorted the B-24s to and from their targets, and even a former German fighter pilot.

780<sup>th</sup> interviews are with Lee Englehorn, Bart Branch, Bob Bleier, Jack Ball, George Britton, Bill Burton, George Kuchenbecker, Ed Gluklick, Sky Campbell, Frank Love, John Nichols, Joe Spontak, T.P. Walton and Orlo Wilcox.

The 780<sup>th</sup> story hardly can be told in 90 minutes, but Branch - son of Bart Branch - touches on enough points, large and small, to leave the viewer with an understanding of the squadron's part in the war, and how its veterans were affected.

If you are interested in a copy of *On The Wing* let me know and I'll see if Brad has more copies for sale.

# TAPS

William C. Lukens Jr., 91, died July 19, 2016, in Alexandria, VA. He was born February 21, 1925, in Duncannon, PA, the oldest son of William C. Lukens Sr. and Mildred (Sullenburger) Lukens. Bill worked his entire working life in the airplane industry, first as a mechanic in the Army Air Corps in World War II, then as a mechanic for Capitol Airlines and United Airlines, becoming a production planner for United. When he retired in 1985 he was head of production planning for Dowty Aerospace. He is survived by his children, Molly Wood of Greenfield, MA; Gregory Lukens of Silver Spring, MD; Judith Torian of Purcellville, VA; and Cora Lukens of Glen Allen, VA; six grandchildren; seven great-grandchildren; and his sister, Nancy Boyer of Harrisburg, PA. His wife of 54 years, Margaret Lukens, pre-deceased him May 7, 2001.

*Editor's note: Most of the time I learn of the passing of a squadron member or their spouse from their family. Sometimes I learn about it from the post office, when a Flightline is returned marked "deceased," or from a random search of the Internet. These are the ways the following two obituaries came to my attention.*



Ord A. Campbell, 91, passed away September 22, 2015, at home in Doylestown, PA. He was born in Eldorado, PA, and he spent most of his life in New Jersey before moving to Doylestown in 2010. Ord served in World War II as a B-24 Liberator pilot stationed in Italy, assigned to the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force, 780<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron. During the war, he was credited for flying over 40 missions in Central Europe and the Balkans. He was awarded the Air Medal, Presidential Unit Citation, and European Theater of Operations Ribbon with five bronze Service Stars. He also served in Korea, and remained in the Air Force Reserves until 1968, when he retired with the rank of Lt. Colonel. Retired since 1986, Ord enjoyed spending time with family and friends. He is survived by his wife of nearly 70 years, Audrey; son, Michael (Mary Carol), of Hayesville, N.C.; daughter, Jennifer (Donald) Hiller, of Doylestown; four grandsons and five great-grandchildren.



Richard A. Keenan, 86, died March 12, 2012. He was born November 8, 1925, in Wolfeboro, NH, to Arthur and Frances Chick Keenan. Richard worked as a sales manager for portable and industrial air compressors. He was a veteran of World War II, having served as a ball turret gunner on a B-24 with the 780<sup>th</sup> and 782<sup>nd</sup> Bombardment Squadrons, 465<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, in Italy. He received the Purple Heart, Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters, and the European African Middle Eastern Ribbon with four bronze Service Stars. He is survived by his wife of 59 years, Marilyn; two daughters, Kathy Lynn Bosiak (Stephen) and Wendy Keenan Edwards (Berry), both of Denver; seven grandchildren and one great-grandchild. He was preceded in death by a son, Scott C. Keenan. (*Editor's note: Marilyn passed away in January 2016.*)

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*Flightline*

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*Merry Christmas  
and Happy New Year  
780<sup>th</sup>!*

