

# ***Freedom's Voice***



The Monthly Newsletter of the  
Military History Center



112 N. Main ST  
Broken Arrow, OK 74012  
<http://www.okmhc.org/>

**"Promoting Patriotism through the Preservation of Military History"**

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May 2016

## **Memorial Day**

### **United States Armed Services Days of Observance**

May has three significant Armed Services Days of Observance. The most important is Memorial Day on the fourth Monday of May, the 30<sup>th</sup> this year. Others are VE Day on May 8 and National Maritime Day on May 22. Each of these Days of Observance is featured in separate articles in the Newsletter.



Graves at Arlington National Cemetery are marked with U.S. flags each Memorial Day

**Memorial Day** originated as Decoration Day in 1868, when Major General John A. Logan, Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Army of the Republic, an organization of Union Veterans of the Civil War, established a day for the nation to decorate the graves of its war dead with flowers.

The preferred name for the holiday gradually changed from "Decoration Day" to "Memorial Day", which was first used in 1882. It did not become more common until after World War II and was not declared the official name by Federal law until 1967. On June 28, 1968, Congress passed the Uniform Monday Holiday Act, which moved Memorial Day from its traditional May 30 date to the last Monday in May, beginning in 1971.



### **Flag Day – June 11**

We invite everyone to join us for the Military History Center's annual Flag Day observance on Saturday, June 11 at 3:00 p.m. at our Memorial Flag Plaza. Our special guest and featured speaker will be Congressman Jim Bridenstine. Musical arrangement will be provided by Silver Star recipient SP4 Willard Parish. We will also be dedicating a memorial to Oklahoma Medal of Honor recipients. You won't want to miss this important patriotic event.

## National Maritime Day

National Maritime Day was first observed on May 22, 1933, on the order of President Franklin Roosevelt. It was created to recognize America's merchant sailors – the Merchant Marine. May 22 was chosen to recognize the date of the first steam powered merchant ship, SS *Savannah*, to cross the Atlantic. *Savannah* was a combination sailing ship and steam powered side wheeler. It sailed from its home port of Savannah, Georgia to Liverpool, England on May 22, 1819.

During World War II, the Merchant Marine were the first to go to war, with U.S. merchant ships being sunk by German submarines as early as 1940, even before the U.S. officially entered the war. They also were the last to leave the war effort, transporting the troops back home.

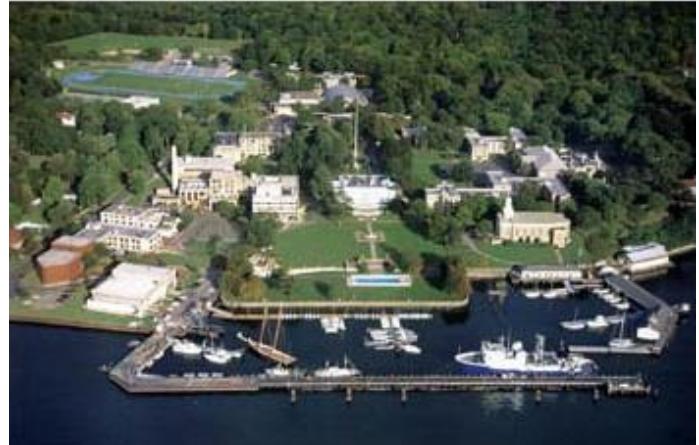
Although they suffered the greatest casualty rate of any service, merchant mariners who served in World War II were denied veterans recognition until 1988 when a federal court ordered it, in compliance with Public Law 95-202.



Flag of the United States Merchant Marine



Liberty ship, SS *Jeremiah O'Brien*, now berthed in San Francisco, is one of only two surviving, operable Liberty ships of World War II. Liberty ships were the backbone of the Merchant Marine during World War II.



The United States Merchant Marine Academy, founded in 1943 at King's Point, New York, is charged with training officers for the United States Merchant Marine, branches of the military and the transportation industry.

## Benefit Golf Tournament

The MHC, in partnership with Museum Broken Arrow, hosted a benefit golf tournament at Broken Arrow's Battle Creek Golf Club, on Friday, April 30. The tournament managers were able to dodge the rain and hold a successful tournament. Everyone had a great time and thoroughly enjoyed the day.

The MHC extends the deepest "Thank You" to all players, sponsors, those who provided prize gifts, management and staff of Battle Creek Golf Club, Ms. Lori Lewis and her staff at Museum Broken Arrow and everyone else who helped make this a successful event. We look forward to next year for an even better tournament.



Three former commanders of the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade – Major General Brad Gambill, Brigadier Generals Tom Mancino (MHC President) and Jim Wasson



Museum Broken Arrow Executive Director, Lori Lewis, and Lori Hill,  
City of Broken Arrow – Parks and Recreation Department



Larry Jimenez teeing off



Gary Swartzlander, Jesse Kreiner, Larry Jimenez and Greg Gallant  
Ken Collins in the back



Pat Mancino, Mike Mancino, Steve Mancino and Rudy Mancino



Sy Coscia, Gary England, Billy Decker and Tom Mancino



Brigadier General (Ret.) Jim Wasson watching his drive



MHC volunteers, Ken Collins and Claudia Price

## Broken Arrow Rooster Days

As it has for the past four years, the Military History Center had a presence in the annual Broken Arrow Rooster Days Parade held on Saturday, May 14.



The MHC's model airplane "piloted" by Sam Hoch in the Broken Arrow Rooster Days Parade

### Museum Hours and Admission Fee

Tuesday – Friday: 10:00 – 4:00; Saturday: 10:00 – 2:00  
Closed Sunday and Monday and major Federal holidays

Adults – \$5.00  
Members and Children under 18 – Free

For more information, call (918) 794-2712

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## Correction

In our April newsletter, we incorrectly named the volunteer in the foreground of the library photo as Sandra Videll, when in fact her name is Susan Virdell. Our apologies to Ms. Virdell.

## This Month's Featured Exhibits



The MHC has two extraordinary exhibits of models of military weapons, ships, aircraft and land vehicles. The above exhibit, of over 200 models, ranges from the lowly jeep to a wide variety of tanks and armored vehicles, to a massive German railroad gun, to German armored trains. SFC William Oakley, an accomplished model builder and an award winning diorama builder, built the models. Sgt. Oakley served twenty years in the U.S. Army. After his death, a few years ago, his sister, Ms. Janice MacManus, donated his collection to the MHC.

The collection of military models shown below was built by James Benjamin (Ben) Bridwell (1931-2011). The collection of over 130 models varies from small models of aircraft from World War I to the present and ships ranging from historic sailing ships to large World War II battleships and aircraft carriers.

Ben Bridwell was an Air Force 1<sup>st</sup> lieutenant stationed at Anderson Air Force Base, Guam during the Korean War. His children gave his magnificent collection to the MHC.





## A Day in the Life of a B-17 Pilot

Imagine you're an eighteen year-old American boy fresh out of high school. After graduating in the middle of a war, you would rather volunteer than be drafted, so you can choose your branch of service. You choose the Army Air Force and apply for pilot training. After you receive your wings, you are sent for further training to learn to fly B-17 bombers. The B-17G Flying Fortress is the Air Force's premiere bomber. After you complete that training, you're squadron is ordered to England.

Donald Joseph Gott flew twenty-seven bombing missions before his twenty-second birthday. On November 9, 1944, he was a first lieutenant commanding a B-17G Flying Fortress named *Lady Jeanette* in the 729<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron, 452<sup>nd</sup> Bombardment Group, flying that fateful twenty-seventh mission. The 452<sup>nd</sup> was diverted from its original mission and ordered to bomb the railroad marshalling yards at Saarbrücken, Germany. As Gott approached the target, *Lady Jeanette* was struck by multiple anti-aircraft shells, knocking out three of her four engines and starting fires. Gott pulled out of formation and turned back. He believed the seriously injured radioman needed immediate medical aid. He feared the wounded man would not receive such aid if he was parachuted into enemy territory.

With their aircraft on fire and flying on one engine, Gott and his co-pilot, Lt. William Edward Metzger, Jr. of Lima, Ohio, flew the crippled bomber back into Allied territory. Once they approached a suitable landing site, the two stayed behind with the seriously injured radioman, while the other crewmen bailed out. Contrary to his Medal of Honor citation, later investigation determined that the aircraft had not exploded in the air, but crashed in woods and exploded on the ground. For "1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Gott's loyalty to his crew, his determination to accomplish the task set forth to him, and his deed of knowingly performing what may have been his last service to his country was an example of valor at its highest", he (and Metzger) was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor, on May 16, 1945.

Donald Joseph Gott was born at Arnett, Oklahoma, on June 3, 1923. He joined the Army Air Force in 1943. He was just twenty-one years old at his death. What was purported to be his remains were returned and buried in Harmon Cemetery at Harmon, Oklahoma. The remains of the three crewmen aboard the bomber when it crashed are actually buried in a common grave in the French village of Cartigny. Their surviving family members were made aware of this years later.



*Lady Jeannette* (No. 42-97904) on a bomb run. The bomber is erroneously reported in Eighth Air Force and other records as "Lady Janet". Consequently, many historians and others have misidentified *Lady Jeanette*, based on that erroneous identification.

That long anticipated day finally comes, your first combat mission as commander of a B-17. You are awakened at 0300 in the morning, quickly dress, go to the mess hall for breakfast, and at 0400, you attend the mission briefing. There, you receive target information, flight plan and a weather briefing. In the meantime, your bomber is getting a final ground crew check, and fuel, bombs and ammunition are loaded. After your mission briefing, you go to the hardstand and do a walk-around of your bomber and then board her. Here you are, a twenty year-old first lieutenant in command of a bomber and a crew of nine, some about your age or younger, others older; some with several missions under their belts; for some, only a few, or their first. You settle into the pilot's seat and wait for the flare that signals you to start your engines. You start the outboard engines and wait your turn to move in line for takeoff. Just before it's your turn to take off, you start the inboard engines and move into takeoff position, where you rev the engines to takeoff speed and feel the aircraft vibrate from the four powerful engines. You're signaled for takeoff; you release the brakes and push the throttles forward. It takes almost the entire runway to get the heavily-laden beast into the air, but, you make it. You're now airborne. Fortunately, the engines functioned perfectly; otherwise, you would be dead by now. If one of the engines had failed at takeoff or shortly after, the plane would have crashed, as three engines don't have the power to lift a fully loaded B-17.

You're aware of all the mechanical failures that will bring your bomber down. Engine failure at takeoff is only one. The B-17 has thousands of parts, and the failure of any one critical to flight might mean catastrophe. But, as you climb and circle to assemble with your squadron, you have other things on your mind; chief among them is to get safely into formation without a mid-air collision, which happens all too frequently. You've made it to your place in the formation and are now on your way to Germany, flying at your mission altitude of 25,000 feet.



The newly formed 452<sup>nd</sup> Bomb Group – Rapid City, SD, June 1943.

While you're over the North Sea, you order your gunners to test fire their .50 caliber machine guns. Fortunately, all are working. Soon, your squadron is flying over the Belgian coast, and in several more minutes, you will be over Germany.

Dozens of German fighters are already swarming around the bomber formation. You're more fortunate than some of your predecessors, as only a few months ago, you wouldn't have had fighter escort beyond Belgium. It wasn't until late 1943 that the Air Force had fighters with engines powerful enough and with enlarged fuel tanks or drop tanks that enabled them to escort you all the way to your target and back. Besides the escorts, your defense against German fighters is the compact formation and the ten .50 caliber machine guns on each B-17. Even so, your defenses are not enough. You soon see bombers falling out of formation, some on fire. Some explode in mid-air, when their engines or fuel tanks are hit with 20 millimeter shells, rockets or machinegun bullets. You see parachutes come from some of the stricken bombers, often never ten out of any one airplane, so you know some of the crews have been killed or were unable to get out of the doomed bombers. The formation is continuously attacked by German fighters until it reaches the flak belts, which make up Germany's outer air defenses. The Germans, as well as your fighter escort peel off, as the flak starts. The Germans have excellent anti-aircraft guns that can easily throw up shells 25,000 and more feet. The shells explode all around your airplane, and you can do nothing but endure it. In your close formation, you have almost no maneuvering room. Too much maneuvering and you are in danger of colliding with another bomber. The flak is so heavy that you can't dodge it anyway, so, you just plow ahead and hope or pray for the best.



B-17s flying through a dense flak field over Germany

Ammunition from any weapon on a German fighter, as well as shrapnel from exploding flak, can easily penetrate the B-17's aluminum skin or the Plexiglas wind screen in front of you or around the cockpit or machinegun turrets. It can penetrate the engines or fuel tanks or cut a fuel line, any of which will ignite the highly flammable 100-octane gasoline, or penetrate the fuselage and wound or kill crew members, including you, cut oxygen lines, electrical harnesses or hydraulic lines and damage anything inside the bomber. Munitions or shrapnel can tear off pieces of the aircraft or anything in it, which then fly around inside the aircraft causing more damage. If oxygen lines are cut,

and you are unable to get to your portable oxygen tank, you will lose consciousness within two minutes and die of anoxia in less than five. If the electricity that feeds your electrically heated flight suit is knocked out, you will likely freeze to death in a matter of minutes in the unheated B-17. At 25,000 feet, the air temperature is thirty degrees below zero. A ruptured hydraulic line can render your airplane uncontrollable. Once you're through the flak belt, the fighters are on you again, until you reach the target area, then, it's more flak.

Your aircraft has so far survived serious damage, and none of your crew is injured, or at least none seriously. You are ready to begin your bomb run. As you approach the target, if your aircraft is equipped with a Norden bombsight, you set the autopilot and turn control of the airplane over to the bombardier, who then commands the bomber. If you are bombing without a Norden, a togglier simply flips a toggle switch to release the bomb load, following the lead bomber's release. By either bomb release method, the bomber must be flown straight and level to maximize bombing effectiveness.

Once the bombardier or togglier yells "bombs away", you turn the aircraft away from the target for the run home.



B-17s of the 452<sup>nd</sup> Bombardment Group executing a bomb run

Once you're out of the flak field that surrounds the target, the fighters are back, and you go through the same fighter, flak, fighter sequence of attacks. The escorts do all they can, but seldom can they prevent some of the Germans from getting in close. You look around and notice there are not as many bombers now as you had last noticed, and some of them are seriously damaged. If one of them is so heavily damaged that it falls out of formation, it's doomed. The only hope for the crew is to bail out, as the Germans will pounce on the cripple and finish it. You and your crew may consider yourselves lucky if only one or two of you are wounded, but none seriously, and the airplane seems to be performing well enough to make it back to base. You may find some comfort in knowing the B-17 is a very well-built machine. It can sustain severe damage and still fly. It can fly with damaged flight controls or with large holes in the fuselage or with large chunks of it blown away or knocked off. Without the bomb load, it can easily fly on two engines. It can actually fly on one engine, but can't maintain altitude, so you will inevitably drop out of formation, and if you're over enemy controlled territory, you will likely be shot down. If your airplane is so heavily damaged that you can't maintain flight, or if it's on fire, or you're running out of fuel, you hope you can at least reach friendly territory, where you

can attempt a landing or bail out, or you hope you reach the North Sea, close enough to England that air-sea rescue can save you. Otherwise, if you go into the cold sea too far away for friendly rescue, there are only bad outcomes. You and your crew will either drown, freeze to death in the open life rafts (depending on the time of year) or be picked up by the Germans and spend the rest of the war in a POW camp.



As a testament to the B-17's durability, *Lovely Julie*, of the 389<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group suffered a direct flak hit at 30,000 feet over Cologne, on October 15, 1944, but 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Lawrence deLancey brought her home. The bombardier, whose station was in the nose, was the only crewman killed. Lt. General Jimmy Doolittle, Eighth Air Force Commander, personally presented Lt. deLancey with a Silver Star for his "miraculous feat of flying skill and ability."

Luck or skill or both are with you. You make it back to base and safely land your aircraft. Now, imagine that you only have to repeat this exercise for a total of thirty times to receive a ticket home. You are aware that your chances of completing your tour without being shot down are only four in ten. This may cause you to pause and reflect on your decision to be a bomber pilot. All bomber crew members are volunteers and can opt out of flying at any time. But, as harrowing as the bombing missions are, you will soon be eating a hot meal, have liquor if you want it, and you will sleep in a dry bed tonight. You also have the satisfaction of knowing that you're making a valuable contribution to the war effort. So, you're pretty sure you made the right decision. You'll continue flying.

### Support the Military History Center

Do you want to join the many patriotic Oklahomans who are already supporting the Military History Center's mission of "Promoting Patriotism by Preserving Military History"? If so, contact the Military History Center at (918) 794-2712 to learn how you can be a supporter, or click on the link below to go to the MHC website, <http://www.okmhc.org/donate/>.

There's something to accommodate everyone's budget. Monetary donations, as well as gifts in kind, are tax deductible, subject to IRS regulations.

We invite you to be a part of this unique opportunity to support a first-class military museum and history center in Oklahoma.

### War on Terror

Five years ago this month, on May 2, 2011, the United States Navy's Seal Team 6 executed a raid on a compound located in Abbottabad, Pakistan. CIA analysts who had been on the case for more than ten years were certain that Osama bin Laden, founder and head of the terrorist organization, al-Qaeda, was in the compound. During the raid, Seal Team 6 did indeed find bin Laden there and killed him as well as one of his sons, his courier, the courier's wife and his brother.



Senior Chief Special Warfare Operator Edward C. Byers Jr., SEAL Team 6 (Photos released by the U.S. Navy)

On December 8, 2012, in the darkness of a single-room building in Afghanistan, Navy Senior Chief Edward C. Byers Jr. had little time to react. A fellow Navy SEAL had just been shot in the head during a hostage rescue mission, and it wasn't clear who else in the room wanted to kill the American team.

Byers burst in anyway, shooting a Taliban fighter who had an automatic rifle aimed at him. A man scrambled to the corner of the room where another rifle was stored, so Byers tackled him and then tried to adjust his night-vision goggles to see whether he was the American hostage. The hostage, lying five feet away, called out in English, so Byers killed the insurgent he was straddling and then hurled himself on top of the hostage to protect him from gunfire. At the same time, Byers pinned another enemy fighter to the wall with a hand to the throat, until another SEAL shot him.

At a White House ceremony on February 29, 2016, Senior Chief Byers, a native of Grand Rapids, Ohio, received the Medal of Honor for the above described action in the rescue of Dr. Dilip Joseph, whom Taliban fighters had abducted, along with his driver and Afghan interpreter, just three days earlier. (Senior Chief Byers' actions are excerpted from an article by Dan Lamothe – [washingtonpost.com](http://washingtonpost.com))



Navy Seal Badge

# *“Lest We Forget”*



**VE Day Celebration in Tulsa – May 8, 1945**

World War II was the most destructive war in the history of humankind. When the war in Europe came to an end with the complete defeat and unconditional surrender of Germany on May 8, 1945, Americans exploded in relief and celebration. Tulsans were no exception. The above photograph was taken just north of the Atlas Life Building at 416 S. Boston Avenue, with ticker tape and other paper debris covering the street, and people celebrating in their vehicles, no doubt honking their horns endlessly. The celebration extended south along Boston Avenue, beyond the First Presbyterian Church, whose spire can be seen in the distance. The United States suffered approximately 407,000 military deaths in World War II – including 6,456 Oklahomans\* – and approximately 12,100 civilian deaths. This last number includes 8,651 civilian merchant mariners, and civilians killed in enemy attacks on Hawaii, the Philippines, Guam, Wake Island and other places, as well as those who died in enemy internment camps. (\*Departments of War and Navy – 1946)

*Freedom is not free.*

