



The Star



Issue #111

"We Speak Their Names"

Winter 2024

From Joy to Tragedy

Abridged and republished from the *Aviation Trails* Blog



Above: The Rueckert Family - L-R Dorothea 'Dee' Rueckert, Little Bill, and 1LT William Rueckert. Soon after, daughter Dianne would join the family.

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In the last edition of **The Star**, we shared a letter received by AWON member William ("Little Bill") Rueckert Sargent, from his father, 1LT William "Big Bill" Rueckert, on his first birthday.

Bill also passed along a truly magnificent story first published on the **Aviation Trails** blog. Here is a much abridged version of the Rueckerts' story. Read the original version for yourself here: [Aviation Trails - Bill](#)

Be sure to check out the [Aviation Trails](#) blog as well - it's a great resource, particularly for those with an interest in the RAF and American airmen stationed in Britain during the war.

William Gamble Rueckert was born June 9th 1920, in Moline, Illinois. A model student, William worked hard at all he did, a work ethic he would carry throughout his short life.

At 18 years of age William joined the Cavalry Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) at the University of Illinois. Here William studied law and continued to achieve those high grades. While in the ROTC, William's reputation for hard work and dedication only grew. He took to fencing and riding, becoming both president of the Cavalry Officers' Club and a Cadet Major. When he graduated, William was presented with an honorary sabre from his class. The sabre

...Joy to Tragedy, Continued pg. 3



President's Message

by Walt Linne

Wishing you all a wonderful 2024!

Folks, in my previous President's Message I stated the primary theme - The Future of AWON. I pointed out the following possibilities:

- 1) handing AWON off to the next generation
- 2) forming a new organization, the American War Orphan Network that would include war orphans of all wars
- 3) remaining active as the American WWII Orphans Network (AWON)

Although AWON members will continue to investigate the feasibility of items 1 and 2 above, I am pleased to announce that AWON will remain an active organization until the last Orphan remains standing. Amen!

This would not be possible without the continued support of our members, the AWON Board, and modern technologies enabling us to find orphans more easily. I especially want to thank the AWON brothers Barry Barr-Finch, Lorin McCleary and Rik Peirson for their service in keeping our war orphan siblings in touch daily via Facebook, MeWe and the AWON Website. Way back when, staying in touch daily was not possible, and we had to rely on face to face orphan meetings at periodic local gatherings and biennial conferences.

And of course a special thanks must be said to our Ann Bennett Mix, for founding the American WWII Orphans Network, helping us to share our feelings with our siblings and allowing us to bring our Fathers back into our lives.

It has been decided that the next AWON National Conference will be in San Antonio, Texas, but not until the spring of 2025. The decision to move it from the Fall of 2024 to Spring of 2025 was based on local considerations - hot weather, football season (travel in Texas during football season is exceedingly difficult), and hotel availability. Looking forward to seeing you in Texas in 2025!

...President's Message, continued next page



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...President's Message, from previous page

Finally, we recently received this message via Facebook from Gold Star Wife Tabitha Farmer:

"For those of you who do not know me, I am the Gold Star Wife of CW2 Jonathan Farmer, who was KIA 16 January 2019. I had the honor of speaking at your conference in 2022 in New Orleans. My daughter is in the 10th grade, she is going to France during her spring break. One of the sites she is visiting is the Normandy American Cemetery Colleville-sur-Mer. She is asking if she could reach you, because she would be honored to visit your loved one's site and take a picture. Gold Star children have to stick together, right? The trip is very soon so reach out to me as soon as possible. Thank you everyone." While unfortunately the trip is too soon for STAR readers to be able to participate in this generous offer, we have had several AWON siblings that have reached out to Tabitha online. And, yes, we must stick together. Thank you, Tabitha.

In Their memory – Never Forgotten!

...Joy to Tragedy, from front page

remained in the family home for many years after.

In April 1939 William met his wife to be, Dorothea Griffiths, the woman he later referred to as 'Dee', on a blind date. They turned out to be the perfect match, and the two became inseparable.

Within a year they were married, on June 10th, 1940. While William's mother protested due to his young age, and even for a brief time had the marriage annulled, that didn't stop William and Dee. They simply ran away to repeat the wedding



Above: In addition to being an excellent student and a good leader, William Rueckert was an accomplished equestrian during his time in the Calvary ROTC.

and reinstated their marriage vows in a new ceremony – love had conquered all.

After returning to his studies, Bill graduated from the University of Illinois with a Bachelor of Science in Commerce and Law in 1941. The young couple moved to Dee's hometown of Staten Island, NY. William worked in the accounts department of the Bethlehem Steel Co. while studying for his law license with the New York State Bar.

With the war in Europe escalating, William, who was still in the reserves, was called up in August 1941. He served as a 1LT Artillery Officer in Company 'A', 1st Battalion. The dedication and diligence he'd shown throughout his education quickly set him apart from other cadets. William also stood out on the ranges, soon winning himself medals for artillery and rifle shooting.

Dee joined William at his training site. She was expecting their first child at the time. It was a time of joy and the love between them never faltered. In an interview after his death, Dee said, "Even after we were married, he would telephone for a date and arrive home with flowers and candy."

Son William "Bill" Griffiths Rueckert joined the family December 1st, 1941. In the first few years

...Joy, Continued page 4

...From Joy to Tragedy, from page 3



of his life, the boy called "Little Bill" would grow very fond of his father and the two developed a deep mutual affection.

William then made a big change in his career, resigning his commission in the Army and volunteering for the United States Air Corps. As William's son Bill later explained, "After four years of wiping his horse's rear end, (in the Cavalry) and looking up at the new way to travel, he had the flying bug."

In 1942 as a 1LT Trainee Pilot, William left New York, Dee and his son, and moved to the West Coast Training Centre at Santa Ana Airbase in California. William progressed through several stages of training, from primary to basic, then on to advanced flying and eventually to the heavy bombers. This course of study took him through many courses at several sites across the United States, and took well into the year 1943 to complete.

One of his first stations was at Lemoore AAF in California. At Lemoore, William learned firsthand the perils of flying, when he was involved in a mid air collision with another aircraft piloted by Air Cadet Donald W. Christensen. Sadly, Christensen would



Above: Pilot William Rueckert with his navigator Jimmy Gardner and copilot Harold Roehrs

Left: "Little Bill" Rueckert plays cowboys in El Paso, Texas. Rumor has it he still owns those boots.

Below: 1LT William G. Rueckert's B-24 memorial plaque at the Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum in Pooler, Georgia

die in the crash, and William suffered a wound to the forehead. Dee would later tell her son that she went to the hospital to see him there, and had to remove splinters of the shattered windshield from William's forehead after the crash for weeks.

It was a hard lesson learned for William, but he didn't give up. On completion of the basic course, he then transferred to the Advanced Flying Course at Stockton Field. During his time at Stockton, William would have undertaken a further seventy hours of multi-engined flying, formation flying, night flying and instrument flying. On August 30th, 1943, LT William G. Rueckert received his wings and his commission – his dreams were slowly becoming a reality.

While William was at Stockton Field, his son Bill celebrated his first birthday. William sent a heartfelt letter home telling Bill how much he missed him, and looked forward to spending time with him again. In his opening paragraph William said to Bill: "This eventful year you have quickly grown from an infant, into one grand, little boy, and I'm certainly proud of you, Billy."

...Continued next page



William was transferred to Kirtland Field, New Mexico, which specialized in navigation and bombardier training. It would be here that William would have his first encounter with the B-24 'Liberator'.

On October 28th 1943, William passed his instrument flying test, and by the time he was finished at Kirtland Field, he was a qualified pilot instructor on B-24s. With these achievements under his belt, William was now ready. His training complete, he would transfer again, this time to Biggs Field, El Paso, Texas. Dee and Little Bill were able to join him here, and the Rueckerts soon added a daughter, Dianne.

Finally, William received a posting overseas. He picked his own crew members, Harold Emerson Roehrs – his co-pilot, and James E. Gardner – his navigator, both of whom he had become good friends with at El Paso. After a long journey across several continents, the men arrived at the US Staging Post RAF Valley in Wales. From there, they traveled to RAF Hardwick, which was then called Station 104. There they would be stationed as a part of the 93rd Bombardment Group.

The 93rd was known as "Ted's Flying Circus" and they were very much in the front line of war operations. They took part in the preparations for D-Day, completing many of their bombing missions over the Normandy area. Their focus was on cutting German supply lines and vital Nazi communication routes across France.

William's first mission was May 1st, 1944, one week after his arrival at the base. Mission 332 called for heavy bombers of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Bomb Divisions, to attack V-Weapons' sites in northern France, destroying launching areas for the V-1 flying bombs that were targeting England.

On that day, William and Jimmy Gardner volunteered to fill the vacant co-pilot and navigator spots in the crew of 2LT Albert Schreiner on B-24 'Joy Ride' #42-7621. Hard-working as he always

was, William said he wanted to get familiar with combat missions before taking his own crew out. The rest of the crew, including William's co-pilot Harold Roehrs, stayed behind in Hardwick.

Due to the magnitude of the mission, there were many planes lined up to take off, one after another. It was 0500, and still dark - some of the pilots had never taken off in the dark before. About half the mission's aircraft were airborne when it came time for 'Joy Ride' to depart.

The engines roared into life, and pilot 2nd Lt. Schreiner brought the engines to full power, released the brakes, and the aircraft shook and shuddered its way down the runway. As it reached almost midpoint, it began to lift off, and when he believed they were about 20-30 feet in the air, Schreiner gave the order to raise the undercarriage. SSGT Monnie Bradshaw, flight engineer and turret gunner, had just reached toward the undercarriage levers, when suddenly the aircraft hit the ground.

A heavy landing tore off the left undercarriage leg and the nose wheel collapsed. Unable to gain height, the aircraft crashed down and slid along the runway, spinning around several times before ending up at a crossing between two runways. Flames engulfed the bomb bay and fuselage. Though injured in the crash, Bradshaw was able to push open the top hatch, striking navigator Jimmy Gardner on the head. Thankfully Gardner wasn't seriously injured and both men escaped from the aircraft through the hatch.

In addition to Bradshaw and Gardner, Waist Gunners SSGT Harold Loucks and TSGT Kerry Belcher, who had been located within the rear of the aircraft between the bomb bay and the tail, escaped unharmed. Tail Gunner Sgt. Anthony Constantine was injured but survived.

By this point, the fuselage was fully engulfed in fire. Potential rescuers ran for cover, knowing that the payload the plane contained was highly volatile. Over the next several hours, seven of

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We want to share your story! Contribute to *The Star* today!

As we head into AWON's next Thirty Years, we here at *The Star* want to urge every AWON member to share the story of your father's life, your family's loss, and your personal journey to learn more about where you came from. It's easy - our editors will do all the hard stuff, we just need to hear from YOU! Submit today!

Even if you've sent your story in before, please don't hesitate to get in touch with *Star* Editor Kristin Holmes again! Sometimes stories don't fit in a particular edition and especially in the digital age, things occasionally get lost along the way. If you'd submitted your story to another person it's even possible it wasn't seen by the present editor. We want to publish as many of your stories as possible! Don't wait!
atomicsagebrush@gmail.com

Guidelines for stories can be found on pages 14-15 or online at: <https://www.awon.org/stardetails>

***The Star* Guidelines for Submitting Material**

We want to tell your story and your family's story. We accept submissions both electronically and via US mail. If you have an article or picture and aren't sure how to submit it, that's ok. Message *The Star* and we will work with you.

Please keep text reasonable in length. 500-1000 words or 1 page is a good guideline, but we publish longer pieces too. Preference is given to material written by, for, and about AWON members and families.

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Looking for Back Issues of *The Star*?

The Star can be found online here:

[AWON Bookstore](#)



Be Sure to Follow AWON on Social Media!!!

Call for Tributes!

Add a Tribute to the AWON Website! This could be one of the most long-lasting and satisfying ways to remember your Father, Grandfather, Brother, or Uncle. Just be a current AWON Member!

Here's How: 1. Have a look at our website's TRIBUTE section at www.awon.org (click "Our Fathers") to see what others have done; 2. Check the web page on "How to prepare a Father Tribute" – (at www.awon.org/check5.html); then 3. Scan (or have a Kinko's scan) your best picture of your loved one in uniform; 4. Collect your thoughts, memories, and service record of your loved one; 5. Send your JPG-formatted image and between 500 and 1,100 words to our Tribute Stager, Nancy Sue Johnson. Her E-Mail address is . . . janceysue@gmail.com. If you need her snailmail address, just call Nancy Sue at 406/529-2315.

Don't let another day go by. AWON is honored to help you honor your Father or loved one! . . . a Tribute page is yours for the asking.



AWON Monthly Financial Report - Winter 2024

	<i>General (Wreath)</i>	<i>Conference</i>	<i>Book Source</i>	<i>Money Market</i>	<i>CD</i>
<i>January</i>	\$20,306.43 (\$10,095.59)	\$1,553.53	\$1,424.89	\$49,070.12	
<i>February</i>	\$20,217.00 (\$10,297.59)	\$1,553.53	\$1,424.89	\$49,099.37	
<i>March</i>	\$24,910.61 (\$10,382.59)	\$1,553.53	\$1,424.89	\$49,120.56*	\$45,000.00

* As of 3/22/2024, The Money Market purchased a \$45,000 CD, 5%, 8 month term. The remaining Money Market \$4,120.56 was deposited into the General Fund.

AWON can't do this without you!

To renew your membership or check your membership status, please visit:

<https://www.awon.org/application>

or email awon@awon.org

AWON Moments

By AWON President Walt Linne

The mission of our AWON Moments series is to review AWON history, celebrating special moments experienced by AWON orphan members since Ann Bennett Mix founded the organization in 1991.

From American WWII Orphans Newsletter, Issue #66, September 2012 – AWON Members Show, Tell War Orphan Story at Annual Pennsylvania Airshow – June 1-3, 2012, AWON participated in the annual WWII Air Show in Reading, PA. This was the eleventh year that AWON has been a part of the WWII weekend, looking for more orphans from that generation. AWONer Rusty Lerch; his son, Kevin Lerch; and AWONer Lynne Lecrone manned the AWON table that was located in the hanger.

Issue #67, December 2012 – We ARE AWON – AWON National Conference, Indianapolis 2012, Celebrating 20 Years – 90 members of AWON attended the 2012 AWON National Conference. Indianapolis was the perfect place to host the 10th National Conference located in the heart of downtown. The historic military district included the Soldiers and Sailors Monument; the USS Indianapolis National Monument; the Medal of Honor Wall; monuments to Vietnam, Korea, and World War II; and the Indiana War Memorial. The Indiana War Memorial was the site of the AWON Fathers' Memorial Service.

Issue #68, March 2013 – AWON Marches in NYC Vet Day Parade – Several tri-state area AWONers and close family participated in the 2012 New York City Veterans Day parade last November. At the parade with the AWON banner were Renee Cooley, Carol Alegi, Penny Bernstein, Maggie Malone, Betsy Harris, and Karen Hammerlof. New York has held a Veterans Day parade since 1929, with more than 25,000 people participating each year.

Issue #69, July 2013 – AWON Attends White House Breakfast – On Memorial Day, AWON

attended the Gold Star Family White House breakfast, and later accompanied President and Mrs. Barack Obama to Arlington for the annual wreath-laying ceremony. AWON was represented at the White House by Anne Moloney Black, Susan Johnson Hadler, Phyllis Epstein Louis, J. Lee Mathis, and Betty Palonen Volkan. AWON Board President Ed Peters, Clattie Cunningham and Louis presented the AWON Wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown at Arlington.

Issue #70, October 2013 – ABMC Seeks Interviews with Family Members – The American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) has asked AWON for assistance in a new project. The ABMC is conducting video interviews of family members who have a loved one buried or memorialized at an ABMC overseas cemetery. The intent of the project is to help our users understand every individual buried or memorialized at our sites has family members whose lives were forever changed by their sacrifice.

Unforgettable AWON Moment – Son Finds Dad's Foxhole in Italy – Norm Burkey: I would have argued that my father's death had no real effect on my life until I read an article about AWON. I remember being home alone and as I read, it hit me like a ton of bricks. Following advice in the article I immediately contacted my father's outfit, the 10th Mountain Division. And, with the help of my father's comrades I located the foxhole where my dad was killed. Kneeling in the foxhole I gathered up stones and some shrapnel. Dr Vamik Volkan would call those "linking objects." This has been closure to be able to mourn for my dad and as much as possible, make him into a real person for my family. I owe it all to AWON. Thanks to all of you.

Please send your AWON Moments to:
AWON STAR
5745 Lee Road, Indianapolis, IN 46216
Or email to president@awon.org

Here's a great AWON Moment sent to us by Webmaster Rik Peirson. With our new conference on the horizon, it's sure fun to look back on memories from previous conferences! Click the connected 'W' below to see more photos of AWON's past conferences!



***AWON Wishes to Thank New & Renewing Members
from Winter of 2023 through Spring of 2024!
Thanks to each and every AWON Member
who helps keep our mission alive!***

Marion Lake
Suzanne Turney
Mary-Anne Collins
Geri Ann DeMicco
Sandra MacDuffee
Carol Dalrymple
Nicole Aure
Roxanna Wedel
Gertrude Wentsler
Joan Miller
Sue Isaacson
Susan Chadd
Lorin McCleary
Helen Heath Vernon
Alys McAllister
Walt Linne
Benjamin Schwartz

Betty Bailey
Ruby Wolens
Tommy Morris
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Nellie Vass
Stewart Lerch
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Mary Martin
Kathleen Mayerski
Audrey Greene
Janie McPherson

Chickie Berry
Barry Barr-Finch
Rik Peirson
Lindsey Peirson Hayes
Zack Hayes
Tanner Hayes
Bernard Achten
Marie Achten
Lynn Williams
Alice Irving
Jamie McPherson
Marilynn Lieurance
Barbara Ferguson
Gretchen Wronka
Rita Boy
Angela Christian
James Biggs

ATTENTION
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Have you moved
recently?

Please help us to get
your STAR to you! Let us
know about any change
of address by messaging
us here at THE STAR!

By Email:

atomicagebrush@gmail.com
or star@awon.org

Or by snail mail:

Kristin Holmes
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Flowers for Fallen Heroes

An Update on the ABMC Flower Program

by Marilyn Lieurance

The Flowers for Fallen Heroes Act of 2024 was presented to Congress on Valentines Day! We're moving forward and continuing to add more organizations, Senators, government officials, members of the military, and others while standing in line to reach the House.

When passed, the Flowers for Fallen Heroes Act of 2024 will once again allow WWII orphans, families, and friends the very basic freedom and assistance to order flowers for the graves of their American soldiers buried overseas in foreign countries, through the American Battlefield Monuments Commission (ABMC).

The bill itself will allow us the needed assistance to deal with language barriers, currency exchanges, and will eliminate international fees, taxes, etcetera. Streamlining the process will help bring the price of ordering flowers down to a more affordable cost.

Our AWON community should know that AWON members (Bob Holliday, Rony Elliott, Marilyn Lieurance, Rik Peirson, and the late Susan Hadler) have spent tireless hours over the past nine years speaking with individuals, various organizations, state conventions, Senators, and others. We have traveled back and forth to Washington, D.C., at our own expense to get the ABMC flower ordering assistance program reinstated. Your American WWII Orphans Network members have and will continue to represent you together with an unknown number of the 183,000 WWII orphans across our great country, all of whom deserve the privilege of using such a program.

Please see the list of support:

Colonel Ben Cassidy, USMC Retired and former ABMC Commissioner: Providing direction, major contacts, strategy, and a great deal of his time.

Congressman, Ryan Zinke and Military Legislative Assistant, Kyle Egan: Personally, taking this project under their wings, preparing strategy, drawing up the bill and presenting it to Congress.

American Four-Star Generals: Chuck Horner (USAF), Tommy Franks (US Army), and John Kelly (USMC).

Society of Former Guards of The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier: Tom Tudor.

Support of Organizations: The American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, AMVETS, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Honor Flight Network, American WWII Orphans Network, America's Warrior Partnership, the Navy SEAL Foundation, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Gold Star Wives of America, and more on the horizon.

Current Original Co-sponsors: Mike Thompson (D-CA-04), David G. Valadao (R-CA-22), Donald G. Davis (D-NC-01), Michael Waltz (R-FL-06), Sanford D. Bishop, Jr. (D-GA-02), Trent Kelly (R-MS-01), Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC-AL), Stephanie L. Bice (R-OK-05), Chuck Fleischmann (R-TN-03), Richard McCormick (R-GA-06), Mariannette Miller-Meeks (R-IA-01), Don Bacon (R-NE-02), Michael Guest (R-MS-03), James R. Baird (R-IN-04), Clay Higgins (R-LA-03), Troy E. Nehls (R-TX-22), Jefferson Van Drew (R-NJ-02), Dan Newhouse (R-WA-04), and Morgan Luttrell (R-TX).

Thanks to all the AWON Members, who answered the call and wrote personal letters of support, telling what the flower program means to you and why we need such a program. It was a real honor to read each and every one of your letters.

...Continued next page

If for some reason you did not hear from our team, or something got in the way of you getting your letter written, please know you still have an opportunity to be part of this worthy effort. Whether or not you ever used the previous flower program that the American Battle Monument Commission ended in 2015, the new Flowers for Fallen Heroes Act of 2024 deserves your support. This bill will allow war orphans, families, and friends who want to use this program to do so. It will make it so much easier to honor and remember your military heroes who are buried overseas, with flowers on their graves.

Your letters should be addressed to your State Representative, but mailed directly to Bob Holliday or Marilyn Lieurance, as soon as possible.

Please be sure to include your current address, email, and phone number so we may update your information in our AWON files.

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the bombs in the B24 exploded, along with ten boxes of .50 caliber bullets. The five men in the front of the plane including Rueckert, were killed: Pilot 2LT Albert Schreiner, Bombardier 2LT Paul Sabin, Radio Operator SSGT Sheldon Sheinfine and Nose Gunner SGT John Dalto. The average age of the crew that day was only 20 years.

The explosion caused such damage that it created a huge crater, closing both main runways for five days. Aside from the 22 aircraft already in the air, the mission was scrubbed. For the next week all aircraft had to take off using a shorter runway and climb up over nearby woods approaching Topcroft village. As a result, there were further subsequent crashes at Hardwick, with aircraft falling into the woods beyond the airfield.

Subsequent investigation found no obvious cause of the crash, and determined it to be pilot error on the part of Schreiner - he had accidentally landed the plane, thinking it was higher in altitude than it really was. Training for night flying was increased after the accident.

For seventeen days Dee knew nothing of her husband's fate. On May 18th the telegram with 'Western Union' emblazoned across the top and two tell-tale red stars in the bottom left corner arrived. Dee knew exactly what it meant - she didn't need to open it. Young Bill was not quite three, but he can still remember hearing his mother's screams from the cot where he slept in his grandparents' attic. Only a few days later, flowers arrived for a shattered Dee, sent by her husband William just before he died.

Though Dee was devastated, with the help of her parents, she carried on as best she could. She took a job playing piano at the USO that eventually led her to being honored as one of the "Rosies", with her name included on the Rosie the Riveter Honor roll plaque at the Yankee Air Museum in Ypsilanti,

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AWON Relative's Remains Recovered

In the weeks following D-Day, German troops retreated, pursued by the Allies. With the Nazis on the run, British Field Marshal Sir Bernard Montgomery persuaded General Dwight D. Eisenhower to launch a vast mission to create an Allied invasion route into northern Germany.

While the plan, called Operation Market Garden, was a daring one, the overstretched Allies were approaching formidable German defenses - the Siegfried line, which had held since World War II began. Many Allied lives were lost during Operation Market Garden, including the relatives of several AWON members.

Because the fighting was being done on the run, in hectic conditions and under heavy fire, it was not possible to retrieve the remains of some of the fallen soldiers. In 2015, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) began a project focused on locating and identifying soldiers missing from Operation Market Garden.

AWON member Judy Gamble shared with us that the remains of her great uncle, Army Sgt. Garland W. "Tex" Collier, were recovered on June 15, 2022, as a result of this DPAA project.

In the fall of 1944, Garland Collier was assigned to Headquarters Co., 3rd Battalion, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division. He was reported killed in action October 5, 1944, when his unit was attacked by German forces near Opheusden, The Netherlands. His body was unable to be recovered.

Following the war, the American Graves Registration Command (AGRC), the organization that searched for and recovered fallen American personnel, conducted several searches of the area, but by 1950, none of the remains found around Opheusden could be identified as Collier. He was declared non-recoverable in November 1950.



Left: Sergeant Garland W. "Tex" Collier; KIA Oct. 5, 1944. The remains of SGT Collier were recovered in 2022. You can read his obituary, written by his great-niece Judy Gamble, here: [G. Collier Obituary](#)

As a part of their work to identify the fallen from Operation Market Garden, the historians at the DPAA began to analyze information about X-3324 Neuville, an unknown set of remains recovered from the civilian cemetery in Opheusden in 1946 and buried in the Ardennes American Cemetery. Following an extensive analysis from DPAA historians, forensic anthropologists, and odontologists, it was determined X-3324 could possibly be Sgt. Garland Collier. These remains were disinterred in April 2019 and sent to the DPAA Laboratory at Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska, for examination and identification.

To identify Collier's remains, scientists from DPAA used dental and anthropological analysis as well as circumstantial evidence. Additionally, scientists from the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System used mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) analysis.

DPAA researchers were able to confirm that these remains were in fact those of Sgt. Garland Collier, finally found more than 75 years after he died. Collier's name is recorded on the Walls of the Missing at the Netherlands American Cemetery. A rosette has been placed next to his name to indicate he has been accounted for.

...Remains Recovered, from previous page

"It was with great surprise when the Army finally identified him," Marguerite Watson Daugherty, Sgt. Collier's niece, told Lauren Sierra of KSTX Channel 12 News. "They were able to use DNA that two of my sisters gave to identify the remains."

It had been over seven decades, but his family had never forgotten him. "We had a photograph of Garland in full uniform, a portrait-quality, that hung in the hallway of our family home," said Watson Daugherty. "So he really had been there with the family all of the time."

Sgt. Garland Collier was laid to rest with full military honors on November 12, 2022, in his home of Coleman, Texas, between the gravesites of his parents. Collier's niece Judy Gamble shared a beautiful video of his coffin arriving at Dallas-Fort Worth, for burial. You can find that here:

[Garland Collier Comes Home](#)



Right: The picture of Garland Collier adorning the hallway of his family's home, where nieces Marguerite Daugherty and Grace Crum, and his nephew Collier Watson grew up

Left: SGT Garland Collier is laid to rest in Coleman, Texas, November 12, 2022.
Photo by KTXS TV



Above: A memorial plaque marks the site of where Garland Collier, along with other AWON relatives, were killed during Operation Market Garden, Opheusden, The Netherlands (photo courtesy of Brenda Kightlinger)

Memorial Day is almost here...

If you haven't sent in your wreath donation yet, be sure to contact your wreath coordinator. If you aren't sure who to contact, you can find a list of wreath coordinators in [Issue 109](#) of **The Star**, or message Rik Peirson at rik@dayone.com. And don't forget to send your Memorial Day pictures to **Star** Editor Kristin Holmes at atomicssagebrush@gmail.com. You can see all our previous Memorial Day wreaths by visiting the AWON website:

<https://www.awon.org/rem-1>

How do I prepare a story for **The Star**?

We NEED your submissions to **The Star**! Even if you've contributed in the past, please reach out again with your AWON stories. And if you contributed in the past and never heard back, please contribute again. Sometimes things get lost along the way, and the present editor may not even have seen stories submitted in the past.

The purpose of **The Star** is to serve the needs of AWON. While these tips help make the staff of **The Star**'s job easier, please don't hesitate to contribute, even if you can't meet all these guidelines. We want to tell your family's story, honor our fallen heroes, and share news and information that AWON members find helpful above all else, and we are happy to help in any way we can.

Before contributing, be sure to take a peek through this and other issues of **The Star** to get an idea of the type of features we publish. Most often, we share family stories about our fathers. That having been said, we are open to any submission - general history, biographies, current news items, editorials, fiction, art, and even poetry! We also love receiving pictures, and even if we can't run everything we receive in **The Star**, the extra items we receive are often featured on the AWON website.

The Star is published 4 times a year, Spring, Summer, Winter, and Fall. We can't always fit every article into every issue and sometimes we have to hold items for the next edition to include time-sensitive items. The sooner you submit your story, the more likely it is to be run in the next edition, but sometimes circumstances arise that make that impossible. Stories that are bumped will be given top priority for the next edition. If you don't see your story, message again! Sometimes things fall through the cracks and we rely on you to let us know if we missed something.

Here's a checklist on how to prepare articles for submission in **The Star** newsletter.

1) If writing a story about your father please include as much of the following info as you're able:

- Full name, nicknames if any
- Date and location of birth
- Where he grew up
- His childhood and education
- Occupation
- Military Unit
- Location where he served
- MIA, KIA, or Date of Death
- Burial and Memorial Info
- Any additional information of historic or military importance regarding his service

2) Please don't forget to include information about your extended family as well:

- Your name (PLEASE include your name in your contributions, we can't always figure out who you are from email alone!!!)
- Your mother's name
- Details of marriage (where and when)
- Father's parents' names
- Father's siblings' names
- Your siblings' names and ages at the time of your loss
- Where you grew up
- How the loss of your father affected your family both emotionally and in a practical sense
- Your search to learn more about your father

3) Tell your story in any way you feel is appropriate. While 1000 words is a good goal length, be as thorough as you feel is required to paint a full picture of your father and how his loss affected your family. **The Star** staff would rather have too much information than not enough!

It is best for us to receive your stories in .doc form

instead of PDF as this allows us to edit them more easily, but if that's all you have, we'll figure it out.

Some other details that may be welcome additions:

- How and why he joined the military
- His military training (what, when, and where)
- Military assignments and special duties
- Medals awarded and special commendations he received
- Date he was sent overseas
- Circumstances of his death
- Circumstances of his burial
- What you have heard about the kind of man he was
- A few of his favorite things
- What you and your siblings miss about your father
- The legacy he leaves behind

4) Any photos you have are welcome additions. However, we do NOT want you to take any chances with your precious and irreplaceable pictures. For this reason, electronic files of pictures are preferred. While we at **The Star** are willing to receive photos via US Mail, scan them in ourselves, and return them to you, this does put your photos at risk of loss or damage while they travel in the mail.

To avoid this danger, it is best if you provide electronic files of your pictures:

- Scan your photo with a scanner or have Kinko's or some other computer service bureau scan it for you
- Put the photo into a .JPG file format (and if you have the option, naming the file with your father's name really helps us identify who the photos are of.)
- Attach the electronic photo file to your email and send it to atomicsagebrush@gmail.com or star@awon.org.
- We can also accept contributions sent by a third party such as a child, grandchild, or friend via email, but be sure to identify who the photos are originally coming from and what article they're meant to accompany!
- If you don't have an email address and can't find someone to send the information on your behalf,

we are willing to receive photos via US Mail to Kristin Holmes, **Star** Editor, PO Box 242, Creston WA, 99117, but this should be a last resort as sending in the mail puts your photos at risk of damage or loss. Whenever possible, computer files are preferred to protect your precious and irreplaceable photos.

5) If your story has already been published in a newspaper or other location, it's fine to send a copy of that article IN ADDITION to telling your story in your own words. But we can't run already-published articles as written (unless you have received permission from the original writer for them to be rerun.) We also cannot use photos that have been printed in a newspaper. They are not suitable for scanning - we need the original photo or a digital file to get enough resolution for publication. Newspaper articles that are scanned into a computer sent in a .PDF file are also very difficult for us to transcribe (and the photos are not useable as they are part of the PDF and can't be moved separately, in addition to being inadequate resolution.)

It is best for us to receive your story in your own words, in a .doc form, with pictures sent separately as .JPG files, rather than copies of articles and photos published elsewhere. But we can work with you on that!

6) To send your stories and photos electronically please send to:

atomicsagebrush@gmail.com or star@awon.org

To send stories and photos via snail mail, please send to:

Kristin Holmes
Editor, **The Star**
PO Box 242
Creston, Wa
99117



Questions? Concerns?

You can always contact **The Star** Editor by phone at 509-279-5241 or via email at:

atomicsagebrush@gmail.com or
star@awon.org

Membership



This is a

- ☐ New Membership
☐ Renewal
☐ Family Membership
☐ Database Registration Only

About You:

Name _____
 Address _____
 City/State/Zip _____
 Home Phone _____
 Mobilephone _____
 E-Mail _____

If you're renewing, skip to the Dues Section

Your Relationship to Serviceman _____
 Your Date of Birth _____
 How did you hear about AWON _____

About your WWII Service Member:

Last Name _____
 First Name _____ M.I. _____
 Birthdate _____
 Hometown & State _____
 Military Unit _____
 Rank _____ Service Number _____
 Date of Death _____ Place _____
 Burial Location _____
 Wife's Maiden Name _____
 Additional information on your WWII Service Member's
 Military Service, Death, or Burial. _____

Please send your check:

Payable to AWON, include it with this form and send it to:

AWON Treasurer
5745 Lee Road
Indianapolis, Indiana 46216

Membership Types:

☐ **Orphan Member:** Any son or daughter of a member of the US Armed Forces, Coast Guard, or Merchant Marine who was killed, remains missing in action, or who died in the line of duty, or who later died of wounds or injuries sustained during WWII.

☐ **Family Member:** Other relations who are not a son or daughter.

☐ **Supporting Member:** Other individuals with an interest in WWII, who wish to support us and participate in our outreach activities and programs.

Membership Dues:

Basic Orphan Member Dues are \$25 a year – starting when we receive your check. This includes your AWON Membership Card, a Web Tribute for your father, a physical or E-version of our quarterly newsletter, **The Star**, a personal account on the AWON online List-serv, and an account on the AWON Facebook Page.

Family Member Dues are \$10 a year – includes an E-version of **The Star**, and \$25 a year – includes a printed version.

Supporting Member Dues are \$50 a year – includes either version of **The Star**.

Membership Dues Levels:

Please circle your Dues Level below:

	1 Year	2 Years	3 Years
Orphan	\$25	\$48	\$70
Family (E-Star Version)	\$10	\$20	\$30
Family (Printed Star Version)	\$25	\$48	\$70
Supporting	\$50	\$96	\$140
Gold Star (Increased Donation)	\$100	\$192	\$280

Donation Considerations:

Memorial Day Wreath Fund \$ _____
 General Operations & Outreach \$ _____
 Total Dues & Donations Enclosed \$ _____



**Submittable
Online >>>**



AWON (American WWII Orphans Network) is a humanitarian, non-profit, nonpolitical service organization under Section 501(c)3 of the US Federal Tax Code. (EINB #91-1538912) Membership is not required to be entered into the Database. For more information, the AWON Website is at www.awon.org.

The Veterans History Project from **The American Folklife Center** of the Library of Congress



Do you have a collection of your father's correspondence and are not sure what to do with it in the long term? Do you wish you could record your memories of your father to ensure that they are preserved for future generations?

[The Veterans History Project of the American Folklife Center](#) collects, preserves, and makes accessible the personal accounts of American war veterans so that future generations may hear directly from veterans and better understand the realities of war. Stories can be told as personal narratives, through correspondence, and through other visual materials such as scrapbooks and art.

The United States Congress created the Veterans History Project in 2000. The authorizing legislation, a bipartisan effort, received unanimous support and was signed into law by President Clinton on October 27, 2000. The focus of the Veterans History Project is preserving first-hand accounts of U.S. veterans who served in wars and conflicts the US was involved with. Living veterans have contributed oral history to this end.

For deceased veterans, The Veterans History Project collects the following documents:

- original narratives/memoirs
- wartime diaries or journals of at least 20 pages
- collections of letters (10 or more)
- official military documents
- collections of original photos or artwork (10+)

The Veterans History Project may be an ideal way to ensure that your father's letters and other important, historically relevant paperwork is in good hands to be preserved as the historical documents they are, for the indefinite future.

In 2016, the Veterans History Project, courtesy of the Gold Star Families Voices Act, expanded the original scope of the Veterans History Project

to also include the recording and preservation of oral histories by immediate family members (parent, spouse, sibling, or child) of "members of the Armed Forces who died as a result of their service during a period of war."

Gold Star Family members, defined by legislation as a parent, spouse, sibling or child of a service member who "became missing in action or died as a result of their service during a period of war," and over the age of 18 are invited to participate. You may contribute a recording in audio or video form or a written account, sharing reminiscences about your veteran, and how losing them to war has affected you and your family.

VHP strongly encourages you to anchor the recording with original photographs, diaries, journals and correspondence that belonged to your veteran, so the researchers of today and future generations will have access to a fuller story of your family member's service, and the ultimate sacrifice they made for our nation.

If you are interested in participating in the Veterans History Project or the Gold Star Family Voices Project, it's easy. There's a step by step guide here: <https://www.loc.gov/programs/veterans-history-project/how-to-participate/> and the Field Kit can be downloaded here: <https://www.loc.gov/programs/veterans-history-project/how-to-participate/vhp-field-kit/>

Editor's note - the Field Kit looks intimidating at first! Please check out the [VHP website](#) where it's broken down into steps with videos to guide you, or contact the VHP Liaison for assistance:

Kerry Ward, Liaison Specialist
Veterans History Project
kwat@loc.gov

AWON Artist Gets Deserved Recognition

Some of you may recall AWON Sibling Sue Roodenberg Perko's Gold Star painting from some of our AWON conferences, where it was displayed in the hospitality room. But she's getting some much deserved recognition for this stunning painting.

Sue writes:

On December 12 I had the great pleasure of being at the ceremony of Wreaths Across America in Elmsford, near where I live in Westchester, New York.

I didn't go into the tent to hear the speeches but chatted with several "Paul Bunyan cousins" who were part of the escort. (They were big guys from Maine in bright red wool jackets.) I brought the painting of my self-portrait as a Gold Star child - a huge gold star with me hiding in the shadows holding my father's flag.

Caroline Jackson never missed an opportunity to talk about AWON and I decided to carry on her tradition, with the painting as a way to start the conversation. These men were so connected to our stories. They organized a photo shoot and I suddenly had ten cameras pointing at me. I found myself a celebrity. It was so far from the shame and secrecy that I lived with before I found AWON and it was a really wonderful experience.

Later a reporter from the local tv station was leaving the ceremony. I accosted her, still inspired by Caroline, and told her about AWON as I showed her my painting. She asked me to follow up before Memorial Day. I have printed AWON cards and I gave them out with lots of enthusiasm.

A local restaurant was a sponsor and I thanked the owner. He is going to start decorating a wall with photos of service people. I asked if I could put my father's picture along with information about AWON, and he said sure.

My best to you with so much gratitude!



Above: Sue poses with her stunning painting at the ceremony for WAA in Elmsford, NY, December 12, 2023.



Right: Sue and her new friends, the "Paul Bunyan cousins" of Maine, escorts for Wreaths Across America.

AWON Members -

Is your father buried in a national cemetery?
Check out the Veterans Legacy Memorial (VLM)!

VLM is an online memorial space managed by the National Cemetery Administration (NCA). NCA manages over 150 national cemeteries to honor our Nation's veterans, and memorializes more than 3.7 million veterans interred in those cemeteries in a digital memorial, providing a VLM profile page for each veteran, to which personal touches like photos and tributes can be added.

Find out more by visiting VLM's homepage at:
www.va.gov/remember

...From Joy to Tragedy, Continued from Page 11

MI. She was featured in the January 1945 edition of the *Ladies' Home Journal*. The 10-page spread had pictures of Dee, Billy, and Dianne, and articles about how Dee coped with William's loss, her health and fitness regimen, and even her fashion sense and cooking.

You can read the Ladies' Home Journal article featuring Dorothea "Dee" Rueckert, reprinted in its entirety, in the 76th edition of the *AWON Star*: <https://www.awon2.org/star/issue76.PDF>

The *Ladies' Home Journal* article was a big help to the younger Bill when it came to finding out about his father. Dee had remarried after the war, and her children took her new husband's name, Sargent. As was so often the case for AWON siblings, not much was said about William Rueckert's life or death. Lieutenant Rueckert's military records were destroyed in the archives fire in St. Louis. It was finding the *Journal* article in his mother's attic after her death in 1994 that got Bill started on the search to learn about his father's life.

Bill made friends in England and met the men that flew with the 93rd to learn about his dad's crash. Despite his efforts, he was never really able to connect with his dad's close friend and crash survivor Jimmy Gardner. Gardner had had a hard time recovering from the accident, sent first to London to recuperate, and then sent home. In later years Bill tried to talk to him about the crash, but the shutters came down and Jimmy, perhaps understandably, turned away from Bill.

He had better luck with his father's former co-pilot Harold Roehrs. Roehrs survived the war and wrote his own biographical account of the events of that time, called *Harold's Story*. The book is dedicated to William Rueckert: "My pilot and friend who shared his knowledge and taught me how to fly a B-24 Liberator." In the book, Howard acknowledged William helped to shape his life.

Since discovering more about his father's death, Bill Rueckert Sargent has repeatedly visited Hardwick, even becoming good friends with the

site's present owner. William's wings and wedding ring were never recovered from the crash site, and remain buried in the airfield's runway.

On the farm that now stands in the place of Hardwick airfield, is a small museum, maintained by a volunteer crew. The farm has a memorial to the 93rd and regularly honours those who served.

On the night before the mission, William Rueckert had visited the local church at Topcroft, in preparation for the following day's flight. This church still stands, and still honors the men who served. Bill has since donated a replica of his father's Purple Heart to the church. Inside the church, a plaque sits on the wall remembering the 668 men - William Rueckert among them - who never returned. In Their Memory.

Don't miss the film **Return to Hardwick!**

Return to Hardwick tells the story of the 93rd Bomb Group of the Mighty 8th Air Force, the most highly decorated bomber group during WWII, notorious for having pulled off some of the most daring air raids during the war, who flew out of Hardwick Air Base (Station 104) in Norfolk, England. You can find out more about the bravery of the 93rd by visiting their website here: <https://www.93bg.com/>

Return to Hardwick tells of the 93rd Bomb Group - while also sharing the tale of the sons, daughters, and grandchildren who journeyed to Hardwick to celebrate the lives of these courageous men. Producer Michael Sellers, the grandson of a 93rd bombardier, grew up attending reunions with his grandfather and decided to make a film honoring these courageous heroes and their descendents. AWON member William Rueckert Sargent, son of fallen pilot William Rueckert, in addition to several other descendents of the 93rd, was involved in the process of bringing **Return to Hardwick** to the screen, a labor of love six years in the making.

You can find **Return to Hardwick** (ranked 100% Fresh on Rotten Tomatoes!) on major streaming services such as Amazon Prime, and on DVD/BluRay.

Check out the movie's website for more!

<https://www.hardwickfilm.com>

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www.awon.org



AWON Mission

To locate and bring together sons and daughters of those who died or are missing as a result of American involvement in World War II, honor the service and sacrifice of our fathers and provide information and support to these people who were orphaned by the war.

AWON Directory

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**Friends of the National
WWII Memorial Liason** Rondy Elliot

MeWe

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OPEN POSITION

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