



The Star



Issue #113

"We Speak Their Names"

Summer - 2024

Tribute to Rene Prosper Petit

By Jacqueline "Jackie" Helen Petit Poslusny



1LT Rene Prosper Petit, KIA June 13, 1944, while serving as a bombardier in Italy. Petit, loving husband to Helen, is the father of AWON member Jacqueline Petit Polusny.

"Think not only upon their passing.
Remember the glory of their spirit."

I have tried so many times to write a tribute to my father for *The Star*. Today is the 80th anniversary of the day, June 13, 1944, he was killed in action in Italy. Over the years, I have learned the details: my husband, my son, my uncles, my cousin, and friends have done the research.

My father, 1st Lieutenant Rene Prosper Petit, was a bombardier. His plane received a direct hit, he and the navigator were killed, the pilot and co-pilot made a valiant effort to land the plane, but they were unsuccessful. The bodies were recovered and are buried together in Louisville, KY. That is all I care to know about his death. I'd rather think about the life he lived, than the day he died.

My father was killed exactly one week before I was born. So does that mean I never knew my father? Fortunately for me, it does not. I prefer to remember "the glory of the spirit" that lives on.

I had the best father ever. I pieced together all the best attributes of the various men in my life and attributed those attributes to my father. He never spanked me or denied me anything like other fathers did. My mother Helen (Neumann) assured me that his spirit was always looking over me, caring for me.

To separate my father's story from my mother's story is, for me, impossible. Their love story - almost a 'made for

...continued on page 3

Table of Contents:

President's Message	2
Wreaths Across America '24 .	4-5
Private Ezra Calkins.....	6
AWON Board Election	9-14
Gold Star Families	15
ABMC Flower Program	16-19
A Note from the Motts	23
AWON National Conference	26-27



President's Message

by Walt Linne

As we approach the end of our 33rd year as the American World War II Orphans Network (AWON), I cannot thank our active members enough. It is you who continue to support our mission through donations and dues - you're the greatest. Although our annual dues have remained the same, \$25.00, since the beginning (our Founder Ann Bennett Mix was insistent that the dues remain affordable to all orphans), our active members continue to support *The Star* newsletter, our Wreath Fund Program, HQ's office insurance (the office itself is provided rent free by The American Legion), the AWON Website, and our non-profit 501c3 status. Again, thank you all very much. We couldn't do it without you.

The future and mission of AWON continues to be reaching out to other orphans, educating the next generation, helping to keep the sacrifice of our Fathers alive, and preparing AWON to hand off our mission to the next generation. The next generation includes our very own Editor Kristin Holmes, daughter of First Founder Lorin McCleary III and granddaughter of 2LT Lorin McCleary, Jr. Kristin has suggested scholarships for AWON descendants, hoping to attract grandkids/ great-grandkids to guide AWON in the future. Scholarships are widely advertised to high school and college students, and it would get the word out to people that AWON is here and looking for descendants to pick up the torch. This suggestion is under consideration by the AWON Board of Governors. And we continue to welcome all viable suggestions that would help hand off our mission to the next generation.

Our 15th National Conference is right around the corner - May 2025. The Registration form for our 2025 National Conference, "Remember the Alamo", is on pages 26-27. Please return the registration and fee by April 1, 2025. Book early if at all possible - the sooner we know our numbers, the sooner we can plan events.

We have exciting news about our Board election on Page 9.

And, finally, due to diminished bookstore sales, the AWON Bookstore order form has been removed from the STAR newsletter. However, it is still available on the AWON Website:

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

In Their Memory – Never Forgotten!



AWON FOUNDER

Ann Bennett Mix

AWON DIRECTORS

(Through 2024)

Bonnie Hellums

Bob Holliday

Judi Kramer

Walter Linne

Lorin McCleary

Robert Meek Jr.

Ann Mix

Roberta Nolan

Rik Peirson

Ken Underwood

AWON ADMINISTRATION

Database Coordinator

Lorin McCleary

Dues

Robert Meek, Jr.

Bookstore Manager

Walt Linne

The Star Editor

Kristin Holmes

Webmaster

Rik Peirson

MeWe Coordinator

Lorin McCleary

Regional Coordinator

Barry Barr-Finch

www.awon.org

Email us at awon@awon.org

The Star is a quarterly publication of the American WWII Orphans Network (AWON), a nonprofit 501(c)3, nonpolitical public service organization serving the children of US Servicemen killed in WWII.

The Star is published and mailed from Indianapolis, IN. ISSN 1941-370X (print), 1941-3769 (online) Copyright 2022 by the American WWII Orphans Network.

All rights reserved. Issue 113 - 1M (3-24)

TV' fairy tale love story' - is how I came to know my father, 1st Lieutenant Rene Petit—'Rennie'.

The story began when Rene and Helen met on a ferry boat connecting Weehawken, NJ and New York City. A group of young twenty-year-olds met every day for the half-hour ferry commute to work in lower Manhattan. Eventually, the group began to meet after work, many times at Helen's parent's apartment. It wasn't long before romantic interests flourished within the group. I have no doubt that Helen was a prize. Her whole life people would comment on her attractive appearance, but most importantly, she had a glow of joy that shown from within. My grandmother and uncle often related to me that Rene would often come to visit and my mother would say, "Oh, it's just Rennie."

That changed when Rene asked Helen to accompany him to a formal dance at the 7th Regiment Armory in NYC. Helen did not accept immediately - after all, he wasn't her first choice as a romantic partner, and her friend really liked him. Her mother talked her into going 'just this once.' So because of her mother's encouragement, Helen accepted Rene's invitation.

My grandmother made her a lovely gown, strapless with fur around the top, and a matching cape. Rene showed up in full dress uniform, one that was the model for the West Point uniform. He cut a very handsome figure. My grandmother told me after that night, he was never "just Rennie" again. My mother told me how gentlemanly and attentive he was. He swept her off her feet.

That night was the beginning of a storybook romance. The year was 1939, and the World's Fair was in full swing in NYC. The French Pavilion Restaurant was the talk of the town. The prominent stars of stage, screen, politics, society all vied for reservations. Rene's father, Prosper, was the maître'd - the manager of the front of the restaurant - so there were many opportunities to dine there for this young couple. My maternal



First Lieutenant Rene 'Rennie' Petit and Helen Catherine Neumann on their wedding day

grandmother's dressmaking skills were called on for a wardrobe of gowns, and my father wore tails. Another series of dates my mother loved to recall involved going to the Metropolitan Opera House, frequently - again, this was thanks to my grandfather being the manager of Sherry's Restaurant there. When the Vanderbilts or Rockefellers were not attending, and using their seats in the prestigious Golden Horseshoe, my grandfather was allowed to invite his family to use those seats. Formal attire was required, but thanks to her mother's dressmaking skills, Helen was always ready. She also loved dancing the night away with the group of ferry boat friends, at a little place called 'The Log Cabin' in Fort Lee, NJ, where a new singing sensation, Frank Sinatra, was just getting started.

At some point in their dating relationship, Helen and Rene became engaged to be married, and started a joint bank account. My paternal grandmother, Anna, was not happy. Helen was not Catholic, and she lived in a poorer neighborhood. My grandmother was an ambitious social climber. Thanks to my grandfather's various positions, which included manager of summer resorts, my father and his brothers learned to swim and

...Tribute, continued pg. 16

Another Year of Remembering, Honoring, and Teaching!

Let's continue supporting Wreaths Across America Again in 2024!

By Sandra Walker

Their hopes buoyed after seeing the Allies triumphant in several horrific battles, by September 1944 American journalists started writing that troops could be home for Christmas. Soldiers and families were hopeful, not about just "being home for Christmas, if 🎵 only in dreams 🎵" but actually celebrating the holiday together.

Alongside the exciting headlines, reality existed: many Gold Star families endured an empty place at the dinner table. Into November 1944, the war in the Pacific and in Europe grew even more horrendous. During the Battle of the Bulge, Christmas Day was white.

Rather than any "dreaming", a hideous nightmare ran for hours as fighting raged through bitterly cold, cruel conditions. The season brought remembrances, especially for grieving children, wives, mothers, brothers and sisters. From both theaters of war, more telegrams were delivered well into the summer of 1945.

Today, remembrances from that profoundly sad, silent era will be beautifully expressed. This December 14, Wreaths Across America will orchestrate the placement of tens of thousands of wreaths across Arlington National Cemetery, and in over 2000 additional locations. WAA's iconic fresh evergreen wreath with a bright red bow placed against a snowy-white background spreads a heartfelt expression honoring selfless service to the United States and to the world.

Wreaths Across America (WAA) began in 1992 because of Mr. Morrill Worcester in Harrington, Maine. As a 12-year-old boy Worcester had visited Washington D.C. and the Arlington National Cemetery for the first time. The indelible impression of the vast cemetery stayed in his soul. When Mr. Worcester retired, he created a way to honor soldiers, especially ones who made the ultimate sacrifice.

From those humble beginnings at Arlington National Cemetery, today WAA reaches across the nation and even to our international American cemeteries.

While we at AWON observe the date of our Father's death, we also respect national dates of remembrance

through the official Memorial Day, Fourth of July and Veterans Day commemorations. National Wreaths Across America Day is another opportunity for us to pay our respects and remember the sacrifices of our fathers and the other young men just like our fathers, true American heroes.

While we aren't having a designated AWON WAA page this year, your participation is still welcome! If we as members actively participate, AWON interaction with WAA, a huge and nationally renowned organization, will help expand awareness of AWON, enabling us to possibly find more of our fellow orphans.

Above all else, we align with the WAA stated purpose: **Remember, Honor and Teach**, for WAA is committed to teaching younger generations where the value of their freedom rests. This AWON outreach project can broaden our ongoing commitment for lasting remembrance of the selfless sacrifice by our heroes.

Recognition day for Wreaths Across America was established in 2008 by the United States Congress, to be observed each December 13. In 2024 the placing of the WAA wreaths will be held on Saturday, December 14. The extensive national WAA organization offers the opportunity to send \$17 for a wreath and also fund additional wreaths. WAA is a non-profit 501-(c) (3). Additionally, WAA needs and welcomes volunteers regardless of location.

To read more about WAA's broad national and international involvement, one can go to their website, sign up for the weekly newsletter, and/or visit their home office in Columbia Falls, Maine. The Wreaths Across America website is found at: www.wreathsassamerica.org

Mailing address for Wreaths Across America: WAA, P.O. Box 249, Columbia Falls, Maine, 04623.

And one of the easiest ways to order from WAA is by phone: 877-385-9504.

Deadline to order is **December 3, 2024!**



Let's make our holiday season more meaningful by enhancing the remembrance of our Fathers through supporting Wreaths Across America - and beyond the United States, at our ABMC cemeteries abroad!

How do AWON members or supportive family engage in this important outreach project?

You can help in two ways:

1. Donating funds for a wreath or wreaths. One wreath is \$17. The most common donation is \$85 (five wreaths) but smaller donations are accepted. It is critical that anyone wishing to order a wreath do so by **December 3, 2024**. All funds are due in the WAA office by that date.

2. Volunteering to help WAA in the placement of thousands of wreaths. To volunteer requires no financial investment, only a commitment of your time.

It is also very helpful to let friends and family know about the WAA program. Help spread the word about this awesome organization. One way to do this is by sending invitations to others at the time you place your order. They will learn about WAA and all it takes is the click of a button.

To send an invite, while placing orders online, you will be given the option to send an invite to friends and family to also make a donation. You can also choose to send a card to let someone know you've sent a wreath as a gift on their behalf. Or both!

IMPORTANT!!!! We are NOT using the AWON dedicated page at WAA this year. Instead, you should order your wreaths directly from WAA. WAA is a non-profit 501-(c) (3). Online donations in the form of wreath orders are completed securely on the WAA online fundraising page:

www.wreathsasscrossamerica.org. Or if you prefer, you may mail donations by cash or check using the fundraising form available on WAA's website. The deadline to order is **December 3, 2024**.

To indicate the choice of where to volunteer, on the WAA website go to the "all locations" listing and then find a convenient "specific location". Volunteers are guided by the location coordinator.

To donate wreaths to a specific cemetery, including the overseas cemeteries, from the HOME page of the WAA Site, select "sponsor a cemetery". This is in VERY SMALL white letters, just below the red "Sponsor Wreaths" button. Once you click that button, a window will open up that gives you the option to order wreaths to be delivered to a particular cemetery. If you don't select a cemetery, your wreaths will go to any cemetery where they are needed.

To order a grave-specific wreath, at the time you order your wreath online, be sure to click the box marked "Honor and Remember a Specific Person." You will be given the options to honor a deceased veteran, a living veteran or first responder, or just for your wreaths to go wherever they are needed. Please note, if you order an "In Memory Of" or "In Honor Of" Wreath, it cannot be delivered to a specific grave.

REMEMBER: Deadline to order is December 3!

Let's spread the AWON holiday spirit across the world this year! Support Wreaths Across America...

Remember, Honor and Teach.



PRIVATE WILLIAM EZRA LEON CALKINS

22 August 1925 – 01 November 1942

By Marilynn Rustand Lieurance

The news was on the television when I walked into the room. A family member had tested their DNA, and a match to a WWII fallen soldier was found. He was coming home. His family lived in Hillsboro, Oregon, an hour or so from my home.

My husband had passed away just a few weeks earlier, and I was having a very hard time even getting dressed and out of the house. Honoring this soldier by attending his Memorial Service the following day seemed to be the right thing to do. I pushed hard to set my own grief aside for a few hours to attend this young man's Memorial Service.

Private Calkins was sixteen the day he left his parents' house, and was never seen or heard from again. America was in the beginning of WWII, and William had secretly gone to enlist. He was underage at 16, but found a gentleman in line and convinced him to tell a story that Calkins was orphaned as a young boy, was now 18 years of age, and that he, this gentleman, was Calkins's guardian. It worked, and Calkins was assigned to the 31st Infantry Regiment, "Polar Bears" Philippine Division, U.S. Army.

William Calkins served his country, and ended up as part of the 75,000 American and Filipino prisoners who were part of the "Bataan Death March" by the Imperial Japanese Army in 1942. It was a march of 66 miles in six days without food or water. 17,000 were killed or died from the horrifying barbaric treatment by the Japanese on route to the prison camps.

So many years had come and gone, but the family had never stopped wondering what happened to the very young William Calkins. Recently, a



Above - a decorative arrangement from the memorial service for Private William E. Calkins, held at the Fir Lawn Memorial Center, Hillsboro, Oregon, Sept. 13, 2024. Photo by John Hughel, provided courtesy of the Oregon National Guard Public Affairs Office

family member's DNA matched the remains of Private Calkins, and his family was notified. At long last, they finally had answers that told them where William had been and what happened to him. He was an American Hero who served his country, and was finally coming home.

As WWII war orphans ourselves, each of us have a story to tell. Although Private Calkins' family are not members of the American WWII Orphans Network, I was compelled to tell this brief story of a very young Private William Calkins, who loved his country enough to walk away from the safety of family here in America. At just 16 years of age, he took charge of his own life, choosing to serve the country he so loved. He was 17 when he died, and now he's home.

I was moved by a poem written by a member of his family, and thought you might enjoy it too:

Private Calkins, con't next page...

I'm Coming Home

In Tribute to Private William Calkins
By Carlena E. White – August 2024

Momma, it's been so long

So many tears

So many years

I'm coming home

Daddy, don't blame yourself

I made my choice

I'm sorry I left you

I'm coming home

I'm scared; so much sorrow

So much pain

So many years

I'm coming home

Momma and Daddy, I love you

Patty and Bonnie, I miss you

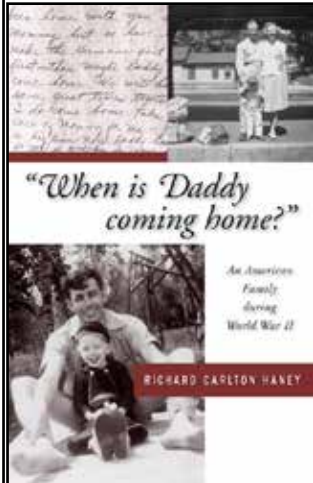
We'll be together soon

I'm Coming Home

When is Daddy Coming Home?

An American Family During World War II

Contributed by author Richard Carlton Haney



Many of my fellow AWON members will be interested to know that the second printing of my best-selling book, *When is Daddy Coming Home? An American Family During World War II*, has just been released by the Wisconsin Historical Society Press. It is a nine-chapter, illustrated, 160-page story of my Dad and Mom's lives during the war, based on his letters home to her, Mom's home-front memories, my childhood recollections of Dad, and my expertise as a long-time university history professor

specializing in World War II. My parents developed a personal code system in their letters to get messages past the censors, and twenty-five of the over 200 letters are included in an appendix.

Dad was in the 17th Airborne Division. During the Battle of the Bulge he was wounded, taken prisoner of war, and escaped. He was killed in the air drop over the Rhine at Wesel, Germany, on March 24, 1945, and is buried in the Netherlands-American Cemetery near Margraten, Netherlands. I remember vividly when the "regret-to-inform" telegram arrived thirteen days after Dad was killed.

My Mom's wartime home-front life during the war is the equal and other half of the book. Mom was left a 26-year-old widow with a four-year-old son to raise. Although I never wanted for anything as a youngster, I realize as an adult that mom faced many difficult challenges both during and after the war. The book's title, *When is Daddy Coming Home?* is quite simply the question that I constantly asked my Mom when I was a little boy. Writing it has been a labor of love and a tribute to my parents. The book is available from the [Wisconsin Historical Society Press](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/press/) or any bookstore can order it from the publisher.

Richard Carlton Haney, a member of AWON and the Gold Star son of J. Clyde Haney, earned his Ph.D. in history from the University of Wisconsin - Madison and later graduated from both West Point's post-Ph.D. military history program and the Army's National Security Seminar at Carlisle Barracks. He is Emeritus Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin - Whitewater, where he taught courses in 20th Century US History, American military history, and Wisconsin history. The UW - W organization Students for an Accessible Society twice presented him with its teaching excellence award for assisting students with disabilities.

Ice Cream During WWII - Morale is a Dish Best Served Cold

When you think of summer in America, one treat above all others comes to mind - ice cream.

For soldiers and sailors away from home, food was a main source of comfort. Ice cream was no exception, particularly for American troops. Ice cream had been popular in America since its founding; both George Washington and Thomas Jefferson were known to be ice cream aficionados. Washington once spent \$200 - \$5000 in today's money - on ice cream in a single summer.



At the beginning of the war, ice cream was more popular than ever. Most men serving in WWII had lived through the Prohibition years, when ice cream served as a substitute for alcohol. Companies like Anheiser Busch and Stroh's began making ice cream instead of booze to stay afloat, and ice cream skyrocketed in popularity during this time. Frozen treats stayed popular during the Depression, with Rocky Road ice cream and Popsicles being invented during those years.

While shortages of cream and sugar made ice cream scarce on the homefront during wartime, it was deemed a necessity for the morale of the boys overseas. The Army's Quartermaster Corps began shipping millions of pounds of ice cream mix to Allied bases worldwide to be frozen onsite. The US Army even built small factories to provide their troops with a ready supply of ice cream. By war's end, the Corps claimed it could deliver frozen desserts even to the front. American bomber crews figured out they could make ice cream themselves by strapping buckets of mix to the rear gunner's compartment before missions. Cold temperatures froze the mixture and the motions of evasive flight churned it.

But because alcohol - another morale-booster - had been prohibited on Naval vessels for a time prior and during Prohibition, it was the Navy who considered ice cream to be truly indispensable for their sailors.

How indispensable? In 1942, the USS Lexington was damaged by Japanese torpedoes. Before the crew

abandoned ship, they broke into the freezer and ate all the ice cream. Men literally filled their helmets with ice cream and licked them clean as they climbed into life rafts to await rescue.

Nearly every ship in the fleet larger than a destroyer was fitted with refrigeration and ice-cream making equipment. In addition, both the Army and Navy built ice cream barges, technically known as "Barge, Refrigerated, Large" (BRL), capable of producing and storing large quantities of ice cream. The Navy's first and most famous "ice cream ship" was a concrete barge it borrowed from the Army. They converted the barge into a 265-foot-long ice cream factory, capable of churning out 500 gallons of ice cream a day with another 500 gallons in its freezers, alongside 1,500 tons of meat and 500 tons of vegetables. The ice cream ship was towed by tugboats to deliver ice cream to smaller naval ships that lacked the facilities to make their own.

The tradition of ice cream for the troops carried on well past the end of the war. During the Korean War, the Pentagon even released an official statement promising that troops would be served ice cream at minimum three times a week.

Napoleon once said, "An Army marches on its stomach." Anyone who spends time around active young men knows that sentiment has a very big grain of truth to it. Military ice cream provided calories and nutrients to fuel the war effort, but more important, it provided a little taste of home for men who sorely needed it.

Meet your 2024 AWON Board of Directors!

by Lorin McCleary, AWON Board Secretary,
and Bob Meek, Election Committee Chairman

Per AWON Bylaws, 2024 is a year when Directors of AWON are elected. Following procedures in our bylaws, the election was announced, and nominees were solicited in the Spring issue of The Star.

We are pleased that the following members stepped up to run for the Board: Rondy Elliott, Gloria Layne, and Marilyn Lieurance, in addition to returning candidates Bonnie Hellums, Bob Holliday, Judi Kramer, Walter Linne, Lorin McCleary, Robert Meek, Roberta Nolan, and Rik Peirson.

Ann Mix, our Founder, does not need to stand for election; ByLaws state that as Founder, Ann is a permanent member of the BoD.

Recently, the present AWON Board voted to expand the Board to eleven members. Since we have eleven candidates, all candidates will automatically become Board Members. Congrats to our 2025-2026 Board Members!

Starting at right, on the next five pages are the biographies of candidates for the AWON Board of Directors. Candidates provided these biographies for the election, which has subsequently been cancelled. We share them here to enable our members to know our Board Members better.

Biographies are listed at random using convenient spacing as criteria.



Bonnie Hellums

I am a retired Senior State Court Judge who lives in Houston, Texas. My daddy, 1st Lt. Pete Blackford, was killed one month after I was born when he was piloting a B17 that crashed in North Africa.

I have been involved with AWON for about 20 years. In my professional life, I was a lawyer and then a judge. I also spent 18 years in University work: 3 years at the University of Houston as Head of Women's Housing followed by 15 years as the Dean of Students at Rice University. I am a complete retirement failure as I am still sitting in 8 counties as a visiting judge and serving on numerous boards and state commissions.

In addition to an awesome husband, I have two children. My daughter, Gretchen is a therapist with two children. My son, Lt. Col. Josh Hellums, has three children and is the Regimental Surgeon for the 160th at Ft Campbell, Kentucky.

Ideas for the Board: I think we need to do all we can to provide opportunities for our children and grandchildren to encourage and facilitate their interest in the AWON work including honoring our fathers, their grandfathers and grandmothers. Reality is hitting that we do not have that much time left, so we need to educate and encourage them to fill our shoes when we are gone. It was wonderful at the conference in New Orleans to have the next generations participating in calling our fathers' names. I would like to help us continue what has been started by serving on the Board again as I did quite a few years ago.

2024 AWON Board of Directors

continued from page 9



Bob Holliday

Bob's previous Board Experience: Iowa Supreme Court Grievance Commission; AWON Board, this past year, and member since 1999; Past Chair, American Football Foundation and College Hall of Fame, Iowa Chapter; Past Chair, Des Moines YMCA Camp Board; Iowa State and Polk County Bar Associations-various committees; Roosevelt High School Foundation Board; Drake University Football Board; Drake University Law School Board of Counselors; Past Chair, Big-8 Collegiate Football Officials Association. I have been on the Board of the Iowa Gold Star Military Museum for 25 years, and am the present Chair. I have served as the Chair for the past 19 years.

Special skills: problem solving, mediation, leadership, bringing people together, handling difficult tasks. I am the AWON member who commenced the present day efforts to convince the ABMC that it made a very bad mistake in dropping the Flower Program. There are four of us involved. The ABMC managed to pour salt into that wound by not bringing family into the discussion prior to making such a decision. Our departed sister, Susan Hadler had been one of us. She is truly missed. In the memory of our Fathers and Susan we will succeed.

Bob's Vision for AWON for the next two years: AWON is an outstanding organization. What it represents and its missions should be known far and wide. I found AWON when one of my Dad's fellow Officers from WWII, having read a Reader's Digest article on AWON, told me to read the article. We are the remaining off-spring of the Greatest Generation. Our Fathers died for the very freedoms we, as Americans, are fortunate to live with. We cannot let their memories be forgotten. What they gave to this country, what they did for everyone who lives here. It is up to us to preserve their memory and to pass that preservation on to future generations of Americans. Perhaps younger Americans can learn something from all of that. We need more members. We need to search out and bring back members that have dropped out. That, and to bring the grandchildren into the fold here.



Judi Kramer

Judi's Previous Board Experience: Past AWON Board of Directors - 12 yrs. Member of various teams and organizations while working.

Special Skills: Public speaking - good communicator and listener. Ability to lead. Organizational - (co-chair 2014 Seattle conference)

Vision for AWON for next two years: Involve more members, better communication with members. Reach out to them - ask what they want to get from AWON. Listen to the members. Ensure that funds are used wisely.

How you can best serve AWON as a Board Member: Be a committed member of the board. Listen to all points of view and make the appropriate decisions for the good of AWON.

Personal: Member of AWON since 1991. Attended all conferences. Volunteer in my community - Cancer/breast cancer/heart disease awareness.

2024 AWON Board of Directors

continued from page 10



Gloria Layne
(b. Zuccarella)

Gloria's Previous Board Experience: AWON Board and President. Bright Side Manor Board & Chairperson. Tenaflly Senior Citizens Committee Chairperson. Vestry Church of the Atonement. Bergen County Office on Aging Advisory Council. Englewood Hospital Advisory Council. Special Skills: Management & administration; PR; event planning; assessing needs & finding creative ways to meet those needs; establishing outreach programs & ability to connect people/organizations; exprienced with government programs and seeking financial and in-kind support for programs.

Vision for AWON for the next two years: I would like to make an effort to establish a greater connectivity with our membership and provide more personal interactions with members by calls and notes to keep members more engaged in the 'what's happening'. I am also interested in continuing work on projects the Board is already pursuing.

How you can best serve AWON as a Board Member: I would be helpful with establishing outreach programs as well as acting as liaison to government officials and other organizations, i.e. TAPS, museums and supporting the projects of other members of the Board.

Personal: I have experience working in private industry, the non-profit world and with both federal and county governments. I love to travel; I am a "Margraten kid"; I enjoy being with family and friends and I enjoy my current role as "professional volunteer".



Lorin McCleary

Lorin's Previous Board Experience: Organizer of AWON First Founders Meeting; Member - AWON First Founders; AWON First President; Past AWON Board Member; Secretary, AWON 2018, 2020, and 2022 BOD, recipient of AWON's Col. Jack O. Forgy Distinguished Service Award.

Special Skills: Enthusiasm for AWON's mission and its members! Extensive business experience and organizational skills. Effective written and electronic communicator. Good at formulating plans and implementing them. Strong computer skills. I serve as the AWON database coordinator.

Vision for AWON for next two years: Continue moving AWON towards health and vibrancy. Continued emphasis on member services, membership recruitment and retention. More responsiveness to membership input and needs. Encourage AWON Regional development and meetings.

Personal: B.S. Indiana University M.S. University of Pittsburgh. Married, 2 daughters, 4 grandsons, 1 granddaughter. Have been a member of AWON since 1993. Membership in AWON literally changed my life, enabling me to come to terms with my father's death in WWII and to honor his service and sacrifice. I want to make sure that our organization will continue on so as to make these things possible for others.

2024 AWON Board of Directors

continued from page 11



Marilynn
Lieurance

The hope I have for AWON is in its future, to continue offering Gold Star families a place to come together—a legacy of Honor, Respect, and Remembrance. I've already mentioned the idea of merging with another Gold Star organization to a few of our AWON members, for the purpose of keeping AWON and other like organizations alive.

You might be one of hundreds of AWON members I personally called and/or emailed in 2023 and 2024 while working together with three other AWON members to get the Flower Program reinstated. I also wrote emails through many nights and early morning to bring major military organizations onboard.

I live in Oregon, and flew across our country to lobby with Congressmen and Senators for four days prior to attending the hearing in Congress—I was part of representing you, and all the WWI and WWII Gold Star families across our country. In me, you'll find a very strong commitment.

Throughout my work career, I've served as a member of the Board of Directors, House Committees, Advisory Boards and such. In me, you'll get a person who's NOT afraid to stand for what's right, and jump-in to do what's necessary to move forward. I'm a hard worker, detail oriented, and have a great follow-through. I get along well with people, and am able to work both independently and as a team player.

In and during the grief of losing my husband a few weeks ago, the first two times I left the house was to attend a Memorial Service for a newly identified WWII



Walt Linne

Walt's Previous Board Experience: St. Mary Elementary School, Board Member, 1976-1978. Scecina Memorial High School, Board of Governors, 1990-1998. AWON Board of Directors 1993-2003. President of AWON Board of Directors since 2018.

Special Skills: Retired USAF Command Pilot and Retired Asst. Director of Operations, Indiana University. Served in numerous leadership positions in the military and civilian service.

Vision for AWON for the next two years: Continue to reach out to WWII Orphans, helping to keep our Fathers' sacrifice alive.

How you can best serve AWON as a Board Member: Serve as needed on the AWON Board.

Personal: Team Player.

soldier, who died serving his country. The following week, I attended a Gold Star family event I'd never heard of before, so I could report back to you. Articles about both events have already been submitted to "THE STAR". (Editor's Note -Marilynn's articles can be found on pages 6-7 and page 15.)

In me you get Honesty, Commitment, Responsibility, and a great Follow-through. I have strong principles, and I will stand-up to meet the needs of AWON.

2024 AWON Board of Directors

continued from page 12



Robert Meek Jr.



Roberta Nolan

Robert's Previous Board Experience: Vice-President AWON BOD. Vice Chairman, Executive Committee, Diocese of Western Carolina (Episcopal). Senior Warden, Finance Warden, Vestry Member, Church of the Ascension and St. Peter's Episcopal Church. Member District and Committee Boy Scouts of America, President, Treasurer and Board Member Catawba Valley Wildlife Club, Chairman and member Hickory Historic Preservation Commission, Member Catawba County Adjustment Board. Member Catawba County Historic Commission. Member Cathedral Chapter, All Souls' Cathedral. Member Hickory Farmers' Market BOD.

Special Skills: Legislative Experience, Budgeting and Financial Management. Retired Army Colonel.

Vision for AWON: To continue to seek out WWII orphans and get more grandchildren involved.

How best can I serve AWON: Legislative conduit and budgeting.

In 2022, I learned that AWON was looking to elect members to the Board of Directors, and volunteered. I have served on the Board since 2022, and was happy to put myself forward as a candidate again in 2024. I have had the pleasure of attending Memorial Day events at the White House twice and the distinct honor of giving a speech at the World War II Memorial on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge. My father was captured in the Bulge, was a prisoner of war, and died when I was five weeks old. So, while I never knew him, I know of him and it is my responsibility and distinct privilege to honor him, his memory, and that of all who served. I have appreciated the opportunity to fulfill that mission by serving on the the Board of Directors of AWON.

I hold a Doctor of Education degree and have worked as Dean of Admissions at Philadelphia universities for 25 years. I am now retired. My husband is a retired Navy Captain who fully supports my seeking this opportunity.

Tapping into my professional experience and education, I would propose launching "Project Torch", facilitating outreach to the next generation. Our heroes lit the torch, AWON members are carrying the torch, and we must pass the torch to our children and grandchildren so they can carry on, ensuring our Heroes are perpetually honored. Past, present, future. In their memory. Never forgotten.

Thank you for your consideration.

Roberta D. Nolan, Ed. D.

Be sure to follow AWON on



2024 AWON Board of Directors

continued from page 13



Rik Peirson

Rik's Previous Board Experience: American Advertising Federation, Santa Barbara; Vietnam Veterans of America - 218th; Unity Shoppe; Victoria Street Community House, AWON BOD - 2 Terms. Special Skills: Planning, Marketing, Primary Research, Advertising, Writing, Design, Branding, Web Development, and Media Relations.

Vision for AWON for next two years: Focus on Reviewing and Prioritizing AWON Missions ~ Long-term as well as Short-term; Completing the Website Upgrade; Deploying OUTreach; Boosting AWON Awareness and Membership; More INreach - Polling and Understanding the Needs and Preferences of the Membership; More Board Transparency and Sharing of Critical Resources; Developing Volunteerism; Optimizing Coordination between the AWON Website and the Star; Promoting Greater Tribute Participation by the Membership; Restoring the ABMC Flower Program.

How you can best serve AWON as a Board member: INSIDE ~ Promoting Management by Collaboration and Consensus: OUTSIDE ~ Through increasing Outreach and Membership; and by Researching, Remembering, & Honoring our Fathers.

Personal: B.A. Penn State; Decorated Vietnam combat veteran; CPT, Military Intelligence; Willing to Work; Married 43 years: Dianna. Children: Lindsey; Grandchildren: Zack and Tanner.



Rondy Elliott

Rondy Elliott is a long-time member of AWON, joining in 1998 just prior to her first conference in St. Louis. She is the daughter of Cpl. Frank Elliott, who was killed on 6/6/44 in the first wave of the Normandy Invasion.

Rondy served on the Board from 2002 through 2006. That was a busy time-- when the WWII Memorial was dedicated and we had a very big presence at this event. Rondy has only missed two conferences in 26 years, and says she feels closer to her AWON siblings than to many friends she has known her whole life.

She brings many skills to the table, experience being one, and an ability to see "the big picture" as another. She has a "let's get things done" mentality. She has spoken for AWON a number of times on national and local media.

Rondy has definite goals for AWON. The social interaction and support between members is wonderful. Going forward, she believes that one large group of orphans from all American wars should be established, so that none of our groups (ie AWON and SDIT) should perish because it's members age out.

She also would like to see AWON get more involved in national legislation and/or projects that promote the memory of those fallen in combat-- because it is all too easy for the public to forget them if one is not personally touched, as we all have been.

Gold Star Families Remembered

by Marilynn Lieurance

It's Sunday, September 29, 2024 and a very special day for Gold Star families. The last Sunday in September is Gold Star Mothers and Family Day, and I thought my fellow American WWII Orphans Network members should hear about what is happening in honor of Gold Star families.

Dick Tobiason, LTC US Army Retired, and Founder/Chairman of the Bend (Oregon) Heroes Foundation has worked to get Highway signs in honor of Oregon War Veterans and all Gold Star families.

It's an effort for Oregon, fifteen years in the making, with a few other states that have begun to follow suit. Dick's goal is to expand this project across the entire United States of America. You might have seen signs of honor and remembrance in your own state.

It's very interesting to look at the map of Oregon signs that travel from South to North and West to East:

- Persian Gulf Afghan Iraq Veteran Memorial, Hwy 101.
- Korean War Veterans Memorial Highway, I-5 - also known as the Purple Heart Trail.
- World War II Veterans Historic Highway; Naval Air Station 1942-1946; and Army Camp Rufus 1944-1945, Hwy 97.
- World War I Veterans Memorial Highway, Hwy 395.
- Medal of Honor Recipients from Oregon run from West to East, Hwy 20.
- POW/MIA Highway runs from South to North on Hwy 395 and from West to East on Hwy 26.
- Vietnam Veterans runs from West to East on Hwy 84 at the top North of the state on Hwy 84.
- Gold Star Families from Oregon Memorial Highway runs from West to East for 477 miles, also at the top/North of the State, and connects to ALL the Highways listed above. *This shows the connection of Gold Star families to all the military groups of the wars listed.* Five ceremonies across Oregon were held today at Seaside, Pendleton, Baker City, Ontario, and Janzen



Above - The dedication ceremony for the Oregon Gold Star Families Memorial Highway. The highway runs across Oregon and links together several military memorial highways across the state. Author and AWON member Marilynn Lieurance is pictured second from left, along with other Gold Star wives and family members, and members of the Bend (Oregon) Heroes Foundation.

Beach. Six signs will be unveiled and put in place in October of this year to complete the goal for Oregon.

Several Gold Star family members were in attendance at this ceremony, and I believe all had lost a husband to war and are members of "Gold Star Wives". We were all invited to do the unveiling of the sign today, that will be placed at the South end of my town of Scappoose, Oregon.

I hope you can see how huge the Gold Star sign is in the photo above. I believe these signs will help educate people to what Gold Star families represent.

In Their Memory,
Marilynn Rustand Lieurance
AWON White House Liaison
Proud daughter of B-17 Pilot
1st LT Hanford "Rusty" James Rustand
KIA 2 November 1944 - Libehna, Germany



dive, to play tennis and golf. My father learned to ride horses, and to duel and ski. The family lived in an upscale apartment, in Weehawken, NJ, overlooking the NYC skyline. Although they lived only 4 blocks apart, Helen lived in Union City. My father's parents had emigrated from Luxembourg, often a battleground between France and Germany. My father's surname is French, my mother's German. My French grandfather let me take sips of his Champagne and my German grandfather let me take sips of his beer. Helen's parents also aspired to a better life for their children and saved money in hopes of sending their daughter to 'Normal School' to become a teacher, which she did not do, choosing instead to work and ride the ferry with her best friend Marie. Grandmother Anna tried many times to dissuade the couple, and I am glad she did not succeed! The contrast of the two families greatly enriched my life.

As part of his commitment to the 7th Regiment, Rene had National Guard duty in the summer. My mother recalled joining him on at least one of those occasions, chaperoned by her good friend, Marie, of course. I have a much beloved photo of her sitting on his lap kissing. This is the only such intimate moment I have of them, and it brings me joy. When the US entered the war, the Seventh Regiment was one of the first to be called up. My father joined the army Air Force and became a bombardier. Every time he came home on furlough my parents would plan to marry; every time my grandmother Anna would produce another reason to postpone. In letters, Rene began suggesting to Helen that she join him on base to marry him, away from family intrusion. Helen had to be convinced to take this step.

In the fall of 1943, my father was based in Santa Anna, CA. The letters and pictures he sent home referenced USO events with young starlets of the era. Helen began to get jealous, and my father's pleas towards marriage were getting more fervent. Finally, in November Helen's mother lit the



The happy days for Rene Petit and his wife Helen were all too brief. 1LT Petit was killed June 13, 1944.

fire. "You go Helen!" are the words she's quoted as saying. All that month and part of the next preparations were hurried. An expensive white suit was purchased, and trousseau gathered. Showers were given, and my mother quit her job. My grandfather called in favors with restaurant associates in California to arrange for a wedding party dinner at 'The Brown Derby' restaurant. A plane ticket was arranged. No one flew in those days, at least not ordinary girls from Union City, NJ. She was nervous, yet eager to join Rennie. Helen recalled that both she and her luggage had to meet a certain weight limit.

The wedding date was set; the flight took off in December, just before Christmas. The first leg of the flight stopped over in Kansas City, where the plane was commandeered for military use. Helen was then given a ticket to go the remainder of the trip by train, sleeping in an upper berth. I can only imagine all the various emotions they both must have felt, scrambling to rearrange everything, making new plans, and all without the benefit of modern communication we have today. To top it all off, my father would be on duty when she

Continued page 21...

Ronald John Paskey

November 21, 1942 -
February 25, 2022

Contributed by Kathy Paskey

John Paskey was born in Greensburg Hospital and lived in the tiny town of Jeannette, PA. Growing up he played in the piles of slag glass from the many glass factories in the area. He grew up under clouds of smoke which spewed from the steel mills in nearby Pittsburgh. When John was just two years old, his Dad enlisted in the Army. His Dad went off to war and was killed in action, months later, in the little town of Gerbecourt, France. He was always haunted by that loss. His Mother remarried and they moved to Monroeville, PA, away from his grandparents and his beloved aunts. 12 years later his brother was born but the age difference made a relationship difficult for many years. John was again struck with tragedy and his Mother died when he was only 18. John was in college at Waynesburg at the time. He was able to attend thanks to a scholarship from the Eagles Club in memory of his father's service.

John majored in history and minored in French which became a well worn joke when he would kid about the phrases, "mow-de-lawn" and "chevy-coupe" as being all the French he could speak. He graduated from Waynesburg University and received a phone call one day from a school superintendent in Vernon, New Jersey. John had never seen the ocean at that point and had no idea where Vernon was, but he needed to start his life, so he accepted the offer to teach 3rd grade and was guaranteed a job if he showed up! He started teaching at Walnut Ridge Primary School and made his mark on the students and teachers with his sense of humor and winning personality. John spent the next 33 years in the Vernon school district. He moved from his beginning third grade position to sixth grade, to vice principal and then as principal of Lounsberry Middle School.

In 1995 John retired and enjoyed a time that was rich

and full of fun and adventure. He and his wife Kathy spent their time attending auctions and estate sales collecting merchandise for Kathy's parents' antique store. John and Kathy moved to Salt Springs, Florida in 2000, where they enjoyed 14 years of lakefront living in the Ocala National Forest. In 2014 they moved to Springfield, Oregon to be closer to their daughter, son-in-law and grandson, who was now 4. John greatly enjoyed being part of his family's life here in Springfield until his death earlier this year.

We will all miss John. Later in life he became a Christian and his faith became a driving force in his everyday life. He became a Deacon in the First Baptist Church of Springfield. He volunteered his time as a transporter for River Bend Hospital for over 5 years. John loved to feed people and volunteered to deliver food boxes for Catholic Charities as well as delivering Meals on Wheels for over 5 years. As one friend said, John was the "real deal." He not only talked the talk, he walked the walk. It was the only way he knew to be.

A highlight of his retirement period was the discovery of his father's burial place and the story of his death. He made several trips to France, and with the help of many wonderful people, he found peace in honoring his Dad, and the 35th Division, 34th Infantry, with a plaque in Gerbecourt, where he fought and lost his life along with many others. He was a die-hard Steeler Fan.

John was a Father, brother, husband, friend, servant, leader, and teacher. He deeply touched the lives of everyone he met. He will be missed.

AWON Director Email Addresses

Bonnie Hellums	
bonniehellums@yahoo.com	
Bob Holliday	bholliday143@gmail.com
Judi Kramer	ladybug5@juno.com
Walt Linne	wlinne@iu.edu
Lorin McCleary	ldmccleary@gmail.com
Robert Meek	rhmeekjr@gmail.com
Ann Mix	annmix@gmail.com
Roberta Nolan	rdnolan@gmail.com
Rik Peirson	rik@dayone.com

A Letter Requesting Your Support

From the AWON Overseas Cemetery Flower Committee

Hello. My name is Rondy Elliott, and I'm one of your AWON sisters.

This letter concerns a matter of prime importance to all of us. I'm writing on behalf of a group within AWON which has been engaged in an effort to restore a program, administered by the ABMC, (American Battle Monuments Commission) a program which was eliminated in 2015, without a request for input from anyone who would be affected. We have been working on this for the past nine years by going politely through the proper channels, and requesting that they restart the program. It was a beloved service for those of us who used it, but, unfortunately, it was not advertised by the ABMC, so many war orphans and other Gold Star family members were unaware of its existence. The ABMC was steadfast in their desire to discontinue the Flower Program.

No doubt you are familiar with the ABMC—the group was formed to establish and maintain the American military cemeteries in other lands, where our fathers fought and died for our freedoms, and where many of our fathers are buried. Perhaps your dad is one of them. The cemeteries are indeed beautiful.

Let me backtrack and explain.

After World War I and especially World War II, there were too many dead for their bodies to be returned to the United States for burial, so cemeteries were created in the lands where these men and women died. Shortly after WWII, knowing that next of kin could not easily visit their soldiers' graves, in 1950 the ABMC, itself, established what we have come to call "The Flower Program." Hereby, a Gold Star family member could contact the ABMC, fill out a form, write a check to the agency for flowers, provide the grave location, and they took it from there. They contacted a local florist, placed the order, had the grave decoration delivered, took a (then Polaroid) picture of the flowers at the gravesite, and sent it back home to us so that we could see what it looked like, and have proof that it was delivered. The reasons why they dropped the program as we knew it, are all insubstantial.

It is taking the proverbial "Act of Congress" to re-establish this program. We AWONers who began this effort so many years ago have the unequivocal support of many service organizations and many prominent individuals. Some examples of service organizations are The Society of the Honor Guard of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Sons and Daughters in Touch (Vietnam War Orphans,) Veterans of Foreign Wars, The Military Order of the Purple Heart, etc.

Individuals include Retired Marine Four Star General John F. Kelly, (White House Chief of Staff from 2017-2019, Senior Military Assistant to the Secretary of Defense (2011-2012,) Retired Army Four Star General Tommy R. Franks, (former Commander of the U.S. Central Command in the Middle East, 2001-2003) and Retired US Air Force Four Star General Charles A. (Chuck) Horner. He was our air commander in the War on Terror.

During the current session of Congress, HB 7361, The "Flowers for Fallen Heroes Act of 2024" was introduced by Rep. Ryan Zinke (R, Montana) and passed the House. This requires the ABMC to restore the Flower Program. Senate Bill 4787 has now been introduced in the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, containing the same or similar language. An important aspect of this bill is that it is completely non-partisan.

Continued on the next page...

...A Letter Requesting Support, from page 18

If you are a constituent of one of the US Senators on the Veterans Affairs committee (see below), a letter of support from you, a Gold Star Son or Daughter, would be very influential. AWON is a “Network,” and this effort is a fine example of networking for our common good. It will mostly benefit those of us with fathers in foreign lands, but it will benefit all of us, by calling attention to our lost fathers, however and wherever they died. As we age, WWII seems far away for most people, and it’s up to us to see that the sacrifice of our fathers – and our sacrifice, having lived a lifetime without them—is not forgotten.

You may Google any of these facts cited to corroborate them. For background ~ you can see Jake Tapper's original interview of Rondy on CNN (his show is called "The Lead"), Tapper's followup coverage (including Bob Holliday and Marilyn Lieurance) and Bob's testimony in front of Congress:

<https://www.awon.org/references4>

On the following page, you will find an example of how you might word your letter to your senator. An email is suggested, because it is very much faster than an old-fashioned letter, which may sit in the mailing room in the Senate Office Building for many days!

We strongly encourage you to write. Thank you so much for considering this. If you have any questions about this, you may reach out to me by email at rondi160@gmail.com or by telephone at 919-641-0876.

Always In Their Memory,

Rondy Elliott, Daughter of Cpl Frank M. Elliott, KIA 6/6/44, Normandy American Cemetery

Marilynn Lieurance, Daughter of 1 Lt. Hanford Rustand, KIA 11/2/44, Luxembourg American Cemetery

Bob Holliday, Son of Cpt. Karl O. Holliday, KIA 4/13/45, Netherlands American Cemetery

Rik Peirson, Son of 1 Lt. John S. Sheffield, KIA 12/25/44, Henri-Chapelle American Cemetery

SENATORS ON THE SENATE VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Alaska	Dan Sullivan
Alabama	Tommy Tuberville
Arizona	Kyrsten Sinema
Arkansas	John Boozman
Connecticut	Richard Blumenthal
Hawaii	Mazie Hirono
Kansas	Jerry Moran
Louisiana	Bill Cassidy
Maine	Angus King, Jr.
Montana	Jon Tester (Chair)
NC	Thom Tillis
ND	Kevin Kramer
NH	Maggie Hassan
Ohio	Sherrod Brown
SD	Mike Rounds
TN	Marsha Blackburn (introduced bill in Senate)
Vermont	Bernie Sanders
Washington	Patty Murray
WV	Joe Manchin



Continued on next page...

Below you will find a sample letter (e-mail is best) that you might wish to send to your senator in support of the reinstatement of the ABMC flower program, as outlined on pages 18-19. You only need to send a letter if your state's senator serves on the Senate Veterans Affairs committee - Alaska, Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Connecticut, Hawaii, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Montana, North Carolina, North Dakota, New Hampshire, Ohio, South Dakota, Tennessee, Vermont, Washington State, and West Virginia. If you live in one of these states, and haven't already contacted your senator in support of the ABMC Flower Program, please do so. It's not too late to help support this wonderful program. Thank you for your consideration and time.

SAMPLE LETTER TO U.S. SENATOR

Date

The Honorable (name of your senator)

US Senate

Address (found on your senator's website)

Dear Senator _____,

I am writing to you because you are a member of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, and I am one of your constituents.

New legislation, SB 4787, has just been introduced in this committee. It has to do with the laying of flowers on American military graves in foreign lands, and has been titled "The Flowers for Fallen Heroes Act of 2024."

I am a Gold Star (Son) (Daughter.) My father was killed in WWII (in what country, battle, date, etc) and rests in (name of cemetery if he is buried overseas) He died that we all might enjoy the freedoms we have today. I lived my entire life not knowing him.

I strongly urge you to co-sponsor this legislation, or at least, support it. It is non-partisan at a time when we all need something on which we can agree, no matter what our political party.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Respectfully,

(your name) Member of the American WWII Orphans Network

(your email)

(your street address)

(your phone number)

arrived on December 31. In keeping with their fairy tale romance, my dad made arrangements for June Havoc, a well known starlet of the time, to meet Helen at the train. My mother said that June showed up in a jeep with a bunch of dogs. The next day June took my mother to the Rose Bowl Parade. I still wonder how Mother spent the next few days waiting for my dad to be off duty so they could have their wedding. Her wedding picture was always a part of our living room furnishings; it showed a beaming bride and groom, and a wedding party consisting of my father's friends and a young women my mother had only just met. They did indeed have their wedding celebration at 'The Brown Derby' restaurant as my grandfather had planned. And they were able to have a short honeymoon on Huntington Beach. My mother felt fortunate to get a job at the PX so she could see my father when he was restricted to base.

Their life together as man and wife lasted less than a year; it was really a yearlong honeymoon. My mother described other bases in the west. She has pictures of a day they were invited to tour a silver mine in Arizona. The two of them in a basket, being lowered into a silver mine in Arizona. My father worked for a mineral company in NYC (perhaps a Luxembourg connection), and was studying geology nights at Columbia University, hence the interest in mining. My mother also recalled trips to Mexico border towns, and she would tell me of all the unfamiliar names of the foods they ate. One of her favorite stories was walking down the main street in a small town and seeing a pair of expensive name brand high heels that she thought were beautiful, and being surprised to see them there in Mexico. She thought them too expensive

for their pocketbook, but my father insisted and bought them for her.

Their last posting was in Greenville, South Carolina. This is where my mother truly got to be the traditional wife she wanted to be. My father's letters back home glory in her domestic abilities. These were the only few months that my mother lived the life she had dreamed she would live. This is where they produced their love child--me. My mother was 3 months pregnant when she returned to New Jersey to her parents' home, and my father was deployed to war duty.

I often think that on the day my father sacrificed his life, my mother did too. She never got the life she envisioned. Initially she relied on her parents for support - emotional, financial, and child care - when she returned to work. When I was four years old, her father died. Her support system was shaken, the totality of her loss was too great and she had a complete nervous breakdown, for which she was hospitalized.

She eventually went on to have a successful career, working in a posh office in New York City. As an accountant, she earned a good salary. In 1965, she ran for the State Legislature in New Jersey. She supported her mother and me all her life and never took a vacation without including us both. She never remarried. I think my father was a tough act to follow.

All the stories my mother told me added up to the "glorious spirit" of the father I never met. My mother and my family made my father a living spirit for me. I was never a fatherless child. I was very fortunate, and thankful to them all.



**National Wreaths Across America Day
is coming December 14, 2024!
Please see pages 4-5 for more info
about how you can get involved
to Remember, Honor, and Teach.**

WAR COMES TO READING, PA - 2024

by Stewart "Rusty" Lerch



AWON Great Grandkids Tate, Marshall, and Suzy Holmes show off their treasured copy of the 2024 Reading, PA WWII Weekend poster and event booklet.

A Gathering of Warbirds took place in Reading, PA on June 7th, 8th, and 9th, 2024.

Along with the Warbirds came the sights and sounds that our fathers and their families experienced during WW II. Walking down Main Street was like walking down Main Street in any town or city in America. You could see a gas station, 1940's cars parked along the street, take in a movie, listen to a radio station, watch kids at play, or visit your grandmother's house.

If you got bored in town, you could visit the over 1500 military re-enactors who would be glad to share their knowledge of their equipment and the war years with you. For a full on enactment experience, you can watch a skirmish between the French Resistance, Allied, and German troops in a ruined French Village, witness Marines in combat with Imperial Japanese defenders and watch a recreation of the iconic flag raising on Mt. Suribachi.

Hey - Where's the AWON Bookstore?

Due to diminished bookstore sales the AWON Bookstore order form has been removed from the STAR newsletter. However, you can always find the Bookstore via AWON's Website or use this direct link below if you are an eStar reader:

<https://www.awon2.org/resources/bookstore.html>

After all this excitement you could visit the military flea market with over 120 vendors to pick up your WWII gear for next year's show. There was entertainment every day of the show in the Officers Club, Main Stage, or Speaker's Tent. On Friday and Saturday nights, you could listen to the Big Band sounds and cut a rug or two. After that, you might want to take a rest and grab a bite. There were so many food vendors to choose from, to quench your thirst and hunger before watching the greatest air show of WW II planes. If you're up for it, you can even take a ride in some of the planes - at your own expense.

Of course, the real stars of the show are the WW II veterans. To hear them tell their stories, to shake their hands, just to see them smile, is a once in a lifetime experience that you never will forget. Hope to see you at next year's show!

Stewart "Rusty" Lerch

AWON 2024 EOM Account Totals					
Treasurer Report as of 9/30/2024					
	General (Wreath)	Conference	Book Source	Money Market	CD
JANUARY	\$20,306.43 (\$10,095.59)	\$1,553.53	\$1,424.89	\$49,070.12	
FEBRUARY	\$20,217.00 (\$10,297.59)	\$1,553.53	\$1,424.89	\$49,099.37	
MARCH	\$24,910.61 (\$10,382.59)	\$1,553.53	\$1,424.89	\$49,120.56*	\$45,000.00
APRIL	\$26,303.66 (\$10,612.59)	\$1,553.53	\$1,424.89	Closed Out	\$45,186.84
MAY	\$23,545.81 (\$9,346.15)	\$1,553.53	\$1,467.54		\$45,368.40
JUNE	\$25,864.26 (\$11,715.40)	\$1,553.53	\$1,455.09		\$45,556.77
JULY	\$24,772.51 (\$11,740.40)	\$1,553.53	\$1,455.09		\$45,739.82
AUGUST	\$24,136.78 (\$11,835.40)	\$1,553.53	\$1,465.42		\$45,929.73
SEPTEMBER	\$23,771.83 (\$11,945.40)	\$1,553.53	\$1,465.42		\$46,120.44
OCTOBER					
NOVEMBER					
DECEMBER					

Comment: * 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.

A Heartfelt Note from Nick and Darlene Mott

AWON President Walt Linne received this lovely note, and the wonderful photos attached, from Nick and Darlene Mott.

Nick and I are blessed to be able to volunteer at the [Miami Valley Veterans Museum](#) in Troy, Ohio, 12 hours a week. We meet lots of veterans and listen to their experiences. We see them sharing with each other and healing together.

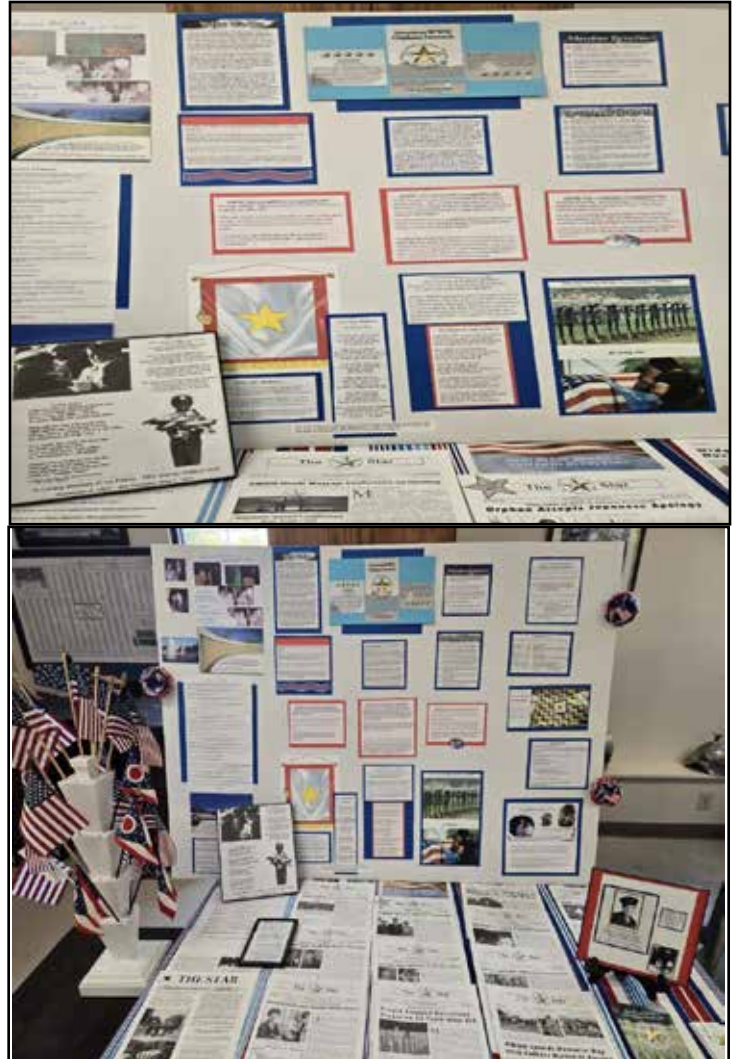
Sometimes we get to share history with the classes of local school children. Many times, they bring handmade notes signed with their names, like Sofia, Kaylee and David, to us. We have many of them posted in the Museum. Note - we also have an AWON display in the lobby. (See photos at right for the AWON display.)

Our Fathers sacrificed for these very children! We are the land of the free because of the brave. All gave some, some gave all!

It is an honor to follow Annie's dream = creating AWON family! Each of our lives has changed, by the chance to share with one another, learn about our Fathers; and heal together with those who understand how all our lives have been affected. Thank you, Annie!

We speak our Father's Names! Because of sacrifices without our Fathers, we have become a bonded family named AWON! Thank you to all who have worked to keep AWON strong over the years...and continue to guide us into the future.

In honor and memory of our beloved Fathers, Nick and Darlene Mott.



Above: AWON's display in the Miami Valley Veterans Museum, Troy, Ohio. Be sure to visit if you are in the area!

Note: Nick, son of Garner William Mott, KIA Okinawa, Japan, 5/7/1945, and his wife Darlene (Stand Up) have been active members of AWON for years and continue to educate the public about the sacrifice of our Fathers and AWON. Nick and Darlene encourage each of us to volunteer in our local veteran's organization. Thank you, Nick, and Darlene, so very much!

Contributed by Walt Linne, AWON President.

Membership



This is a

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

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

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

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.

Roberta (Robbie) J. Poplett Thomas

January 15, 1943- April 1, 2024

Contributed by the Thomas Family

Roberta Thomas was born in Peoria, IL. Her father, Technical Sergeant Gerald H. Poplett, was killed when his B-17 was shot down over Chateaudun, France, March 28, 1944. He had flown in the first US mission to bomb Berlin, and three subsequent ones.

Robbie passed away unexpectedly in Lakewood, CO, on April 1, 2024. She was a longtime member of AWON. Robbie and her husband Jim attended the AWON conferences in Seattle in 1995 and the dedication of the WWII Memorial in 2004. She was an invited guest of the people of Chateaudun in 2015 to help dedicate a plaque with the names of her father and the other airmen killed that day in 1944. She paid



an emotional visit to the exact spot where her father died. She is survived by her husband and children, Kent and Michelle Liberator, five grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. She was a very loved and loving person, and a beloved friend. She will be greatly missed by all who knew her and loved her.

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's 15th National Conference

"Remember The Alamo!"

**AWON's 15th
National Conference
"Remember The Alamo"
will be held May 14th thru May
17th, 2025, at the Hotel Contessa
in San Antonio, Texas.**

**This may be the last national
conference that AWON has -
we hope to see you there!**



Conference chairpersons
Barbara Kelly and Walt
Linne have reserved forty
rooms at the Hotel Contessa
on the Riverwalk in San
Antonio, Texas.

Room rates will be \$179 plus
tax and fees.

The conference reservation
fee will be \$250 which
will include a welcoming
reception and dinner.



AWON's 2025 National Conference – "Remember the Alamo" - May 14-17, 2025

Return registration and fee by April 1, 2025
Registration includes Welcoming Reception and Dinner

Member Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Is this your 1st AWON Conference? Y N Do you want your name in the conference roster? Y N

Do you have any special needs?: _____

Registration Fee for AWON Members and Guests: \$250.00 x number of attendees _____

Registration Fee for New Members and Renewals (includes AWON Membership Dues):
\$275.00 x number of attendees \$ _____

Total Registration Fees enclosed: \$ _____

Name Tag information (please print clearly – and include State of Residence

Your name: (include maiden name) _____ State _____

Guests Names: _____ State _____

Serviceman's Name (First, Middle, Last): _____

Rank: _____ Service Branch: _____

Circle One: KIA MIA Died while on Duty

Date of Death: _____ Country: _____

Mail Registration Form with check or money order payable to AWON to:

AWON 2025 National Conference
5745 Lee Road
Indianapolis, IN
46216

Editor, The Star
JH Geiger Operations Center
5745 Lee Road
Indianapolis, IN 46216

Non-Profit
U.S. Postage PAID
Indianapolis, IN
Permit No. 9589

Address Service Requested

Is it time
for you to
renew? 🖐️

The Star

"Breaking Down the Wall of Silence"

AWON Headquarters
5745 Lee Road
Indianapolis, IN 46216
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

Address Corrections

Lorin McCleary ldmccleary@gmail.com

Archives

OPEN POSITION

Bookstore

Walt Linne bookstore@awon.org

Database Coordinator

Lorin McCleary ldmccleary@gmail.com

Dues

Robert Meek rhmeekjr@gmail.com

Facebook

Barry Barr-Finch barrfinch1@gmail.com

First Inquiry Coordinators

Lorin McCleary AWON@awon.org

Janice Ott Buterbaugh Janicebuterbaugh@gmail.com

Friends of the National WWII Memorial Liason

Rondy Elliott

MeWe

Lorin McCleary ldmccleary@gmail.com

Membership

Open Position

Memorial Day White House Event

Marilynn Lieurance mlrustysgirl@yahoo.com

Memorial Day Wreath & Banner

Jeanne Rhinehart hart1003@comcast.net

Rik Peirson rik@dayone.com

Regional Gatherings Project

Barry Barr-Finch barrfinch1@gmail.com

The STAR

Kristin Holmes atomicssagebrush@gmail.com

Washington, D.C. Liason

Gloria Layne glayne731@gmail.com

Website

Rik Peirson rik@dayone.com