

Directions to the Club Meeting Location

Where: South St. Paul Municipal Airport, a.k.a. Fleming Field, located on the southern extremity of South St. Paul, south of 1-494, west of Concord Street and East of Highway 52.

If coming from the western Twin Cities going east on 494:

- Exit at the 7th and 5th Avenue exit (Exit No.65)
- Turn right (South) on 7th Ave and go approximately .6 miles to a 4-way Stop sign. This is South Street W. To your left there will be a McDonald's; to your right front there will be a Walgreen's.
- Turn left (East) at the 4-way Stop onto
- South Street W and go approximately .6 miles. Along the way you will encounter three more Stop signs—the third Stop sign (Henry Avenue) will be a "T" intersection. At the "T" intersection on your left will be homes and on your right softball fields.
- Turn right (south) onto Henry Ave. and go approximately .2

- miles toward the Fleming Field airport terminal building.

If coming from east Twin Cities on westbound 494:

- Exit at the 7th and 5th Avenue exit (Exit No.65)
- Turn left (South) on 7th Ave and go approximately .6 miles to a 4-way Stop sign. This is South Street W. To your left front there will be a small strip mall; to your right there will be an Amoco station.
- Turn left (East) at the 4-way Stop onto
- South Street W and go approximately .4 miles. Along the way you will encounter two more Stop signs—the third Stop sign (Henry Avenue) will be a "T" intersection. At the "T" intersection on your left will be homes and on your right softball fields.
- Turn right (south) onto Henry Ave. and go approximately .2 miles toward the Fleming Field airport terminal building

The terminal is on the right with parking available.



The Aero Historian is published monthly by the Twin City Aero Historians, Inc., a joint chapter of the American Aviation Historical Society and International Plastic Modelers Society/USA, for members and readers as part of their annual dues or fees.

The group is open to aviation enthusiasts from teenagers on up who are interested in aviation modeling, photography, collecting, art and writing.

The Twin Cities Aero Historians (TCAH) meet the second Saturday of every month at 1:00pm.

See above for the new meeting locations and directions.

Mail Newsletter material to the editor and address changes to the treasurer.

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Sgt. Spragg (Ball Turret Gunner) were captured and spent the rest of the war as prisoners of war. Lt. Robert Dykeman (Co-Pilot) and Sgt. Ira Arnold (Top Turret/Flight Engineer) were captured by German civilians and promptly hanged by the angry mob. Twenty year old Radio Operator/Gunner, Sgt. Edward Walker, who perished on the March 19th mission, never met his daughter, Sherrill Jean, who was born a few months later. His body was never found.

For pilot John Gibbons, March 19, 1944 was just his sixth mission. Gibbons returned to England after he completed his first tour and signed up for a second tour of duty. He wanted to see the end of the war and the defeat of Nazi Germany. By the conclusion of the hostilities, he

was credited for completing a total of an incredible and unbelievable, 49 missions.

This article is dedicated to the crew of "Miss Irish," in particular to members, 2nd Lt. Robert Dykeman, Sgt. Ira Arnold and Sgt. Edward Walker Jr., who never made it home.



The Aero Historian



Volume 56 Number 6-7

Website: <http://www.aerohistorians.org>

June-July 2023



Ground crewman standing in front of the nose art of "Miss Irish" at her hardstand at Thorpe Abbots

The Luck of "Miss Irish"

The Miraculous Story of the John P. Gibbons Crew
100th Bomb Group –
13th Combat Bomb Wing –
Eighth Air Force
March 19, 1944

by Mark S. Copeland

The Second Lt. John P. Gibbons Crew reported for duty at Thorpe Abbots, England, the

home base of the 100th Bomb Group, in February 1944. Joining the 350th Bomb Squadron, the Gibbons Crew were new replacements for the 100th Bomb Group airmen that had been lost in the costly raids in late 1943.

Having never been in combat, 1st Pilot Gibbons received his indoctrination flight on February 25, 1944 when he

flew his first mission as Co-Pilot with an experienced 100th Bomb Group crew. Target: Regensburg, Germany. It was Gibbons' "baptism of fire" and his first introduction to the savage air war that was being waged over Fortress Europe.

In the following days, the Gibbons Crew would suddenly plunge into the fray of the

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TCAH Officers

President, Mark Copeland
Vice-President, Steve Hustad
Secretary, Bob Maderich
Treasurer, Dennis Strand
Historian, Merrill Anderson

Newsletter Info

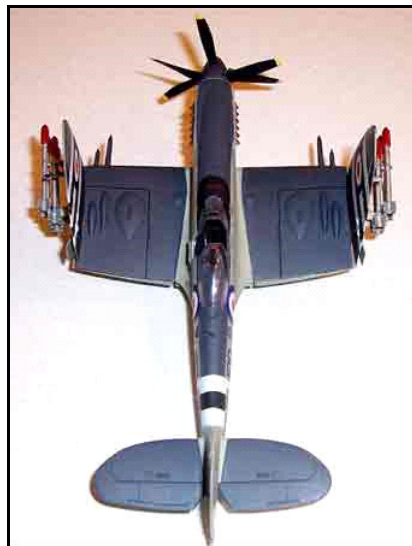
Article Submission Deadline: 22nd of each month

Editor
Bob Arko
 6417 Rice Court
 Lino Lakes, MN 55014
 651-481-8887
 boba@arkokraft.com

Send Change of Address Notice to:
 Dennis Strand

TCAH This Month

The monthly meeting will be held Saturday July 8, at Fleming Field, South St. Paul, beginning at 1:00 pm. Come early.



President's Address—June
 by Mark Copeland

I hope you are all enjoying the warmer weather and are enjoying the pleasure of a Minnesota summer!!

One of the summer highpoints of living here in Minnesota is the annual Wings of the North Air Expo 2023. It's not quite Oshkosh, but for a small airshow, it is fantastic!! This year promises to be no less!! The event will include over 30 flyable WWII/Vintage aircraft to include everything from a Supermarine Spitfire Mk. IX to a newly



restored Republic P-47D Thunderbolt!!

Tickets can be purchased online to save an extra \$5.00 per head (\$25.00). It is well worth it and you can get right up next to the aircraft!!

Check the website at: www.wotn.org

August 2nd to the 5th will see the **2023 IPMS USA Nationals**

in San Marcos, Texas. This event is the largest scale modeling event in North America, if not one of the best shows in the world!! This epic event will likely have well over 2000+ models, 300+ vendor tables and a full immersion into "modeling heaven" for four days.

The contest and the model quality is insane, the vendor rooms are deadly and will surely send you to the poorhouse, but the real meaningful part of the weekend is the socializing with fellow modelers. That is what it's all about. It is a long way from Minnesota, but it will be well worth it, if you can fit it into your schedule.

More information can be found at their detailed website at www.nats2023.com.

Our June theme is Carrier Aircraft / Aircraft Carriers.

Looking forward to a great summer and seeing everyone at the June meeting on the 10th!!

Treasurer's Report—June
 by Dennis Strand

There has been no recent financial transactions, so the club coffers remain at a healthy \$5366.36. Hope to see everyone at the June meeting. The theme is aircraft carriers and carrier aircraft. I am working on a World War II Fleet Air Arm biplane to bring to the meeting. Can you guess what it is?

On The Table—June 2023

Modeler	Kit	Manufacturer	Scale
Don Stauffer	Saratoga Carrier	Trumpeter	1:700
	Grumann F3-F	Accurate Miniatures	1/48
	FB2-C	Accurate Miniatures	1/48
Bernie Kugel	Hawker Hurricane	Revell	1/32
	BF-109F	21st Century Toys	1/32
Josh Barney	Fokker Triplane	Revell	1/28
	Frank Japanese fighter	Tamiya	1/48
	The Monitor and Merrimac	Atlantis	?
	Honda Fire Blade	Tamiya	1/12
Piercy Jones	Robots x 2	Bandai	
	F-4E Phantom	Revell	
Tom Crayne	P-47D	Trumpeter	1/32
Leonard Prakasam	Sea Harrier	Italeri	1/72
	Hawker Sea Hawk	Hobby Boss	1/72
Jay Budge	F-4J	Monogram	1/48
John Dunphy	Merkava tank	Takom	1/35
	Mitsubishi Zero	Tamiya	1/48
Steve Jantscher	F-35 (two)	Tamiya	1/48
	M1 Abrams	?	1/72
	Leopard II	Vespid	1/72
Dave Perzel	A-6E	Revell	1/48
Dave Johnson	Zero/T6	Hawk	1/72
	SOC Seagull	Hasegawa	1/72
Dennis Strand	Fairey Albacore	Special Hobby	1/48
Navin Bala	F-4 RN (Phantom)	Airfix	
	Supermarine Scimitar	Dynavector vac-form	
	Banshee	Hawk	
Erik Zabel	SBD-3 Dauntless	Accurate Miniatures	1/48
	TBM-3 Avenger	Hobby Boss	1/48
Bob Maderich	1986 Indy car	AMT	1/25
	TBM Avenger	Accurate Miniatures	1/48
	Skoda "Turtle"	Hobby Boss	1/35
Ed Vigilante	USS Kitty Hawk	Academy	1/800
Noel Allard	T4M Torpedo bomber	Scratchbuilt	1/72
	Zundapp Cycle	Lion Roar	1/35

On The Table—May 2023

Modeler	Kit	Manufacturer	Scale
Steve Erickson	PT-109	Revell	1/72
	Marder II	Tamiya	1/35
	Spitfire MK.1	Airfix	1/48
	Vampire MK V	Trumpeter	1/48
	Pershing	Tamiya	1/35
	Comet tank	Tamiya	1/35
Ken Sallman	Roland D.VIb	Wingnuts	1/32
	M4A2 Sherman	Tasca and others	1/35
Franklin Haws	Model T ambulance	ICM	1/35
Keith Brusten	Sazabi Gundam	Bandai	1/100
Steve Shaffer	B-Wing	3-D Printed	1/32
	Marauder Havoc	AMT	1/144
John Bernier	Spitfire MK 1	Kotare (new kit)	1/32
Steve Hustad	Heinkel HE 115b	Matchbox (old, old kit)	1/72
Bernard Kugel	FW-190D	Revell	1/32
	P-26 nightfighter	Hasegawa	1/32
	KI-27	Special Hobby	1/32
	Fokker F-1	Roden	1/32
	SE-5a	Wingnuts	1/32
Josh Barney	Volvo F1b diesel	Pocher	1/8
	Cyclone 9	Atlantis	1/41
Tom Crayne	Macchi 202	21st Century Toys	1/32
Bob Ferreira	FW-190A-5	Eduard	1/72
	FW-190A-3	Tamiya	1/72
	FW-190-D9	Tamiya	1/72
Don Stauffer	G3-M	?	1/72
Dave Perzel	FW-190A-8/R8	Tamiya	1/48
Noel Allard	Stearman PT-17	Revell	1/72
	Bavarian Farmhouse	Faller	1/87
Dennis Strand	Ta-152H-1	DML	1/48
Bob Maderich	Zero	Tamiya	1/72
	PZL-P-7a	Arma	1/72
	Ford GT-40	IMC	1/25
	Panzer IV	Border Models	1/35
	Zundapp Cycle	Lion Roar	1/35

And Noel Allard and Bob Maderich displayed 7 Indy 500 winners dating from 1911 to 1972 all in 1/43 scale.

President's Address—July by Mark Copeland

Hello All!!!!

To begin this month's address I want to thank Bob Maderich for taking the lead and for filling in for me at the June meeting. I was heeding my doctor's orders to keep off my foot as much as possible to allow it to properly heal.

In late March, I took a dive on an ice patch while taking out the garbage and broke several bones in my left foot. Like an idiot, I didn't have it looked at professionally at the time and proceeded to blow it off as a "pulled muscle or ligament." I did the stupid "guy thing" and went on a regiment of eating Advil like they were Skittles and to just get on with life, "*suck it up, buttercup.*"

I then led a tour to England for three and half weeks from Easter Sunday till the latter part of April on a pair of crutches and large bag of ibuprofen. I didn't have it thoroughly looked at until after my return and found out that we have 27 bones in our foot.....and, I broke almost half of them, one way or another!! Reconstructive surgery was the next thing and I now have a nice selection of titanium screws, pins, plates and rods throughout me foot. I told my girlfriend, Signe that when I croak and you have my body cremated, make sure you get the titanium out of the deal, cause it goes for about \$40.00 an ounce!! So, I guess I'm worth something!!

We had an email communication issue last month and failed to update the website with the June newsletter. Our apologies for the mistake, but sometimes these things happen.

We have corrected the error and have got things back on the rails.

Thanks to our Editor, Bob Arko and Webmaster, Sean Brzozowski for their coordinated effort on behalf of the club for organizing the newsletter and getting us back on track.

Our July theme will be "Science Fiction / Space" subjects. So bring your Star Trek to Star Wars and everything in between. Should be fun!!

July 22-23, 2023 is the **Wings of the North Airshow** at Flying Cloud Airport in Eden Prairie. This year's line-up of aircraft will include everything from a B-17G Flying Fortress, a Douglas A-1 Skyraider, Grumman Avenger, Douglas Dauntless and a F4U Corsair. In amongst all the flyable aircraft, there will be a group of VIPs that will be accessible for you to meet. See the list on page 4.

There will be at least two WWII Eighth Air Force veterans, several Vietnam veterans, right up to the current day. It always is a pleasure to meet these amazing people and be surrounded by vintage aircraft!! Tickets can be purchased and more information can be found at their website, www.wotn.org. It's a local great event that celebrates the aviation community and our wonderful veterans.

Of course, the big modeling event of the year, the IPMS USA Nationals will be held in San Marcos, Texas – August 2-5, 2023. Hundreds of models, deadly vendor rooms and dozens of the best builders in the world will converge for this annual event. I know it's far away, but it's well worth the effort.

Stay cool everyone and enjoy the summer while we it's here!!! See you at the July meeting everyone!!!



Treasurer's Report—July by Dennis Strand

Last month we had a new member join TCAH. His name is Navin Bala from Bloomington, MN. He brought several outstanding models to display at the monthly "Show and Tell" portion of our June Meeting. Welcome aboard, Navin!

This brings our current tally to \$5381.36



CDR Richard Barr	Navy helicopter pilot-Seawolf Squadron 1242 combat missions, Purple Heart and DFC
Ralph Delperdang	RF-4C WSO (weapons systems officer)
Dan Farkas	Navy A-1 Skyraider pilot
Jim Floring	Forward Air Controller
Roger Georges	Navy helicopter door gunner-Seawolf Squadron
Roger Grotbo	C-1/C-130/C-118 pilot
Tom Harrison	F-16 pilot
Robert Holmstrom	B-24 tail gunner
Mike Huttner	C-130 pilot
Ronald Kelly	F-86 pilot
Joe Latham	F-4 Phantom pilot, 1 MiG kill
T.J. Mannion	Navy AD Skyraider pilot
Ron Olberg	B-52/AC-130 EWO
LCDR Mike Petersen	Navy helicopter pilot-Seawolf Squadron
Joe Repya	Helicopter pilot
Jim Rasmussen	B-17 navigator
Paul Sailer	Helicopter pilot
Glenn Sell	B-52 EWO
Barry Waluda	Navy helicopter door gunner, Silver Star recipient-Seawolf Squadron
Tom White	Helicopter pilot
John Zimitsch	B-52 Navigator



The aft bulkhead can be seen in the rear portion of the Radio Operator's compartment. The bulkhead was the only thing that held the stricken bomber from breaking in half.



The gaping 7' x 12' hole in the side of the fuselage of "Miss Irish."

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The crew received a new airplane and continued to fly missions. John Gibbons completed his tour and returned

to the United States. Most of the remaining members of the Gibbons crew were assigned as a "pick up" crew on July 29, 1944. On their 34th mission that day, they were shot down over

Merseburg, Germany.

After bailing out of their stricken bomber, Sgt. Buschmeier (Waist Gunner) and

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daylight European bombing campaign and participate in some of the most harrowing missions for the 100th Bomb Group and the Eighth Air Force. This is the story of the crew of "Miss Irish."

Staff Sergeant Chandler, the lead crew chief assigned to the Gibbons Crew, would have the honor of naming Boeing B-17G Flying Fortress; 42-31968, LN-D. Affectionately, he decided the ship's name would be in honor of his girlfriend back home, so he christened the olive drab Fortress, "Miss Irish." Thus the nose art was painted on the port side nose, along with a large green shamrock. Perhaps, a talisman that would bring good luck to the rookie Gibbons Crew.

In the early spring of 1944, the Eighth Air Force was now under the command of General James H. Doolittle. Having suffered appalling and crippling losses in the fall of 1943, tactics had to change or the Eighth Air Force and the daylight strategic bombing campaign would be doomed. The percentages were stacked against the "Mighty Eighth." If the heavy losses persisted, it simply couldn't survive.

General Doolittle knew it, and he decided to direct the Eighth Air Force towards a more aggressive offensive strategy. Eighth Air Force Bomber Command selected targets that would send the bomber formations farther into Germany. Ultimately, the target selection came to what the Allied High Command saw as the ultimate prize, the German capital of Berlin.

Eighth Air Force mission planners set the date for the first

American daylight raid to strike Berlin on March 3rd, 1944. Not only would this mission be a historic day for the Eighth Air Force, it would be the first mission for the Gibbons Crew.

The formation however ran into an uncontrollable obstacle on their way to hit the German capital. A large low pressure system had formed over the European continent that was simply impenetrable for the American bomber stream. There was no other choice, and a mission recall was issued.

The following day, March 4th, 1944, Berlin was once again selected as the primary target for the bombers of the Eighth Air Force. However, once again, the deteriorating weather over the Continent forced the mission to be recalled back to England. But the 95th Bomb Group, the 350th Bomb Squadron of the 100th Bomb Group and pathfinder aircraft pressed on towards the German capital. Having the challenge of bombing through a heavy cloud layer, the small formation of B-17s did successfully strike Berlin for the first time. For Lt. John Gibbons and the crew of "Miss Irish," they were credited for their first complete mission.

On March 6th, 1944, two days later, Berlin was once again selected as the target for the Eighth Air Force. With favorable weather conditions and an adequate striking force, the Eighth Air Force bombers would thrust forward to strike the capital of the Third Reich. But now, something would be quite different, the German air and ground defenses were waiting for the bomber streams and they were hungry for revenge.

By the end of the day, the

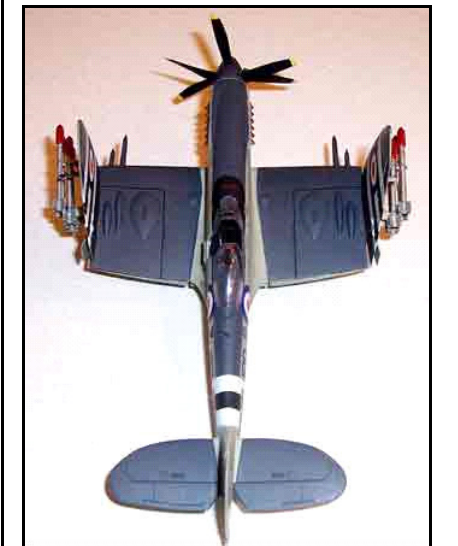
Eighth Air Force had lost 69 heavy bombers and 14 escort fighters, resulting in the worst one-day loss of the entire European air campaign. For the 100th Bomb Group, the March 6th raid on Berlin was horribly devastating, with the loss of 15 of their Flying Fortress and 150 of their airmen.

Mercifully, the 100th Bomb Group stood down because of

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Monthly Themes 2023

- July 2023 – Sci Fi
- Aug 2023 - 1/32 Scale
- September 2023 – Korea/
Viet Nam
- October – Ukrainian War
- November – Interwar Years
- December – White Elephant –
Christmas Event





Boeing B-17G Flying Fortress 42 – 31968 – LN-D “Miss Irish” after landing safely at Raydon Wood airfield. The aircraft would never fly again.

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 weather the following day, but once again they flew another mission to Berlin on March 8th. For the crew of “*Miss Irish*,” they had flown their third successive mission to Berlin, in less than a week. In a 2010 interview with 1st Pilot - Colonel John Gibbons (ret.) stated, “*No other crew received that kind of indoctrination.*”

The early daylight bombing raids on Berlin in March of 1944 proved costly to the Eighth Air Force. For the crew of “*Miss Irish*,” this was their introduction to the savagery of the air war against Nazi Germany. This was

never more apparent to the Gibbons crew than their next mission on March 19, 1944.

It would be a day that they would all never forget.

Eighth Air Force High Command assigned the Third Air Division, which included the 100th Bomb Group, a target along the French coastline. It was referred to as a “no ball” target which was meant to destroy the German V-weapons launching sites around the Marquis-Mimoyecques area. The 100th Bomb Group crews were briefed that there would be a heavy concentration of flak around the target area; however

they would only be over the enemy coast for 18 minutes. In the eyes of the airmen that flew that day, it was an easy mission, a “*milk run.*”

After briefing, the Gibbons Crew once again boarded “*Miss Irish*” and awaited the signal to start engines. As the flares shot from atop of the Thorpe Abbots control tower, the engines began to come to life on their Fortress. As the group took off from the east-west runway, they began to slowly form-up before heading eastward towards the English Channel.

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The shattered fuselage of “Miss Irish.”

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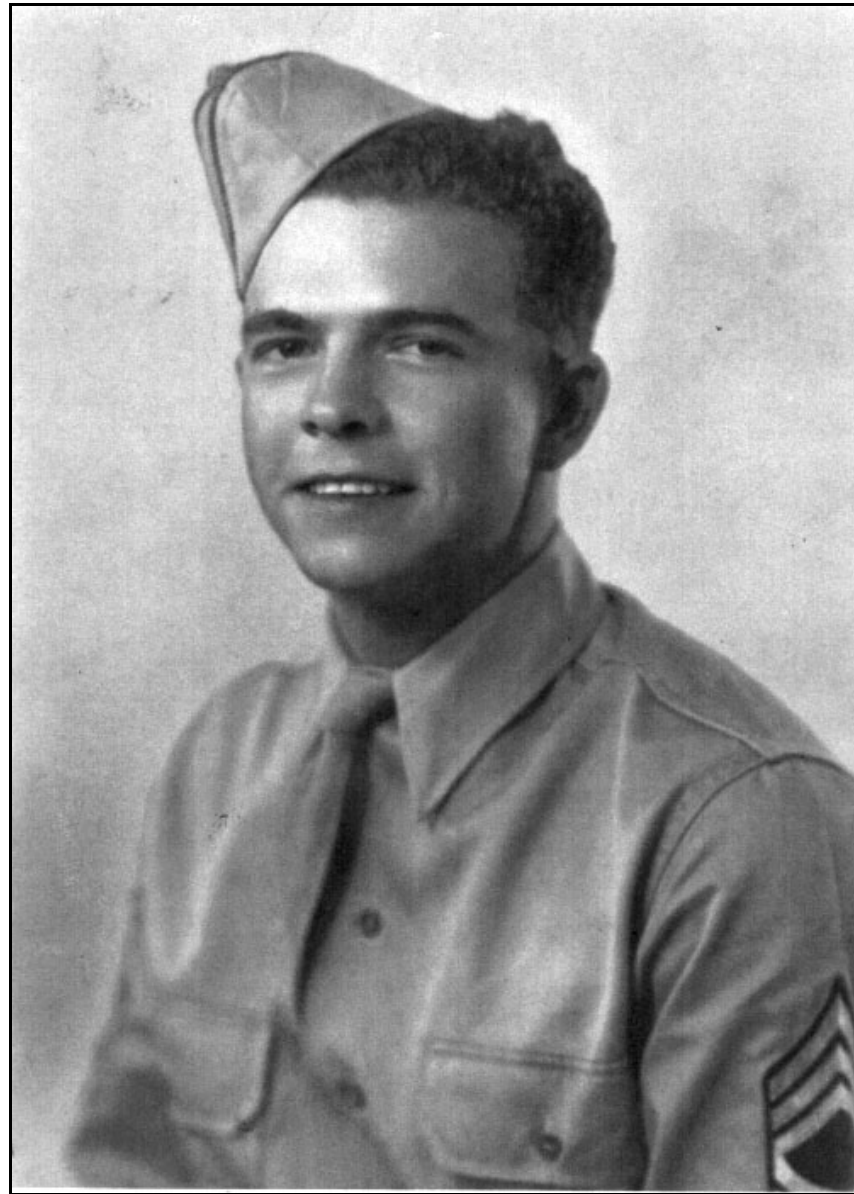
Gibbons carefully lined up **"Miss Irish"** on final approach and gently nursed the Fortress towards the runway. By working the throttles and the control yoke he steered ever so gently to make a smooth landing. As the airspeed bled off, Gibbons put the Flying Fortress into a soft flair. Frank Buschmeier joyfully recalls, *"It was a fantastic landing!! I didn't know we were even on the ground!! We floated onto the runway like we were on an oil bath."* Gibbons had made a perfect landing.

As **"Miss Irish"** rolled to a stop on the runway, the crew quickly jumped out of the ship, in case of fire. Once it was deemed safe to return, a large crowd gathered around the Fortress in utter amazement. Buschmeier remembers, *"No one could believe it. They couldn't understand how the airplane stayed in the air. If this is what 'milk runs' are like, I would rather go back to Berlin!!"*

"Miss Irish" never flew again.

The exhausted Gibbons crew was taken to a room where they spent the night together. John Gibbons recalls, *"The base Flight Surgeon came to our room with a couple bottles of booze. I didn't drink and I told him that I didn't need that. He answered, 'You will by the morning.' I was somewhat of a prohibitionist from Kansas; if it was whiskey, I wouldn't drink it, but I learned pretty rapidly."* By the morning, the two bottles had disappeared.

100th Bomb Group Commanding Officer, Lt. Colonel John M. Bennet, Jr. recognized the Gibbons Crew with a special commendation. It stated, "Probably few bomber pilots and



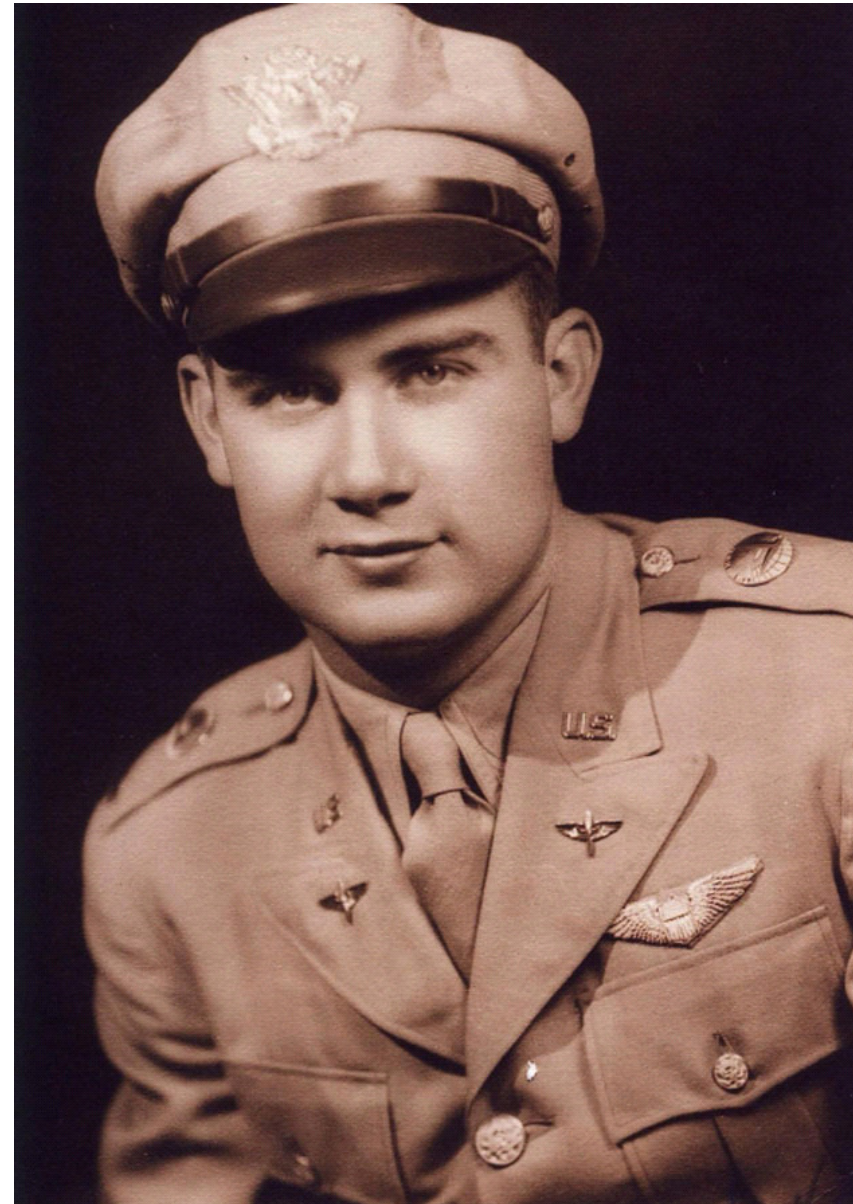
Sgt. Edward "Eddie" Walker, Jr. – Radio Operator on "Miss Irish." Walker was killed in action on March 19, 1944 when a German 88mm flak burst struck the bomber.

crews have had such an introduction into battle, and your courage, resolution and effectiveness in the circumstances certainly warrant the highest praise."

Was it pure luck that saved the crew of **"Miss Irish"** that day? Perhaps luck did have something to do with it. However, one variable was quite

certain. The crew of **"Miss Irish"** would not have survived if it wasn't for their faith in one another's abilities as a crew and the subsequent teamwork and resourcefulness they displayed that day. They also survived because of the skilled leadership, the undaunted courage and superb airmanship of their pilot, John P. Gibbons.

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John P. Gibbons. Shown here in his post-war Air Transport Command uniform, Gibbons became a legend of the "Bloody Hundredth," completing an astonishing 49 combat missions.

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As the 100th Bomb Group approached the French coastline they established their course towards the I.P. (Initial Point). Just then, the German 88mm flak gunners began to open up on the formation. John Gibbons remembers, *"We are at about 21,000 feet on the bomb run when they started shooting at us."* Sgt. Frank Buschmeier, the

left waist gunner on **"Miss Irish"** recalls, *"There was a burst of flak that exploded in front of us, then another one in back of us and I thought to myself, the next one is going to hit us dead center."* Unfortunately, Buschmeier was right.

Suddenly, a direct hit of German 88mm flak scored a direct hit to the radio room of

"Miss Irish." The deadly burst ripped the side of the Fortress open like it was made of thin aluminum foil. The blast severed the cables to the elevator and rudder taking away any vertical control for pilot, John Gibbons and his Co-Pilot, Second Lt. Robert Dykeman.

Waist Gunner Frank Buschmeier recalls, *"I was sitting on an ammo box, like I normally did, when all of a sudden there was a terrific blast. It blew the whole radio room apart! The plane lurched upward and the door of the radio room bulkhead blew off its hinges and landed between my legs!! The floor was gone; the whole right side of the fuselage was gone!! I thought we were done for and we were going down. I reached for my parachute and strapped on and prepared to bail out."* **"Miss Irish"** had taken a devastating hit that should have completely destroyed the airplane, but it kept on flying.

Buschmeier crawled towards the radio compartment of the stricken bomber to survey the damage. *"I saw Walker (Radio Operator) slumped over his desk. He looked like he had been hit by three or four shotgun blasts. I was sure he was dead. I turned around to secure my parachute harness and by the time I turned around, Walker had fallen out."*

The lifeless body of Sgt. Edward "Eddie" Walker had helplessly tumbled out of the gapping seven by twelve foot hole in the fuselage of **"Miss Irish."** He was gone.

On the flight deck, Gibbons called over the interphone for a damage assessment. Buschmeier answered back, *"the radio room is gone, sir."* Gibbons

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sent Top Turret / Flight Engineer, Sgt. Ira Arnold to go investigate.

Lt. Gibbons knew he couldn't stay or keep up with the formation. The Fortress was vibrating horribly and he had to immediately reduce airspeed or the aircraft would surely break in half. He pulled back the throttle and dropped out of formation and started to "mush" the airplane down to 10,000 feet to let the crew go off oxygen.

Down in the ball turret, the side windows were smashed and the front window was gone; but, miraculously, the crew got the frightened gunner, Sgt. Bernie Spragg out of the turret, visibly shaken, but alive. Despite the powerful wind flailing through the aft fuselage, knowing any moment the damaged aircraft could simply break in two; the four gunners knew that they had a critical task to complete. Instinctively and without provocation from the flight crew, Buschmeier, Spragg and Waist Gunner, "Ty" Ettus began to try and splice the severed control cables back together. They knew, in order to survive, they had to join the vital cables back together in order to give Gibbons a fighting chance to get the battered Fortress on the ground. Soon, Gibbons felt the controls start to respond, the efforts of the three gunners had just saved the ship.

But, there were more problems for the crew of "Miss Irish." 2nd Lt. "Red" Blakeman, the ship's bombardier, had already released the bomb load, but there were still two live bombs hung up in the bomb bay. Blakeman and Arnold were tasked with freeing the two 500 lb. bombs from the ship. It was far too dangerous to attempt to



The Gibbons Crew – Kneeling L-R – Sgt. Edward Walker, Jr. (ROG) KIA 3/19/1944, Sgt. Bernard "Bernie" L. Spragg (BTG), Sgt. Archie "Bugs" Bunting (TG), Sgt. Frank W. Buschmeier (LWG). Standing L-R – Sgt. Ira Arnold (TTG/FE), 2nd Lt. John P. Gibbons (P), 2nd Lt. Robert Dykeman (CP), 2nd Lt. Sterling Blackman (B), 2nd Lt. Everett Max Johnson (N), Sgt. Myron J. "Ty" Ettus (RWG).

ditch in the English Channel or land the airplane with bombs aboard. After several attempts, they finally got the bombs to release from the damaged shackles to fall into the sea.

Gibbons nursed the stricken bomber westward and ordered the crew to lighten up the aircraft by throwing everything they could from the crippled ship.

As the crew began to toss out their weapons and ammunition, Top Turret Gunner Sgt. Arnold accidentally caught his ripcord handle, which in turn deployed his parachute. The silk billowed out of the aircraft and hung itself on the jagged metal skin of the fuselage. Arnold miraculously released himself from his parachute harness which now blossomed from the

side of the ship. The chute was causing an unnecessary drag to the crippled bomber. For the rest of the journey, Spragg and Buschmeier took turns holding on to the flapping parachute against the side of the fuselage.

Sgt. Arnold was now in a sheer state of panic. He had lost his parachute and his chance to bail out. To calm the frightened airman, Gibbons reached down behind his seat and gave Arnold his own chute.

With only a bulkhead holding the airplane together, "Miss Irish," limped closer to the English coastline as Gibbons fought to steer the aircraft towards England. Besides the seven by twelve foot hole in the side of the fuselage, the aircraft

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Sgt. Frank Buschmeier – Left Waist Gunner on "Miss Irish"

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had sustained over 450 additional holes throughout the airframe.

Pilot John Gibbons recalls, "I guess we were half way across the Channel and I turned to my co-pilot, Bob Dykeman and told him to take over. I wanted to go back and look at the damage." Waist Gunner Frank Buschmeier

remembers, "He (Gibbons) came back on the catwalk through the bomb bay and his eyes got awfully big!!"

Gibbons couldn't believe what he was looking at. When seeing the damage for the first time, he recalled, "I looked out of that hole and then looked at the water below us. Being from St. Mary's, Kansas, I couldn't swim.

I could only dog-paddle and there was no reason that I was going to let the airplane go in the water, because I knew I couldn't paddle all the way to the white cliffs of Dover!!"

Gibbons returned to the flight deck and called "E-Max" (Edward Johnson) the Navigator to ask how far they were away from their home base, Thorpe Abbots. "About 15 minutes, sir." At that point, Gibbons made the decision to go to the first airfield he could find. He wasn't going to take any chances.

As soon as Gibbons reached the coastline, he ordered the entire crew to bail out, but the crew refused to jump.

Gibbons looked ahead and soon saw an airfield. It was Raydon Wood, the home of the 353rd Fighter Group. Gibbons reflected, "I didn't want to take the risk and decided to go for Raydon. I was confident it would stay in the air, the thing I wasn't sure of was would it hold together if I screwed up the landing." If he landed hard, in all likelihood, the rear portion of the aircraft would break away with four of his crewmembers inside. He knew he had to make a perfect landing. He continues, "A "power landing" was our only chance. I flew it about 20 kts. higher than normal landing speed and kept the tail high."

Waist Gunner Frank Buschmeier remembers, "we were all huddled together in the waist gun position. We had the utmost faith in him. I don't think there was anyone that could fly a B-17 better than John. Nothing rattled him."

The crippled bomber began to descend towards the airfield.

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