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News :: Remembering missing hero Steinfeld's final flight in '45; burial Tuesday in CR

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BY DEAN CLOSE · 3:15pm June 17th, 2011

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Staff Sgt. Marvin Steinfeld, Keystone

Staff Sgt. Marvin J. "Steiney" Steinfeld was 22 years old, married for a year and a half, with a baby daughter at home in Keystone. The end of World War II was less then seven weeks away.

Steiney, a member of the 2nd Bombing Group's 429th Squadron and veteran of eight missions (with targets in Germany, Italy, Hungary and Austria) in February and March of 1945, was on his first flight with a new B-17 crew, led by Lt. Richard Rapelyea. Their assignment: Leave their base in Italy and go

to Germany to blow up the Daimler-Benz tank plant in Berlin. One World War II web site called it the "2nd Bomb Group's longest mission."

The 15th Air Force, according to WWII airman Dave Carlock, sent 150 B-17 bombers that Saturday to attack the site in the suburbs of Berlin.

The predicted enemy defenses: 394 heavy flak guns in the target area; nests of anti-aircraft artillery along the way around well known past targets; 40 to 45 Me-262's and FW-190's to supplement the jets if the enemy chose. Another 250 Me-109's and FW-100's in the target area.

The ME-262 fighters were particularly ominous. The first jet-powered fighters to see action in World War II, the ME-262s were much faster and more heavily armed than any Allied fighter. Many airmen still believe that if the Germans had been able to put the ME-262s into service sooner, it would have significantly changed the outcome of the war in Europe.

The mission started well, said Carlock. The weather over the Alps was clear and continued that way to the target. The escort was visible in abundance.

But then the German defenses arrived.

"The mission's tranquil pattern was broken as serious flak started coming up," said Carlock. "Dogfights were in full force and the flak came mushrooming up. Eighteen airplanes were damaged; two were severe."

The mission was declared a success: The Daimler-Benz plant was left 70 -80% destroyed.

But the cost of that success was the loss of two B-17s, and the lives of a few U.S.airmen, including Staff. Sgt. Marvin Steinfeld.

"This was the 2nd Bombing Group's last loss of the war to enemy aircraft," declared Carlock.

WWII veteran Jack R. Myers, in his book "Shot at and Missed: Recollection of a World War II Bombardier," shares what he learned about Steinfeld's ill-fated flight:

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Letter to the Editor

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"Lt. Rapelyea headed east with their plane on fire, and they all bailed out. They were over the Russian Front at the time, and they reported that both the Germans and the Russians shot at them as they floated to the ground. Two men, Sgt. Marvin Steinfeld and Cpl. Melvin Rowe, were killed by this small arms fire. The rest of the crew were captured by the Germans and placed in POW camps.

What happened to Sgt. Steinfeld after he bailed out, and how his body ended up buried in a cemetery with Russian soldiers in the city of Zirc, Hungary -- more than 400 miles from Berlin -- remains a mystery.

Sgt. Steinfeld bailed out of that B-17 on March 24, 1945.

It would take the U.S. government one day less than 65 years to positively identify the remains of Sgt. Steinfeld. The Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office positively identified Steinfeld's remains on March 23, 2010. On that date, he was removed from their database of "missing" personnel.

The Second Bombardment Association

For Lew Waters of Springfield, Ohio, the stories about Sgt. Steinfeld are not just words in some book. As President of the Second Bombardment Association, he is part of an organization that documents the official military service of men like Steinfeld. The Association's web site lists every mission flown by every one of its members. From that source, anyone can look up Sgt. Steinfeld's name and learn the dates and targets of every mission he has flown.

The Second Bombardment Association helps the veterans of the unit keep in touch through reunions and newsletters. Waters plans to come to Iowa Tuesday for Sgt. Steinfeld's funeral.

Memorial Service Tuesday, June 21, in C.R.

A memorial service and burial for Sgt. Steinfeld will take place at 2 p.m. Tuesday, June 21, at the Christ Episcopal Church, 220 40th St NE, Cedar Rapids, 319-363-2029. Burial will be held immediately following the memorial at Cedar Memorial Cemetery with full military rights. The public is invited to attend. The Patriot Guard Riders of Iowa plan to participate with many motorcycles.

Click [HERE](#) to see Airman Carlock's full summary of the mission in which Sgt. Steinfeld gave his life. Click [HERE](#) to see the Second Bombardment web page.

National Guard News Release

The Iowa National Guard has helped coordinate the return of Sgt. Steinfeld to Iowa. Below is a news release from Guard Public Information Officer Col. Greg Hapgood about the process of returning Sgt. Steinfeld to Iowa:

Sixty-six years after leaving Amendola, Italy, with a B-17 "Flying Fortress" on a bombing mission bound for Berlin, Germany, Staff Sgt. Marvin J. "Steiney" Steinfeld is coming home to Iowa.

Steinfeld, a 22-year old toggelier (toggeliers were the the Army Air Force successors to bombardiers) from Keystone disappeared between Soviet and German lines in Hungary on March 24, 1945 after bailing out of a B-17 aircraft damaged by German anti-aircraft fire.

On Nov. 16, 2004, Hungarian authorities notified the United State Defense Attaché (USDAO) in Budapest, the potential remains of an American serviceman had been discovered in the city of Zirc, Hungary during the excavation of a WWII Soviet war memorial and grave site which was being relocated to the outskirts of town. During the excavation, workers unearthed a dissimilar wooden coffin among the Soviet-style coffins. Upon further examination, they discovered remains and a set of identification tags that bore Steinfeld's name.

Trilateral negotiations involving American, Hungarian, and Russian officials to recover Steinfeld's remains began in early 2005. Due to the sensitive nature of the commingling of remains from the Soviet war memorial in Hungary, repeated diplomatic negotiations were required to attain approval from Russian Federation leaders to allow the exhumation of Steinfeld's remains.

In February 2008, after failed negotiation attempts in 2005 and 2007, Lt. Gen. Jozef Hollo, Director General of the Hungarian Institute and Museum of History, was informed by the Interdepartmental Committee of the Missing and Deported POWs of the Russian Federation that approval had been given to exhume the grave site. On Sept. 9, 2008 representatives from the three nations signed a Coordination Memorandum for the exhumation of the site, thus beginning the coordination of the unearthing and identification of remains.

disappearance. Within several days, the Department of Defense's Joint POW/MIA Accounting

Command (JPAC) team transported eight bags of remains to the Museum of Natural Sciences in Zirc for examination. Over the course of several days, the JPAC team determined the bag marked with the word "cedulas" (Hungarian for "one with tags") contained the remains of Steinford, as well as one other Soviet soldier.

After segregating the remains, JPAC officials met with Russian and Hungarian authorities on Aug. 3, 2009, to present their final determination. Following unanimous agreement, the segregated remains were sent to Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii for final identification. Representatives from JPAC initially contacted the Steinford family in May 2005 and confirmed the positive identification of Steinford's remains in October 2010.

Marvin J. Steinford was born Aug. 29, 1922, the youngest son of Herman and Henrietta (Pohlman) Steinford. He grew up in Keystone, Iowa, and enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps (now known as the U.S. Air Force) on Oct. 31, 1942. In December 1944, he deployed overseas and was assigned to the 429th Bombardment Squadron, 2nd Bombardment Group, 15th U.S. Air Force.

Steinford married Rosella M. Behrends on Oct 21, 1943, and had one daughter. He is survived by his daughter, Carol Ann (Steinford) Sansenbach, four grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren and one step-great-grandchild, as well as several cousins.

Memorial and Graveside services

The family of Staff Sgt. Steinford asks that the dignity of Marvin's memorial and graveside services be respected. Memorial services will be held at 2 p.m., Tuesday, June 21, at Christ Episcopal Church, 220 40th St. NE, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, followed by interment and graveside services at Cedar Memorial Cemetery, 4200 1st Ave. NE, Cedar Rapids.

After first running the story, a member of the family contacted us with more family photos, so we've added them on! Thanks so much Jeff!

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