

County Veteran Service Officer

Special Report

December 31, 2013 – January 2, 2014

Monday, December 30, 2013, it was a busy day in the office, phone call after phone call and one "walk-in" after another. "Walk-ins" being veterans that need assistance but do not have an appointment. In addition, Judge Lee had notified the various departments that the voice mail system was down and it could be next week before the controlling computer problem is resolved. I had no idea that this day would be one of the most memorable of my tour of duty as CVSO.

One of the early calls I received Monday morning was from a lady asking if I could help her find some information about her deceased first husband. Following a brief discussion, I explained that this was a very busy day and I would try to find out what I could and that I would call her back when I had something to report. The soft spoken lady gave me her phone number and the name of her deceased veteran. She mentioned that she had been given a new I-Pad for Christmas and her grandson had found a website of a place having a marker with the same name as her deceased first husband. I told the lady that I would check in to it and let her know.

The morning progressed and I decided to do some of the research for this lady during lunch. I knew that I would not be able to find out much more than she was already aware of unless I had more information. I called her and she told me she had a folder with all of his military documents and that she was going to run some errands so she would drop it by the office. She arrived only a few minutes later with folder in hand. I then had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Eleanor Norine Robinson Bowdish Sisk. She placed the folder on the counter and began telling me of her motivation to "suddenly" seek this information as she slowly turned each clear plastic sheathed page.

Mrs. Sisk related that Kenneth Gordon Bowdish, originally from Seattle, Washington, enlisted in the Army December 14, 1941, a week after Pearl Harbor. He was Honorably Discharged and immediately accepted a Commission as a First Lieutenant in the US Army Air Force in 1943. The couple met in San Antonio, her home, and was married in Tampa, Florida on October 6, 1943. 1st Lt. Bowdish served as Navigator and/or as Bombardier, depending on the needs of the mission. Assigned to the 344th BG (Medium)/497th BS, 99th Bomb Wing, 9th Bomber Command, 9th Air Force, Station A-59, Cormeilles-en-Vexin Airdome, France. Bowdish's flight crew manned a B-26 Marauder Medium Bomber.

Mrs. Sisk showed me the photographs of Bowdish's flight crew, named each and recounted how as they flew more and more missions, the Army raised the number of required missions in order to rotate home, but the crew never complained. On February 23, 1945 the crew, having already surpassed its 45th mission, was the designated Pathfinder on a bombing raid over Erkeland, Germany. The "*Gratis Gladys*" and her crew of eight souls did not return. The plane is seen dropping out of formation after taking a direct hit from anti-aircraft flak.

Mrs. Sisk then shows me the faded Western Union Telegram bearing the news that her husband, and the other members of the flight crew were Missing in Action. She shows me a picture of a young widow receiving the posthumous awards of the Purple Heart Medal and Air Medal with one silver and four bronze oak leaf clusters for 1st Lt. Kenneth G. Bowdish from General Wainwright.

There were a series of letters from the War Department and Department of the Army, through 1953, expressing sympathies but no information on the whereabouts of the missing crew. Two hand written letters, dated May 13 and May 14, 1945, from the families of two of the other crewmen noted the downed aircraft had been located but only five of the crew had been tentatively identified, 1st Lt. Bowdish and two others were still missing.

After sixty-nine years of not knowing what had happened to her husband, Mrs. Sisk expressed to me that she was even more confused now after her grandson

had located a grave marker bearing the name of Kenneth G. Bowdish. She had remarried in 1948 and was hoping for closure.

Following her visit, I returned to the research and reviewed the cemetery website, located the marker and noted that the burial date was 1950. This didn't add up. This morning I contacted the cemetery director and discovered that the Army's original files were still there. As I waited for the new information to be sent to me, out of curiosity, I entered the aircraft number and type into the search bar of my computer, as I scrolled down the list of links I was surprised to see the exact number match appear on the list, I hesitated briefly, then clicked on the link. I was shocked at what appeared, one of the most iconic and famous photographs of WWII, especially among airmen. Could this be true? An actual picture of the B-26 Marauder "*Gratis Gladys*" and her crew of eight, dropping out of formation, ablaze, following a direct anti-aircraft flak hit to the left engine. There are several knowledgeable references that confirm this to be 43-34565, B-26G-11-MA, built by Glenn L. Martin Company, Baltimore, Maryland. The Missing Air Crew Report #12649 and eyewitness accounts from other aircrews on the raid verify the date, time and location.

Information provided by Fort McPherson National Cemetery Director, Kevin Johnson, states that the crash site was identified and the remains of 3 of the crew; Pilot-Capt. Carl F. Chapman, Jr., Radio Operator-T/Sgt. J. P. Herndon and Tail Gunner-S/Sgt. W.T. Williamson are buried in the Netherlands American Cemetery, Margraten, Netherlands. Co-Pilot-1st Lt. John J. Sheehan is buried at Ardennes American Cemetery, Neupre, Belgium and Engineer-S/Sgt. Ballard J. Bently burial location is unknown. The commingled remains of Navigator -1st Lt. Kenneth G. Bowdish, Bombardier-2nd Lt. James R. Harl and GEE Operator-1st Lt. Frederick D. Storey, Jr. were interred at Section R, Grave 96, Fort McPherson National Cemetery, Maxwell, Nebraska on September 20, 1950. There is no record of any governmental or military notification to Mrs. Sisk of the identification, recovery, return or burial of 1st Lt. Bowdish.

It is my Honor and privilege to confidently report to Mrs. Eleanor Bowdish Sisk, your wait is over, sixty-nine years of unanswered questions can now be put to

rest. May I officially state for the record, "Welcome Home 1st Lt. Kenneth G. Bowdish and the crew of the *"Gratis Gladys"*, Thank you for your service and your sacrifice, may you Rest in Peace."

Thank you for allowing me to assist you.

Organizational Information

497th Bombardment Squadron, 344th Bombardment Group (Medium)
 99th Bombardment Wing, 9th Bomber Command, 9th Air Force
 Station A-59, Corneilles-en-Vexin Airdrome, France

<u>Aircraft Manufacturer</u>	<u>Aircraft Type</u>	<u>Aircraft Name</u>	<u>Aircraft Tail #</u>
The Glenn L. Martin Company, Baltimore, Maryland	B-26G-11-MA	Marauder	43-34565

Facts And Circumstances

This grave marks the final resting place for three individuals who were killed aboard this aircraft that departed from Station A-59, Corneilles-en-Vexin Airdrome, France enroute to a bombardment mission at Erkeland, Germany. Comments by eyewitness were as follows: "After bombs were dropped over the target, aircraft was hit by flak. One engine appeared to be afire. Aircraft was making a bank to the right when it went into a spin. Members of my aircrew watched the descent of the aircraft. It appeared to be under control at an altitude of approximately 8000 feet. A short time later my radio-gunner saw a plane crash and burst into flame. My Co-Pilot saw one man leave the aircraft immediately after it went into the spin, but did not see the parachute open. My radio operator saw one other man leave the aircraft and saw the parachute open." This statement was signed by 1Lt Theodore R Pearcy. Another statement was prepared by 1Lt Lewis E Lanford and his comments were as follows: "I did not see the aircraft piloted by Captain Chapman hit by flak. I saw the left engine of his aircraft when it burst into flame after he crossed the target. The plane started to pull left out of formation, the elevator burned out as he started to pull out of formation and the aircraft went into a spin. I did not see the aircraft crash but my waist gunner followed the descent of the aircraft until it crashed. Aircraft exploded when it hit the ground. One chute was seen to leave the aircraft." **Combat actions for this date were as follows:** 8th Air Force: As a follow-up to the previous days attacks on transportation facilities, 1,193 heavy bombers strike ten marshalling yards and numerous targets of opportunity, mostly rail communications, in Central Germany. Fighters fly over 600 effective escort and strafing sorties. Far East Air Force: Strikes supporting ground forces continue throughout battle zones on Luzon. P-47s hit Jesseiton airfield while B-24s bomb Sandakan, Lahat Datu, and Miri airfields. B-25s on shipping sweeps bomb vessels in Phan Rang harbor and hit the small convoy Southwest of Cam Ranh Bay. 15th Air Force: 380 heavy bombers hit marshalling yards at Vörsch, Wörgl, Knittelfeld, Klagenfurt and Udine, plus Kitzbuhel railroad junction. 140-plus P-38s and P-51s provide escort. Some of the fighters strafe areas Northwest of Linz and North of Munich. Thirty-five other P-38s dive-bomb Wörgl marshalling yards and afterwards thirty of them strafe rail line Rosenheim-Innsbruck-Landeck. Other P-38s and P-51s fly reconnaissance and escort missions. 14th Air Force: Twenty-nine B-24s and twenty-two fighters scheduled to attack Shihkiachwang abort because of bad weather. Eight P-51s hit railroad targets of opportunity near Siaokan and attack river traffic from Nanking to Hankow. Five B-24s sweep Gulf of Tonkin and South China Sea, damaging one vessel. Four P-40s attack targets of opportunity in Kaifeng area. 7th Air Force: 26 B-24s from Angaur bomb San Roque airfield. Two P-47s from Saipan on armed reconnaissance strafe Pagan. On 23/24 Feb. Seven B-24s from Guam fly snoopers raids against airfield on Chichi Jima and town of Okinawa on Haha Jima. Marines raise US flag on summit of Mount Suribachi on Iwo Jima. 10th Air Force: 20-plus P-47s support ground forces in Mongmit sector and near Lashio, hitting Japanese concentration. Twelve B-25s and 120-plus fighter bombers continue pounding troop concentrations, supply areas, road traffic, and ammo dumps in frontline areas and behind enemy lines. All remains recovered after the war were examined and extensive efforts made to segregate and effect the individual identification, but it was not possible due to circumstances of the crash and the commingling of remains. Casualty date was 23 February 1945 and these remains were returned to Fort McPherson National Cemetery for internment on 20 September 1950. Missing Aircrew Report # 12649 covers the loss of this aircraft.

Navigator
 Sewall, Kenneth G
 1Lt, US Army Air Forces

Bombardier
 Harl, James R
 2Lt, US Army Air Forces

GEE Operator
 Storey, Frederick D Jr
 1Lt, US Army Air Forces

Other individuals on this aircraft/mission

Below three individuals killed in crash and buried at the Netherlands American Cemetery, Margraten, Netherlands. Grave information is listed

Pilot
 Ober, Carl F Jr
 Captain, US Army Air Forces
 Plot L Row 3 Grave 1

Radio Operator
 Herndon, J P
 TSgt, US Army Air Forces
 Plot O Row 21 Grave 1

Tail Gunner
 Williamson, W T
 SSgt, US Army Air Forces
 Plot L Row 4 Grave 22

Co-Pilot
 Sheehon, Jenn J, 1Lt, US Army Air Forces
 Killed in this crash and buried at Plot C Row 9 Grave 31
 Netherlands American Cemetery, Neupre, Belgium

Engineer
 Bentley, Ballard J, SSgt, US Army Air Forces
 Below individual killed in crash and burial location is unknown

Bombardier



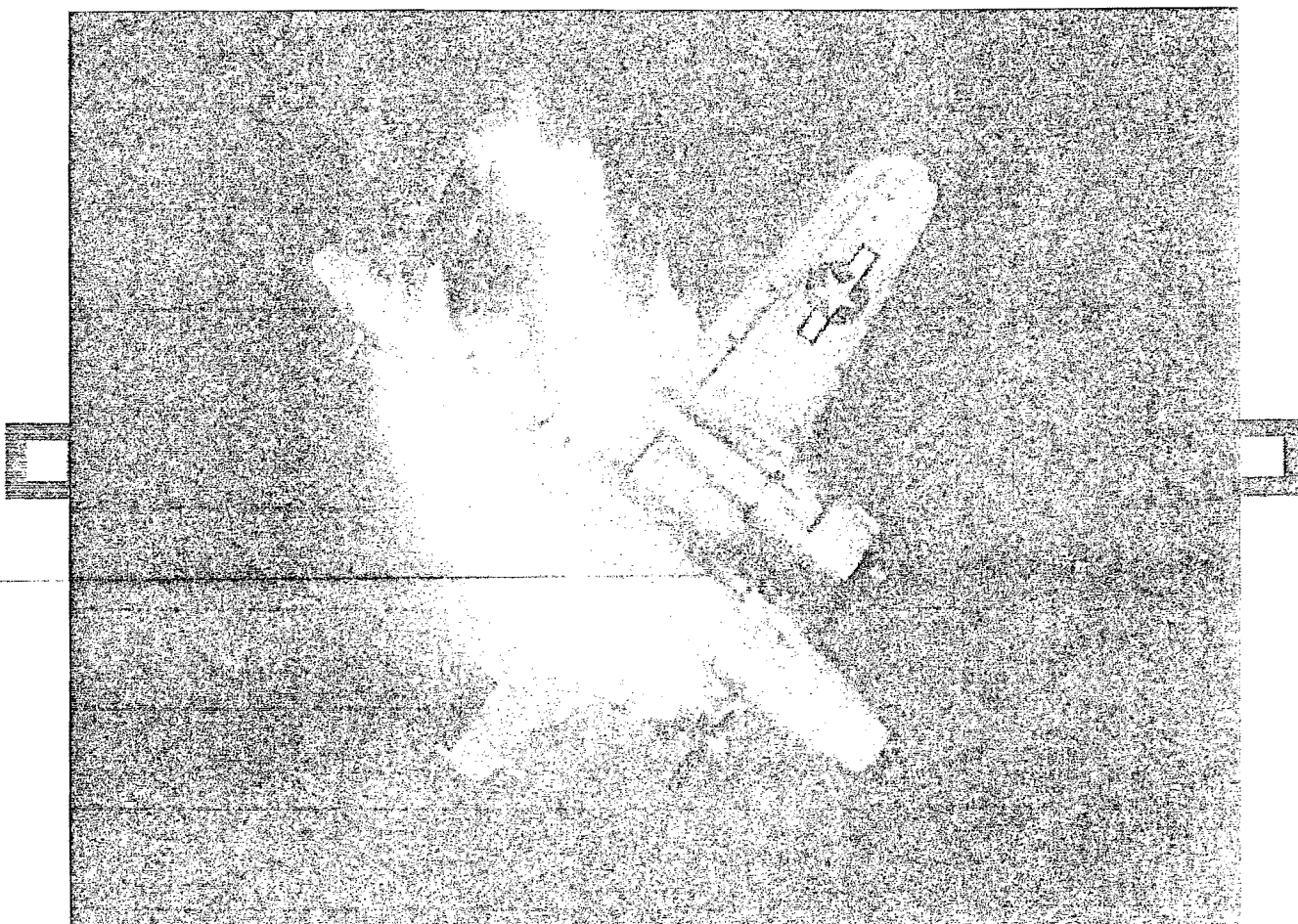
Lieut. Kenneth G. Bowditch, son of Earl W. Bowditch, of Centralia, is serving in the army air force as an aerial navigator and bombardier.



[Mail](#)
[News](#)
[Sports](#)
[Finance](#)
[Weather](#)
[Games](#)
[Groups](#)
[Answers](#)
[Screen](#)
[Flickr](#)
[Mobile](#)
[More](#)

[Sign Up](#)
[Explore](#)
[Upload](#)

[Sign In](#)



Martin B-26 Marauder

From the 497th Bomb Squadron, 344th Bomb Group, 9th Air Force in flames after a direct AAA hit.

I believe this plane is:

"Gratis Gladys" (71-B)

B-26G-10-MA Marauder

s/n 43-34565

497th BS, 344th BG, 9th AF

Shot down by flak on the February 23, 1945 mission to Erkelenz, Germany. 8 KIA

MACR 12649

Capt. Carl F. Chapman, Jr. - Pilot (KIA)

..... (O-659663) Macon, Georgia

1st Lt. John J. Sheehan - CoPilot (KIA)

..... (O-816603) Boston, Massachusetts

2nd Lt. James R. Harl - Bombardier (KIA)

..... (O-722452) Pulaski, Iowa

1st Lt. Kenneth G. Bowdish - Navigator (KIA)

..... (O-741451) Seattle, Washington

1st Lt. Frederick D. Storey, Jr. - GEE Operator (KIA)

..... (O-765744) Houston, Texas

T/Sgt. J.P. Herndon - Radio Operator/Gunner (KIA)

..... (18005969) Dallas, Texas

S/Sgt. Ballard J. Bentley - Engineer/Gunner (KIA)

..... (6941901) Neon, Kentucky

S/Sgt. W.T. Williamson - Tail Gunner (KIA)

..... (18083383) Dallas, Texas

.....,, and added this photo to their favorites.



Hi, I'm an admin for a group called, and we'd love to have this added to the group!

5

4



D. Sheley

Member since 2007

[Follow](#)

Taken on January 20, 2010

3,894 Views

2 Galleries

D. Sheley's photostream (4,915)



This photo also appears in

9th Air Force (set)

Martin B-26 Marauder (set)

World War II Bombers (set)

Martin B-26 Marauder (group)

Lockheed (group)

World War II Bombers (group)

World War II Bombers (group)

World War II Bombers (group)

World War II Bombers (group)

Additional information