

TRIBUTE TO SGT. HERMAN SMITH:
WE WILL NEVER FORGET

HON. HAROLD ROGERS

OF KENTUCKY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 12, 1998

Mr. ROGERS. Mr. Speaker, on February 20, 1998, Sgt. Herman Smith of Williamsburg, Kentucky, and nine other World War II crewmen of the B-24H "Liberator," serial number 42-95064, will be buried with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery.

This ceremony is a long-overdue recognition of the honor, bravery and devotion displayed by ten World War II servicemen who lost their lives nearly 54 years ago when their plane crashed in northeastern Brazil on April 11, 1944.

At 9:05 a.m. on that fateful day, 42-95064's pilot requested weather information. That was the last word from 42-95064 and her crew.

Today, no one quite knows where the crew of 42-95064 was heading, what their mission was, or why the plane went down. For 51 years, no one even knew where the plane and her crew were. Sgt. Herman Smith's mother passed on without ever knowing what happened to her boy. Like thousands of other mothers, fathers, wives, sons and daughters whose loved ones were listed as missing in action, Mrs. Smith lived her life with an empty place in her heart, never knowing the fate of her son.

Although Herman Smith and thousands of other American servicemen have been listed as missing, they have never been forgotten. Over the years, we have continued efforts to discover the fate of American service members lost during times of war. And, with the help of the Army Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii, hundreds of missing servicemen have been identified, providing their families with peace of mind and final resolution.

That is the story of the long-lost crew of 42-95064. During the 1990s, reports started coming back of plane wreckage in an uninhabited, isolated area of the Amazon jungle. After a 1994 search party failed to find the site, officials finally confirmed the plane's location. On Independence Day 1995, a 15-man team from the U.S. Army Central Identification Laboratory arrived in Brazil to begin the arduous process of bringing our boys back home.

Next week, the 10 crew members of 42-95064 will be placed in their resting place after 54 long years. Phyllis Bowling of Williamsburg, a first cousin of Sgt. Herman Smith and his closest living relative, will attend the service. For the people of Williamsburg, Kentucky, this service means that one more man, whose name has been forever captured on the VFW Post 3167's memorial commemorating those killed from Whitley County during the Great War, will finally receive the military honors he deserves.

Every day, men and women from counties all across our nation volunteer, like Herman Smith did, for one of the most important jobs America has to offer—military service in the United States Armed Forces. These men and women have so much faith, honor, love and respect for this nation that they are prepared to sacrifice their lives in order to preserve and protect the United States and all that she stands for.

In turn, we must remain committed to them. We must support our service personnel in

times of war and times of peace. We must help their loved ones cope with the demands and stress placed upon them as military families. We must honor them after they return from service, and if they don't return, we must be dogged in our pursuit to bring them home. But, most important, we must never forget the sacrifices they have made.

We should remember, because every man and woman who has served in this nation's armed forces has helped secure the peace that we enjoy today. In times of peace and war, American's military personnel have been a beacon of hope in the darkness of conflict. They answered the call of service, prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty. The next generation must know about the courage, honor and strength of the men and women who gave their lives for us. Our service members must know that we will never forget.

Mr. Speaker, so everyone will remember the story of the men on B-24H "Liberator," serial number 42-95064, I ask that a newspaper article appearing in the Whitley Republican-News Journal in Williamsburg, Kentucky, be printed here, for everyone to read.

May God bless all the men and women who serve in America's Armed Forces, and may God bless the United States of America.

[From the News Journal—February 4, 1998]

LOCAL MAN WAS BALL TURRET GUNNER ON
LONG-LOST WWII B-24H BOMBER

Somewhere in some foreign field, The gunner sleeps tonight . . .

But we cannot write off his final scene—Hold onto the dream . . .

"The Gunner's Dream," Pink Floyd, 1982

(By Philip A. Todd)

Like thousands of his fellow World War II servicemen, a Williamsburg man listed as missing in action (MIA) for over a half century will never come home.

However, after making the ultimate sacrifice for their country, Sgt. Herman Smith and the nine other crewmen on his B-24H bomber will finally receive the remembrance they earned with their lives.

The remains of the ten Army Air Corps aviators, who died on April 11, 1944 when their plane crashed in northeastern Brazil, will be buried Feb. 20 with full military honors in Arlington National Cemetery, official sources said.

Sadly, this recognition comes much too late for most of those who waited in vain for news of their loved ones—while for 51 years, the bomber's crash site remained lost, hidden in a dense and uninhabited region of the Amazon jungle.

Smith's mother, Martha E. Smith of Cumberland Ave., Williamsburg, apparently died years ago; and now, no one at Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 3167 seems to remember him.

His name appears on the VFW's memorial outside the courthouse, along with the other Whitley County men listed and killed during the Great War. Other than that, there has been nothing but silence surrounding Smith, the plane's ball turret gunner, and his crewmates for nearly 54 years.

DO YOU READ ME, 42-95064?

As the Allied war effort in Europe escalated towards the "longest day"—the actual invasion of Hitler's "Fortress Europe" on D-Day, June 6, 1944—America and her allies mounted heavy bombing raids throughout Axis-held Europe, North Africa and Italy.

Daily aircraft losses reaching 50 percent in some raids meant new, replacement planes moved in a steady stream from American factories to the front.

Secrecy concerns kept security so tight that even the very crews flying these replacement aircraft didn't know where they were going; and after a half-century, memories have dimmed and files have disappeared—so no one may ever know the complete story of Smith and the men on B-24H "Liberator," serial no. 42-95064.

Exact details remain a mystery; however, Smith's aircraft was apparently headed for duty in Europe by way of a series of refueling stops leading from the U.S. to Africa by way of South America when it crashed in the Brazilian jungle.

This ferry route enabled new planes to replace lost combat aircraft in a matter of a few days, instead of the weeks it would take to ship them across the Atlantic Ocean.

After probably flying from Colorado Springs to Florida and then south to Trinidad, Smith's B-24H reportedly left Trinidad's Waller Field at 6:09 a.m. April 11, 1944, enroute to Belém, Brazil.

Around 9:05, about an hour from Belém, 42-95064's pilot, 2nd Lt. Edward J. Bares, reportedly requested weather information.

A ground station in Brazil responded with a report, but heard nothing further from the plane.

Nothing further was ever to be heard from 42-95064.

LOST BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

"We were on the same route, departing probably the 16th of April," remembers R.F. "Dick" Gelvin, a B-24 navigator whose aircraft took the same route to the front only days later.

"I don't remember them telling us about having lost an airplane in the previous week."

"I do recall them telling we navigators, we would have enough fuel that we could follow the (South American) coast if we wanted to do so, but that over the (Brazilian) jungle would be closer," he said.

"After a crew discussion, we opted to take the 'great circle' (globe-line) route, over the jungle."

Apparently 42-95064's navigator, 1st Lt. Floyd D. Kyte Jr., took the same shortcut to Belém, but the plane crashed some 250 miles short of that Brazilian port city.

Authorities have never issued an official explanation for the crash.

The aircraft remained lost until the 1990s, when a group of gold prospectors reportedly stumbled across it.

A joint expedition by the Força Aérea Brasileira (FAB, Brazil's air force), and the U.S. Army located the crash site and recovered the crew's remains in July 1995.

"They told me that the place was 150 miles off course," said James K. Leitch, whose brother, Staff Sgt. John E. Leitch, was 42-95064's flight engineer.

James Leitch, also a World War II veteran, said he contacted government officials in 1995 after reading a short news report that the plane had been found.

"They don't know why it went down, but it could have run out of gas."

"They feel that the whole crew was killed on impact," he said.

A HALF-CENTURY'S SILENCE

When 42-95064 and its crew of 10 went down in April 1944, James Leitch was a 19-year-old infantryman waiting to be shipped to duty in the Pacific.

His company commander called him to the office and told him he needed to go home to Los Angeles.

There, his parents told him his brother was reported missing in action somewhere in the Brazilian jungle.

About a month later, A Brazilian native reportedly told officials he had seen the wreckage of a four-engine plane and six bodies, but the man disappeared before anyone

could verify his story, said Peter Muello, an Associated Press writer in 1995.

Shortly after that initial report, a British man told authorities he had found the plane, and even reported the aircraft's correct identification number, said Muello.

The Leitch family never heard about either of these sightings.

A letter to Leitch's parents from a Brazilian official, dated July 14, 1944, said American authorities were searching "where the plane is supposed to have made a forced landing."

Five years later, Leitch's mother contacted a U.S. vice-consul in Belem, who told her that tribes in the area were friendly, and if anything had been found, they would have contacted the Brazilian authorities.

During that same time year (1949), the Los Angeles Times reported that the U.S. Adjutant General's Office issued the statement that "no evidence has been submitted that any of the crew parachuted to the safety, nor has any indication been received that the men were found by natives."

"Any that was all we heard," said Leitch. "My mother went to her grave believing her John was still alive, somewhere in the jungle," he said.

After these reports, no official statements about 42-95064 were made until 1995, when Brazilian army authorities said their 3rd Jungle Infantry Battalion discovered the wreckage in August 1994 and brought back "a leather artifact" that one official said was probably part of a crewmember's flight jacket.

But in December 1994, a joint search party mounted by Brazil's air force and the U.S. Embassy to Brazil failed to find the site.

Finally, officials confirmed the site; and on Independence Day, 1995, a 15-man salvage team from the U.S. Army Central Identification Laboratory arrived in Brazil to join a Brazilian army expedition to travel to the site and recover anything that was left.

"BRING THE BOYS BACK HOME"

When millions of Americans sang along with war-era stars like Vera Lynn and Glenn Miller, hoping that "We Will Meet Again" and praying to "Bring The Boys Back Home," few would dream their government and their tax dollars would still be busy trying to do exactly that, more than 50 years later.

Thanks to the ongoing mission of the Army Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii (CILHI), many missing servicemen—especially from Vietnam—have been positively identified from even the smallest of remains, after a process involving long hours of scientific analysis.

Apparently, that's where 42-95064's crew has been since the summer of 1995, while U.S. Army officials attempted to track down next-of-kin for each man.

An FAB (Brazilian air force) team prepared the site, and assisted the CILHI researchers during a three-week recovery effort in a dense jungle area some 50 miles northeast of the Amazon River city of Macapá, located about 250 miles northwest of the plane's destination, Belém.

Searchers found two sets of "dog tags" and numerous bone fragments at the site, said Johnnie Webb, a CILHI civilian deputy commander.

"It is, very dense jungle," he said, adding that "all 10 (crewmen) perished in the aircraft."

Two weeks of digging at the crash site brought nothing, Leitch said officials told him.

"They had dug several meters deep and were starting to lose hope, when suddenly, they started finding bones, rings, necklaces and dog tags with names and ranks written

on them," said Fernando Allegretti, a spokesman for the Brazilian state of Amapá, where the plane crashed.

One investigator found a wallet, and another found several 1944 dollar bills, he said.

The high-speed impact of the crash meant little was left of the aircraft, and most of it—spread over a wide area and undisturbed for 51 years—will never be recovered, officials said.

After three weeks, the team recovered the remains of all 10 on board.

Officials then held a memorial service for the crew at Macapá, capital city of Amapá.

A short time later, CILHI forensics experts confirmed the remains were, indeed, those of the long-lost crew of 42-95064.

GIVE THEM PEACE

After more than two-and-a-half years of attempting to find surviving relatives of the crew, the U.S. Army has apparently decided against returning the remains to the families.

"I made call after call" to the authorities, said Leitch after hearing of the plane's discovery in 1995.

"I was told they were going to use a DNA process to identify each man," he said.

"We wanted him (John) buried out here in Los Angeles, with my parents."

Leitch said the family has kept a burial plot for John all these years.

However, last month's announcement of plans for the Feb. 20 group burial in Arlington put an end to each family's own hopes for closure.

Army officials apparently identified Peggy Bowling, a Williamsburg woman who is Smith's first cousin, as Smith's closest living relative.

Bowling and another Whitley County resident are expected to attend the Feb. 20 ceremony.

Leitch said the government is arranging to fly family members to Washington for the event.

The 42-95064's crew included:

2nd Lt. Edward I. Bares, pilot, Chicago; Flight Officer Robert W. Pearman, co-pilot, Miami; Flight Officer Laurel Stevens, bombardier, Monroe, Iowa; 1st Lt. Floyd D. Kyte Jr., navigator, Elmira, N.Y.; Sgt. John Rocasey, nose gunner, El Monte, Cal.; Staff Sgt. John E. Leitch, engineer, Los Angeles; Sgt. Michael Prasol, tail gunner, Northampton, Mass.; Sgt. Herman Smith, ball turret gunner, Williamsburg, Ky.; Sgt. Max C. McGilvrey, upper gunner, Perkins, Okla.; and Staff Sgt. Harry N. Furman, unknown replacement, Dayton Plains, Mich.

Furman, not part of the plane's original crew, replaced the crew's radio operator. Staff Sgt. Abe Shepherd of Ohio, on the fateful flight

"It is likely that the ground crew chief may well have replaced one of the gunners, who would have gone by sea," said Kevin Welch, a B-24 veteran.

"Occasionally, some positions were manned by non-crew members," said John Jakab, another B-24 veteran.

For example, he said, "my co-pilot crossed over by ship. My co-pilot for the overseas flight was our unit operations officer."

Shepherd's fate is not known—and, after all these years, there aren't that many people still around who remember the lost crew of 42-95064.

But some will never forget them.

"I have mixed feelings" about the upcoming ceremony, said Leitch.

The Leitch brothers, born 17 months apart, "used to double date" in their young days in southern California, he said.

"I'm happy that it's coming to a close, but I really miss him. It still bothers me."

UNABLE TO ATTEND ROLLCALL
VOTE

HON. ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 12, 1998

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I regret that due to unforeseen circumstances I was unable to vote on H. Res. 352 (Rollcall No. 12). If I had been present, I would have voted "Aye".

TWO YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF THE
TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT OF
1996

HON. SUE MYRICK

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 12, 1998

Mrs. MYRICK. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commend the Federal Communications Commission on their newly demonstrated spirit of cooperation as they continue to implement the Telecommunications Act of 1996.

We are beginning to see the spirit of the new faces on that Commission. There is no question that the new members of the FCC have a lot of work to do—particularly as they work through what their predecessors started in the process which will allow local phone companies into the long distance market.

Until just recently, the 14-point check list, designed to ease the long distance entry process, has been a constant source of confinement for local service providers. They have been forced into the courts to seek refuge. The courts have ruled in favor of the local companies.

After such a long string of slanted rulings, clearly issued in defiance of the will of this Congress, I am pleased to see that the FCC is singing a new tune. I look forward to seeing those new words develop into new actions—actions that will fulfill the 2 year old promise of lower prices and more choices for American consumers.

1998 CONGRESSIONAL OBSERVANCE
OF BLACK HISTORY MONTH

SPEECH OF

HON. WILLIAM J. COYNE

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 11, 1998

Mr. COYNE. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join my colleagues in this special order celebrating Black History Month. I would like to express my appreciation to Representatives LOUIS STOKES and MAXINE WATERS for organizing this special order, which provides the Members of the House with an important opportunity to participate in Black History Month.

The United States has officially commemorated Black History Month and its predecessors can be traced back an additional 50 years to 1926, when Dr. Carter G. Woodson, a prominent educator, historian and author, created Negro History Week. Since then, each February has been a time when Americans are called upon to educate themselves about