

American Memories - Bracelet in the Sand

<http://www.stedmundsbury.gov.uk/acmbrace.htm>

This story is dedicated to Lt Ashley M Guynn 710 BS 447th Bomb Group (H) and all his crew past and present

The 710th Bomb Squadron of the 447th Bomb Group (H) 8th USAAF departed from Kearney Air Force Base, Nebraska, USA on 11th November 1943 to fly the Atlantic via the northern route to England. On that day crew number 75-30 flying in the B17G Flying Fortress number 42-31168 and piloted by Lt Ashley M Guynn made a successful crossing. They eventually arrived at Station 126 at Rattlesden in Suffolk, England to make a total of 60 planes and crews to arrive (2 B17G having been lost over the Atlantic).

Their first loss came on 30th December when "Maid to Please" was shot down, but between 24th December 1943 and 27th April 1944 Lt A Guynn flew 23 missions. Regrettably on returning from the Group's 55th mission Lt A Guynn's B17G 42-107197 was hit by heavy flak resulting in the loss of this plane and crew over Ostend in Belgium. After the seven survivors had bailed out, the plane exploded and fell to earth. Sadly the Pilot, Flight Engineer and Tailgunner were killed, and the other crew members became Prisoners of War. Guynn's body could only be identified after the war by a process of elimination, and his remains were returned to Chico, California for burial. There was no trace of his dog tags or other identification.

At the 1995 UK Reunion of the 447th I met Richard R Bender, the co-pilot of Lt A M Guynn's crew on that fateful day. At all our UK Reunions we arrange an exhibition of photographs and 8th Air Force memorabilia from the Second World War. One photograph which Richard spotted and was keen to obtain showed B17G 42-107197 the last B17 he had flown in before being brought down by flak over Ostend. I duly sent him a copy photograph. There followed an exchange of letters and photographs etc and I put together all the information regarding that fateful day in April 1943 when B17G 42-107197 was lost over Belgium. I became fully conversant with the complete story of Lt Ashley M Guynn and his crew, and I thought that was the end of the matter. Little did I know of the dramatic chain of events that would bring the story round full circle in Millennium year.

It was Sunday 2nd January 2000 when I received a telephone call from Mr Martin Collins in London, England. Martin is an Englishman who lives in Israel, often making reports to America and overseas newspapers. His sister still lives in London and he was over here for the Millennium celebrations. Martin explained that he had found my name, address and telephone number on the internet. I am the UK contact for the 447th BG Association (UK) and along with other local bases and associations I have had a presence on the St Edmundsbury website since 1998. He was keen to meet me to discuss a certain Lt Ashley M Guynn. Also he wanted to visit Rattlesden airfield. He explained that whilst on holiday (vacation) in Ostend, Belgium in 1997 he had unearthed part of a bracelet on the beach using his metal detector. The blackened object displayed the pilot's wings of the USAAF. After cleaning it, Martin was able to see the name of Ashley M Guynn and on the reverse side was the number 0-746256 now known to be his service number. These identity bracelets were not official issue, but many aircrew had them made in sterling silver to supplement the dog tags worn round the neck. Martin appeared to be surprised that I was already familiar with this story which had been passed on to me by Richard R Bender.

It was arranged that we meet at the Brewers Arms public house in Rattlesden on 3rd January 2000 at 11.30 am. In the meantime I collected all the papers together containing information on the incident regarding the loss of B17G 42-107197 on 27th April 1944 and also arranged permission to visit the airfield. Part of the runway is still in use for flying by the Rattlesden Gliding Club

I met Martin at the pre-arranged place and we proceeded to the airfield via High Town Green to visit the 447th Bomb Group memorial. We spent time on the airfield and in the control tower studying old papers and memorabilia. Whilst in the control tower and much to my surprise, Martin insisted that I should accept his Ashley Guynn documents and bracelet on behalf of the 447th BG Association (UK). He was very sure that the bracelet should be kept by the UK Association. It was accompanied by the full story of that tragic day of 27th April 1944 as written up by Dan Johnson in America. He also gave me details of his search to discover more about his find, all sparked off by that remarkable bracelet in the sand on Ostend beach, discovered 53 years after its owner was killed in action. Martin told me that he has no objection to this story going on the internet or to the story being printed in the local newspaper.

I acknowledge the great efforts made by the following people who have made the telling of this story possible.

Grateful thanks to: Martin Collins (Israel), Richard R Bender (USA), Dan Johnson (USA)

E A Osborne 11th July, 2000

A BRACELET IN THE SAND – A TRUE STORY

<http://www.worldwar2pilots.com/guynn-01.htm>

Thousands of Pilots never came home. Just as surely as their mortality had fallen prey to a war more than half a century ago, for too many, the memory of their too short lives was snuffed out by the relentlessness of time's passage. But not for these few.

July, 1999 USAF Missing Persons Bulletin Board:

I hope that you can help me with this enquiry. About 1 year ago I was metal detecting on the North coast of Belgium, close to Ostend and found a sterling silver identity bracelet. This bracelet was completely black and by the amount of work needed to remove the black layer of oxidation from it I can only assume that it had been buried in the sand for many years. The bracelet plate has the US Air force pilots wings symbol applied to the front surface and under the wings the name ASHLEY M. GUYNN has been engraved. On the reverse side the number 0-746256 is engraved (I am not sure whether the first character is a letter O or a zero). ould it be possible for you to investigate this and advise how this bracelet was lost. Was it lost during an operation during WW11? If so, would it be possible to let me know the details of what occurred. I am extremely curious about this. If it indeed was caused during action perhaps the owner survived and would like his bracelet returned, or if he is no longer alive perhaps there are close relatives alive who may cherish this bracelet, in which case I would gladly contact these and arrange its return. I would be very grateful if you could investigate this matter for me, or if you are unable to access this information would you kindly advise whom I could contact to help me further. Thanks very much in advance. "

*Yours truly, Martin Collin
Rattlesden, England: Christmas Eve, 1943*

Ostend Belgium July, 1998

Son of a British WW2 RAF officer, Martin Collins continues his walk down the beach. He swings the scanner of his metal detector back and forth across the sand, waiting for a signal that would alert him to the presence of invisible metal objects. Martin is enjoying his vacation days on the coast of the English Channel near Ostend Belgium. His metal detector is a hobby he and his wife have enjoyed for quite some time, garnering over the years, jewellery, coins, and other objects of varying value. He has no premonition that he is about to unearth an object that will stretch across the boundaries of time and distance.

The sound changes in his earphones almost imperceptibly. Faint traces of something buried in the sand. Kneeling down at the spot, he digs. Soon an object appears. Blackened and corroded, the object appears to be some sort of a bracelet. By its

condition it is clear the object has been buried in the sand for some time. Peering intently at the bracelet, Martin makes out a barely discernible inscription. He looks forward to getting back home and cleaning up the bracelet. Perhaps, if he is careful and thorough, he will be able to make sense of the inscription. Arriving home, he meticulously removes the layers of loosened corrosion. There is a name and a series of letters and numbers. Time passes, the name and numbers continue to stare back at him, their mystery nagging at him for some reason. His instincts tell him it belongs to a fallen veteran. He starts his search to find the family of the owner.

Rattlesden, England: April 27, 1944

Staff Sergeant John Northup has only been in his bunk a short time when he hears the sound of a jeep approaching. It is mid afternoon and Northup is enjoying the sack time after afternoon chow. He'd only been with the 447th Bomb Group a short time, after transferring in from the 385th. He had flown three missions with the 385th before his regular crew had been lost. He'd transferred to the 447th as a replacement crewman and had flown six missions already, as a fill in on a number of different crews.

The door opens and a Sergeant sticks his head in. "Grab your flight gear, you are flying this afternoon!" Northup quickly grabs his gear and hops in the jeep for the ride out to the hardstand where the B17 he is assigned to is waiting. He has no idea where the mission is going as he has missed briefing. As he approaches, Northup can see three of the four engines of the bomber were already started. The engine closest to the entrance hatch in the nose is stopped to allow him to climb aboard safely. Throwing his gear aboard, Northup climbs in the nose of the Flying Fortress and continues to get into his flight clothes as the big bomber taxis out for take off.

Minnesota, October, 1999

Dan checks his e-mail late one evening. His wife is working the late shift at the community's critical care hospital, and he is just finishing tucking in the youngest of their three youngsters away for a good night's sleep. Now part of his daily routine, he must use his computer to stay in touch with his many friends and contacts. He has found that being a dad is indeed a life-changing event as was promised, and the vast majority of any socializing not revolving around the children must be of the "high-tech" variety. With half of an ear tuned for any last minute rustlings from the kids, he sets about sorting through the dozen or so messages that have arrived during the day.

One particularly catches his eye; a friend in California has forwarded him a copy of the message posted on the USAF missing persons bulletin board he came across by accident. After reading through it twice, and having run into many dead-ends over the years on similar quests, he knows that there is only an outside chance that he can be of any immediate assistance. Setting it aside for the moment, he finishes up the rest of the day's messages. It will be hours still before Cathy returns from the bedlam of the emergency room, so he crawls into bed after setting the alarm to greet her when she returns. Vague images of a standard USAAF Officer's ID bracelet and the name Ashley M. Guynn intrude upon his consciousness. No matter; he is asleep within minutes

Israel October, 1999

After three months of waiting, a message arrives for Martin Collins from the United States. The message does not say much; but it is from someone who saw his bulletin board inquiry concerning an ID bracelet he found. All that is promised is that the sender will try to help out in his quest. There is a vague mention that the he has had some success in the past in similar situations. Due to a catastrophic fire in St. Louis, Mo. some years earlier, thousands of military files were lost forever, and that if anything, it is a long-shot at best. . Martin needs no reminding of this, as he has run into nothing but dead-ends for the past year himself, but is grateful that someone has volunteered to help him.

Minnesota October 1999

Dan is in luck. A couple of well-placed calls has yielded the answers he was looking for. A friend "inside" has located just the information he might be looking for. It is a "Missing Air Crew Report". At the end of the call, all he knows is that there is information on the way about the crew of the B-17 "42-107197" flown on April 27, 1944. He waits anxiously for three days for the mail to arrive.

Israel, October, 1999

Martin Collins reads the message from Dan Johnson again. He cannot believe it. After all this time, it appears he will finally learn of the bracelet and the fate of Ashley Guynn that has filled his thoughts for over a year. He takes some quiet time to reflect upon his own father's war experience in Great Britain's Royal Air Force.

Stationed in the U.K. until 1942, the senior Collins was aboard a troop ship about to arrive in Singapore as the Japanese invasion forces, were about to land, Collin's ship was turned around and after wandering the Pacific for some time, ended up porting on California's West Coast. For the duration of the war his duties consisted of doing public relations on behalf of His Majesty's Royal Air Force. The senior Collins returned to England and after meeting and marrying Martin's mother-to-be, slipped happily and quietly back into civilian life, exhausted; yet grateful that he was so fortunate.

Rattlesden, England April 27, 1944

In the cockpit of the B17, Pilot 1st Lt. Ashley Guynn and Co-pilot 2nd Lt. Richard Bender work together to taxi the bomber out to the runway for take off. They'd been through the briefing and knew the plan. The 447th was for the first time in their short history, flying a second raid in one day; a bombing mission to hit a target in France, following a mission into Germany earlier in the day. Their plane had picked up some flak damage in the nose in the day's first mission (flown by another crew) but not enough to seriously hamper their operational status. The Guynn crew was to fly in the number four position in the formation made up of 18 B17s.

There had been a couple of changes in the crew since their arrival, not because of problems, but due to fate or bad luck. Lt. Guynn's original co-pilot 2nd Lt. Richard Lindemann and his first engineer/top turret gunner, T/Sgt. Louis Guentner had both been lost on February 20, while filling in on the crew of Lt. Finfinger. Lindemann was killed and Guentner was captured by the Germans. Ironically it had been Lindemann who had filled in for this mission's co-pilot Richard Bender when Bender had come

down with an illness that grounded him for a short time. Guentner had filled in for T/Sgt. John Thomas. Thomas, now manned the Top turret just behind Guynn and Bender. Bender and Thomas now had no crew, and were assigned to Guynn's crew, from whence Guenter and Lindemann had come; in effect trading places.

Ashley Guynn and his crew were on their 23rd mission. They had been with 447th Bomb Group from the time it was formed in the United States and had flown one of the group's B17s over to England. They'd flown on the Group's inaugural combat mission on Christmas Eve, 1943 and were now considered veterans, closing in fast on their 25th and final mission.

At 1610 hours the last "Flying Fortress" from the 447th started its roll down the runway having been preceded by the others at short intervals. Shortly they were formed up over the English Channel and began the flight towards France.

Albany, Oregon October 1999

Physicist James Ashley Guynn arrives home from work late in the day. From his answering machine, he retrieves a message left by a Dan Johnson calling from Minnesota about "WW2", a "B-17" and "Ashley Guynn." The message he leaves says he hopes he has reached the "right" Guynn and apologizes for any possible intrusion or inconvenience, but will try to contact him later that evening. James knows that caller has in fact reached the "right Guynn." Somewhat apprehensively, his hands and his thoughts begin to sort through a few old photos and some distant, yet poignant memories. When Dan phones back, James confirms that he is the nephew and namesake of Ashley Guynn. Better yet, he has a phone number that is he is certain will be of help to Dan.

Chico, California: October 1999:

With a gracious greeting and a delightful personality that even advancing years cannot hide, Phyllis listens briefly as Dan introduces himself. He tells her of his and Martin's quest. She listens quietly and patiently while Dan speaks of the reason for his call. When he is finished, Phyllis spends the next hour charming Dan with recollections of her young husband, Ashley Guynn.

English Channel: April 27, 1944

Settled into formation in the assigned number four slot, Ashley Guynn and his crew proceeded in their combat boxes with the rest of the flight of 18 bombers. With continued skilled flying and a little luck, the crew would get their bombs on target and return to Rattlesden safely.

Ashley himself would soon be stateside with his high-school and then college sweetheart and new bride, Phyllis Snow if they could complete two more missions after this one. He and Phyllis were engaged for a year and a half and were finally married in 1943; the very same day he had finished training in New Mexico.

With good fortune, they could resume their life together, and hopefully the war could be won and he could return to the quiet yet rewarding life teaching elementary school kids. With even more luck, he and Phyllis would have some children of their own.

They looked forward to raising a family; after all he had been on his own for much of his life and knew the ropes of growing-up pretty well. His own mother died the year he was born and his father followed 19 years later in 1939. Ashley does not feel sorry for himself however. He is a descendent of a large pioneer family who had settled in Chico. Its a quiet scenic town nestled in the northern reaches of California's Central Valley getting its start during the Gold Rush Days. A nice town he and Phyllis hoped to return to. Though he was a quiet, easy-going young man, he never had problems making friends and was well l

English Channel April 27, 1944:

As the formation of bombers drones on towards France, John Northup, in the nose of the Guynn B17, finished getting his flight clothes on. He then got a crash course in manning the nose guns and operating the Norden bombsight from the regular bombardier, 2nd Lt. Reed Hollister. Hollister in turn was filling in for the crew's regular navigator, 2nd Lt. Bernard Hadler who had failed to show up for the mission briefing. Holliste's parting words to Northup before he resumes his own duties: "If anyone can get us back its Ash Guynn. He's the best pilot in the squadron!"

Finally settled into his flying clothes and with an understanding of what was expected of him, John Northup turned to his job in the very front of the plane. He felt a cold breeze coming from somewhere. Spotting a small flak hole in the nose-glass, from the day's previous mission, Northup took his chest pack parachute and used it to cover the hole, stopping the cold air that was hitting him in the face.

Rattlesden, England - April 27, 1944,

Back at Rattlesden, Guynn's regular bombardier, Bernie Hadler arrives back at the base from an early afternoon bike ride to find his crew had gone on a mission he was not anticipating, without him.

English Channel - April 27, 1944,

The bombers have reached their bombing altitude of 18,000 feet as they approach the French coast. The gunners in the rear of the plane move to their positions and check their guns. Waist gunner, Charles "Pop" Mouser helps his buddy, Bernie Weis squeeze into the cramped quarters of his ball turret. "Pop" closes the turret hatch behind Bernie and watches as Weis spins and rotates the turret hanging from the belly of the plane. Satisfied that all is well, Pop turns towards his own waist-gun stationed at the open window on the right side of the plane. Just behind him, left waist gunner Ed Kucinski test fires his gun. At the back of the plane tail gunner Ernie Hernandez kneels at his twin 50 caliber machine guns and scans the sky around him looking for enemy aircraft.

Sergeant George Swingle, in the radio room has also readied his single machine gun. It points out of the open hatch above his compartment behind the bomb bay of the B17. He hopes he does not have to use it against the Luftwaffe pilots who have taken to making head-on passes with their canon-armed Focke-Wulfs. At the same time he monitors the radio for any messages that might be directed at the bombers.

With the crews set, the bombers cross the coast and head for their target. It is quiet on the radios inside the planes except for the periodic oxygen checks. At 18,000 feet

all of the crews are on the oxygen necessary to keep them alive in the thin frigid air at higher altitude.

Tennessee - October, 1999

The daughter of Radio Operator George Swingle answers the phone. She is at a loss as to why her father's name and phone number is still listed in the phone book. He passed away 26 years ago in 1973. Puzzled, she knows very little of her father during the years before she was born. There had been vague references to "Bombers", "The War", "The Army Air Force", but little else. "Dad just did not talk about it much." Cautiously, quietly, yet brightly, Dan illuminates for her and her son and her brother, the bravery and sense of duty of their father, and her son's grandfather as a very young man.

South Carolina - October, 1999

Former USAAF B-17 bombardier John "Jerry" Northrup picks up the receiver for the umpteenth time that day. He is more than a little taken aback by the suddenness of hearing from a stranger who is trying to piece together the events of the April 27, 1944 flight. It has been 55 years since that time. And while he has been very active in Veterans' and POW affairs in South Carolina for many years, that a stranger would phone asking him such specific questions about that particular flight is a little unnerving. Nevertheless, his curiosity piqued, John Northrup listens as Dan explains to him the ID bracelet that Martin Collins has found. Giving himself time to collect his thoughts, John "Jerry" Northrup reaches across the years and begins to unfold his story of that flight

France - April 27, 1944,

Nearing the primary target the lead crew and mission commander see that the target is covered by cloud. He elects to move the formation on to a secondary target, the German airfield at Le Culot, France. The bombing goes off without incident and Northrup, manages to pickle the bomb load on the target by timing his release to coincide with that of the lead plane. So far, the Luftwaffe is still on the ground and the flak over the target is not a factor. He crosses his fingers hoping the mission will turn out to be a "milk-run".

Florida - November, 1999

Luck! Former Guynn co-pilot and aviation magazine contributor, Richard Bender is finally reached. Miraculously he has an almost photographic recollection of the entire flight and after listening briefly about the bracelet, he goes to great lengths, to give insight as both a professional writer and as a crewmember. He has committed himself to the self-discipline of a meticulous adherence to facts and details. He and Mrs. Bender are enjoying their retirement years. They hope she can have her surgery scheduled so they can be at home together in time for Christmas. A consummate professional, he details in an extraordinary manner the flight of April 27, 1944. And while he has written numerous published articles in aviation magazines and other publications, he has never written his own and he and Dan will start putting the piece together right after the holidays.

Ostend, Belgian Coast, English Channel - April 27, 1944

Turning for home and moving across Belgium towards England, the planes run into a ferocious head wind. Their progress towards England slows to a snail's pace. To the crews in the planes it feels like they were hardly moving as they approached the coast near Ostend, Belgium. In effect, they are little more than stationary targets for the heavy German anti-aircraft fire. As they cross over the town of Ostend, the flak begins to fire. From the nose of the Guynn B17, it looks to John Northrup like "cigarettes being lit" when he sees the flashes from the ground of the guns opening fire. The flak intensifies as the crew braces against the barrage.

With the progress of the formation slowed by the head wind, it does not take long for the flak to begin to get the range, the sounds of the bursting shells audible over the drone of the planes engines. Suddenly a cry from tail gunner Ernie Hernandez pierces the intercom as a flak shell explodes near the tail of the Guynn plane. Almost immediately, his anguish is followed by another flak round scoring a direct hit on the number two engine. It sets the engine and the left wing fuel tank on fire.

Lt. Guynn realizes the plane is doomed and stabs at the bail-out bell but gets no sound. Lt. Bender flips the intercom switch and yells at the crew to bail out but gets no reply. Checking all five channels without success, it is clear that the intercom and electrical system are out. They are running out of time. As Ashley Guynn attempts to trim the plane as best he can, to give himself and the others a fighting chance to escape, the crew on the flight deck begin to undo the straps on their seats and prepare to bail out.

In the radio room, George Swingle is rocked by the second blast right after hearing Ernie Hernandez over the intercom and looks out the window towards the left wing. He sees the fire streaming from the engine and fuel tank and knew it was time to get out. Hooking on his chest pack parachute, he opens the door and moves quickly towards the rear escape hatch. Spotting the two waist gunners looking dazed in their positions he grabs the closest and pulls him towards the door. After releasing the door, he pulls himself and Ed Kucinski out of the plane, pulling Kucinski's ripcord first--and then his own. The two men are the first to escape the fatally injured Fortress.

Back in the waist, Pop Mouser comes to his senses after the second explosion, and turns towards the ball turret where his buddy Bernie Weis is trapped. Cranking the turret desperately until the escape hatch is inside the plane, he snatches and pulls at Bernie until he can wrestle him out. They both prepare to bail out. The plane is beginning its final dive towards the ground, out of control; the clock has run out.

In the nose, John Northrup gets bounced around by the hit of the second artillery round and senses the plane beginning to nose over. Peering out the nose he can see the ground filling the view and knows the B-17 is in its death throes. It is time to leave. Crawling back towards the nose escape hatch he can see Reed Hollister and John Thomas at the hatch with Hollister working desperately to open it. Suddenly Northrup is pulled to a stop by the wires to his electrical flight suit, his radio and the hose from his oxygen mask. In his haste to get out he'd forgotten to unhook himself. Quickly he unhooks from all the lines and starts moving again, just then realizing he'd forgotten his chute that was covering the hole in the hose. Going back a second time, he grabs his pack, hooks it to his harness and moves to the hatch, waiting for the other two men to leave first.

As Hollister leaves the plane, the left wing suddenly folds up. The bomber spins wildly out of control, trapping the other men inside with centrifugal force. John Northrup lay pinned in the nose by the sheer force of the spin. It is too late to get out. He wishes for unconsciousness so he won't have to endure his last agonizing seconds in gravity's rush to the ground. As quickly as the thought comes, he is knocked out by something loose crashing around the nose.

In the back of the plane, Pop Mouser begins to climb towards the escape hatch as the bomber entered its death spin. He is stunned by something and his movement stops. Ernie Hernandez never gets out of the tail, dead or seriously wounded. Bernie Weis is also trapped in the rear of the falling plane.

In the cockpit, Richard Bender has managed to grab his chest pack from the back of his seat and hook it on. He sees John Thomas sitting near the tunnel to the nose hatch and motions him forward. He then sees Thomas roll into the tunnel. Behind him he can feel Ashley Guynn moving as well. Bender decides to try and get the bomb bay doors open and jump that way, while Guynn moves into the tunnel towards the nose where Thomas has just rolled. Despite his efforts, the bomb bay doors will not open, and Bender sees flames through the crack on the bottom of the plane. As the wing folds Bender feels himself rolled and trapped against the ceiling of the flight deck. . Something covers his eyes and he can feel things rolling around him.

Ostend, Belgium -- April 27, 1944

Silence.

The noise of the engines and the falling plane was gone. The plane had exploded in mid-air. Richard Bender managed to push whatever was covering his eyes away from his face and saw the sky. Around him were nothing but fragments of airplane rushing earthbound in a mock race toward the earth in gravity's pull. The largest part he recognizes is the vertical tail flipping down towards the Channel. He could clearly read the 197 of the serial number as it fell away. Looking down for the ripcord, Bender sees what looks like canvas ripped and flapping from the fall. Fearing it was his chute pack, he decides to pull the ripcord to find out. After an eternity lasting mere seconds, it opens and is intact. The ripped fabric was instead from his flight overalls that were shredded from the ankle to the crotch. As his fall slows under the chute, he can see a spiral of black smoke falling to the ground. Three or four parachutes appear and his heart sinks to think so few have made it out.

John Northrup comes around to find himself hanging from his parachute, with no knowledge of how he'd escaped the plane. Looking up he can see his chute is torn, but is somehow still doing the job as he drifts down towards a farmer's field. His traumatized body soon lapses him back into unconscious darkness.

Pop Mouser in the rear of the plane came around as well to find himself still in the aircraft. Looking up he could see the tail of the plane had been ripped away. Looking down, he could see Bernie Weis sitting near the ball turret. To his shock he also saw that the front of the plane was gone as well -- from the radio room forward. He and Weiss were falling in the remains of the fuselage between the tail and main wing. He quickly made his escape out the rear, while Bernie Weis fell out the front. They had miraculously survived the mid-air explosion. Both men pulled their chutes and began to drift down, watching the remains of their plane fall in pieces. Some few parts fell

outside of the town of Ostend. Most of the plane's remains hit and sank forever in the waters of the Channel.

Ostend, Belgium -- April 27, 1944

Ashley Guynn, John Thomas and Ernie Hernandez had failed to get out of the plane in time, trapped in the remains by the forces of the death spin just before it exploded in mid-air.

The Guynn plane was the only bomber of the eighteen that did not return. For the survivors, the immediate future meant capture and a grim life as a prisoner of war.

John Northup landed in a field and was almost immediately captured by German soldiers from the local flak battery. He'd broken his leg horribly, either in the exploding plane, or upon landing, he never knew which. He was manhandled by German soldiers from the flak battery and drifted between agonizing pain and unconsciousness.

Pop Mouser and his buddy Bernie Weis were also captured quickly.

Ed Kucinski came to after landing in the Channel, having been saved by the quick actions of George Swingle in getting him out of the plane. Kucinski somehow managed to struggle ashore and was captured.

George Swingle drifted down towards the town and landed hard on the roof of a building, breaking his ankle while punching a hole in the roof at the same time. He hung on for dear life as he felt himself slipping. Throwing tiles down and yelling for help, he finally attracted some attention. Local civilians found a ladder and went up and brought him down. He ended up in a hospital bed in Brussels right next to John Northup.

Richard Bender saw himself drifting towards the water and worked hard to slip his chute to get him back towards land. He then saw he was headed for a swamp and worked away from that, only to land in a barb wire entanglement where he was trapped until the Germans sent in a young soldier to get him out.

Reed Hollister was also captured quickly.

Belgium - 1944

The seven survivors soon were headed to Dulag Luft for interrogation and then towards over a year as prisoners of war. What little wreckage of the plane that hit land was removed from where it had fallen and the bodies of the three dead crewmen were recovered. John Thomas and Ernie Hernandez were identified by dog tags or other identification found on their remains.

The third body remained unidentified and was buried as "unknown" along with the other two men in an English Cemetery at Coxyde, Belgium.

The war in Europe raged on to its conclusion the next year.

After the war, the survivors returned home, as did those killed. By the date of death and knowing the identities of the other two men buried at Coxyde, identification of the "unknown" was made by process of elimination. Lt. Ashley Guynn returned to his hometown of Chico, California. He was buried with full military honours and a posthumous promotion to Captain.

Epilogue - 2000

Time went by, lives moved on, and Ashley Guynn drifted out of people's memories. Until one day a man took a walk on a lonely stretch of beach in Belgium.

Only three members of the crew are still alive. Richard Bender, John "Jerry" Northrup, and ball turret gunner Bernard Weis.

Ashley and Phyllis Guynn's modest little cottage home on Eighth Street in Chico, California is still where it used to be. The neighbourhood is little changed, with the exception of the expanded State University. It is a peaceful and quiet place, just a few blocks away from where Ashley was buried after the war. Phyllis remarried eventually and lives with her husband in Chico. She still thinks often of Ashley.

James Ashley Guynn is a physicist for a large national corporation in Corvallis, Oregon. He was born a little more than 12 months after the loss of his Uncle Ashley, for whom he is named. He will be taking early retirement in May of this year. He was of great help, and support.

Martin Collins and his wife recently travelled to Rattlesden Airfield. After consulting with Ashley's family and Richard Bender and John Northrup, there was mutual feeling that the Bracelet In The Sand will go on display at the 447th Bomber Group Memorial at Rattlesden Airfield England, to honour Ashley's and his crew's memory.

Dan Johnson and his wife Cathy are busy raising three young children. Dan continues to work tirelessly to bring news to lost friends and family members with the history of their WW2 airmen.

With great sadness, Mrs. Richard Bender passed away unexpectedly. As Richard was preparing to drive her home from the hospital following minor surgery, Mrs Bender collapsed just as they were completing her discharge papers. It was Christmas Eve Day, 1999 -- Fifty Six years to the day of the first mission of the Ashley Guynn crew.

MISSION ROSTER

Guyann Crew Mission No.	Date	USAAF 3rd Bomber Division Mission No.	Mission Target	Aircraft Number
1	12/24/1943	116	Noball # 50 near Drionville, France	42-31169
2	01/04/1944	123	Port area at Keil, Germany	42-31191
3	01/07/1944	126	Ludwigshafen, Germany	42-31191
4	01/24/1944	139	Marshalling Yards - Frankfurt, Germany	42-31191
5	01/29/1944	142	Marshalling Yards-Frankfurt, Germany	42-97484
6	02/03/1944	146	Port at Wilhelmshaven, Germany	42-97484
7	02/06/1944	149	Air Depot at Romilly-sur-Siene, France	-
8		162	Aircraft Industry Plants-Rostock, Germany	42-97484
9	02/25/1944	163	Aircraft Plant-Regensburg, Germany	42-97484
10	03/15/1944	178	Aircraft Plants-Brunswick, Germany	
11	03/16/1944	179	Aircraft Plant-Augsburg, Germany	
12	03/18/1944	181	Munich, Germany	"764"
13	03/20/1944	184	Propeller Plant-Frankfurt, Germany	"902"

14	03/26/1944	188	Noball #93 near Cherbourg, France	"003"
15	03/27/1944	189	Airfield at Merignac, France	"025"
16	03/28/1944	190	Airfield at Chatres, France	"029"
17	04/09/1944	197	Warnamunde, Germany	--
18	04/10/1944	198	Aircraft Repair Depot, Charleroi, Belgium	--
19	04/11/1944	199	Aircraft Plant-Arnimswalde, Germany	"052"
20	04/12/1944	190	Aborted mission to Liepzig, Germany	--
21	04/22/1944	206	Marshalling Yards-Hamm, Germany	"025"
22	04/24/1944	208	Aircraft Plant-Friedrichshafen, Germany	"025"
23	04/27/1944	212	Le Coulet airfield, France	42-107197

CREW ROSTER

Pilot --1st LT. Ashley M. Guynn (Capt. Posthumously)	0-746256	KIA
Co-Pilot 2nd LT. Richard R. Bender	0-684471	POW
Navigator/Bombardier 1st LT. Edmund R Hollister	0-739433	POW
Top Turret/Engineer T/Sgt. John H. Thomas Jr.	34450741	KIA
Tail Gunner S/Sgt. Ernest Hernandez	39277536	KIA
Ball Turret Gunner S/Sgt. Bernard J. Weis	12143039	POW
Radio Operator T/Sgt. George D. Swingle	14161347	POW
Right Waist S/Sgt. Charles A Mouser	15337767	POW
Left Waist S/Sgt. Edward F Kucinski	33167550	POW
Nose gunner S/Sgt. John A Northrup	15076240	POW

(The following were members of the original crew when they flew their original bomber to England from the U.S.

First Co-pilot 2/Lt. Ralph W. Lindemann

First Nav 2/Lt. Bernard J Hadler

First Engineer T/Sgt. Louis Guentner

CREDITS

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- To The Guynn Crew for their sacrifice and especially;
- To Captain Ashley Marion Guynn, USAAFA Job Well Done.