

A Summer of Sacrifice Begins: Remembering Harry W. "Pop" Strahlendorf

"On this day in 1944, June 24, P-47 Thunderbolt pilot 2nd Lt. Harry Strahlendorf of the 404th Fighter Squadron took off in his aircraft, named "Eddie Nor II" after his wife Edna Lenore, from A-6 Airfield near Ste. Mère-Église on a combat mission. The squadron's planes and pilots had flown over to A-6 from **Bisterne Airfield** in England only the day before, 23 June, but with the weather suitable for flying the group continued combat missions without let up.



June had been a rough month for the squadron. On D-Day Lt. Joseph E. LaRochelle was shot down by anti-aircraft fire and captured. On June 8 Lt. Harry W. Hohl, Jr., and F/O's Edwin S. Humphreys and Wesley R. Izzard went missing in action from aerial attack by the German Luftwaffe. Lt Willis R. Brown was wounded in action. On June 17, Lt. Glen L. Banks bailed out over France after his engine failed. These losses were from just one of the three fighter squadrons in the group and indicated the painful cost of doing business in the big leagues of air combat with the enemy in Europe. Though these men were missed, the missions continued.

The 371st Fighter Group generated an Oprep A, No. 7, for the 24 hours ending Sunset on 24 June 1944. It was the operational report from the group to higher headquarters on their accomplishment of 371FG missions under Mission/Order No. M1U-14, from IX TAC. Lt. Strahlendorf took off on the first mission of the day, described in this Oprep as follows:

"Major Gunther leading, took off at 0756 with 8 D/B and 4 escorts. Squadron arrived over target area at 0820 (Strong point at front lines Cherbourg). 7 planes attacked area designated by smoke from 4,000 ft. at angle of 45 degrees with release at 1,000. Results were excellent. (Grids were 0153202). 2 miles W. of Target, moderate, accurate heavy flak was encountered. 6 gun emplacements were observed at 0149194. 2/10 clouds at 2,000 ft. with visibility 5 miles prevailed.

Time down was at 0905...2nd Lt. Harry W. Strahlendorf...A/C was hit by flak and crashed in vicinity of Les Ingoufs. No one saw him bail out."



REPUBLIC P-47D-15-RE THUNDERBOLT
Eddie Nor II
Pilot 1st. Lt. Harry W. "POP" Strahlendorf
371st Ftr.Gp. 404th Ftr.Sq.


The sad fact of the matter was that Lt. Strahlendorf did not bail out. He was on his **48th combat mission**, attacking enemy gun emplacements at Fort du Roule at Cherbourg when his P-47D-15 Thunderbolt, serial number 42-76345, was apparently struck by German 88mm anti-aircraft fire from that very site, which scored a direct hit on his P-47, completely shearing off the tail. Without its tail, the aircraft plummeted to the ground and crashed in nearby Octeville, killing him instantly. He was 29 years

old, older than most of the other pilots in their early 20s, who called him "Pop." They were devastated by his loss.



Octeville citizens quickly buried his body, next to his aircraft. The area was liberated two days later and Lt. Strahlendorf's body was later re-interred at the temporary American cemetery called Ste. Mere Eglise #2. This was only about a mile from A-6 Airfield from which he had taken off on that fateful day. In 1948, his body came home to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Mr. Harry W. Strahlendorf, Jr., Lt. Strahlendorf's son whom he never met, the son who never met his father, is proud of his father's service for the United States and for freedom. On Veteran's Day in 2001, he shared a story of the French response to his fallen father with some elementary school children at a school assembly. He told them about a ten-year old French girl named Janine Letulle, whose father had taken her to the countryside away from the militarily important Cherbourg area as the battle for Normandy erupted. He told them:

"One day, several months later, Janine's daddy came for her. He told her that Octeville was now free, liberated by the American soldiers. He said that he wanted her to remember these men who had come from over 3000 miles away to save France from the German invaders.

When they arrived in Octeville, it was raining. Janine's father did not take her directly home. Instead, he took her to a street across the valley from where they lived. He told her that he wanted to show her a place that was very special, where one hero had given his life for her.

As they rounded a street corner, Janine saw wreckage from an airplane. The airplane had a white star on it. Beside the wreckage, a wooden cross rose out of a mound of earth. Hanging from the cross was a military hat. Janine wondered what this was all about. 'Papa,' she asked, 'why have you brought me here?'

Her father replied, 'Janine, this is the place where a brave American pilot died only two weeks ago, and I wanted to show you this place so that you will never forget what this man, and men like him, have done for France. This man is our Liberator. I never want you to forget that he came here, so far from his home, to save us. He gave his life for France, for Europe and the world. You must never forget!'

Janine was deeply touched, for she realized that this mound of earth was the grave of the pilot, this unknown man, her Liberator."



The citizens of Octeville haven't forgotten. In 1994, they dedicated "Square Strahlendorf" in their town. Lt. Strahlendorf's son Harry and his wife Ann made it to France to attend the dedication and remembered: "Fifty years to the day of my father's sacrifice, I stood on his crash site with my wife, Ann. It was June 24, 1994. We had been invited by the French people to attend what they called 'a memorial

ceremony.' They had a surprise for us that day. Little did I know that they had created a beautiful park on my dad's crash site and named it for their Liberator, my father."

"It's a beautiful little park in the centre of town," Strahlendorf said. It has wooden benches, maple trees, gravel walkways and a collection of white stones arranged in the shape of the state of Pennsylvania."

The moving ceremony that followed was a sincere expression of the appreciation conveyed on the monument marking the crash site, which is inscribed as follows: The monument marking the crash spot contains this inscription:



"TO THE MEMORY OF THE AMERICAN
LT. HARRY W. STRAHLENDORF
PILOT OF THE 371 FG - 404 SQUADRON
9TH U.S. AIR FORCE
WHO GAVE HIS LIFE ON THIS SPOT
DURING THE AERIAL ASSAULT IN
THE COURSE OF THE LIBERATION OF
CHERBOURG
JUNE 24, 1944"

Following the commemoration, Strahlendorf met a man, Monsieur Launey, then in his late 70s, who for the past 50 years had placed a rose on the spot where his father made his supreme sacrifice. Indeed, the residents of Octeville still remember. On 21 June 2014, grateful citizens of France held a ceremony commemorating the 70th Anniversary of Lt. Strahlendorf's sacrifice at his crash site on the Rue du Poitou in Cherbourg-Octeville, at the Square Strahlendorf.

<https://www.aerosteles.net/steleen-octeville-strahlendorf>

So on this day, 24 June 24, 2014, we salute the service and sacrifice of Lt. Harry W. "Pop" Strahlendorf! It was only by efforts like his, engaging the enemy in mortal combat, that the oppressed were freed from fascism in World War II. Freedom is never free, not then, and not now, a lesson we should all remember and heed.

We salute Harry W. Strahlendorf, Jr., who honors his father and his memory, searching for information on his loss, making the journey to Normandy to commemorate him with grateful French citizens, and creating tributes to Lt. Strahlendorf in the news media and the internet.

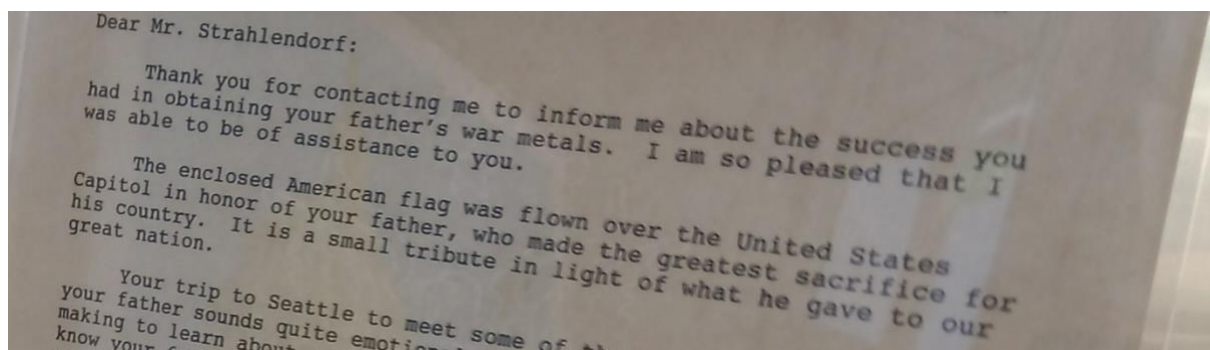
We also salute the French citizens, the Normans of Octeville, who faithfully remember Lt. Strahlendorf of the 371st Fighter Group. May God bless their loyalty to his remembrance and preserve for our people on each shore the liberty and freedom that makes this life a wonderful journey."

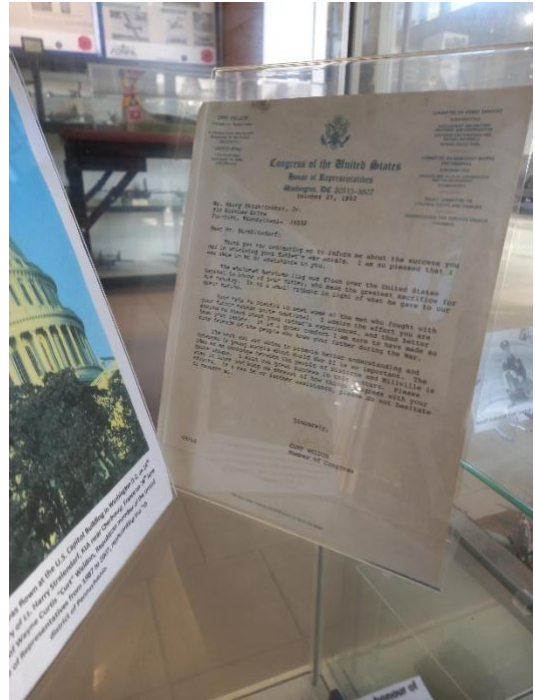
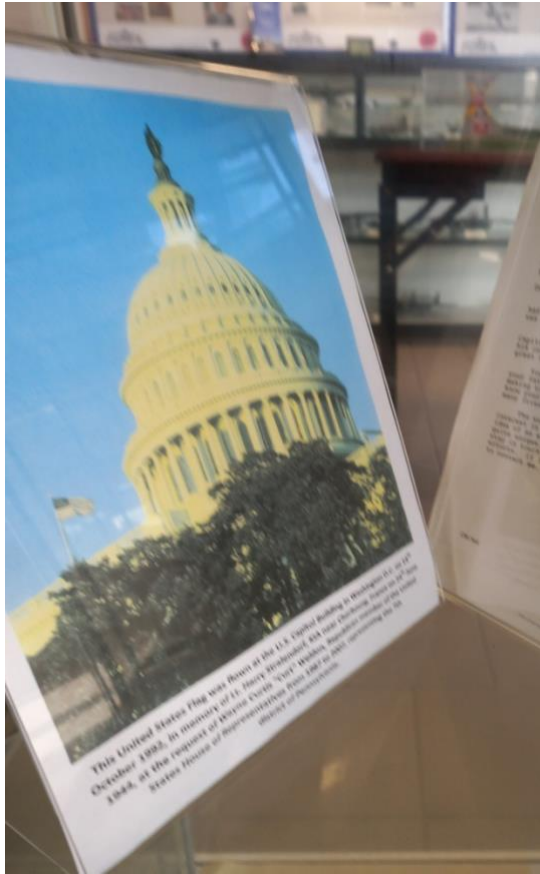
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<https://371stfightergroup.wordpress.com/2014/06/24/a-summer-of-sacrifice-begins-remembering-harry-w-pop-strahlendorf/>

← Bragging Rights: First USAAF Combat Unit Based in France

FONFA are privileged to have a letter from the Congress of the USA to his son as well as the USA flag flown on Capitol Hill in October 1992 in honour of this brave pilot. These items are in a display case along with a model of the aircraft he flew.







404th FG pilots Harry W. "Pop" Strahlendorf sixth from the right back row standing.