

POW/MIA ~ Welcome Home
Putnam Veterans SITREP
 Volume 15 Issue 4
Eugene J. Darrigan
 US Army Air Forces
 Staff Sergeant
 Radio Operator
 Age 26
 Wappingers Falls, New York

320th Bombardment Squadron
 90th Bombardment Group
 5th Air Force

B-24D Liberator
 S/N: 42-41216
 "Heaven Can Wait"

320th BS
 90th BG
 JOLLY ROGER

Killed in action 11 Mar 1944, B-24D shot down into water near Hansa Bay, New Guinea
 Crash site located in 2013 by Project Recover, unexploded ordnance cleared in 2019
 Remains, ID tags and life support equipment recovered 9 Mar – 13 Apr 2023
 Accounted for 21 Jan 2025
 Identified via DNA, Dental, Material, Circumstantial and Anthropological Evidence
 Buried at Fort Campbell, New York

AN E-MAIL SITUATION REPORT (SITREP) OF THE PUTNAM COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE AGENCY



**PROJECT
RECOVER**

BRINGING OUR MIAs HOME

WWII bomber crash in 1944 left 11 dead and 'non-recoverable.'

WAPPINGERS FALLS, N.Y.

As the World War II bomber Heaven Can Wait was hit by enemy fire off the Pacific island of New Guinea on March 11, 1944, the co-pilot managed a final salute to flyers in an adjacent plane before crashing into the water. All 11 men aboard were killed. Their remains, deep below the vast sea, were designated as non-recoverable.

Yet four crew members' remains are beginning to return to their hometowns after a remarkable investigation by family members and a recovery mission involving elite Navy divers who descended 200 feet (61 meters) in a pressurized bell to reach the sea floor.

Staff Sgt. Eugene Darrigan, the radio operator was buried military honors and community support on Saturday in his hometown of Wappingers Falls, New York, more than eight decades after leaving behind his wife and baby son. The bombardier, 2nd Lt. Thomas Kelly, was to be buried Monday in Livermore, California, where he grew up in a ranching family. The remains of the pilot, 1st Lt. Herbert Tennyson, and navigator, 2nd Lt. Donald Sheppick, will be interred in the coming months.

The ceremonies are happening 12 years after one of Kelly's relatives, Scott Althaus, set out to solve the mystery of where exactly the plane went down. "I'm just so grateful," he told The Associated Press. "It's been an impossible journey — just should never have been able to get to this day. And here we are, 81 years later."

The Army Air Forces plane nicknamed Heaven Can Wait

was a B-24 with a cartoon pin-up angel painted on its nose and a crew of 11 on its final flight. They were on a mission to bomb Japanese targets when the plane was shot down. Other flyers on the mission were not able to spot survivors. Their wives, parents and siblings were of a generation that tended to be tight-lipped in their grief. But the men were sorely missed.

Sheppick, 26, and Tennyson, 24, each left behind pregnant wives who would sometimes write them two or three letters a day. Darrigan, 26, also was married, and had been able to attend his son's baptism while on leave. A photo shows him in uniform, smiling as he holds the boy. Darrigan's wife, Florence, remarried but quietly held on to photos of her late husband, as well as a telegram informing her of his death.

Tennyson's wife, Jean, lived until age 96 and never remarried. "She never stopped believing that he was going to come home," said her grandson, Scott Jefferson. As Memorial Day approached twelve years ago, Althaus asked his mother for names of relatives who died in World War II.

Althaus, a political science and communications professor at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, became curious while researching World War II casualties for work. His mother gave him the name of her cousin Thomas Kelly, who was 21 years old when he was reported missing in action.

Althaus recalled that as a boy, he visited Kelly's memorial stone, which has a bomber engraved on it. He began reading up on the lost plane.

"It was a mystery that I discovered really mattered to my extended family," he said.

With help from other relatives, he analyzed historical documents, photos and eyewitness recollections. They weighed sometimes conflicting accounts of where the plane went down. After a four-year investigation, Althaus wrote a report concluding that the bomber likely crashed off of Awar Point in what is now Papua New Guinea.

The report was shared with Project Recover, a nonprofit committed to finding and repatriating missing American service members and a partner of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, or DPAA. A team from Project Recover, led by researchers from Scripps Institution of Oceanography, located the debris field in 2017 after searching nearly 10 square miles (27 square kilometers) of seafloor.

The DPAA launched its deepest ever underwater recovery mission in 2023. A Navy dive team recovered dog tags, including Darrigan's partially corroded tag with his the name of his wife, Florence, as an emergency contact. Kelly's ring was recovered. The stone was gone, but the word BOMBARDIER was still legible.

And they recovered remains that underwent DNA testing. Last September, the military officially accounted for Darrigan, Kelly, Sheppick and Tennyson. With seven men who were on the plane still unaccounted for, a future DPAA mission to the site is possible.

More than 200 people honored Darrigan on Saturday in Wappingers Falls, some waving flags from the sidewalk during the procession to the church,

others saluting him at a graveside ceremony under cloudy skies.

"After 80 years, this great soldier has come home to rest," Darrigan's great niece, Susan Pineiro, told mourners at his graveside. Darrigan's son died in 2020, but his grandson Eric Schindler attended. Darrigan's 85-year-old niece, Virginia Pineiro, solemnly accepted the folded flag.

Kelly's remains arrived in the Bay Area on Friday. He was to be buried Monday at his family's cemetery plot, right by the marker with the bomber etched on it. A procession of Veterans of Foreign Wars motorcyclists will pass by Kelly's old home and high school before he is interred.

"I think it's very unlikely that Tom Kelly's memory is going to fade soon," said Althaus, now a volunteer with Project Recover.

Sheppick will be buried in the months ahead near his parents in a cemetery in Coal Center, Pennsylvania. His niece, Deborah Wineland, said she thinks her late father, Sheppick's younger brother, would have wanted it that way. The son Sheppick never met died of cancer while in high school.

Tennyson will be interred on June 27 in Wichita, Kansas. He'll be buried beside his wife, Jean, who died in 2017, just months before the wreckage was located. "I think because she never stopped believing that he was coming back to her, that it's only fitting she be proven right," Jefferson said.

MICHAEL HILL 40/29 News

Lest

we

forget



Memorial Day is not a day for sales or for R & R. It is a sacred day. It is a day to honor those brave Americans who perished defending this great nation. So because of that sacrifice Americans are free to do what ever they want on Memorial. Even if it too make a fool of themselves tell people to have Rest and Recuperation on Memorial Day.

LEST WE FORGET.

The Saturday before Memorial Day my wife and I attended Eugene J. Darrigan's funeral at St. Mary's Church in Wappingers Falls. There were several hundred people there with those in the church for the Mass and those outside at the cemetery for in interment. What a fitting way to begin the Memorial Day weekend. Welcoming home a service member who died from enemy fire over 80 years ago.

LEST WE FORGET

Two organizations you should know.

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency:

A world-class workforce fulfills our nation's obligation by maximizing the number of missing personnel accounted for while ensuring timely, accurate information is provided to their families.

Project Recover is a collaborative effort to enlist 21st-century science and technology in a quest to find and repatriate Americans Missing In Action (MIA) since World

Karl



In Loving Memory of



Eugene J. Darrigan

November 7, 1917 - March 11, 1944

Day is done, gone the sun
From the lake, from the hill
From the sky.

All is well, safely rest
God is nigh.

Thanks and praise, for our days,
'Neath the sun, 'neath the stars,
'Neath the sky,

As we go, this we know,
God is nigh.
Amen.

Deleahanty Funeral Home, Inc.
Wappingers Falls, NY



**RONALD B. SMITH GOVERNMENT CAMPUS
110 OLD ROUTE 6, BLDG. #3
CARBON, NY 10512
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**KARL IMHOF, DIRECTOR
TANYA PENNIEJA, DEPUTY DIRECTOR**



DON'T FEED THE SHARKS



DontFeedTheSharks.org

What we think a "Claim Shark" is:

- A Claim Shark is an individual or company that charges hefty fees to "assist" or "consult" veterans with filing their VA benefit claims – this practice is illegal!
- Claim Sharks are not VA accredited, meaning they aren't required to adhere to the well-established professional and ethical standards of VA accreditation, so their advice can often be misleading or even fraudulent.
- Like a "Loan Shark," once you're in, you can't get out, and may be subject to new and hidden fees whenever you get a new rating, no matter who does the work.

Some of their predatory practices are:

- Promising or guaranteeing an increased disability rating or percentage increase.
- Advertising expedited VA claims decisions.
- Requesting login credentials to access a veteran's personal information through secure VA websites like eBenefits or VA.gov.
- Using confusing tactics or ambiguous language to mislead claimants or coerce them into signing a contract.
- Telling veterans to forego VA exams and offering health consultations within their own network of doctors.

Who we think the Claim Sharks are:

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| ➤ Trajector Medical | ➤ Veteran Care Services |
| ➤ Veteran Benefits Guide | ➤ REE Medical |
| ➤ Veterans Guardian | ➤ VA Claims Academy |
| ➤ VA Claims Insider | ➤ Vet Assist |
| ➤ Telemedica | ➤ Just4Veterans |
| ➤ Patriot Angels | ➤ Veterans Disability Help |

Veterans can protect themselves by:

- Always working with VA accredited representatives.
- Attending all exams ordered by VA.
- Not signing contracts.
- Not agreeing to fees or payments from future benefits.
- Not agreeing to pay for medical consultations or opinions.
- Not providing access to Protected Health Information or Personal Identifiable Information.

Who is NOT a Claim Shark?

- VA accredited veterans service organization representatives, like the VFW
- VA accredited claims agents
- VA accredited attorneys
- Attorneys assisting with Camp Lejeune lawsuits who do not charge excessive fees



This is extremely important!!!!

Recently a Federal Grand Jury indicted 10 people with defrauding the government for unearned VA benefits.

It is difficult enough to get VA benefits for deserving Veterans without competing with cheaters.

Please be careful.

I would like to thank the VFW for standing vigil for our rights as Veterans.

Contact this office for a claim!

The Bulletin Board

Senator Pete Harckham
Veterans Advisory Council Meeting
with special guest

Aaron Leonard
CEO of Guardian Revival
(local veterans non-profit organization)

Saturday, June 7, 2025

12:00 - 14:00 (12 p.m. - 2 p.m.)

Amawalk Firehouse (Somers Fire Department)
1 Liberty Way, Amawalk, NY 10501

**Free lunch will be provided by
the Office of Senator Harckham**



**Please RSVP to
David Zeiger at
(914) 241-4600 or
zeiger@nysenate.gov**