



BONNIE WELLER / Inquirer Staff Photographer

A McGuire Air Force Base honor guard stands at attention by the grave of Lt. John C. Murphy in Broomall. He died on the last U.S. bomber lost over Germany.

Broomall ceremony pays tribute to lieutenant's sacrifice.

Gravestone is finally erected for an airman lost in WWII

By Gaiutra Bahadur
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

BROOMALL — A Purple Heart in a box in the basement.

A faded portrait of a dark-haired airman in uniform, fixed proudly on a bookshelf.

One name sought out — and found — among the litany of the fallen at a memorial for American soldiers at St. Paul's Cathedral in England.

Lt. John C. Murphy was killed aboard the *Black Cat*, the last American bomber shot down over Germany in World War II. For half a century, he lay in a

grave without a tombstone, with only the mementos and memories of his family to mark his place in history.

That changed yesterday, with the dedication of a bronze plaque bearing the West Chester radar operator's name and details of his death on April 21, 1945.

A U.S. Air Force color guard folded a U.S. flag, and a bugle let out a plaintive wail under morning skies as solemn as the nearly 100 people gathered for the ceremony at the Glenwood Memorial Gardens in Broomall.

A couple from King of Prussia had
See **AIRMAN** on B3

A marker is erected over the Delco grave of a WWII airman

AIRMAN from B1 made it their mission to mark Murphy's grave after reading about the Black Cat and its crew in a book called *Wings of Morning*, by University of Pennsylvania professor Thomas Childers.

The couple, John and Ellen Fleming, are amateur historians. John Fleming and Childers both spoke at the memorial yesterday.

"No way would I allow an Eighth Air Force veteran lie in an unmarked grave," John Fleming told the crowd of veterans at the ceremony. "Not if I can help it."

Fleming and his wife tracked down Murphy's grave by digging through records at the Chester County Historical Society. Over the last year and a half, they collected \$3,000 from 50 donors to craft a plaque engraved with wings and a B-24 Liberator long-range bomber like the one in which Murphy died.

"Precious little was known about Murphy but a group number and a squadron number," John Fleming said. "We were not even sure what the 'C' in his name stood for."

The C, it turns out, stands for Charles.

John Murphy's brother — Daniel G. Murphy Jr., 83, the owner of a Ford dealership — lives in Media. And Daniel G. Murphy III — the soldier's nephew and keeper of the box containing the Purple Heart — lives in Bryn Mawr.

They did not know about the memorial or the Flemings' search for Murphy's grave until last week, after a newspaper article about it was published.

"We had all the answers they were looking for," said Nancy Murphy, a relative. "We knew the plots were here."

John Murphy, 24 when shot down, lies next to his parents, Grace and Daniel. His father, a lawyer, was chairman of the Pennsylvania Workmen's Compensation Board. The family owned a home in Philadelphia and a farm near West Chester.

The box of John Murphy memorabilia also contains a class picture from the Haverford School

and a letter from the University of Pennsylvania granting him a leave of absence to join the Army Air Forces in 1942.

It is unclear why Murphy's grave did not bear a marker.

Daniel G. Murphy III, the nephew who was not yet a year old when the Black Cat was shot down, said he was told most graves at the cemetery at the time were unmarked.

Marking or no marking, the story of the fallen soldier's end was passed down in the Murphy family. "I knew about the last mission, that he had been killed in the last mission of the war," the nephew said. "And that it was a needless mission."

Professor Childers — whose uncle was a radio operator on the Black Cat — retold the tale of its last mission at the ceremony.

Seventeen days before the war's close, a formation of B-24 bombers ventured into Nazi-held Austria to target a railroad bridge and forestall a possible last stand by the German army.

The mission was aborted because of bad weather. On the way back, a commanding pilot of the 466th Bomb Group of the Eighth Air Force ordered a great sweeping right turn back, a fateful mistake that would take them over the heavily fortified city of Regensburg. The lead navigator questioned the order.

"Stay off the air," the command pilot snapped. "I'm leading this mission."

Shortly after 11:30, an 88mm shell hit one plane flying in the center of the formation — the Black Cat — between its first and second engines.

The plane caught fire, lost a wing and crashed. Only two men, a tail gunner from Brooklyn and a bombardier from Pittsburgh, were able to parachute to safety. Murphy and nine other crew members were killed.

"It reminds us of the terrible costs of war," Childers said. "It reminds us too that even in triumph there is heartbreak."

"A generation of young Americans, kids really, rose to the challenge. The gift of freedom and peace that all of us enjoy today, even in these troubled times, is their legacy."

John Murphy's body was recovered and buried in England. In 1948, his remains were returned to the United States and interred at Glenwood, where his parents were later buried. Their graves, too, are unmarked. The ceremony closed with a prayer by Chaplain



BONNIE WELLER / Inquirer Staff Photographer

Thomas Werner, a WWII Army veteran who fought in Burma, holds flags to be put on veterans' graves. He was at the ceremony in Broomall yesterday to dedicate Lt. John C. Murphy's grave marker.

Chad Bellamy, who is stationed at McGuire Air Force Base. "gotten," he said.

"Though our nation has suffered the loss of many heroes, they shall never, never, be forgotten," he said. Contact staff writer Gaiutra Bahadur at 856-779-3923 or bahadug@phillynews.com.



Lt. John Murphy was buried in an unmarked grave in 1948.

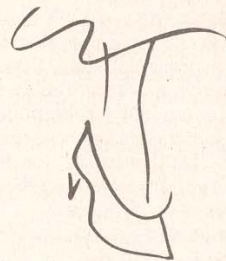
DONATE THAT CAR!

Free Pickup • Tax Deduction "Fair market value" per IRS
We Do All Paperwork • Running or Not* *Restrictions apply

Pennsylvania Council of the Blind has helped blind people become productive in the workplace since 1940.

Vehicles, Boats, RV's, and more!

800-822-3490



Semi Annual Sale

20-50% Off!

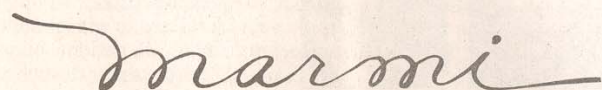
Spring & Summer Shoes and Accessories

Save now ... wear now!

The latest European influenced designs

- Sesto Meucci Sizes 4-12
- Rangoni of Florence in 5 widths
- Van Eli super-slim to wide

Fit, fashion and friendly service!



The Court, King of Prussia 610.992.1932
www.marmishoes.com