

One Senior Scientist Travel Overseas for Unveiling of WWII Memorial Honoring Fallen US Airmen

Michael Philbin's cousin was among those lost in the B-17 "Mission Belle" crash in 1943

On September 29, 2018, approximately 300 hundred people gathered in Nieuw-Lekkerland, a town in western Netherlands, for the unveiling of a new memorial site in honor of the crew of a crashed B-17 bomber "Mission Belle" in World War II (WWII). Of those in attendance were 30 American relatives of the then crew, including our very own Michael Philbin, Senior Scientist for Global R&D, Surface Chemistry.

Michael's father's first cousin, John F. Healy, was the tail gunner in the B-17 "Mission Belle" that was shot down on December 1, 1943. In this role, he functioned as a gunner defending against enemy fighter attacks from the rear, or "tail", of the plane. In route to a mission in Leverkusen, Germany, the "Mission Belle" was intercepted and subsequently shot down in enemy territory in the Lek River in Southern Holland only a few kilometers away from the world famous Kinderdijk Windmills. Three of the crew were killed in action, including Michael's cousin, but the remaining seven were rescued from the crash by the local population. The seven American survivors became Prisoners of War, but were liberated in May 1945.

Two of the fallen airmen – the pilot (Sunde) and the ball turret gunner (McCutchen) – were buried at The Netherlands American Cemetery in Margraten soon after the crash. Michael's cousin John was laid to rest at the Ardennes American Cemetery in Neuville-en-Condroz, Belgium, in 1955 when the plane wreckage was finally salvaged from the river.

Fast forward to 2018, nearly two generations later, the local community is paying tribute to those who served and fought for their freedom. Given the large impact of the crash and war on the local community, the Mission Belle, B-17G Memorial Foundation was created. Over the past three years, the Foundation Committee worked with the local community to raise funds to support the development of this monument and memorial near the crash site.

"The event was unforgettable," states Michael Philbin, after returning to the US following the unveiling in The Netherlands. "After so many years, for the local community and Foundation to put so much support and hard work into this tribute is pretty incredible and my family is grateful for the opportunity to participate and honor those we lost."

Check out a [video](#) of the unveiling ceremony and see below for more pictures of the memorial and crash site. To learn more about the "Mission Belle," click [here](#).



Michael Philbin and his brother, Brian Philbin, at their cousin's gravesite and near the monument



Design mockup of the monument honoring "Mission Belle"



A picture of the crash site where the "Mission Belle" went down in December 1943



The "Mission Belle" crew - standing left to right: Healy, Josephson, Culver, Padgett, England, McCutchen. Sitting from left to right: Tully, Sunde, Giovannini, Christensen.