

**May, 30<sup>th</sup> 2016:**

**VINCENT BRADNER**

On behalf of the Village of Piermont -  
Welcome residents, honored guests and Gold Star families to our  
Memorial Day commemoration.

This Memorial Day, we turn our attention to Army Air Force Staff Sergeant Vincent Bradner, who left his clerk job and enlisted in August of 1942. SSgtBradner was assigned to the 524<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron of the 379<sup>th</sup> Bomber Group. In December of '42, Vincent assembled with his Bomber Group at Wendover Field, Utah and trained there until the squadron departed for Kimbolton, England, north of London, in April 1943.

Vincent served as a Ball Turret Gunner on the B-17 Flying Fortress. The ball turret hung beneath the B-17, designed as an extremely small space in order to reduce drag. The ball turret was an unforgiving space and was typically assigned to the smallest man of the crew.

Vincent flew more than a dozen bombing raids over France and Germany throughout the late spring and early summer of 1943. In late July, Vincent was assigned to a patched up, already war-weary B-17 named "Calamity Jane." This ship was named for the fictional frontier character, who earned the nickname due to her excellent marksmanship. Pilot Lt. Robert Paulin probably chose this name in the hope that some of her shooting skills would rub off on the gunners of his crew.

The target on August 12, 1943 was a synthetic rubber plant in Gelsenkirchen, Germany, deep in the industrialized and heavily defended Ruhr Valley. In an ominous precursor to this mission, a raid on a ball bearing plant in Schweinfurt planned five days earlier was

scrubbed at the last minute with speculation that German intelligence knew every detail of the plan and was prepared to respond.

The B-17 engines roared to life in the early morning darkness of August 12<sup>th</sup> and the Flying Fortresses took off every thirty seconds until all 21 planes of the group were airborne. Vincent's squadron joined a total of 300 planes in the air, with a collective bomb load of 750 tons of high explosives. Once airborne, Vincent manned his station, lowering himself in a fetal position into the ball turret beneath the plane.

After crossing the enemy coastline, German fighter planes lie in wait for them to run the gauntlet of ground fire before picking off any B-17s crippled by the high-altitude explosives. After passing through several walls of flak, the squadron continued without incident toward the heavily defended target and the beginning of their bomb run. Once the ten 500-pound bombs dropped from the lead plane, the "Calamity Jane" released its payload. Bombardier Lt. Harry Ford looked at the clock on his instrument panel; it was 9:05 am.

SSgt Bradner was about to get very busy at his gun station. The bomber group was now feeling the full effect of the enemy's perimeter ground defenses. Almost immediately after hitting their target, three B-17s were seen falling out of formation. One after another, German FW-190s and ME-109s stalked the lagging planes and picked off any B-17s that succumbed to the heavy flak. Vincent reported over the intercom that the plane on their left wing was hit and going down in a steep dive with its number one engine on fire. Another nearby plane blew up, and yet another was out of control, falling wing over wing.

The intense barrage continued and the "Calamity Jane" was beginning to fall behind the formation and losing altitude. In a matter of seconds, it was dangerously isolated from the formation. Voices were shouting over

the intercom and streams of tracer bullets and exploding 20mm cannon shells flew by on both sides of the plane. From his position beneath the plane, Vincent was struggling to keep the marauding German fighters at bay. As the fighting intensified, yelling over the intercom turned into screams of either panic or pain. It seemed obvious that Vincent and the gunners in the rear of the plane were in deep trouble, to such a degree that they were no longer able to return fire.

Five FW-190s lined up just out of range of the plane's defenses. The lead fighter dropped its wing and turned toward its prey. Within seconds, a loud explosion interrupted the noise of the guns; the "Calamity Jane" rolled over on her back, dropped her nose and went into a spin. The "Calamity Jane" emerged from the clouds, falling helplessly in a flat spin. Shot down by the FW-109 captain Walter Hoeckner, the "Calamity Jane" crashed in a field in Lindlar, east of Cologne, Germany.

Waist Gunner SSgt. Jim Farnum; Radio Operator T/Sgt. Dan Foxx; Tail Gunner T/Sgt. Adolf Lurig; and Ball Turret Operator SSgt. Vince Bradner were unable to escape the plane and had all been killed in the crash. Today we remember the sacrifice of Vincent and the extended Bradner family. We, their Piermont family, honor this sacrifice and, through this annual ceremony, ensure Vincent's efforts will not be forgotten. In remembrance of him, we express our gratitude by naming this stretch of Piermont Avenue after SSgt Vincent J. Bradner.

Keep SSgt Vincent Bradner, and all of our fallen soldiers in your thoughts and prayers - it is in their honor that we gather this day. Also, keep in mind that these sacrifices are not only distant history - since we gathered here last Memorial Day, 58 men & women gave the ultimate sacrifice of their lives in the service of our country. Families of these soldiers, and communities like our own, are facing the raw, recent loss of their native sons and daughters today.

I ask you to keep in mind all of our men and women who are serving our country. As we enjoy this beautiful day in Piermont, away from our own labors, let it not be far from our thoughts that these soldiers continue to stand guard for us on foreign soil, in harm's way.

May God bless them, keep them safe, and ensure they return home soon.