

Honoring a Veteran

As he grew up in Englewood, Vernon resident Chris Wyman always heard the stories about how his father's brother, Lt. Burt C. Wyman, at age 21, had given his life for his country. He knew that his uncle had been shot down during a combat mission over Belgium and that his airplane crashed resulting in his death on January 29, 1944.

For many years, one of the Wyman family's treasures has been an old framed photograph of Burt and the wings and medals he had earned during his service in the Royal Canadian Air Force and then the United States Army Air Corp's Fourth Fighter Group in Europe during World War II.

What Chris wasn't prepared for was a July 6, 2017 email from France with the subject line, "First Lieutenant BURT C. WYMAN, Epinal American Cemetery." Email exchanges with the sender, Ben Howson, a cemetery volunteer with the U.S. Memory Grand Est France, revealed that Burt Wyman's grave had been adopted by another French gentleman, Michel Chacel, who in 2015 was able to locate the exact crash site and uncovered not only parts of the airplane, but parts of the pilot's seat belt and his badly-burned wristwatch. The stopped hands below the melted watch crystal were at the same time as the official reported time of the crash.

In the months that followed, Chris received the wristwatch and over 30 pounds of airplane debris from the crash site. He also discovered never before recognized photographs of his uncle taken during the war, which were preserved by the U.S.-based Fourth Fighter Group and the British-based American Air Museum.

Starting in the beginning of May, the airplane parts and related memorabilia will be on display at the Sussex County Library System's Dorothy Henry Branch located at 66 Route 94 in McAfee/Vernon, N.J. As a prelude to Memorial Day, Chris will offer a special presentation entitled "Honoring a Veteran" at the library on Saturday, May 12 at 2 p.m. Area veterans' associations and civic organizations are especially invited to attend the presentation.

For additional information call Chris at 973-764-9421 or via email to photos9421@warwick.net.



At Left: Lt. Burt C. Wyman circa autumn 1943 at Debden Airfield in England with the nose art of his Republic P-47C Thunderbolt with a depiction of the Wyman family's black cat with the word "Jersey" below it. The pilot was shot down and killed by enemy fighter aircraft in 1944 at the age of only 21.

At Right: Front and rear views of his recovered but badly-burned wristwatch.