



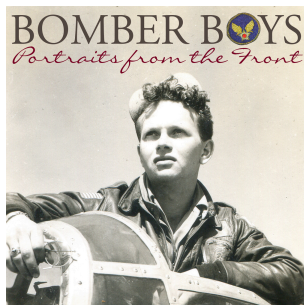
HARBOR HISTORY MUSEUM

Contact Zachary Sokolik
Telephone 253.858.6722 ext. 5
Email marketing@harborhistorymuseum.org
Website www.harborhistorymuseum.org

MEDIA RELEASE
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HARBOR HISTORY MUSEUM HOSTS BOMBER BOYS EXHIBIT

“Bomber Boys: Portraits from the Front” on view through June 2nd, 2019



Gig Harbor, WA – Harbor History Museum is pleased to host “Bomber Boys: Portraits from the Front,” a special exhibition now available through Harbor History Museum’s Traveling eXhibition Service. Featuring a series of striking photographs reproduced from a secret stash of World War II images, ephemera, and a diary from 1945, the exhibit highlights the combat, captains, crew, and camp life of the 445th bomb squadron of the 12th Army Air Corps stationed mainly on Corsica and in Italy.

“This amazing collection was found when my sister and I were cleaning out the hayloft of our horse barn in Gig Harbor, Washington,” says Stephanie Lile, exhibit curator. “Dad never talked much about the war and never seemed to want to, so finding the box of dusty old photos and a diary was a huge surprise.” Lile and her four siblings felt the collection was too special not to share. In fact, she has spent the last 10 years researching and cataloging the collection, an adventure that took her both to Italy and to Arizona to fly in an historic B-25.

Lile used the collection as inspiration for a young adult novel *THE TAIL GUNNER*, then she and her family decided to expand access to the collection by creating a traveling exhibition. Lile was a lecturer for Museum Studies at University of Washington Tacoma when she saw an opportunity to use the collection and exhibit to involve her students in a real-world project. “The students did much of the background research on specific topics and people that was then transformed into various interpretive elements,” explains Lile. “The stories that have surfaced are amazing. One student discovered that Lorton Wellnitz, one of the bomber boys pictured in the exhibit, was not only an enlisted man and statistician, but an all-star pitcher around base.”

The exhibit features portraits of the “boys” who flew B-25 bombers in the Mediterranean theater. Some of them are known, like Wellnitz and Keith B. Lile—the tail gunner whose collection these images came from—many are not.

One of the curator's hopes in presenting this exhibit is that as the show travels, people will recognize some of the men depicted. A handful of the men in the portraits were identified by notes on the original prints, but many remain a mystery.

An engaging combination of portraits, personal stories, and an introduction to the little-known history of the 12th Army Air Corps, "Bomber Boys" invites visitors to see beyond the bravado and smiles to the question that plagued every airman, "How long will I live?" And some didn't make it. In honor of all who served with the 445th squadron, the exhibit provides a complete list of officers and enlisted men, many of whom became prisoners of war or were killed in action. Additionally, visitors are invited to share their memories of bomber boys past and are challenged to piece together the stories of the men depicted through clues placed throughout the exhibit.

Far from your typical studio portraits, many of these images were snapshots taken during stand down on base. A very few show combat. Many were taken to mark a significant event such as a 50th or 100th mission, while others were meant to be shared with friends, family, and hometown newspapers.

"Bomber Boys: Portraits from the Front" will be on view from December 8, 2018 to June 2, 2019, with a curator talk being presented on Thursday, April 11, 2019 at 6:00 p.m. at the Museum.

For more information about "Bomber Boys," visit www.harborhistorymuseum.org.

Press photos and an FAQ are also available.

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Image credits:

Bomber Boys Promotional Image by Harbor History Museum

About Harbor History Museum: Harbor History Museum creates opportunities to experience the heritage of the greater Gig Harbor communities by collecting, preserving, and sharing the rich history of the area. Our vision is to be the cornerstone that provides a gathering place and a sense of identity for our community. Founded in 1964, the Gig Harbor Peninsula Historical Society dba Harbor History Museum opened its new facility in 2010. The museum campus includes an 1893 fully restored one-room school house; a 65-foot fishing vessel currently under restoration; 7,000 square feet of exhibition space; and a 900-square foot library, research and meeting room. The Museum provides a variety of public education programs. Our core educational program is the Pioneer School Experience (PSE), which serves over 1,400 students every year. Led by a trained "School Marm," the children experience a pioneer school classroom complete with lessons, recitations, music, recess, and lunch. Our permanent exhibit features professionally designed exhibitions, larger-than-life experiences, and opportunities for hands-on exploration of our region's rich history and unique heritage. Artifacts, video kiosks, hands-on exhibits, computer interactives, and a small theater bring Peninsula history to life in our permanent

galleries. In addition, the Museum provides 3-5 special exhibits throughout the year so there is always something new to see and experience for our members and visitors.

WINTER HOURS – Wednesdays–Fridays 10 am–5 pm, Saturdays 10 am–4 pm.

ADMISSION – Complimentary Admission for all visitors courtesy of the City of Gig Harbor.

CONTACT – 253-858-6722, www.HarborHistoryMuseum.org, Marketing@HarborHistoryMuseum.org