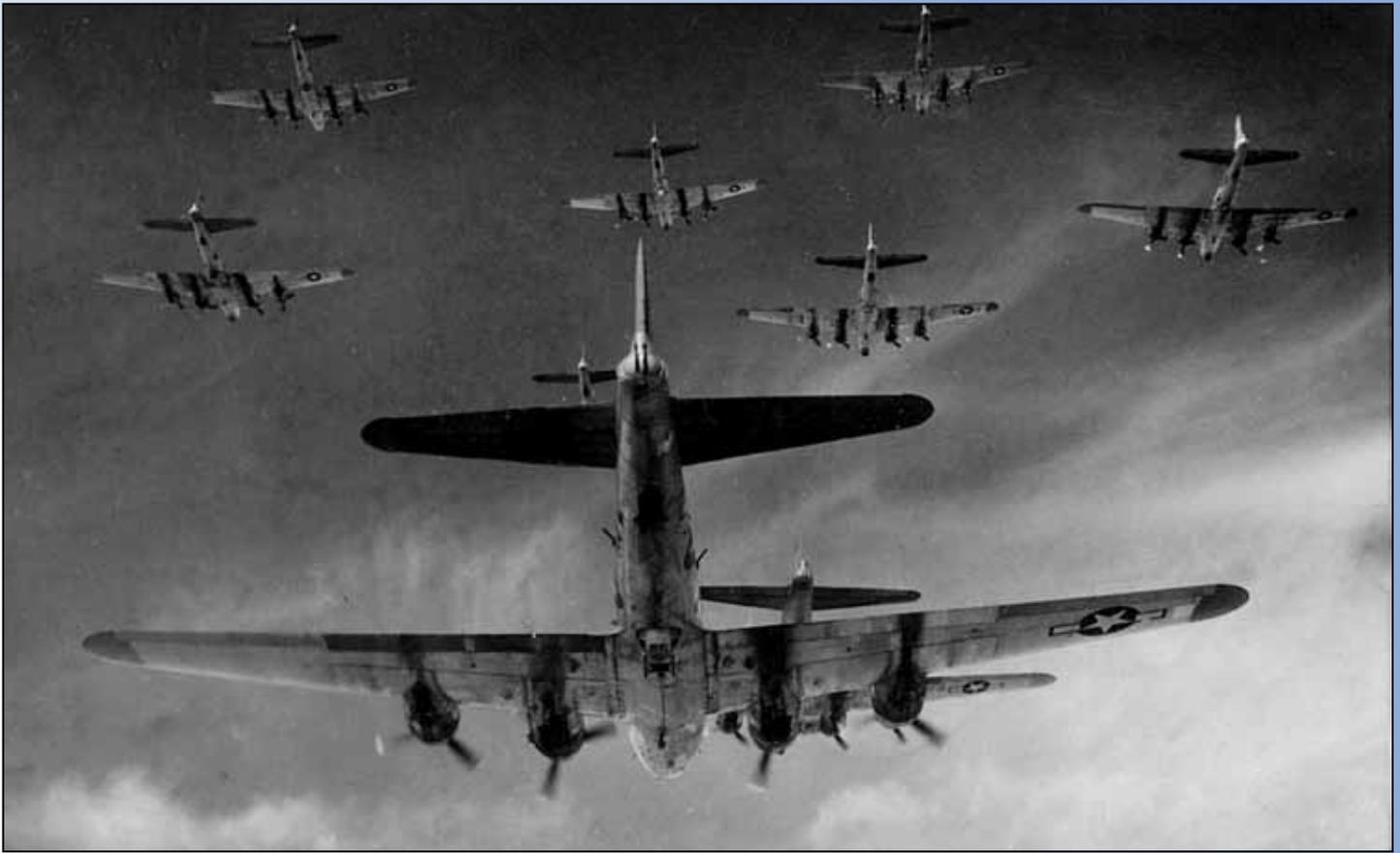




Airmen of the 514th Air Mobility Wing stand in formation during a ceremony at the American Cemetery in Normandy, France, Sept. 24.

Photo by Shawn J. Jones



U.S. Air Force Photo

A flight of B-17 Flying Fortresses fly a bombing run near Neumunster, Germany, on April 13, 1945. Airmen from the 514th Air Mobility Wing visited France Sept. 23-25 to retrieve the wreckage of a B-17 that crashed in France during World War II.

## Airmen update history in French countryside

Mr. Shawn J. Jones  
*Freedom Flyer editor*

In a farmer's field on the outskirts of a small town in the Normandy region of France, an American flag flies alone atop a tall flagpole. Neither its stars nor stripes can be seen from the road, but the residents of Lonlay L'Abbaye are well aware of its presence. For these French townspeople, as it is for most Americans, the flag is a symbol of liberty.

This particular flag also represents sacrifice, as it marks the site where an American B-17 Flying Fortress, known as the *Chowhound*, crashed after being hit by enemy flak Aug. 8, 1944. The crash proved fatal for the aircraft's crew, who gave their lives as part of the Allied liberation of Nazi-occupied France during World War II.

More than 67 years after the crash, a new generation of Airmen came to Lonlay L'Abbaye to update the story of the *Chowhound's* last flight.

Approximately 40 Reserve Airmen

from the 514th Air Mobility Wing flew a C-17 Globemaster III to northern France Sept. 23 to retrieve the wreckage of the downed bomber, which had been donated to the wing's active-duty counterpart, the 305th Air Mobility Wing.

### MILITARY BEARING

"Our mission was not only to recover the *Chowhound*, but to thank the people who took care of it for so long," said Lt. Col. Dennis Duffy, 732nd Airlift Squadron commander. "We wanted to show that we are very serious about this."

From a military perspective, being "very serious" usually means a lot of marching in formation, standing at attention and saluting in unison – actions a C-17 air crew doesn't typically perform except on special occasions.

Led by Master Sgt. Chuck Kramer, the squadron's first sergeant, the Airmen marched approximately 300 yards through the town's winding streets, from a 12th-century abbey to the war memorial in the town center.

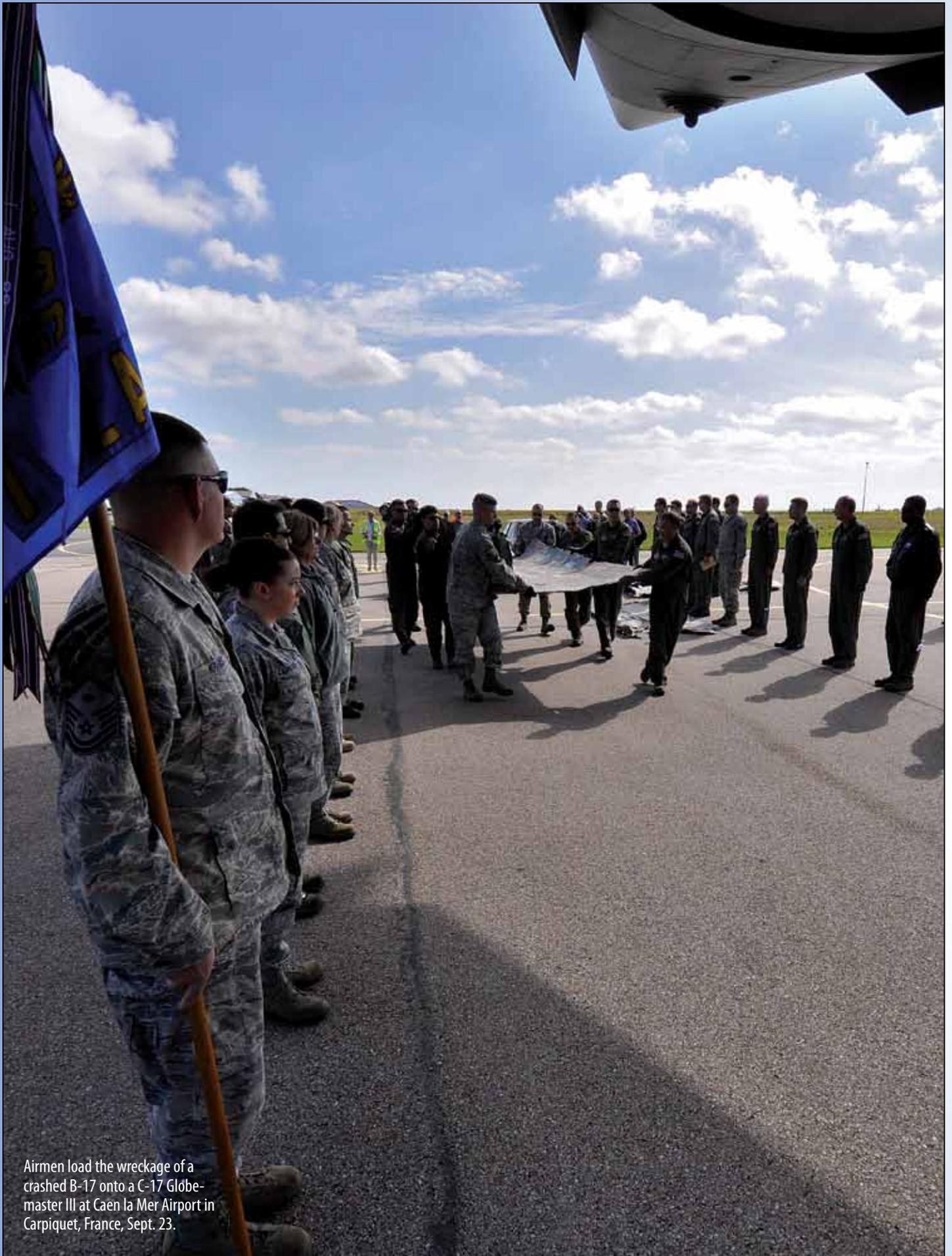
"This march was very special as we were probably the largest contingent of United States armed forces to march in Lonlay L'Abbaye since World War II," said Maj. Jonathan Bradley, one of the mission's lead planners from the squadron.

Several of the Airmen on the mission said they were impressed with how quickly their fellow Airmen came together to show one another that they had remembered their lessons from basic training and officer training school. Bradley, for instance, said he hadn't marched in formation in more than 20 years.

### NOTHING TAKEN FOR GRANTED

Upon reaching the war memorial, the Airmen stood among French veterans and other townspeople as the Mayor of Lonlay L'Abbaye delivered a speech. He said he was honored and grateful for the presence of the Airmen standing before him, but saved his highest praise for the crew of the B-17 that crashed in his town.

"We have a duty to remember these aviators who lost their lives in the youth



Airmen load the wreckage of a crashed B-17 onto a C-17 Globemaster III at Caen la Mer Airport in Carpiquet, France, Sept. 23.

Photo by Shawn J. Jones



Photo by Shawn J. Jones



Photo by Shawn J. Jones

Reserve Airmen from the 514th Air Mobility Wing march past a bakery in the narrow streets of Lonlay L'Abbaye, Sept. 23. The Airmen were the largest contingent of American servicemembers to visit the village since World War II.

Lt. Col. Dennis Duffy, 732nd Airlift Squadron commander, meets with the owners of the farm where *Chowhound* crashed. Through an interpreter, the farmer said he appreciated the sacrifices of U.S. servicemembers in liberating France.

of their age,” the mayor Christian Derouet said through an interpreter.

Though most of the Airmen could not understand his French, they could hear the emotion in his voice and read his body language to perceive that he was moved by the sacrifice of the bomber’s crew and other Americans who gave their lives to liberate France.

“When he spoke, it was apparent that the citizens of Lonlay L’Abbaye understood the price of freedom,” Bradley said. “They really cared about the nine crewmembers of *Chowhound* that gave their lives so that the French could have liberty.”

As they marched back toward the abbey, the Airmen were lead by members of the French Resistance.

“It was an event that I will never forget,” Bradley said.

### FAMILY FIRST

Throughout the planning and execution of the mission, the Airmen made sure to actively communicate with the families of the *Chowhound*’s crew.

“It was very important to let the family members know that their loved one’s ultimate sacrifice will not be forgotten,” Bradley said.

Master Sgt. Ben Atkinson, 514th AMW historical properties custodian, played a key role in bringing the *Chowhound* home. He brought the story of the *Chowhound* to attention of the 732nd AS and served as a liaison between the Airmen and the crew’s family members.

Prior to departing for France, Atkinson met with Virginia Dimon, the sister of a *Chowhound* crew member, to ascertain what she wanted the 514th and 305th AMWs to do with the recovered aircraft parts.

“I was so touched by her heart-felt emotion of what had happened to her brother that I was going to do whatever needed to be done to make her wishes come true,” Atkinson said.

Upon landing at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, the Airmen were met by Dimon, who was invited onto the C-17 to see the remains of the *Chowhound* and those who brought it home.

“I was extremely honored to show the *Chowhound* to Virginia Dimon and to describe to her the events of the week-end: how reverent we were in loading the *Chowhound* on board our plane; how grateful the people of Lonlay L’Abbaye were not just to us, but mostly to the crew of *Chowhound*; how we placed a wreath in the town square in front of the memorial to her brother and his crew; and how honored everyone aboard was to take part in the mission,” Duffy said. “She began to tear up, and it was difficult to keep my composure.”

### ALWAYS TRAINING

Gaining approval for unusual missions like this isn’t always easy, but Duffy and

his Airmen were able to convince higher headquarters commanders that the mission was not just about repatriating an artifact of Air Force heritage. The mission would also help the reservists to accomplish much-needed training.

In addition to loading the remains of the downed bomber, the crew trained on loading a C-130 engine, an F-15 engine, ten space-available passengers, multiple pallets of cargo and mail. Two pilots were able to meet their currency requirements for overseas flights, and an entire aeromedical evacuation crew was able to conduct comprehensive training aboard the C-17.

**We have a duty to remember these aviators who lost their lives in the youth of their age.**

**Christian Derouet**  
Mayor of Lonlay L'Abbaye

### CHOWHOUND’S LAST FLIGHT

The mission allowed the family members of the *Chowhound*’s crew to know that their sacrifices are not forgotten. It also allowed French townspeople and American Airmen to join together in a genuine tribute to those who gave their lives for liberty.

The mission also allowed the Airmen to update history.

“The *Chowhound*’s last flight did not end with a crash in a farmer’s field in France, but it flew home and was greeted by family members with honor and dignity,” Duffy said. ♦

*Editor’s note: A final decision on how best to display the Chowhound is being determined by Airmen of the 514th and 305th Air Mobility Wings.*