

## This Week in Saratoga County History

### The Corinth Connection to the Final Heroic Flight of a WWII Bomber

Submitted by Chris Carola August 31, 2022

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*Franklin L. Darrell Jr. – Photo provided by his family*

Residents of an alpine valley in Northern Italy still hail as heroes the two American pilots of a crippled U.S. plane who crashed into the side of a mountain rather than release their bomb load onto the villages below during a World War II mission.

Both pilots died, but they bought enough time for the five other crewmembers aboard their crippled B-25 Mitchell bomber to bail out. One of them, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Franklin Lloyd Darrell Jr., the bombardier-navigator, lived for a time during and after the war in Saratoga County, as did his parents.

Earlier this summer, the International Tyrolean Trentino Organization of North America, a Northern Italian cultural heritage group, honored the crew of the bomber nicknamed “Maybe” during the group’s convention held Aug. 4-7 at the Crown Plaza Albany-The Desmond Hotel in Colonie.

For group member Ivo Finotti, the events of Feb. 6, 1945, have a personal connection. He grew up near where the Maybe crashed, and he has relatives who were living in the plane's final flight path who may have been injured or killed if the pilots had jettisoned the bomber's 3,000-pound payload.

"It's all about keeping this history alive," said Finotti, of Toronto, Canada, who gave a presentation on the Maybe's last flight and the fate of its crewmembers, including Darrell, whose parents were living in Corinth when his plane was shot down and he became a prisoner of war.

Franklin Lloyd Darrell Jr. was born on June 29, 1921, in Kenogami, Quebec, where his father was employed as an engineer at a paper mill. Franklin Sr. was born in Brooklyn in 1889. While attending engineering school at the University of Maine in Orono, he met Elizabeth Merrill, a native of Bangor, Maine.

They were married on June 10, 1916, in Bangor. The couple also had another son, Alan, and a daughter, Betty.

By 1940, the Darrell family was living in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where Franklin Sr. was working at the International Paper mill. It was in Minneapolis where Franklin Jr., called Lloyd by his family, met his future wife, Jeanne Herbacek, a Chicago native. In the early 1940s, Franklin Sr. was transferred to the IP mill in Corinth, where he was assistant plant engineer.

Franklin Jr. enlisted in the Army Air Forces in May 1942 after two years of studies at the University of Minnesota. He was trained as a bombardier and navigator aboard B-25s, and in between postings that took him from to Alabama to New Mexico he married Jeanne on Jan. 20, 1944, in Minneapolis.

Darrell was assigned to the 447<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron, 321<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group, which by September 1944 was flying bomb missions against Nazi forces being driven up the Italian peninsula by Allied ground troops.

On Feb. 6, 1945, while on a bombing run in the Italian Alps, the Maybe was hit by German anti-aircraft fire. Pilot 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Earl Remmel of Oklahoma and co-pilot 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Leslie Speer of Kentucky kept the plane in the air long enough for the five other crewmembers to parachute to safety before the bomber crashed into a mountain outside the village of Ronzo di Chienis.

The surviving airmen – Darrell, Sgt. Silas Barrett of Connecticut, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Harlan Tulley of Wyoming, Tech. Sgt. Bernard Gould of Massachusetts and Tech. Sgt. Isadore Ifshin of Brooklyn – were captured by the Germans and sent to prisoner of war camps.

Jeanne Darrell spent the last months of the war living at her in-laws' home on Main Street in Corinth, a not-uncommon arrangement at a time when stateside housing for military spouses was scarce. Franklin listed her as his next of kin with an address in Palmer, a neighborhood in Corinth.

On Feb. 24, 1945, Jeanne received a Western Union telegram from the Pentagon informing her that her husband had been reported “missing in action since Six February over Italy.”

A day earlier, Franklin had written a postcard, addressed to his parents in Corinth, from a stalag in Nuremberg, Germany. “I’m as well as could be expected but of course the thought of home is very strong,” he wrote. “Maybe Jeanne will come there to stay with you now so we can all be together when I come home.”

Darrell’s POW camp was liberated by American troops in early April 1945, about a month before Germany’s surrender on May 7. On May 13, a Western Union telegram from Darrell was delivered to his parents’ home in Corinth, telling them he was “well and safe.”

The news of his liberation was announced in the May 24, 1945, edition of his mother’s hometown newspaper, the Bangor Daily News, with a photo of Darrell in uniform and a caption that listed his hometown as Palmer, N.Y.

Among his surviving wartime keepsakes is his handwritten note that says he was a POW at two stalags, returned from France aboard a ship that docked in New York, then he traveled to Minnesota before he “returned with Jeanne to Corinth N.Y. on June 23, 1945.”

According to the 1950 census, Franklin and Jeanne were then living in Richfield, Minn., where he was employed as an aeronautical engineer. Franklin III and Richard, the first two of their five children had been born by then. The elder Franklin re-enlisted in the Air Force in 1951 and spent the next 18 years in the service, retiring as a lieutenant colonel in 1969.

Franklin L. Darrell Jr. was 80 when he died in Nebraska on Oct. 20, 2001. Jeanne Darrell remained in Nebraska, where she died on June 27, 2018. She was 93.

Guild died in 2003, Tulley in 2006 and Ifshin in 2017. Barrett, the last surviving member of the Maybe’s crew, died in 2019.

Ben Appleby, a British expatriate teacher living in Northern Italy, led an effort in 2014 to have a memorial to Remmel and Speer placed near where the Maybe crashed. The same year the memorial was dedicated, Appleby co-authored a book on the Maybe’s final flight.

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Sources: Chris Carola, Associated Press story, Sept. 19, 2014; Rachel Clothier, town of Corinth historian; Darrell Family; Bangor Daily News.

