



Personal info

Full name

ASHCRAFT, Wilton James

Date of birth

31 August 1920

Age

24

Place of birth

Munson, Geauga County, Ohio

Hometown

Chardon, Geauga County, Ohio

Military service

Service number

35911860

Rank

Sergeant

Unit

**332nd Bombardment Squadron,
94th Bombardment Group, Heavy**

Awards

Purple Heart

Death & Grave

Status

Killed in Action

Date of death

15 March 1945

Cemetery

American War Cemetery Ardennes

Plot	Row	Grave
C	10	21

Immediate family

Members

Frank E Ashcraft (father)

Irene (Betzer) Ashcraft (mother)

Genevieve (Barnum) Ashcraft (sister)

Plane data

Serial number

43-38662

Data

Type: B-17G

Destination: Oranienburg, Germany

Mission: Bombing of the marshalling yard

MACR: 13028

More information

Sgt Wilton J. Ashcraft was a meatcutter.

He enlisted in Cleveland, Ohio on 21 July 1943.

According to witness statements of crew members of other aircraft, this aircraft was hit by flak while on the bomb run, just before the target was reached. Seconds after the aircraft was hit, their bombs were released. When the formation turned westward, this airplane turned eastward and headed for the Russian lines. Much flak was being shot at the lone plane but no direct hits were observed. Number 2 engine was smoking. Two parachutes were seen leaving the plane and it is believed a third man was observed, but it could not be positively identified as coming from this aircraft. The first parachute out caught on the tail wheel and about three minutes later the crewman was seen to fall out of his harness and fall to the ground.

Surviving crew members also mentioned that Sgt Ashcraft's parachute was caught by the tail wheel.

They also stated that the pilot, 2nd Lt Torndike stayed in the plane, thinking he could save it.

Six crew members were taken prisoner, four were killed in action: Navigator Harold E. Long Jr, Gunner Wilton J. Ashcraft, Pilot William K. Torndike and Co-pilot Theodore H. Esklund. They were buried in two coffins in a common grave at the community cemetery of Werneuchen on 17 March 1945 (see photo) by German soldiers.

On 2 September 1947 an American team disinterred the bodies. The remains were in very bad condition and two of the bodies could not be separated on disinterment. There was no identification found on these four remains, so they were evacuated to Ardennes Cemetery as four unknowns.

He was initially buried at Ardennes as Unknown X-6587. After investigation, he could be identified by comparison of tooth charts.

His mother requested that he would be buried as near as possible to his friend, William Thorndike. This was done for the first burial on 4 October 1947 when Sgt Ashcraft was buried at block CC, row 7, grave 167 and Lt Thorndike at grave 160.

Later, after disinterment on 9 December 1948, he was finally buried on 22 September 1949 at the actual spot.

Photos



Source of information: Raf Dyckmans, Peter Schouteten, Terry Hirsch, www.wwiimemorial.com, www.archives.gov, www.fold3.com - MACR, IDPF, WWII Draft Card

Photo source: Peter Schouteten, www.findagrave.com - Jon Strupp, shadows