

# Museum with a Mission

## Memorial Museum Keeps Legacy Of World War II Airmen Alive

(NAPSA)—A museum has taken on the urgent task of preserving the history of World War II airmen. Many of the “greatest generation” signed up to fight and fly when they were only in their teens or 20s.

John Keema was a 21-year-old airman aboard a B-17 Flying Fortress of the 390th Bombardment Group on August 24, 1943. On a raid over Evreux-Fauville, France, his aircraft was hit by German anti-aircraft fire. A friend and crewmember of Keema’s was killed and four others wounded. His crippled B-17 ditched in the English Channel, where the survivors were rescued at sea. It was his second mission.

“Youthful excitement about finally being in combat was quickly shattered by the bitter truth of war: Men die,” said Keema, now 90. “My friend died.”

The 390th Bombardment Group was a part of the 8th Air Force, based in England during WW II.

Of the 350,000 men and women of the 8th Air Force, 54,000 were killed or taken prisoner, among the highest casualty rates of any unit during the war.

### **A Time When Young Men Came of Age**

The average age of an officer aboard a B-17 was 24. Many enlisted crewmembers were still in their teens. Today, these special veterans are rapidly passing into history. The 390th Memorial Museum located in Tucson, Arizona, is preserving their legacy.

Stories like Keema’s are vital to that mission.

“We want the memories of the veterans to live on through the museum,” said Emile Therrien, executive director of the museum.



### **John Keema—B-17 crewman with 390th Bombardment Group in World War II.**

“We encourage anyone associated with the 390th, or their descendants, to tell us their story.”

More than 3,000 men and women served with the 390th during WW II. From 1943–1945, the group flew 301 missions over Europe with a loss of 181 aircraft, and 714 crewmen paid the ultimate sacrifice.

### **Honoring Their Courage and Sacrifice**

In addition to its mission of recording the oral history of the 390th and others from the “greatest generation,” the museum is home to the Joseph A. Moller Library, a research center for the Air Campaign of Central Europe. The museum houses over 90,000 pages and more than 10,000 photographs documenting the combat history of the 390th, along with memorabilia and historical artifacts from the air war over Europe.

The centerpiece of the museum is a beautifully restored B-17 airplane. Known as the Flying Fortress, it became the most recognizable symbol of the European air war.

For more information on the museum, to make a donation or tell your story, visit [www.390th.org](http://www.390th.org).