

In Remembrance

David Gaston Alford AAFA #0503 (1917-2002)

We were saddened to learn of the death of a long-time active member of AAFA. Gaston began working with AAFA on his Alford ancestry over ten years ago, and he had been at it without AAFA help long before that. He and Dorothy were present at several AAFA meetings. The first was the 1993 St. Francisville, LA meeting and the last the 2000 meeting in Augusta.



This is a recent photo of Gaston, the one used in his obit and what wife Dorothy calls her favorite. Those who knew Gaston will recognize the subtle smile. Few, if any of us visiting with him in life, had any appreciation for his background.

In addition to the following obituary there were two news articles and the church In Memoriam published about Gaston. One of the articles, *Former Sheppard commander dies*, Wichita Falls Record-News, May 29, 2002, is not published here because the content is covered in the other articles. While there is some repetition in the following accounts of his life each has something unique. It was considered more appropriate to provide them to you unedited rather than to consolidate them.

San Antonio Express-News (Obituary)
Wednesday, May 22, 2002

ALFORD

A Loving Tribute to Col. David Gaston Alford. A Distinguished Flying Cross recipient and a veteran of World War II and the Korean War, Colonel David Gaston Alford (USAF Ret.) died on Monday, May 20, 2002 of complications related to his recent struggle with bone cancer at the Health Care Center at Air Force Village II, where he had resided for the past 13 years. He was born in Rising Star, TX on May 29, 1917, attending Daniel Baker College in Brownwood, TX where he earned a B.S. in education, and East Texas State College in Commerce, TX where he received an M.B.A. in accounting. He became an Army Corps Flying Cadet in 1939 and graduated from flying school as part of Class 40E at Kelly AFB in August 1940.



Flying Cadet David Gaston Alford, U.S. Army Air Corps, Class 40-E, 1940.

Col. Alford began his military flying career as part of an Atlantic patrol to search for German vessels. Col. Alford is best known for his heroism while serving as Group

Operations Officer for the 91st Bomb Group when his plane was shot down while leading a raid on Frankfurt, Germany in February, 1944. While under heavy flak attack, his B-17 bomber caught fire, and, after bailing out his crew, he discovered that his parachute was on the floor of the plane; however, he managed to safely land in a cow pasture near Groenio, Holland. Thanks to the kindness of Dutch families whom he has never forgotten, and with the help of the Dutch Underground, he was hidden by patriots who risked their lives to hide and feed him for more than eight months. With their help he evaded the enemy, traveling, as he frequently recalled with much delight, as a deaf and dumb typewriter repairman and was picked up south of Liege, Belgium by the U.S. Army as they overran the area in battle in October 1944. On returning to the States, he



This is a photo taken for an ID in Maastricht for use in taking him across the border in Belgium and beyond. Dr. von der Ley, his underground host, was jailed by the Germans and knowing there would be a search of his office and home, the other members of the underground removed him and his traveling companion, Floyd Stegall, into caves until they could provide them transport into Belgium.

with the area planning commission. His final retirement brought adequate time to devote to his passion for golf and his fondness for traveling with his beloved wife, Dorothy. His last 13 years he lived at Air Force Village II in San Antonio, TX with his wife. Though his health took a turn for the worse just several weeks prior to his

was part of a B-17 training organization in Tampa, FL, which was followed by duty as an Air Force liaison officer to the Army at Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, TX. Col. Alford returned to action with the outbreak of the Korean War where he flew 35 missions in a B-29 bomber. One of Col. Alford's fondest military memories was his 3-year tour in Greece as Base Commander with his family. It was in Greece where he became active in the Masonic Lodge, rising to a 32nd degree Mason and Shriner. Col. Alford's final base command was at Sheppard AFB, Wichita Falls, TX where he retired from military service in December, 1965. For almost 14 more years, he worked in the public sector with the Wichita Falls city government and finally



This is a photo of the David G. Alford Boy Scout Troop of Vorden, Holland. The troop was formed shortly after the war by one of Gaston's helpers Mr. William Spanhaak. He was assistant gamekeeper in the forest where the Vorden Underground kept Gaston in a hunting hut. Spanhaak asked the U.S. Embassy in Den Haag to find David, which they did. About a year later Gaston returned to Holland where there was a great reunion. They were guests of the family on whose farm Gaston landed in 1944.



This is Gaston and his wife Dorothy at their wedding.

death, his memory was still sharp, said his family, and he could recount a story with remarkable detail. In spite of his illness, Col. Alford managed to keep his sense of

humor as he smiled, laughed, and he recounted his stories. In addition to his wife of almost 30 years, Dorothy Jean Burkett Alford, Col. Alford is survived by his son, Michael Alford and his wife Bernadette of Framingham, MA; his daughter, Patricia Lanier and her husband Jerry of Shawnee, OK; three grandchildren, Chad Lanier and his wife Melissa, of Kaufman, TX, Lea Alford of Framingham, MA and Lori Lanier of Shawnee, OK; a great-grandson, Jacob Alford Lanier of Kaufman, TX and a stepdaughter, Dorothy Dee Phillips of Stuart, FL. A memorial service will be held at the High Flight Chapel in the facilities of Air Force Village II on Wednesday, May 29, 2002 at 10:30 A.M. to fittingly celebrate the life of Col. David Gaston Alford on this, the 85th anniversary of his birth. In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made to the Texas Scottish Rite Home for Children, 2222 Welborn, Dallas, TX 75219 or the Air Force Village II Health Care Center, 5100 John D. Ryan Blvd. San Antonio, TX 78245.

The following article was published May 23, 2002 in the *San Antonio Express-News* under the full page width headline Alford hid from Nazis after bomber was hit



This is another passport photo used for ID in Holland issued by the Dutch underground. He posed as a deaf and dumb typewriter repairman as he moved from Amsterdam to Maastricht.

with a sub-headline Also served in Korea. The byline was Carmina Danini.

Retired Air Force Col. David Gaston Alford, 84, who survived the harrowing crash of his plane in World War II and spent eight months in occupied Holland hiding from the Nazis, died Monday of bone cancer.

Serving as group operations officer for the 91st Bomb Group, the 26-year-old Alford was on his 19th bombing mission when his B-17 bomber was struck by enemy fire over Germany's Ruhr Valley.

After the rest of the crew bailed out, Alford discovered his parachute had unsnapped and there was no time to replace it. He raced back to the cockpit and, though all the engines were on fire, managed to land the plane in a cow pasture inside Holland.

The date was Feb. 4, 1944.



This photo of the plane Gaston, then a Lt. Col., crash landed Feb. 4, 1944 in Holland was taken by a local Dutchman several weeks after landing. The delay in taking the photo was necessary because of the attention being given the plane by the Germans who destroyed most of it. All of the crew abandoned the plane as ordered by the pilot but Gaston's parachute had come open and was deployed on the floor leaving him little option but to land it as best he could. All of the crew that parachuted out were captured by the Germans and later returned living to the US. He did not know it but he had landed about five miles within Holland. As soon as he landed he made a dash for nearby farm woods where neighbors of the family allowed him to come into their home. They called another neighbor who had a 19 year old son who knew a little English. They gave him an overcoat and some food, which he crammed into his pockets, and pointed him towards Amsterdam. He was instructed to travel only at night because the area had been occupied by the Germans for four years. After two days, he heard farmers milking in their barn and they took him in and put him in touch with the Dutch underground.

For the next eight months, he hid in rural areas and in Amsterdam with the help of members of the Dutch underground. On the occasions when he was moved

from one place to another, he escaped detection by impersonating a hearing and speech-impaired typewriter repairman.

"He was apprehensive most of the time because he did not speak Dutch and most of the people he met did not speak English, but they risked everything to help him," said Alford's wife, Dorothy Jean. "He was very lucky. He always said the only injury he suffered during the war was a broken fingernail."



The source for this photo was poor. It is the truck in which the underground moved Gaston from Holland to Belgium, June 16, 1944. It was owned by Du Moulin Fernand, Rue Maghim 10, Leige, Belgium. The truck had a false compartment in which Gaston and three others were nailed in until they crossed the border.

The Belgian underground also helped Alford, and in October, he was picked up by U.S. Army troops near Liege, Belgium.

Alford also served in the Korean War, flying 35 missions in a B-29 bomber.

He later served as base commander in Greece and at Sheppard AFB in Wichita Falls before retiring from the military in 1965.

Alford's decorations included the Distinguished Flying Cross.

Born in Rising Star; in Eastland County, Alford earned a master's in business administration from East Texas State College in Commerce and a bachelor's in education from Daniel Baker College in Brownwood.

He joined the Army Air Corps in 1939 and graduated with Class 40E from Kelly AFB in August 1940.

Originally with the 92nd Bomb Group, he was later



This photo of Gaston and his traveling companion, Floyd Stegall, was taken by one of the Belgium underground in July or August 1944. Sleeping near the river they were sheltered and fed by farmers until rescued by the U.S. Army.

assigned to the 91st.

Other survivors include his son, Michael Alford of Framingham, Mass.; a daughter, Patricia Lanier of Kaufman; stepdaughter Dorothy Dee Phillips of Stuart, Fla.; three grandchildren and a great-grandson.

Alford donated his body to the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio.

A memorial service will be held at the High Flight Chapel at Air Force Village II on May 29, on what would have been his 85th birthday.

The following was taken from the program printed for his memorial service.

When his time came this old pilot followed the directions from the ground crew to the parking area, closed the throttles and cut the switches and exhaled and softly said, It s been a great flight.

IN MEMORIAM

Col. Alford was born in Rising Star, Eastland County, TX the son of Eula Mayfield Alford and Virgil Carl Alford. He attended Rising Star schools and Daniel Baker College in Brownwood, TX getting his B.S. in Education (1939), taught briefly in Baird, Callahan Co., TX before resigning to become an Army Air Corps

Flying Cadet (December 1939), graduating in Class 40E at Kelly AFB, TX on August 31, 1940. While on ROTC duty at East Texas State College, Commerce, TX he received his MBA in accounting.

The 21st Squadron was sent to Gander, Newfoundland in May of 1941 and opened up that Base for American traffic. In September of 1941, the Squadron was transferred to McDill AFB, FL, and became a part of the 29th Bomb Group. In the spring of 1942, several groups were formed out of the 29th. He joined the 92nd Bomb Group and after training in B-17Es, he went to England and the 8th AF in August of 1942. They were preceded only by the 91st and 97th Bomb Groups.



Major Gaston Alford and Capt. Bruce Sam Bass of the 92nd Bomb Group at Alconbury Air Base in England, 1943.

After serving as a Squadron Commander in the 92nd, he joined the 91st Bomb Group as Group Operations

Officer in May of 1943. He flew 19 missions with both the 91st and 92nd; was shot down on the 20th mission while leading a raid in Frankfort, Germany on February 4, 1944.

On returning to the states, he was in a B-17 training organization in Tampa, FL, until the end of the war in Germany. After the war he had 3 years duty as Air Force Liaison Officer with the Army at Ft. Sam Houston, San Antonio, TX. With the outbreak of the Korean War, he returned to McDill and with his old SAC Bomb Group, the 307th, went to Okinawa to fly B-29s in Korea where he flew 35 missions.

Among his many awards and decorations are the Distinguished Flying Cross, eight Air Medals (one Air Medal with seven oak leaf clusters), Army and Air Force Commendation Medals, Service Medals for American, UN, and European-African Middle Eastern

Campaigns. He retired from Sheppard AFB, Wichita Falls, TX, in December of 1965, having been offered a job with the City Government of that city. After 3 and one-half years with the City, he worked with the Area Planning Commission for another 11 years then retired a second time.

Gaston and Dorothy moved to AFV II in August, 1989. He is survived by his wife, Dorothy; daughter, Patricia Lanier, of Shawnee, OK; son, Michael Alford of Framingham, Mass; one step-daughter, Dorothy Dee Phillips, of Stuart, FL; three grandchildren, Michael Chad Lanier and Lori Lanier of Shawnee, OK, and Lea Alford, of Framingham, Mass; one great-grandson, Jacob Alford Lanier, of Shawnee, OK.