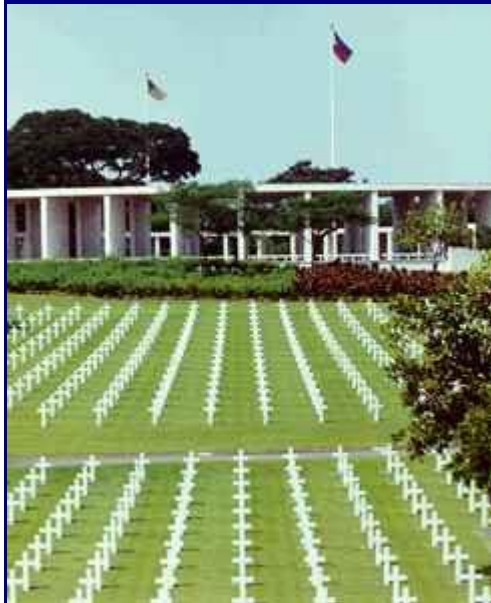


AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION



THE WORLD WAR II HONOR ROLL



Francis J. Piotrowski 37-42

Second Lieutenant, U.S. Army

Service # 1173035

**121st Field Artillery Battalion
32nd Infantry Division**

Entered the Service from: Michigan

Died: 7-Feb-1944

Missing in Action or Buried at Sea

**Tablets of the Missing at Manila American Cemetery
Manila, Philippines**

Awards: Air Medal, Purple Heart - Remains recovered



In Memory of “Bud”

Posted on May 29, 2012 by Kris Rzepczynski

For much of my life, Memorial Day weekend centered on spending time with my family, Gravel Lake, and the Indianapolis 500. Yet about 10 years ago, my holiday experience took on new meaning with the discovery of a World War II crash site in Papua New Guinea.

Francis “Bud” Piotrowski was born 29 August 1918 in Dowagiac, Michigan. His family moved to Kalamazoo, Michigan shortly thereafter, where they quickly established themselves in the Polish neighborhood northeast of downtown. Bud graduated from Central High School in Kalamazoo in 1936, and majored in music at Michigan State College (Michigan State University today), graduating from there in 1940. An accomplished musician, Francis played the bassoon in the Wyandotte (MI) Symphony Orchestra.

Shortly after his graduation from college, Bud enlisted in the U.S. Army in July 1941, and later graduated from Officer Candidate School at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. With the United States now fully engulfed in World War II, Bud was stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina before going overseas to the Pacific Theater.

On 7 February 1944, 2nd Lt. Piotrowski and Maj. Earl Kindig were aboard a Piper L-4 on a reconnaissance mission near Gabutamon, Papua New Guinea. Last seen approximately 18 miles southwest of Saidor, the airplane vanished; extensive searches of the area yielded no trace of the aircraft or the two men. First designated as Missing in Action, Piotrowski was officially presumed dead by the War Department one year later, and was posthumously awarded an Air Medal and Purple Heart.



After the remains of MAJ Kindig and 2LT Piotrowski were recovered and identified a common grave at Arlington Cemetery held the remains of both men. 2LT Piotrowski was later reunited with his family in Mount Olivet Cemetery in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Although Bud was lost long before I was born, my brother and I were certainly aware of our great-uncle's story. Indeed, I vividly remember a conversation with my grandmother where she still expressed deep sadness and regret about never having learned what happened and where on that February day. More than anything, she just wanted a sense of closure, both for her brother and for the rest of the family.

A few years after my grandmother died, our family was notified by the U.S. Army's Central Identification Laboratory that a crash site had been found in Papua New Guinea. Human remains, personal effects, and aircraft wreckage were all consistent with the missing Kindig/Piotrowski flight. DNA analysis later verified this. The full range of emotion at the discovery – disbelief, joy, pride, love – was tempered only by the realization that my grandmother did not live to see her brother's journey completed.

A special ceremony for Piotrowski and Kindig was held at Arlington National Cemetery, the common grave for the two men can be found there at Section 60, Site 8022. Bud was later reunited with his family at a special service at Mount Olivet Cemetery in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Indeed, he is now buried alongside his mother, father, and brother in the southeast corner of Lot 73, Block R.



The remains of 2LT Piotrowski are now in Mount Olivet Cemetery, Kalamazoo, Michigan

Bud's sister, my grandmother, Stella Clara Piotrowski, is buried with her husband, Leo Rzepczynski, in Mount Olivet's mausoleum, a short walk from the Piotrowski plot. Sharing that full military honors event at Mount Olivet Cemetery with my family, and particularly with my father, Francis' namesake, remains one of the most memorable experiences of my life. Our family now has the closure that my grandmother always wished for.