

Cimetière américain de Neuville-en-Condroz : Parrainage de la tombe d'un militaire américain

Je parraine la tombe du Lieutenant Keith M. Pickel du 571 BOMB SQ 390 BOMB GP (H) au cimetière américain de Neuville-en-Condroz depuis le 23 juin 1997.

Keith Pickel, co-pilote du B-17 Flying Fortress 42-30223, « *killed in action* », le 11 décembre 1943, avait 22 ans et a perdu la vie lors de sa troisième mission.



La tombe de Keith, parmi 5327 sépultures de militaires américains du cimetière de Neuville-en-Condroz.

En 2017, j'ai écrit à FIELDS OF HONOR - DATABASE, mémorial numérique américain pour 28 000 militaires inhumés dans plusieurs cimetières ou portés disparus de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale. J'ai demandé s'il était possible d'entrer en contact avec un membre de la famille de Keith.

J'ai obtenu une réponse et la nièce de Keith m'a contacté pour me remercier du parrainage de la tombe de son oncle. Keith est né à Cadillac dans le Michigan et le journal *Cadillac News* du 8 juillet 2017 a publié un article « *A hero in our hearts* » concernant mon parrainage.

Après les cérémonies du Memorial Day du 25 mai 2019 à Neuville-en-Condroz, le *Cadillac News* m'a transmis l'article « *Belgian family cares for American GI's grave in Europe* ». Sur la photo je suis avec ma fille Marie-France et mon petit-fils Charles qui me remplacera plus tard pour parrainer la tombe de Keith.



Belgian family cares for American GI's grave in Europe

BY MARDI SUHS

CADILLAC NEWS

FRANCE — Keith Pickel, a 22-year-old Cadillac High School grad, never made it home from World War II. Thousands of airmen shared his fate. Killed in action, the fighter pilots, bomber crews, and glidermen who fought the airwar over Europe were buried in 18 cemeteries that stretch across Belgium, France and Luxembourg.

Pickel, a tall, handsome young man with ambition and promise, completed two years of college at Purdue University before the war changed everything.

In 1941, he enlisted and qualified for advanced flight-training. He was assigned to copilot a B-17 bomber in the 8th Air Force, heady stuff for his young age. On his third mission, the four-engine Flying Fortress was hit by enemy fire and exploded.

Pickel was laid to rest in the Ardennes American Cemetery in Belgium along with 5,246 other Americans, many of them fallen airmen of the U.S. Army Air Forces. Their white headstones are aligned in straight rows to form a Greek cross.

Every year during Memorial Day services, thousands of Europeans remember and honor the men who gave their lives to preserve their freedom. The GI grave sites are lovingly cared for by volunteers through adopt-a-grave programs so that even now, even 75 years later, these brave men and their sacrifices are not forgotten.

Belgian family cares for Cadillac GI's grave

Two years ago, a retired colonel in the Belgian Army, Fernand Gérard, contacted the descendants of Keith M. Pickel. He wanted them to know that he was taking care of the second lieutenant's grave. "I wanted to let them know that their hero is always living in our hearts," he said in an email. "Here in Europe, we have to be grateful to all the young American boys who brought us freedom during World War I and World War II."

On Saturday, Gérard, his daughter Marie-France Gérard and his grandson Charles Demoulin attended Memorial Day services at Ardennes American Cemetery and Memorial in Belgium. Charles, 15, has been helping care for Pickel's grave with this grandfather since he was 9-years old.

"I am the godfather of Keith's grave and attend each year," Gérard wrote.

The ceremony includes school children singing "The Star Spangled Banner," military bands playing patriotic music, and thousands of people carrying bouquets to the graves.

"This warms my heart to know there are people that still appreciate what the United States and

Canada did in World War II to free people from the Germans,” said Kris Kay (Jerry Lowe) Sundberg, a Cadillac native and Pickel’s niece now living in Arizona.

Sundberg and her sister Cathie traveled through Europe in 1972 and visited the grave of the uncle they never met. They were stunned by what they saw.

“There were rows and rows ... thousands and thousands of crosses and Stars of David, all white, all in neat little rows ... we sat and cried and cried.”

“We are very grateful for their sacrifice,” Gérard said. “Keith will live forever in our hearts.”

This is an update to a story we printed on July 8, 2017. Each Memorial Day since then, Fernand Gérard sends photos from Memorial Day services in Belgium to let us know that Keith M. Pickel of Cadillac will never be forgotten.

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Retired Belgian Army Colonel Fernand Gerard adopted the grave of Cadillac's Keith M. Pickel, who was killed in action during World War II and buried in Belgium. His daughter Marie-France Gerard and grandson Charles Demoulin help him.

COURTESY PHOTO



Pickel

