

Monument to Captain Raymond Littge U.S. Air Force
Perry County Circuit Court Town Square
Perryville, Missouri
Cape Girardeau County

Memorial to Captain Raymond Littge of the U.S. Air Force. Died for his country in 1949. A member of the 352nd Fighter Group. Credited with destroying 23 & 1/2 enemy aircraft. Missouri's top ranking fighter pilot Ace of WWII. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross (second only to the Medal of Honor), the Distinguished Flying Cross, Silver Star, Air Medal with 15 Oak Leaf Clusters, Distinguished Unit Citation and French Croix de Guerre with Palm.

Background

CAPTAIN RAYMOND LITTGE – HIS LIFE AND MILITARY CAREER

Raymond Henry Littge was born on October 18, 1923, into a large, poor family of seven brothers and one older sister in Altenburg, a small German-heritage farming community in southeast Missouri. As a kid, he and his brothers built and flew model fighter airplanes, which was the beginning of his fascination with aviation. When he was 16 years old, the family received a small inheritance enabling them to buy a bike for Ray and his brother to share. Shortly afterward, Ray set off on a 110-mile trip to see his sister, Altheda, who was working in St. Louis. While there, he got to see a large passenger plane and became more obsessed with airplanes and flying. Back home, he started working as a farm hand to earn some money and begged his mother for permission to take flying lessons; she gave in. Ray started taking lessons at a small field about 40 miles from his home town.

Raymond graduated from Perryville High School in May of 1942 and enlisted in the Aviation Cadet Program of the Army Air Corps on July 1, 1942. He was inducted at Jefferson Barracks on January 19, 1943, and commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant. He received his wings at Dale Mabry Field, FL, on December 5, 1943. He went on to compile a very distinguished military career and became Missouri's top ranked World War II fighter pilot.

Sent overseas, Raymond was attached to the highly decorated 352nd WWII fighter pilot group. The unit—based at RAF Bodney airfield in Norfolk, England, for the majority of its service—served as bomber-escort, counter-air patrol, and attacker of enemy targets. The group flew 420 missions and destroyed 769 German aircraft, losing one of four of their own pilots during the war. The 352nd flew 115,675 sorties for a total of 59,387 combat hours. The group had 29 aces; it received two Distinguished Unit Citations and the French Croix de Guerre with Palm. Raymond attained the rank of Captain and was credited with 23 ½ enemy aircraft destroyed while flying the P-51 Mustang. His gun camera film captures many of these kills.

Captain Littge was assigned three P-51 Mustangs during his service. The first P-51B, he named Silver Dollar. After many missions it was wrecked after an emergency landing on a rough landing strip. His second plane was a P-51D, which Ray named E Pluribus Unum. He flew this plane until February, 1945, when he was assigned a brand-new P-51 Mustang (number 44-722216 HO-M). Ray named this plane "Miss Helen" for his fiancé and soon to be wife. On April 17, 1945, returning from an escort mission, looking for targets of opportunity, Ray's Red Flight came upon the German Plattling airfield. They strafed the air field attempting to destroy enemy aircraft. After flying through German anti-aircraft fire, Ray destroyed six planes total, Me-109s and Me-262 jets. Ray describes in his Encounter Report for that day: "During these attacks my oil tank was hit and I lost most of my oil, one of my guns was shot out, and two electrical lines and the manifold line were hit." Upon landing after this mission, Ray found that almost one and a half feet of his left wingtip had been shot off by flak. For his impressive display of bravery that day, Ray would be awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

On one occasion, while E Pluribus Unum was in scheduled maintenance, Ray was flying a replacement plane over occupied France when he was hit; the radiator and oil tank were damaged, and he had to bail out. He was rescued and made his way back to the American lines with the help of the French Underground, a fascinating chapter in Raymond's chronicle.

The P-51s of the 352nd have distinctive blue noses and upper cowls. Legend has it that German General Hermann Goering asked who was giving his pilots trouble on the western front. He was informed it was the pilots from Bodney, England. General Goering said, do you mean the "bluenosed bastards of Bodney." They said, yes! Goering knew then the war was lost.

The indomitable "Miss Helen" was again reunited with a Littge, when in April of 2003, Don Littge, nephew of Ray Littge, flew in the aircraft with British aviator and former racing driver Robert (Robs) Lamplough, who traveled all over the world to acquire aircraft to restore. According to the commemorative history, "The Bluenosed Bastards of Bodney": "The acquisition and restoration of P-51D 44-72216 (Raymond's last plane, "Miss Helen") by Lamplough is probably the most unique of all Mustang restorations. This aircraft is the only known original P-51D from the 352nd fighter Group still flying. It not only survived postwar service with the Swedish and Israeli Air Forces, but endured a stint in an Israeli kibbutz playground before being found and restored to flight status in 1988."

The restored "Miss Helen" was featured in the History Channel program entitled "Wings of War, the P-51 Mustang." "Miss Helen," under different names, was also used in the films "Memphis Belle," "Emperor of the Sun," and "Hart's War."

Captain Littge flew in the major air battle at Asch, Belgium, known as The Legend of Y-29. It was one of the most decisive air battles of World War II and involved greatly outnumbered U.S. fighters against German aircraft. The battle occurred on January 1, 1945, and was intended by the Luftwaffe to neutralize U.S. air power at the forward airbase called Y-29. Captain Littge shot down two German FW-190s in that

battle and is mentioned by the narrator describing the engagement during the animated video produced by the History Channel titled "Dog Fights – Death of the Luftwaffe."

On May 7, 1945, one day before the end of the war, Littge was given the assignment of debriefing a German pilot who had defected with one of Hitler's new jet aircraft. Captain Littge's fluent German and his pilot status earned him this assignment, and he was instrumental in obtaining vital information about the new German jet plane from the defected pilot.

Captain Littge, flying an F-84 jet, died in an air crash near Maupin, Oregon, on May 20, 1949, while escorting a group of fighter aircraft to an air show for a ceremony at the Coulee Dam on the Columbia River in Washington. A faulty oxygen supply is thought to have caused the death of the 26-year-old pilot.

Captain Littge's brother, Ralph Littge, did the necessary research and documentation to chronicle Raymond's military career and establish a lasting granite monument to honor him in the Perryville, Missouri, town square.

On an interesting side note, Ralph also served in World War II, in Army Intelligence, and shared the information many years later with his family that he had actually been a spy in Germany, utilizing his fluent German communication skills. Ralph and Ray were able to meet several times during the war in England and Europe. It was Ralph, then stationed in Belgium, who arranged for and drove Raymond to debrief the captured German jet pilot in Luxembourg.

Captain Littge's military career has been compiled in the book [Absolutely Fearless: The Life of Raymond H. Littge, Missouri's Top Scoring WWII Fighter Pilot Ace](#) by Kathy Evans and Lisa Frankel.

His life is also well documented in newspaper articles based on his partially completed autobiography published in weekly installments in the Perryville (Missouri) Republic from 5/18 -7/10, 1950. Other articles include: St. Louis Post Dispatch: 9/22/1987, 8/7/1990; Perry County Republic: 4/27/1995; The Republic Monitor – Supplement: 5/11/1995, 5/27/1995; The Republic Monitor: 5/26/1997; Memorial Day Littge Memorial Monument Insert; multiple articles on the Internet available by searching "Raymond Littge."

Captain Littge's story is also documented in his Military Flight School graduation book, "Class of 43K, his pilot flight record, log books and his Cadet Book. Captain Littge is also mentioned prominently in the book written by Joe Noah and Samuel L. Sox, Jr. "George Preddy - Top Mustang Ace." The authors have this to say about Ray: "Littge was one of America's best fighter pilots, admired for his flying skill. With 23 1/2 victories, Littge was way up there in kill numbers." Captain Littge flew with Preddy on several missions and obviously respected him because he and Helen named their first son George Preddy Littge.

Captain Littge is survived by a son, George Preddy, severely handicapped as a child in a car accident. His second son, Captain Raymond Littge II, who also became an Air Force fighter pilot, was killed stateside in an F-4 Phantom jet training exercise after serving with valor in the Viet Nam War. Raymond's wife, Helen Littge Starnes passed away in 2013. All of Captain Littge's seven brothers are deceased; five of whom also saw military service in WWII. His only sister, Altheda Littge Schmelig passed away at the age of 107 in April, 2017.

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How A Missouri native became a top fighter ace during World War II - KMOV TV

https://www.kmov.com/news/spotlight_on_those_who_served/how-a-missouri-native-became-a-top-fighter-ace-during-world-war-ii/article_dc48a5fe-813b-11eb-a5ed-2be607a4da8b.html

link to the Cape Girardeau Channel 12 interview:

<https://www.kfvs12.com/2021/05/20/remembering-world-war-ii-hero-heartland/>

Ace High by Warren Schmidt, Lutheran Heritage Center & Museum, Oct. 18, 2017

<https://lutheranmuseum.com/2017/10/18/ace-high/>

[Interview on 550 KTRS with Don Littge and Kathy Evans](#)