

Consolidated B-24J #42-73365

January 8, 1944

On the evening of January 8, 1944, B-24J #42-73365 with the 776th Bomb Squadron, 464th Bomb Group, took off from Pocatello Army Air Base, Idaho, for a night time practice bombing mission. After proceeding to the bombing range north of the base, the crew made three practice runs on the target from 20,000 ft. Following the third run, the aircraft got into a stall-spin situation. After a harrowing three-minute descent, the crew was able to pull the aircraft out of the spin at 500 ft. The left rudder then tore off, the aircraft went out of control, and crashed. All seven crew members were killed.

In January 2014, Project Remembrance teamed up with archaeologists at Idaho National Laboratory and relocated the crash site on U.S. Government property. While examining the wreckage, INL archaeologist Hollie Gilbert found a 1935 high school class ring. Using the initials on the band and centerpiece of the ring, it was determined that it belonged to the wife of tail gunner Sgt. George H. Pearce, Jr. Sgt. Pearce wore the ring on a chain around his neck for good luck. In late 2014, Sgt. Pearce's daughter, Nancy Gavalis, was located in New Hampshire and the ring was returned to her family.

In November 2015, Nancy and her husband, Dick Gavalis, were invited to visit the crash site at INL. A granite marker and U.S. flag were placed at the site at that time.

In June 2024, INL hosted a ten-year commemoration of the rediscovery of the #42-73365 crash site. In attendance was the daughter of navigator 2Lt. Robert W. Madsen, Roberta Armstrong, who also visited the crash site with her husband, Al Webster.

Special thanks to INL archaeologists Julie Braun-Williams, Hollie Gilbert, Brenda Pace, Dan Mahnami, and also Craig Fuller at AAIR for help with finding this crash site.

Crew:

Pilot	2Lt. Richard A. Hedges	Circleville, OH
Co-Pilot	2Lt. Lonnie L. Keepers	Aransas Pass, TX
Navigator	2Lt. Robert W. Madsen	Stillwater, MN
Bombardier	2Lt. Richard R. Pitzner	Chicago, IL
Engineer / Gunner	Sgt. Louis H. Rinke	Washington, D.C.
Gunner	Sgt. Charles W. Eddy	Templeton, CA
Gunner	Sgt. George H. Pearce, Jr.	Hartford, CT



Part of a window frame



Data plate from a Pratt & Whitney R-1830 radial engine



Part of a cast aluminum engine case



Handle from the interior of the aircraft



Part of a practice bomb



Part of the debris field at the impact site



Heated flight suit control panel



Several layers of riveted aluminum



Aluminum stringer



Parachute harness buckles



Padlock key



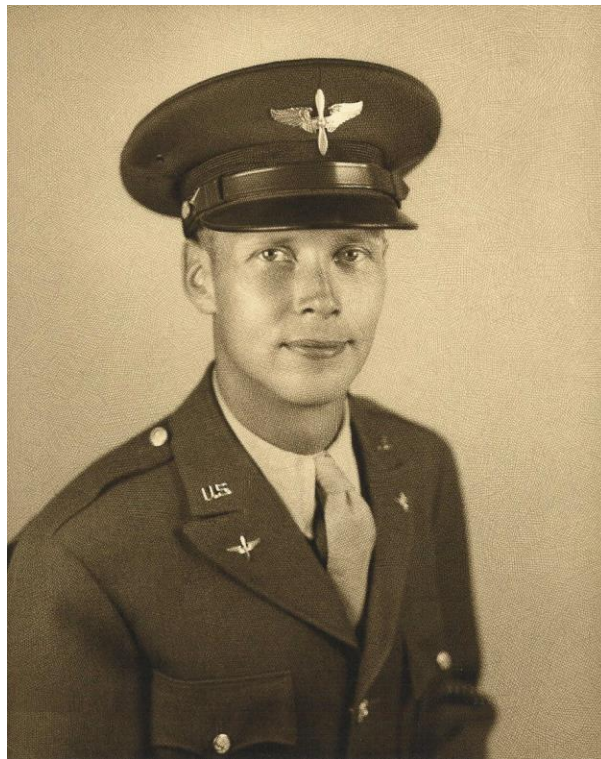
The 1935 high school class ring that was found at the crash site



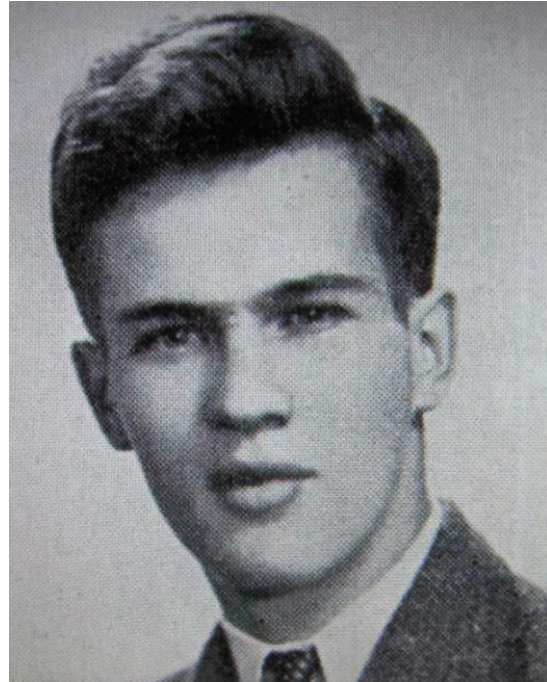
Pilot 2Lt. Richard A. Hedges (left) and his brother (Courtesy of the Hedges family)



Co-pilot 2Lt. Lonnie L. Keepers (Courtesy of Find-A-Grave.com)



Navigator 2Lt. Robert W. Madsen (Courtesy of Roberta Armstrong)



Bombardier 2Lt. Richard R. Pitzner (Courtesy of Ancestry.com)



Engineer / Gunner Sgt. Louis H. Rinke (left) and his sister (Courtesy of the Rinke family)



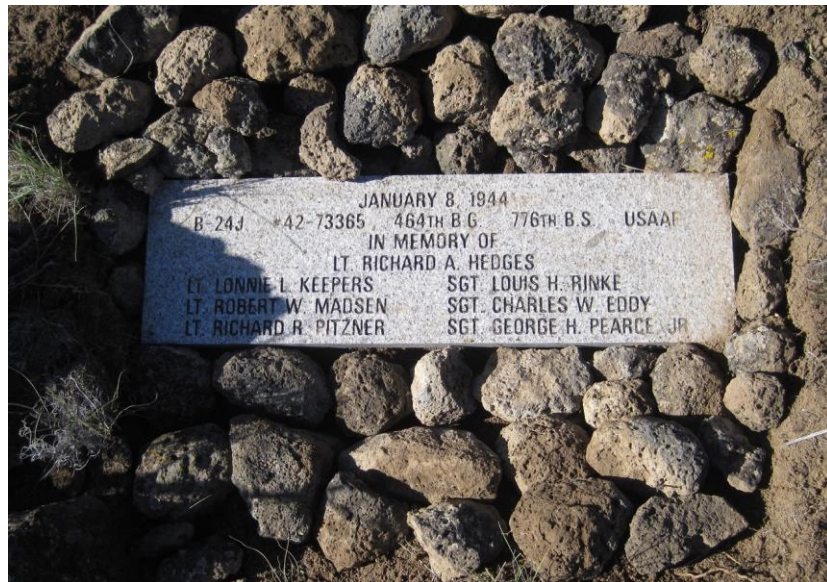
Gunner Sgt. Charles W. Eddy (Courtesy of the Eddy family)



Tail gunner Sgt. George H. Pearce, Jr. (Courtesy of Nancy Gavalis)



Marc McDonald (left), INL archaeologist Brenda Pace (center), and Nancy Gavalis, daughter of Sgt. Georg Pearce, at the crash site in 2015.



Granite marker that was placed at the crash site in 2015



Marc McDonald (left), Roberta Armstrong, daughter of 2Lt. Robert Madsen (center), and her husband, Al Webster (right) at the 10-year commemoration event in June 2024.



A Consolidated B-24J similar to #42-73365 (USAAF photo)

Media Center

Original 2015 video featuring Nancy Gavalis, daughter of Sgt. George Pearce:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zGLwSNqp1H4>

New 2024 video featuring Roberta Armstrong, daughter of 2Lt. Robert Madsen:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CTe0F1GSyVc>