

When I think of the 100th [Bomb Group]'s casualties... I wonder what poets, what statesmen, what inventors, what husbands, what fathers, never were permitted to play their part in a contribution toward human well-being.

— Harry H. Crosby, *A Wing and a Prayer*

The Promise of His Youth: a biography dedicated to the memory of

Lt. Thomas Cryan, 1920-1944

written by his grand-niece, Jill DeVito



More than 16 million Americans served with the Allied Forces in World War II. My grandfather's brother, Tom Cryan, was one of almost 300,000 who never came home. Thomas Cryan was born June 10, 1920, the seventh of nine children of John P. and Anna G. (O'Reilly) Cryan. The family lived in a large white house at 59 Temple Street in Lowell, Massachusetts. Both John Cryan and Anna O'Reilly were born in Lowell as children of Irish immigrants. John, a veteran of the Spanish-American War, worked as a traveling salesman and for many years was involved with local politics in Lowell. Anna took care of several boarders who rented rooms in the family home, managed the household finances meticulously, and was a devoted homemaker. Beyond the constant challenge of keeping Jim, Frank, Arthur, Jack, Catherine, Eileen, Tom, Paul and Gerry fed and clothed, Anna's highest priorities for her children were their education and their Catholic faith.

Even among seven boys and two girls, from an early age Tom stood out as the star of the family. Tom's sister Catherine told the story of his fifth birthday. "Well, I guess Tom was a budding politician. He had told all the kids in the neighborhood that they could come to his birthday. His birthday arrived, the 10th of June. Mama was getting supper ready and she looked out and here's every kid in the neighborhood sitting on the back piazza, all dressed up and carrying wrapped presents. She didn't know what they were there for. They were there for Tom's birthday! So she took the regular everyday supper cake, and she put fancy icing on it. And she gave me the money to run down to Steve's and get a quart of ice cream. A quart of ice cream from Steve's was as good as any half-gallon nowadays. So Tom had his birthday party." As a six-year-old, Tom traveled with his Aunt Katie and Uncle Gene to visit his oldest brother, James, in New York City.



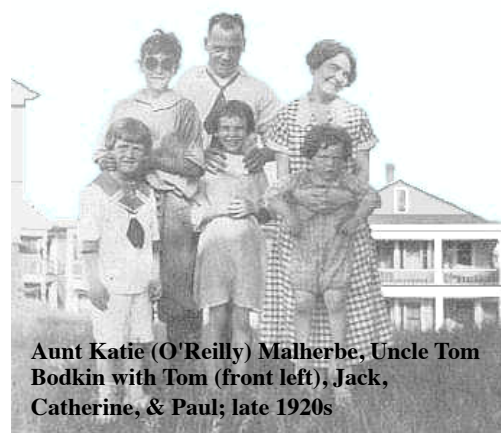
Anna G. O'Reilly Cryan
(Tom's mother); 1903

In a letter dated August 17, 1926, Tom's mother Anna wrote:

Dear James:—

Very glad to receive your letter, also glad to know that my company had arrived safe in New York. We miss Thomas very much, more than we would any of the others. He stays around the house more than the others. I am pleased to know that he is enjoying himself, he is a good kid to do things for, he appreciates anything. I know he was delighted over the two suits Gene bought for him. Especially the belts. I can just see him admiring them... I forgot to tell Katie that when Thomas has nothing to do he used to practice writing, she could try him with all his letters and the heading he has to put on his papers at school. Thomas Cryan, St. Peter's School, Grade 1. Our Paul is fine and every little while he says, "I wish Thomas did not go to New York."

By October of 1926, Tom had already begun to shine as a young scholar. By his father's account, "Thomas is going like a house afire at school and every night he has a paper home that is the best in his room and everybody has to praise him and tell him how good he is. He knows it and admits it himself." And his mother writes, "Thomas is very proud of himself. He is doing so well. He is studying very hard and gets a star every day. I am almost run out of adjectives telling him how good he is... He can read out loud until everyone is asking him to stop. He is so interested in schoolwork that he thinks of nothing else. I hope he keeps it up when he gets into the higher grades."



Aunt Katie (O'Reilly) Malherbe, Uncle Tom Bodkin with Tom (front left), Jack, Catherine, & Paul; late 1920s

Tom's Sister Catherine remembered that "In the 5th grade, Tom was Santa Claus in the Christmas play at the Lincoln School. The Lincoln School was really a neighborhood school in those days. Everybody bought a ticket to the Christmas play. And I wonder if it was because Tom Cryan was going to be Santa Claus! After he broke his leg (during the summer after third grade) he was quite awkward. And when he did a dance with his reindeer on the stage, it was really something to see!"

The Cryan children were a close-knit group, and they led an adventurous, independent lifestyle in the industrial city of Lowell. Tom's brother Paul recalled a childhood experience from the early 1930's: "One spring, we had gone over to watch the circus come into town about 2:00 a.m. After the circus had set up I was jumping in a sand pit by the railroad tracks and sprained my ankle. Someone found Tom for me and he carried me about a mile and then borrowed a wagon to get me home. I was about 9 and Tom was 11."

Since 4th grade at the Lincoln School, Tom's best friend was John Casey. As Tom's sister Catherine recalled, "Casey was like another member of the family." As John himself claimed, "That was my second house." He said that with seven boys in the Cryan household, "Whoever went out first on Saturday night was the best dressed!"

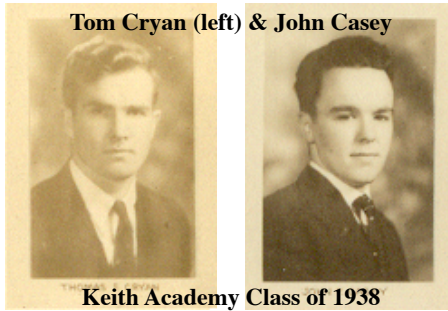
According to Catherine, "When Tom and Johnny Casey finished the 6th grade, Johnny had to go to the Butler School, because that's where his father was a Janitor. And Tom went to Morey, up in the highlands. They had planned in the 6th grade that (after graduating from junior high) they were going to go to Keith Academy, and be in the same class again." In high school, "Tom and Casey would come home from school... and use the phone, to call up girls." With little privacy to be found in the Cryan household, they would pull the telephone into the closet before dialing.



Uncle Tom Bodkin, with Frank, Tom (center) & Arthur; late 1920s

The Cryan boys spent many evenings outdoors playing football, but Tom's brother Arthur remembered that one of the boys would always have to return to the kitchen to "put water on the beans, so they wouldn't burn." 59 Temple Street was "an open house" with people always coming and going. Family friend Joe Brodeur remembered "that long table in the kitchen where always could be found a jar of peanuts that everyone helped themselves to... and enjoying a weenie roast in that large side room with two fireplaces in it."

According to Arthur, one day another neighborhood pal, Ray Gendron, was visiting the family. Tom accidentally stepped on a cat. The animal let out a yowl, and Tom felt terrible. After Tom left the room, Ray poured a bottle of ketchup on the floor where the cat had been. When Tom came back to the kitchen "the cat was quite well, but Tommy wasn't!"



For one or two weeks every year, the Cryan kids would vacation at the Hampton beach cottages owned by Aunt Bridget and Aunt Katie. Tom's best friend John Casey remembered being invited once to join the Cryans during "the last week of the season, when they let the Cryan boys take over." For Casey, who was the only boy in his household, supper with the Cryans was quite an experience. "I had to move fast, or there was nothing left!"

Tom's sister Catherine told the story of another trip to the beach houses. "Tom and I borrowed the car and we started down to Hampton. Neither of us had even a nickel. (You could buy a hot dog for a nickel in those days ... but we didn't have one). So Tom says, 'Say a prayer that we meet some old ladies with a flat.' We were driving along, and sure enough, there are a couple of old ladies with a flat in answer to our prayers. So Tom pulled over behind them and got out and took the spare out, and put it on. So the ladies say 'Here, take this.' 'Oh, no, thank you!' So the lady finally put it in his pocket and he said, 'Well, thank you very much.' And it was paper, folding money, which we didn't have any of. So we went along to Hampton Beach and were able to eat with all that money. It was probably a buck, but in those days that was a lot of money!"

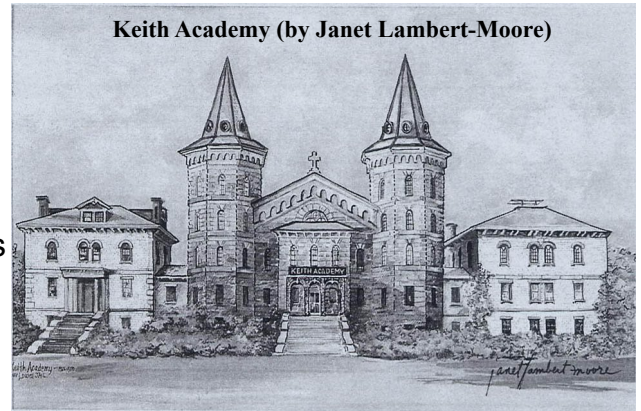
Just as his mother had hoped, Tom continued to excel in academics at St. Peter's School, the Lincoln School, Morey Jr. High, Keith Academy (class of 1938) and the Lowell Textile Institute (class of 1942). His sister Catherine recalled that Tom once took a special math class in the Keith Academy principal's office, with just one other student. She also recalled that their brother Jack once said "The way to drive Tom crazy would be to put him in a room with math problems all over the walls, and no place to work them out."

Paul Cryan, who attended Lowell High School while his brother Tom was at Keith Academy, said, "The Headmaster at Lowell High, Ray Sullivan, was the principal at the Lincoln School when Tom was there and he always followed his progress. If there was a project to be done he would call on Tom. When they started the Columbian Squires (youth organization), he called on Tom to lead it."

Tom's high school and college years were marked by the loss of both of his parents. Anna Cryan suddenly became ill and died before Tom's sixteenth birthday, and John Cryan died from a stroke following an eye operation, less than three years later. The care of the family fell into the hands of the older brothers, and everyone pitched in to help run the household.

Paul also recounted his brother's popularity as a local athlete, "Tom played four sports (in high school) and received a varsity sweater with four stripes on the sleeve to indicate his participation. In 1939 I Went to Jacquet River, New Brunswick, with Irene and Gordon Grant to visit her sister Linda, they were my mother's first cousins... Tom let me take his high school sweater — a great thrill for a sophomore."

While a student at Lowell Textile, Tom worked in the carbonizing department of Talbot Mills in Tewksbury. As Paul explained, this was only one of many jobs that kept Tom busy as a teenager. "Thinking about Tom brings back a lot of memories. He always had a couple of jobs going. He drove a truck delivering candy and tobacco after school and on weekends he cleaned the boilers at the greenhouse of the Merrimack Valley Nurseries in Tyngsboro. It was a coal burner and a dirty job. In the summer he worked for Kydd's ice cream parlor. One time the state inspector came by and told him he couldn't work after 10:00 as he wasn't 18. He told him he would have to close up and send everyone home, as he was the manager."



“In 1940 when they started the draft,” remembered Paul, “the first one [of us] that was called was Lenny Gendron. We all knew it was just a matter of time and we would all be in so Tom set up a testimonial dinner for Lenny. When the dinner started Tom was on one of his jobs so I ended up as the emcee. The next day after his physical Lenny came home as he didn't pass. All the rest of his brothers—6 of them—did go in. Lenny joined the fire department and was killed from a fire accident.”

“In the fall of 1940 Tom and one of his buddies at Textile School started dances on Friday nights at the Liberty Hall and then moved over to the Rex Center. There was a band of six or seven members from Nashua, NH, that played. I sold the cold drinks. At the end of the night we pooled all the ticket money and the soda money. We would just about have enough to pay each band member their three dollars and five for the policeman. When the Federal Government said we had to pay an entertainment tax the dances ended.”



Four of the seven Cryan brothers (Francis, Thomas, Paul, and Gerald) served with the US Armed Forces in World War II. Frank, Paul, and Gerry joined the Navy. Tom left the Lowell Textile Institute in his junior year and applied to enter the Army Air Corps. According to his sister Catherine, Tom "was interested in airplanes—he used to say that he'd been wanting to fly an airplane since Lindbergh had flown over Lowell in the '20s."

As Paul recalled, "Tom applied for the Air Corps in September, 1941, in Massachusetts. He was finally accepted when he got his weight below the maximum late in November, while he was living in Fairfield, Connecticut. He went in the service in January of 1942." According to Catherine, "Tom was a big guy—there was nothing little about Tom!" and although he passed all of the Air Corps exams, he did not pass the physical. "The doctor put him on an obesity diet, but he couldn't lose an ounce." While Tom was working at Remington Arms, he contracted a Strep infection. "He had to go to the hospital. He came out of the hospital, and he went to the Air Corps and said 'Weigh me in!' He weighed 184 pounds, and they signed him up right then. (In less than two weeks, he was back up to 205)." Paul Cryan noted with a chuckle that by the time his brother reached his normal weight of 220 lbs, Tom may have been "the heaviest pilot in the air force!"

Jim's son, James Cryan, Jr., remembered "a story that Dad told, about when Tom came home on leave, once. Tom was driving down Merrimack Street, and instead of using the brakes, he pulled back on the steering wheel. He pulled the steering wheel right off the car!"

During another furlough, Tom's sister Catherine said that the weather was cold enough for Tom to borrow long johns that belonged to his brother Gerry, who was "always the skinny one." "And my modest little brother, he said, 'You should see this!' and he came in dancing like a ballet dancer. They fit like skin."

Catherine said that Tom shared a special bond with his older brother Jack, even though "there were seven years between them." As kids, Tom and Jack had shared a room. One night they "kept each other awake all night" reciting a tongue-twister until they got it right:

**There was a successful thistle sifter
who when sifting a sieve full of unsifted thistles
thrust three thousand thistles through the thick of his thumb.
See that thou when sifting thy sieve full of unsifted thistles
thrust not three thousand thistles through the thick of thy thumb.
Success to the successful thistle sifter!**

A few months after entering the Air Corps, while Training at Maxwell Field in Alabama, Tom wrote to his oldest brother, James:

March 17, 1942



Hi Jim: I've been going to write to you but haven't found the time till now. It's raining so hard that we have had our morning classes called off so I have some spare time. This rain we are having may cool things off down here, it has been too hot this past week. It feels like June or July instead of March.

How's the family and the business? I got a letter from Catherine and she said that your daughter was quite a girl. How are you going to take care of your trade when your tires wear out? I finish my training at Maxwell Field this week and where I go from here I don't know. The next step in my training will be flying 250 IP planes. I will be taking up cross country and acrobatic flying. I've finished my ground school and if I go straight to my next base I'll be flying solo in two weeks. But all my class is probably going on a furlough as there are no flying fields open to send us to. They are pushing so many pilots through that everything is congested. So I hope to be up North for the month of April. I guess I'll spend Easter Sunday at Lowell. I'll drop over and tell you all about Army life. It's a great life, at least in the Air Corps. Well I'll close here as I have quite a few letters to write and I won't have any chance to, the rest of the week as I'll be busy getting ready to leave as I may be moving this weekend. Drop me a line sometime.

Yours

Tom

P.S. My address is: A/c Thomas Cryan, A.C., RC., Squad C Group 1 Class 42, I, Maxwell Field, Ala.

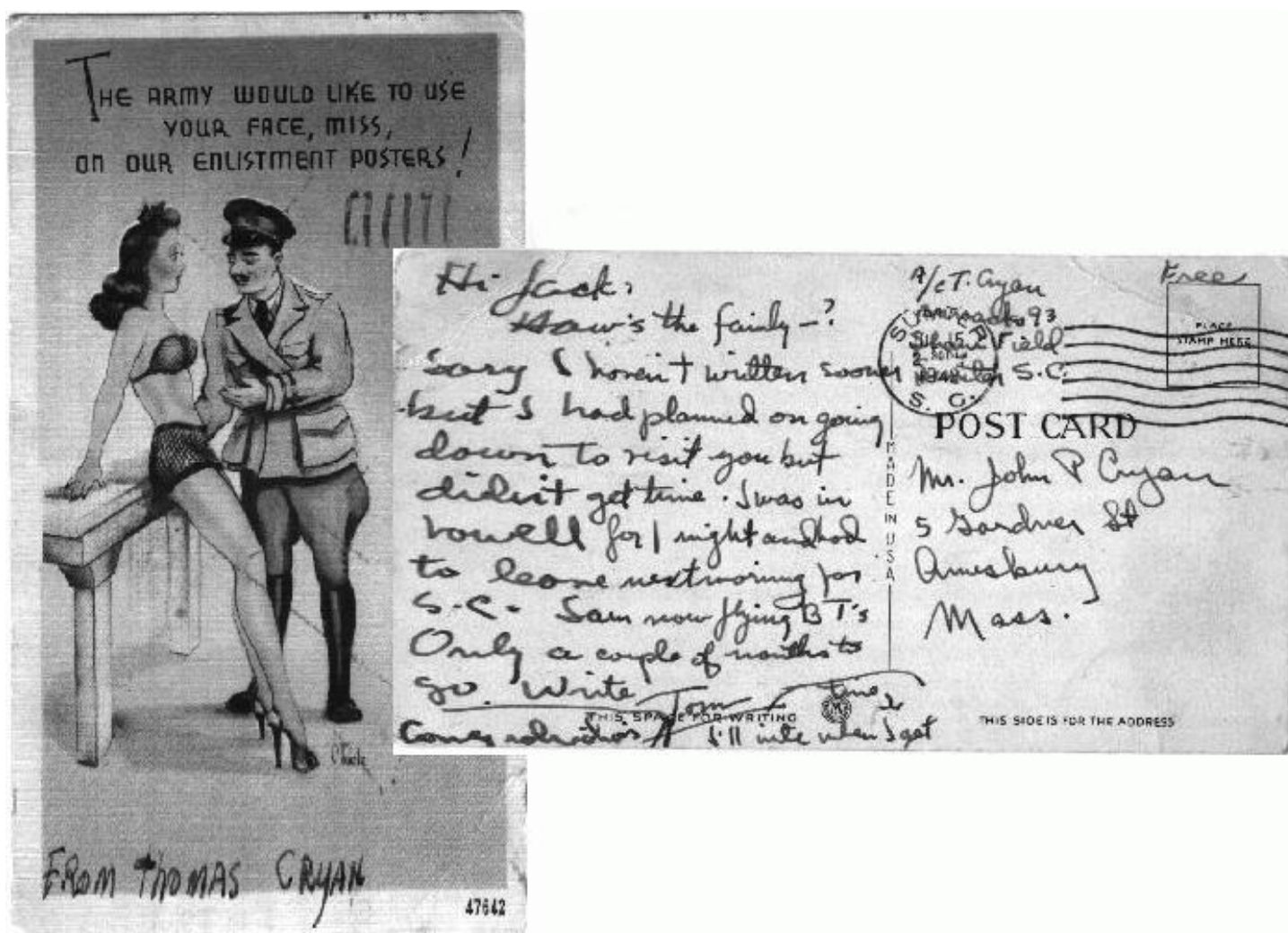


Stateside fighter pilot training (L to R): Kirk, Hudson, Bahre, Lt. Garlington, Lt. Sidwell, Cryan

Tom's best friend John Casey remembered that "Tom was the first of our group to go into the service." While Tom was on leave from South Carolina in 1942, John Casey accompanied Tom and two other friends on a trip to New York City. As Tom's car was "an antique," Casey estimates that they had four flat tires by the time they drove the forty miles Southwest to Worcester. When they "finally made it" to New York, the "three civilians and Tom in his uniform" went into the famous club called Billy Rose's Diamond Horseshoe. Upon viewing the cover charge and the prices on the menu, the three civilians made jokes about Billy Rose: "This guy must be paying alimony to three wives!" Tom, who did not wish to be embarrassed in uniform, kept telling them to "Keep quiet!"

On another occasion when Tom was on leave and in uniform, he and his sister Catherine were driving through downtown Lowell, in a Model A Ford that their brother Paul had bought for a low price and left in Catherine's care. The car broke down; "Something happened, and it wouldn't go another foot." This resulted in quite a dilemma, as Catherine explained: "When you're an officer in uniform, you don't get your hands dirty." They called the local Ford dealer, and he asked Catherine how much she wanted for the car. They settled on "enough to buy a war bond— \$18.75."

This post card from Tom to his brother Jack was post marked: Sumpter, SC July 15, 1942:



From late 1942 to early 1943, Paul Cryan remembered that his brother Tom was "flying B-25s and teaching aerial gunnery for six months" in Panama City, Florida. "During this time I believe he was credited with a submarine kill in the Gulf of Mexico. He also flew some VIPs to Africa. I don't know what kind of plane he was flying, but it was not armed." Tom's sister Catherine said that there was one thing he didn't like about Africa: "Little boys, 8 to 10 years old, would meet the soldiers coming in, and they would say, 'my sister, 25 cents, my sister'... and Tom was shocked!"

While stationed at the Army Air Forces Gunnery School at Tyndall Field in Panama City, Florida, Tom wrote the following letter (post marked March 10, 1943) to his brother, Gerald, who was then stationed at Camp Allen in Norfolk, Virginia.

Hi Gerald,

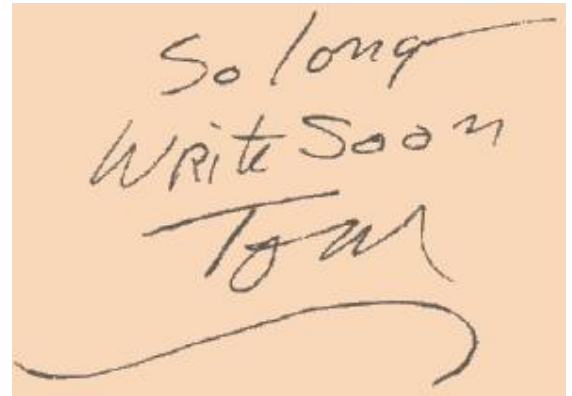
I've been going to write you for quite a while but am just getting around to it. How do you like the Navy? Are they keeping you busy? Do you expect to ship out soon? If you are going to get a leave when you finish training write and let me know as I will get one at the same time and we can both go home at the same time. I intend to get my leave in April so if you are getting one we can probably arrange to go north together. You see I have a leave coming up and I can arrange to get in any time I please — So write anyway and tell me when you expect to finish your training. I certainly would like to see you in your navy uniform. Send me a picture of yourself at any rate. I bet you're a killer in that flashy navy blue outfit. Have you run into any southern belles yet? Take a tip from an old-timer don't get too friendly with any of these southern queens, they are mostly a pain in the neck.

I have been hoping to get a plane to fly up to Norfolk but so far no-soap. I flew up to Atlanta this weekend but I can't get permission to go as far as Va. I had quite a time in Atlanta though. Here is Frank's address: F.D. Cryan CBNI USNR, US Naval Construction Battalion, 8th Co. D, Dutch Harbor, Alaska

So long — Write Soon

Tom

At times, the secrecy surrounding Air Force missions and the rapid pace of pilot training prevented Tom from communicating with his family and his hometown sweetheart, Pat Holmes (to whom Tom had given his wings upon earning them at Turner Field in Albany, Georgia). As Paul writes in a May 28, 1943 letter to his own sweetheart, Pearl Mott, "No one at home has heard from my brother Tom since he went back from his furlough so there's no telling where he is. His girl friend when she didn't receive a letter in over a month had sent his wings back to him; that afternoon she met my sister [Catherine] and found out no one had heard from him and went to the Post Office and had to sign a paper before she could get the wings back." In a June 3, 1943 letter from Paul to Pearl, he writes, "This is the first time we've heard from Tom in over a month. He has been changed from Bomber Pilot to Pursuit Pilot. This is probably the reason he hasn't been writing. The training was probably pushed on him as fast as possible."



Written on the back of this photo:
"Taken last day before he left the U.S.A." (1943)



While Tom was still stationed in the U.S., he became engaged to Pat. Tom's sister Catherine said that Pat was "a lovely girl." "She worked for the United Service Organization in Lowell during the war. They were very much in love." After being sent overseas, Tom sent Catherine \$50 a month, so that when he needed to have something done in the states, she could do it for him. When there was enough money put away, Tom sent Catherine to the jewelry store with Pat to choose an engagement ring.

In a letter dated March 16, 2000, Pat (Holmes) Regan writes:

Dear Miss DeVito,

Thank you for the interest you've shown in the Cryan family history of which I was part of for a time.

My time with Tom was short. Servicemen didn't get much time between training and leaving for duty.

The first time I saw Tom, 1941, was at a dance at Immaculate Hall. He didn't know me then. To my surprise, mutual friends introduced us in March 1943. I liked him immediately — we saw each other as much as we could. We rode the bus to movies and to dinner, simple things. Tom was in training during this time and was an officer. He was neat in his "pinks". Tom went back to Alabama and Georgia to his group to leave for England. In August 1943, he asked me to marry him.

His letters were personal and funny and they were wonderful to receive. At the same time, he was writing your great Aunt Catherine and giving her instructions about taking me to get the engagement ring, the cedar chest, and other information about how Catherine should be taking care of me. Catherine is a wonderful person and she and Tom were very close.

I wish that I could offer you some concrete information, but my life changed when Catherine was notified of Tom's death. One deals with the knowledge that his brothers and sisters were strong because they had Paul, Gerry, and Frank (who were also in the service) to be concerned about. That reason helped me hold and to understand that grief is a part of the living process.

Tom was a smart, witty, protective man. May God have a special place for Tom and the Cryan family.

In memory of March 1944...

Sincerely,

Patricia Holmes Regan



Overseas, 1st Lieutenant Cryan (0-795631) served in the 350th Squadron of the 100th Bombardment (Group H) in the 8th Air force. He earned the Air Medal with two Oak Leaf Clusters and Stars for combat service in the European campaign. The 100th Bomb Group (known as "The Bloody Hundredth" for the heavy losses it suffered) was stationed in Thorpe Abbots, England, Northeast of London between Norwich and Ipswich.

When the U.S. Army Air Forces were set in motion to assist the Allied effort, the 8th Air Force (established in 1942 as the VIII Bomber Command) was assigned to the European/African/Middle Eastern Campaign. Air force bases were quickly constructed in British agricultural fields, where flat expanses of land permitted the building of adequate runways.

The British and American Air Forces worked together to cripple the German wartime industry. While the Royal Air Force performed night bombing operations in German industrial cities, The 8th Air Force conducted daylight bombing raids designed to eliminate more specific targets. Prime targets included the German submarine and aircraft industries, the oil industry, and critical transportation routes. Precision daylight bombing raids were conducted primarily by groups of "heavy bombers" such as the B-17 "flying fortress" and B-24 "liberator." Whenever possible, the heavy bombers were escorted by smaller, more maneuverable British and American fighter planes, known as affectionately as "little friends." These escorts were in scarce supply and high demand, and missions were notoriously dangerous. Bomber crews were plagued by inclement weather, German anti-aircraft fire (known as flak), and the Luftwaffe (nimble German fighter planes capable of engaging the larger planes in combat at close range). As a result, the 8th Air Force sometimes sustained heavy losses. The air war in the European Theater was not won as quickly as expected, but it paved the way for the ultimate success of Allied ground forces in Europe.

Young American lives (and British too) were lost in great air battles. It was a fearful kind of barter, the hope being that each life might be traded for a moment or an hour nearer the war's end. There was no means of knowing, at the time, whether or not this would prove true. — Edward Jablonski, *Flying Fortress*



Jack Eling, the radio operator from Tom's original crew, described Tom as a cherub-faced, bubbling guy. Sgt. Eling remembered that the crew of pilot Mark Cope and copilot Tom Cryan trained together in the U.S., then picked up a B-17 Flying Fortress bomber and flew it to Scotland. In a letter dated February 4, 2000, Dr. Eling explained:

Our crew was put together... in early 1943. Our training bases were at Walla Walla, and Moses Lake, Washington. After our crew's training we were given a furlough. We met at Scott Field, Illinois. We ferried a B-17 bomber to Presque Isle, Maine. 24 hours later we flew from Presque Isle in a driving rain storm through the night and I can't recall if we landed in Labrador or not (at 77 years of age, the mind gets fuzzy sometimes). Anyway, the next day we landed at Prestwick, Scotland. Pilot Mark Cope and copilot Tom Cryan did a great job getting us to Scotland. We went to a base named Stone, Scotland. From there we went by rail to the 100th Bomb Base at Thorpe Abbots. ... Three weeks later, November 3, 1943, we flew our first mission.



"Superstitious Aloysius"
(photos courtesy J.C. Eling)

Flight and ground crew of aircraft 049 are pictured here after co-pilot Tom Cryan's promotion to the position of pilot on another B-17.

Left waist gunner (James) Elmore Morrison recalled that Tom's crew "thought a lot of him," and that "he and Cope worked well together." According to Sgt. Morrison, Tom had been trained as a fighter pilot, but was assigned to Lt. Cope's crew when the demand was greater for heavy bomber pilots. Tom was "a big man, and strong. If he hadn't been, we would have crashed in phase training." He explained that during the landing of a flight in Walla Walla, the flaps malfunctioned and the B-17 started to nose dive. "Cope and Cryan were stout enough to manhandle the plane and level it back up."

Upon arrival at Thorpe Abbots, the crew were assigned the B-17 #231049 (known by the last three digits as "049"), which they named "Superstitious Aloysius." A magician was painted on the nose of the aircraft, along with a wishbone, a four-leaf clover, and several other good luck charms. According to Ethell and Simonsen's *The History of Aircraft Nose Art*: "Some nose art characters were painted on many individual aircraft in many areas across the globe. Superstitious Aloysius was a popular good luck elf who carried just about every charm known to man, including a wishbone, horseshoe, four-leaf clover, tied string (on his nose), and rabbit's foot while crossing his fingers. These examples in the Eighth Air Force show crews wanted all the luck they could get."

H.R. Davidson puts this phenomenon into a broad context in her book, *Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe*. "Men exposed to physical danger and sudden hazards, such as airmen in war, racing drivers or those who go to sea in small ships, are very much alive to the need for good luck, and many rely on mascots, prized amulets and little protective rituals to bolster up their confidence, since confidence is essential when calamity threatens and an instant decision is needed."



(Bud Frum)

Luck, confidence, discipline, and teamwork indeed came together for Aircraft 049. As ground crew member Bud Frum recalled, "The Superstitious Aloysius survived the war. It flew over 100 missions, and we never lost a crew."

However, several crew members including Tom Cryan were killed while flying on other planes. In a March 8, 2000 letter, Bud Frum wrote: "Remember freedom has a price and your grandfather's brother paid the highest. I was proud to have been associated with him."

Right waist gunner Donald Walker joined Mark Cope's crew during stateside training in the late summer of 1943, and traveled with them to England in October of the same year. Sgt. Walker had "fond memories" of Tom, and described him as jolly, youthful, energetic, enthusiastic, and full of life. Sgt. Walker recalled that during preparation for a mission, Tom would borrow a motorcycle and ride around the base, fully outfitted in his heavy padded flight suit, steel vest, and helmet. As he drove by on the motorcycle, Tom's comrades would yell "Here comes Cryan!"

Navigator Festus "Shorty" Bryant was a good friend of Toms. "We had a lot of fun together. We would go pub crawling; drink some beer, and shoot some darts. Tom was one of the most nonchalant guys I knew. He would never get worked up about anything. We would keep about \$5.00 in a pot as spending money, and when someone would ask Tom, 'How much do you have?' he would answer, 'I don't know, ask Shorty!' (pronounced Shaw-ty, in Tom's Boston accent). Tom was a super guy. He was one of two people that I really looked forward to visiting in the states after the war." The other, an officer named Becker, was also killed in action.



Pilot Mark Cope estimated that Lt. Cryan flew with his crew for about 6 to 8 missions, after which Tom was promoted to become the pilot of another aircraft. Lt. Cope's cousin, George Cope, was impressed by Mark's tales of "barn storming" (recreational low-altitude flying) in a B-17 during training in Washington State. Mark also spoke often of Tom Cryan's ability as a copilot, and of the sad news of his death.

Ball turret gunner Richard Donnelly described Tom as a robust fellow with a big laugh. He said that during the early missions while Tom was still flying with Cope's crew, "Everything was new to us. Our first mission was an easy one... They broke us in." Sgt. Donnelly remembered that months later, Lt. Cope's crew was on stand down between missions on the day that Tom's plane did not return.

One of the early missions flown by Cope, Cryan, and crew may have played a major role in preventing Hitler from manufacturing the atomic bomb. Pilot Owen "Cowboy" Roane, who led the 100th Bomb Group on the November 16, 1943 mission to Rjukan, Norway, explained that although they didn't know it at the time, the 100th Bomb Group crews were participating in the destruction of a heavy water plant.

Tommy should bounce up one of these days but I'm afraid we won't hear for a while, probably until the end of the war.

While Lt. Cryan was overseas, his family often waited for months with no news of Tom. In early 1944, Tom's brother Frank wrote to his brother Gerald, "Tommy should bounce up one of these days but I'm afraid we won't hear for a while, probably until the end of the war."

But good news came in March, as his brother Paul remembered; Tom had completed his tour and was due to return home. Tom's sister Catherine received a letter from another soldier indicating that Tom would soon be home "without a scratch." Then he was assigned to fly as fill-in for another crew because one of the pilots was ill. "One of [our sister] Eileen's friends from the Highlands off of School Street was in Tom's squadron and called her and said Tom would be home in a day or so as he had taken the other mission."

The target of the mission was an Augsburg wartime factory which manufactured ball-bearings. Sergeant Richard Faulkner, ball-turret gunner for the B-17 "Berlin Playboy," remembered that twenty-one B-17's from the 100th Bombardment joined more than 600 aircraft involved in the March 18, 1944 mission to Augsburg and Munich.

This was Sgt. Faulkner's first mission. Although he had only met Tom that morning, he remembered that as an experienced pilot, Lt. Cryan had been chosen to serve as copilot on the newer crew of the Berlin Playboy for the potentially difficult Augsburg mission. On the morning of Saturday, March 18, The 100th Bomb Group took off from Thorpe Abbots, England after being delayed by heavy fog. En route to Germany, the formation came under heavy flak (anti-aircraft fire) from the Germans in Northern France. The group leader pulled out, and when the planes re-grouped, the Berlin Playboy and another aircraft tried to occupy the same spot in the formation.

A mid-air collision resulted over the countryside near Neufchatel, and the Berlin Playboy broke apart at the wing. Sgt. Faulkner was the only member of the crew who was able to clear the aircraft and open his parachute. He was rescued by the French underground, and "spent 28 days behind German Lines" as he was moved from house to house in the French countryside. Sgt. Faulkner communicated with the French patriots by pointing to words in a French/English dictionary. When he was finally brought to the coast, he was picked up by British forces in rubber rafts from a PT boat. Upon returning to England, Sgt. Faulkner asked where he should sleep. He was shown a room full of empty bunks, and was told to take his choice. None of the previous occupants had returned from battle.

Century Bombers: the Story of the Bloody Hundredth, by Richard LeStrange, details the fates of the three 100th Bomb Group planes which failed to return from the Augsburg mission:

...It was noted that, at 12.10 and 'over France,' B-17 42-39830, piloted by Paul Martin, had collided with B-17 42-37913, piloted by Donald Stuke... The man observed bailing out (was) ball-turret gunner Richard Faulkner... The rest of Lieutenant Martin's crew, including the co-pilot, Thomas Cryan, who originally flew with Mark Cope, were killed.

Only two men bailed out of Lieutenant Stuke's plane, the co-pilot Thomas Lemond, who successfully evaded the Germans, and engineer Daniel Segrete, who was taken prisoner of war. The rest were killed, including replacement navigator George Owens, from the crew of Donald Rice.

A third plane, 'Bastard's Bungalow II' (42-3508), piloted by Robert Horn and co-piloted by Bart Mahoney, also failed to return due to battle damage.

The bombardier Charles Conner, recalls: 'We crash-landed near Ulm, with Lieutenant Horn making a superb smooth dead-stick wheels-up landing in the snow covered back yard of a farmer. As we climbed out of the airplane we were "greeted" by the very irate farmer and his family armed with pitch forks and pistols, and they held us captive for fifteen to thirty minutes until a half-dozen German military men took control and moved us to the town jail.'

Operation Officer's Report, Mission to Munich, 18 March (1944)

1. Main 100th Group; The main 100th Group formation took off at 0908 hours. By 0945 hours, the group formation had assembled. We then cut Splasher 7 Short to the north to make up time and arrived at Bishop Stortford at 1053 hours as ordered. We then proceeded to Cambridge, arriving there at 1102, one minute early. At 1123 hours the combat wing rendezvous was made at Splasher 7, at 12,300 feet.

The climb to bombing altitude was delayed, and begun over the channel. Bombing altitude was reached at 1308 hours. The enemy coast was crossed at 1207 hours at 49 58 N, 01 15 E on the briefed course.

At 1210 hours the group leader aborted, and the whole group came around with him before it was discovered that he was aborting. Although he had called the deputy leader and told him he was aborting, most of the group were under the impression that the group leader was making a turn to avoid flak, which had hit the group lead ship.

The low squadron then took over the lead and continued on course, joining the 385th group at 1227 hours. At 1257 hours we ran into clouds and the groups scattered. We took a heading of 110 degrees after breaking through and joining "K" group 20 miles south of course. The briefed course was intercepted at 1400 hours at 40 08 N - 09 07 E. On a heading of 36° we turned at the I.P. at 1414 hours. We flew over Augsburg and about 20 miles west of Munich, then took a heading of 90° and dropped our bombs at 1438 hours, 24 minutes late.

The route out was 8 to 10 miles north of the briefed course. The French coast was recrossed at 1745 hours, at 49 58 N - 01 15 E, on course. The lead ship landed at 1855 hours.

2. Aircraft not attacking; Twenty-three aircraft including two spares left base in formation. The two spares, #710 and 968 turned back before being dispatched.

Of the 21 aircraft dispatched, six failed to attack the target. These were #s 090, 256, 389, 941, 903 and 537.

3. Missing aircraft; 42-39830 and 42-37913 collided in the air at approximately 1210 hours, shortly after crossing the French coast on the route in.

#42-3508 had trouble keeping up with the formation all the way. Last seen at 1511 hours, 42 22 N - 10 01 E, altitude 16,400 feet, dropping back with no feathered props.

Missing Air Crew Report

DATE: 18 March 1944 350th Sqdn. A/C#42-39830
MISSION: Augsburg MACR#3234, Micro-fiche#1105

"BERLIN PLAYBOY"

2nd Lt Paul A. Martin P KIA
1st Lt Thomas Cryan CP KIA
2nd Lt Albert F. Racz B KIA
2nd Lt Tom F. Hughes N KIA
T/Sgt Russell E. Longdon R KIA
T/Sgt Levi O. Tonn E KIA
S/Sgt Richard J. Faulkner BT POW (May have been an Evadee)
S/Sgt Veryl A. Lund RW KIA
S/Sgt Lonnie J. Albin LW KIA
S/Sgt John E. Howley TG KIA

The date this crew joined the 100th and its exact composition at that time has not as yet been determined. It is known that Thomas Cryan was from the crew of Mark Cope.

Summary of Eyewitness reports: "A/C #830 and A/C #913 (Flown by D.J.Stuke) collided over France at 1210 hours near (?). #830 broke up while #913 pulled away, badly damaged but apparently under control. One chute was Seen to come from #830. The ship going down under control had two port engines torn out, and only #4 was operating. The nose of this A/C also was sheared off. The collision resulted when the Group leader aborted and the formation scattered and reformed."
Capt. Lauro, Lt. Gummersall, Lt. Malooly.

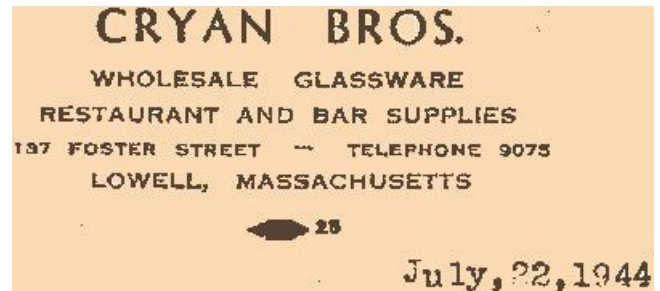
On 13/7/45, Sgt. Faulkner, then at 3718 AAF Base, Denver, Colo., was interrogated as to the death of Lt. Cryan. He gave the following information:

1. Over the coast of France, Lt. Cryan's bomber formation encountered heavy flak. Formation was broken with lead ship falling out. A new formation was formed with Lt. Cryan's ship as wing man.
2. There was a sudden explosion near Lt. Cryan's A/C. Sgt. Faulkner, ball turret operator, upon bailing out noticed the ship broken in two sections. Sgt. Faulkner having been in the rear section, and Lt. Cryan's station was in the front section as co-pilot.
3. Sgt. Faulkner became unconscious upon the opening of his chute and did not regain consciousness until after landing when he noticed the front section of the A/C crashed in the woods, surrounded by German soldiers.
4. Sgt. Faulkner was rescued by the French patriots. Having an understanding of the French language, Sgt. Faulkner was informed by the French patriots that all remaining crew members were killed in the crash of the A/C. Description by the French patriots of one of the bodies found in the front section of the A/C fitted that of Lt. Cryan.

German records in MACR state that the bodies were thrown from the plane... badly mutilated... identified by I.D. tags. Burial took place in the French cemetery in Poix de la Somme.

When the Cryan family received a telegram with the news that Tom was Missing in Action, they did not give up hope that he was still alive. In a May 11, 1944 letter from Jane (Matthews) Cryan to Paul Cryan, she wrote, "We haven't heard anything else about Tommy, but we are all praying that he may still be alive and well... He has had so many narrow escapes and has always come out of them alright, so let's hope this will be the same."

Within a few months after the accident, word reached the Cryan family that the German Government had identified Tom's body. Tom's fiancée, Pat Holmes, was widowed before she was married. Tom's oldest brother, James, articulated the depth of the loss experienced by the family in a letter to his youngest brother, Gerald, who was stationed in Alaska when the family in Lowell received the telegram. Jim wrote the letter on his own 36th birthday.



Dear Gerry:

I hope you didn't take the bad news too hard... In case other letters haven't come through yet and this is the first news you've had about the last telegram from the war dept., the German Gov't reported through the International Red Cross that Tom was killed in action over Germany on March 18th.

It's bad enough for us here to take, but at least we are together and it certainly helps to have the rest of the family around when a thing like this happens. Don't let it get you down, I always felt that Tom was the one guy in this family that had everything it takes physically, morally, and mentally to make a real success of life, I felt this without any disparagement of the rest of us, because of all the other people I have ever met or known, heard of, or read about, no one was more qualified to be a leader of men, the father of a family, a good Catholic, and a real gentleman in every worthwhile meaning of that hackneyed word, than Tom.

I think the purpose for which God put us here on earth was to know him, love him, and serve him, as the catechism says, and believing this and all the kindred teachings of the church, I must admit that Tom was better prepared to meet him than I am now or ever hope to be though I am here for another fifty years and strive to better my character and understanding throughout every minute of that time.

It can always be a source of pride to you that you belong to a family that can produce a person like Tom. It is up to all of us to lead good clean lives, to pick when we marry the finest and best woman we can find, and then perhaps with the help of God in a generation or two there will be another Tom, and this time perhaps the race of murderers will be subjugated, and he can live to fulfill the promise of his youth.

Let's not feel too bad about it, after all God is taking care of him no matter where he is and grief is mostly for our own loss.

After reading this letter I hesitate to send it but after all you are not a kid any longer and we can speak as man to man, not as big brother to little brother, and there can be no harm in you knowing how I feel... That's enough for this letter; I'll write you again in a week or so and let you know how the business is and everything.

with love,

Jim

Several months after receiving news of Tom's death, the Cryan family lost another family member and close friend to the war. In early September of 1944, Jane [Matthews] Cryan was informed of the death of her brother John, who was serving in the Army during the invasion of Europe. In a letter (postmarked September 17) from Paul Cryan to his fiancée Pearl, he writes: "I got a letter from Jack today. Jane's brother John was killed in action in France. They had Mass for him today. He was a swell, quiet kid. I went to school with him & hung around with him a lot during high school. He was an awful lot like Jane. Of all the fellows I've known, he was one of the friendliest and most honest. I usually set standards of persons & myself by my brothers, and he rated at the top of the class. Say a couple of prayers for him."

Josie (Ort) O'Connor lost two nephews to the War. As her daughter Ann O'Connor Raskopf remembered, "Tom was tall and very handsome. A totally nice person. My mother was devastated when we heard of his death. He was about the same age as his (and my) cousin John O'Flahavan. Both were pilots in the Air Force... My mother received the message of John's death at about the same time and she was wiped away by it all."

Josie played the piano and several stringed instruments. She owned a zither, a classical guitar, and a mandolin which she had treated with care since she was a child. Upon hearing that her nephews had been killed, she donated all three of the stringed instruments to the United Service Organization. She told Ann "They're giving up their lives. The least we can do is give away our instruments."

Keith Academy *Sentinel* October 14, 1944
(from the collection of John Casey)

Lt. Thomas Cryan Killed In Action

Since the last issue of the **Sentinel** we have received news of the death of Lt. Thomas Cryan of the class of '38. Son of Mr. and Mrs. John P. Cryan of 59 Templar Street, Thomas was killed while participating in recent operations in the European theatre of war.

Tom is well remembered among our older students and the faculty. He was never found wanting when it came to loyalty to the Academy. Even after he had graduated, Tom came back to help out with the teams. He was ever a good student, with particular skill in mathematics. His scholastic achievements were finely balanced by his accomplishments

on the gridiron, where he was always a fine player and an outstanding gentleman.

The name of Lt. Thomas Cryan will be placed with those of the seven other men of Keith who have paid the supreme sacrifice. On the altar in the Keith Chapel is a permanent list of their names, and in the hearts of every Keith student is a shrine to their hallowed memories. Daily are they remembered in Mass here at school, and in the frequent visits of the student body to chapel.

Other Gold Star graduates are: Robert Balfrey, Edwin Reilly, James Farley, Donald Adie, Fred Webster, William Coffey, and Freddy Roberts.

Paul Cryan recalled a bittersweet meeting that occurred a year after Tom's death. "In 1945, near the end of the war, I was thumbing home to Bridgeport from New Jersey, and on the parkway the car that picked me up picked up an Army man. In a few minutes he asked if I had a brother in the Air Corps. A pilot had given him a ride to a spot in northern England when he couldn't have gotten to his base on time. He had only met Tom on this one occasion but made the connection. The man was home on leave as he just escaped from a German prisoner of war camp."

On Saturday, June 14, 1949, the expected arrival of Tom Cryan's body in Lowell was announced in the Lowell Sun, with the headline, "Body of Local War Hero Due Here Today." Tom's casket was borne by his six brothers, and he was laid to rest beside his parents in St. Patrick's cemetery in Lowell.

Tom Cryan's biography was made possible by the assistance of many family members and new friends. Special thanks to: Joe Brodeur, Festus (Shorty) Bryant, John Casey, George Cope, Mark Cope, Arthur P. Cryan Sr., Jane (Matthews) Cryan, Jeff Cryan, Jim Cryan Jr., Pat Cryan Martick, Paul E. Cryan, Sharon Cryan, Luc Dewez, Richard Donnelly, Jack Eling, Michael Faley (100th Bomb Group Association), David Hanson, Richard Faulkner, Gray Fitzsimons (Lowell National Historic Park), Elwood (Bud) Frum, Cindy Goodman (100th Bomb Group Association), Kathy (Cryan) Hicks, George Klare, Janet Lambert-Moore, Catherine (Cryan) Lewicke, Peter Lewicke, Martha Mayo (UMass Lowell Library), David Morrison, Mr. & Mrs. (James) Elmore Morrison, Stephen Najarian, Ann O'Connor Raskopf, Dolores Regan, Pat (Holmes) Regan, Owen (Cowboy) Roane, Betty Roane, Donald Walker, Dan Walsh (Lowell National Historic Park), Paul West, Arnold Wimer, and Jeff Wimer. Special credit is also due to James Cryan, Sr., whose moving letter of July 22, 1944 (above) inspired the undertaking of this project.

PLEASE BE ADVISED THE REMAINS OF THE LATE 1 LT THOMAS CRYAN
ARE ENROUTE TO THE UNITED STATES. OUR RECORDS INDICATE YOU
WISH REMAINS DELIVERED TO MEEHAN & KIRWIN 228 WORTHEN ST

Thomas Cryan Funeral Notice

The Lowell Sun, July, 1949

With full military honors, the funeral of First Lieut. Thomas F. Cryan, who lost his life in a bombing raid over Germany in 194[4], took place yesterday from the Meehan and Kirwin funeral home, 228 Worthen Street, opposite the Whistler House.

At St. Peter's church at 10 o'clock at a solemn high funeral mass was celebrated by Rev. William S. Mullen, assisted by Rev. Thomas F. Wilkinson as deacon, and Rev. J. David Welsh as sub deacon.

The choir, under the direction of Raymond J. Kelley, the organist, sang the requiem by Pietro Yon. The solos were sung by Miss Mary A.C. Rynne, Thomas F. Tobin and James L. Cashman.

Among the large gathering present at the services were Past Commander of the American Legion post 87 John J. O'Rourke, Dr. Patrick J. Meehan, Martin Conley, James O'Flahavan, Joseph P. Meehan, Dr. Louis A. Sicard, Charles F. O'Neill, past Sergeant at Arms of the American Legion, James T. Lynch and John M. Kemp past commander of the Spanish war veterans.

Also attending the services was the color guard from the American Legion, Post 247, Tyngsboro, consisting of Henry LaFrance, Kenneth Dodge, Sergt. Earl Stratton and Lawrence V. Magoon.

At the grave, the first firing squad from Co. D, 182nd Infantry, Mass. National Guard, consisted of T-Sergt. Robert Roberto, Sergt. Leo Savary, Corp. Bruce O. Dickinson and Pvts. Albert Desmarais, John Gardini, Robert Stevens and Roland Page. "Taps" was sounded by Bugler John E. Grenier.

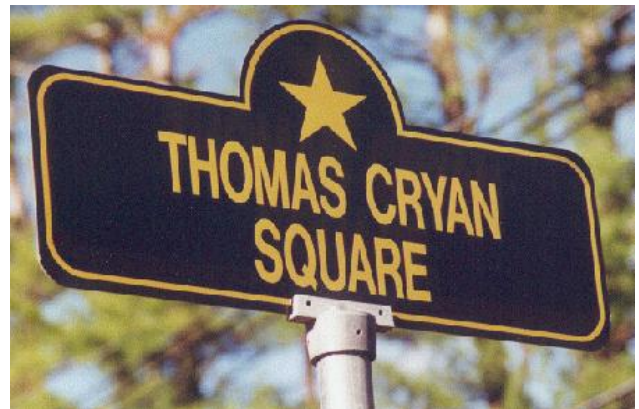
The bearers were six brothers: James U., Francis D., Arthur P., John P., Paul E., and Gerald F. Cryan.

Burial took place in the family lot in St. Patrick's cemetery where the committal prayers were read by Rev. Fr. Wilkinson.

Arrangements were in charge of Funeral Directors Meehan & Kirwin.

Far beyond an ocean, in hostile and
foreign lands, 3,500 men of the 100th
Bombardment group fought the enemy... Of
those who fought, some 775 were slain...
the hopes secretly kept, the ambitions,
the prayers, and the courage, which went
down with them in flaming bombers, are
unknown. Let it not be forgotten,
however, that they were young, with so
much to live for, and that they died.

— John R. Nilsson, *Story of the Century*



A memorial to Lt. Cryan's sacrifice (erected by the Tyngsboro Veterans) is marked as Thomas Cryan Square, located on Westford Road, between Middle Road and Route 40, in Tyngsboro, Massachusetts.
