

RECORD UPDATE

306th Bomb Group Association

(Please complete as much of this form as you wish, and return to
Russ Strong at the reunion, or mail to Russ Strong, 5323 Cheval
Place, Charlotte, NC 28205) Little Rock 1989

Date completed _____

LAST NAME: Drennan FIRST NAME: Billy H. TITLE:
Street address: 123 N. polk Telephone: (501) 664 1213
City, state, zip: Little Rock, AR 72205

Date of Birth: 7/13/19 Wife's name:
College(s) attended: University of Ark Degree(s): Year(s): 2
Last employment and job title: Owner operator retail furniture

Reunions attended: (by year or location) none

Serial #: 37101459 Squadron: 369 Specialty: Radio gunner

Date joined 306th: If combat, what crew: ED Hennessy

Special duties or assignments w/306th:

Number of missions flown: 25 Date of last mission:

Date left 306th: Highest rank/grade with 306th: T³/SGT.

Other 8th AF units served with:

Top service assignments after 306th:

USAF retirement date: Rank/grade:

Copies of old 306th orders, either from the Group or Station 111, or any of the
squadrons or other units, will be welcomed by the secretary.

If you know of other 306th people who do not appear in the directory, please add
their names and current or former addresses to this sheet so that we may search
further for them.

Billy Helmer Drennan

Bomber radioman, furniture merchant

BY LARRY AULT

Democrat-Gazette Staff Writer

Billy Helmer Drennan was looking forward to his reunion next week with his World War II bomber group, which he had not seen since the war.

"Bill Drennan was the lad we got for the radio position," recalled Edward J. Hennessy of Las Vegas. Hennessy piloted their B-17 bomber, nicknamed "Little Audrey."

"We flew together probably on about 20 missions" as members of the 306th Bombardment Group at Thurleigh, England, Hennessy said.

When the first American bombing forces entered Germany, the men of the 306th were in the lead.

Hennessy recalled that he and Drennan flew the 25 missions required of them, but neither really believed he would survive the war.

"Our loss rates were initially so high, you couldn't expect to make it," he said.

Drennan, 76, a retired Little Rock businessman, died Thursday of health problems that included cancer and a heart attack.

He was the retired owner of Drennan Furniture Co. of Little Rock, a business his father started. He also volunteered at the VA Medical Center, North Little Rock Division.

"He was a very handsome young man," Hennessy said. He said Drennan, who reached the rank of technical sergeant, was at a disadvantage on the bomber because he could hear everything on his radio but couldn't see much.

Hennessy said none of the 10-member crew who knew Drennan during his days in the Army Air Force knew what happened to him after the war.

"We thought he was dead for 50 years. No one knew where he was. They found Billy living in Little Rock about two years ago. We were stunned when we realized he was

still living."

They had hoped he would be able to join the five surviving crew members gathering Wednesday at Knoxville, Tenn.

Hennessy said he spoke with Drennan on the telephone recently and found him "surprisingly optimistic."

Drennan grew up in Benton and spent the last 50 years in Little Rock. He attended Benton High School. For a short time, he studied

chemistry and engineering at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville.

Drennan married Sammie Lewis of McCrory in October 1946. She died in 1980.

At the family business, which closed in the early 1990s, Drennan originally sold new furniture and appliances. Later, he sold used appliances and "fixed TVs in the back," recalled John Wells of Little Rock, a nephew whom Drennan adopted.

"Every kid in the neighborhood called him Uncle Bill," Wells said. "He raised me. He was just an incredible human being."

Wells recalled a story Drennan told about his duties as a radio operator on the B-17.

"They had to log everything they heard," Wells said. Although he maintained the log while the aircraft was flying into combat, on the return flight to Britain there was no need to record the messages.

Drennan, who inspected and made minor repairs to the radio equipment before and after each flight, would shoot the antennae wire off the plane with his machine gun so that he didn't have to keep the log on the return trip, Wells said.

As he grew older, Drennan relished telling World War II stories and recalled his service as "the most exciting thing he had ever done," Wells said.

Drennan told him "he would have had the time of his life if he hadn't been scared out of his wits," his nephew said.



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