American Airlines Newsroom

NEWS RELEASE

Honoring One of the Many Who Sacrificed for Freedom

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In the 243 years since the U.S. military's inception with the creation of the Continental Army in 1775, more than 50 million people have answered the call, committed to defending freedom throughout the world. As we celebrate Independence Day in the United States, and recognize the men and women who have fought to ensure our freedom, we remember and honor the Pieper family.

Radioman 2nd Class Julius H.O. "Henry" Pieper, depicted in his official U.S. Navy photo

In the 1940s, amid conflicts throughout the world, Julius H.O. "Henry" Pieper and his twin brother Ludwig "Louie" Pieper joined the U.S. Navy. The brothers were initially sent to different units per Navy protocol, but their father wrote to their commanding officer, saying, "My sons came into this world together, and they should have the right to fight and die together." Their commanding officer relented and allowed the twins to stay together aboard the tank landing ship USS LST-523, which was stationed in the Atlantic Ocean.

On June 19, 1944, 13 days after D-Day, the ship hit an underwater mine approaching Utah Beach near Normandy, France. USS LST-523 exploded and sank. Forty-two people perished, including the Pieper twins.

Radioman 2nd Class Louie Pieper's remains were recovered, identified and buried at the Normandy American Cemetery. Henry was declared missing.

In September 1961, French salvage divers dismantled the sunken ship and turned over remains discovered in the radio room to U.S. authorities. At that time, the remains could not be identified and were interred in Ardennes American Cemetery in Belgium as Unknown X-9352. In 2017, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency successfully

identified the remains as those of Henry.

The Pieper family wished to have Henry buried alongside his brother at the Normandy American Cemetery in Colleville-sur-Mer, France. In April, Louie was relocated to a position with an open grave so they could be buried side by side.

Preparations at DFW for the arrival of the flight carrying Henry and his family

An Honor Guard salutes the aircraft on arrival at DFW

A U.S. Navy representative assists with transferring Henry's remains to a flight to Paris, France (CDG)

Last month, American flew Henry's remains and his family to Dallas Fort Worth International Airport (DFW) and then on to Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport (CDG) for military burial. An Honor Guard, partly comprised of American team members, assisted the U.S. Navy with the dignified transfer with full military honors ahead of the onward journey to Normandy.

American is grateful for the opportunity to transport the fallen to their final resting place whether it's at home or abroad. Team members know it's an important honor — a way to show appreciation to a military family during an emotional time. And it's a mission they are proud to carry out.

"I didn't serve, but my grandfather, father, brother, husband and son have all served in the military," said Autumn Hedberg, Customer Service agent, DFW, who started volunteering with the Honor Guard 10 years ago. "It's a blessing to participate in ceremonies like Henry's; it gives me the opportunity to honor our military members' service and sacrifice. We take care of them from the time they book their travel to the time they return home."

Raphael Aouiche, Airport Services manager, CDG, added: "It was important to us, across all departments, to ensure the ceremony happened smoothly and respectfully. For us French citizens, this reminded us of our close, historical relationship with the United States. Because our allies fought for our freedom in 1944, we were able to remain French and thrive as a free, democratic country. We are forever thankful and proud of servicemen like the Piepers who gave their lives for freedom and for France."

On June 19, 2018, exactly 74 years since they were separated, Henry and Louie were reunited. Linda Pieper Suitor accepted her uncles' flags.

"I'm so grateful to the U.S. Navy and American Airlines for the respect they showed as they transported my uncle's body to France," said Linda. "The entire experience was very emotional. There were six of us at the ceremony, including my brother, Louis Henry; he was named after both of our uncles."

The pilots of American Airlines Flight 48, pictured on the CDG ramp, honoring Henry with a salute

Henry received full U.S. military honors upon arrival at CDG