

Kenneth E Callahan

Compiled by Judy Hansen
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Kenneth Earl Callahan was born to William Henry and Frances Mariah Grundy Callahan on 9 April 1923 in Loa, Wayne County, Utah. His family moved to Provo, Utah Count, Utah where he was raised. He had three older brothers William Guy, Sterling Grundy, and Merrill Blake who died as an infant. He also had a younger sister Bathsheba (Betty) Gay. He was known at home and in school as Earl Callahan. He attended Provo High School and Brigham Young University (BYU). He was a successful student and participated in many extra-curricular activities. In High School he was on the yearbook staff. He excelled in Drama, Art, Music, and Debate. He won honors in both tenor vocal solo and also the Interstate Debating Meet in Ogden, Utah in 1940. He graduated Provo High in 1941. While attending BYU he was a program service member, a member of the Brigadiers, and Sorority Alpha member.



On the 18th of Dec 1942 Earl married Mary Robinson of American Fork, Utah in the Salt Lake City Temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. He met Mary while attending Brigham Young University as she was also a student there. They were the parents of one son, Michael. Earl was employed at Geneva Steel. Earl enlisted in the United States Army Air Force on April 5th 1943 after attending BYU for almost two years.

Earl trained as a pilot at Sheppard Field Texas; Santa Ana, and LaMore, California; Thunderbird field #2 Phoenix, Arizona; and LaJunta Colorado where he received his commission May 27, 1944. He was able to take a twelve day leave home before reporting to his assignment as Second Lieutenant with the 100th Bombardment Squadron, 42nd Bomber Group, 13th U. S Army Air Force. This group nick-named themselves 'The Crusaders.' Earl went overseas February 1945.

Earl provided air supports for Cebu Air Campaign with the Victor Five Operation. The mission was to destroy Japanese Forces on Mindanao. Mindanao was the last major enemy stronghold in the Philippines. There is a lot of wonderful information in the book, *The Crusaders: a history of the 42nd Bombardment Group* and this book also explains why there is not a lot of specific

information about the 100th Bombardment Squadron. We are told "They call themselves "MacArthur's Secret Weapon" so they couldn't tell family where they were, what they were doing, how many personnel they had, or how much other support they had." . . . "Crusader pilots call themselves B-25 drivers; they are so affected by being the Group Nobody Knows that it crops up in all their reports." They were apparently ultraconservative even when reporting damage. It was written about the 42nd Bomber group, "They don't fly rocket ships or jet propulsion craft; they've never dropped a bomb down the smokestack of a Jap battle ship or radioed to base "Scratch one flat top," although their roster of destruction includes every type of Nip war craft except a battleship. They are The Crusaders, the medium bombardment group of the 13th Air Force."

Lt. Callahan was on a mission as Co-pilot on the plane B-25J #43-27848. The plane was marked on the side, "Ace of Spades, and was nicknamed Tabu. The non-abandonment of search reports dated 10 May 1944 states the crew has been missing since 14 April 1945 and that, "The plane disappeared while on a low altitude attack on Route #5 on Western Mindanao. Immediately after the loss of the aircraft an extensive search was conducted along Route #5 and the adjacent area. (This area was then in enemy hands but is now under American control.) A radiogram has been sent to the Commanding General, Ground Forces, Mindanao to ascertain whether or not they sighted any wreckage or found any trace of the missing crew. Pending receipt of the answer it is recommended that his crew be carried in a missing in action status until further information becomes available.

2nd Lt. Joseph D Campbell who last saw the B-25J #43-27848 plane between Matutum Mountain and Sugar Loaf Peak provided the following witness statement, "On 14, April I took off from Palawan in a formation of six B-25's on a strike to Mindanao. After reaching the coast of Mindanao the formation broke up into three, two ship elements, I was flying left wing of the second element. The second element leader and myself then flew down the route as briefed looking for enemy vehicles on the road we were to cover.

After reaching a point approximately five to ten miles Northeast of Koronadal (which is ten miles Northeast of Sarangani Bay). At 1340 the leader called and said that he thought he had spotted a truck. We circled but couldn't find it. The lead ship then called and said that we were near the end of our route and that we should drop our bombs there and head back. Our target was a group of buildings on an "S" curve in the road. After passing over the area again the lead ship called and said he saw a green sedan partly camouflaged among the buildings and that we was going after it. I did not see the sedan but followed him in on the runs. Our runs over the target were single ship, approximately 30 to 40 seconds apart. I made three runs, dropping bombs on the first two and strafing on the last. The tail gunner reported seeing the lead ship following us a couple miles behind, strafing on our last run. Because of the hilly wooded area I lost sight of the lead ship several times during our runs over the target but would always find him orbiting after coming off the run. After I came off the last run I looked for the lead ship and not seeing him I circled the area for approximately ten minutes and called several times on V.H.F getting no answer. (We received no fire from the ground and I saw no evidence of a plane crashing.) Because the lead ship has mentioned heading back after dropping our bombs, and not being able to contact him, I decided he had started back to the rendezvous point. After circling approximately twenty minutes the squadron leader told the rest of us (four ships) to return to base, and he went back over the route to look for the missing ship with no results."

On April 14, 1945 the following were reported missing:

2nd Lt. Daniel Fischer 0-771365 Rochester, New York
2nd Lt. Kenneth E Callahan 0-782674 Provo, Utah
Flt/O Ralph E Roth T-128789 South Bend, Indiana
Cpl. Jack C Knowlton 394655420 Pasco, Washington
Cpl. Ewing Baker 35771758 Jenkins, Kentucky
Cpl. Arnold J. Smith 14163621 Campbell, Missouri

Chapter 13 of the *The Crusaders: a history of the 42nd Bombardment Group* Page 174 mentions this unfortunate event, ““Contrary to arm-chair strategic pronouncements that the Philippines had been taken at this time, we knew only too well the true score. The 100th Lieut. Daniel Fischer and crew paid the price on the Mindanao targets-of-opportunity strike of the 14th, being seen last near Koronadei.” It appears it was after this accident when "The Crusaders" was officially adopted as the Group's nom de guerre.”

Earl's wife was initially informed of his Missing In Action in 1945 but she was notified of his status change to Killed in Action in February 1946. Kenneth E Callahan, Jack C Knowlton, Ralph E Roth, and Arnold J Smith were initially interred overseas and later re-interred at the Fort McPherson National Cemetery, Maxwell, Lincoln County, Nebraska as a group on April 26, 1950. His widow, baby son Michael, parents, and mother-in-law traveled the distance to attend the group funeral. The reason for the group funeral and group headstone is because the soldiers were killed in such close proximity to each other they were unable, at that time, to identify them separately and interred their remains together in one grave.

Frances Mariah Grundy Callahan, Earl's mother wrote, “Earl was twenty two years old just five days before he was shot down in his plane over Mindanao Island in the Philippines. This was a great shock to his entire family Wife Mary Robinson Callahan and baby boy Michael Earl Callahan who was five months old, His parents, Brothers and Sister. Earl was a brilliant scholar in school and had a very bright future before him. His Father Wm Henry Callahan was never well again after Earl's death. He is buried in Fort McPherson National Cemetery Nebraska. Four boys were buried in three caskets. Earl a Latter Day Saint and a Jewish boy -- Protestant and Catholic.”

Kenneth Earl Callahan was Killed in Action 14 April 1945 Mindanao, Philippine Islands
Buried Fort McPherson National Cemetery, Maxwell, Lincoln County, Nebraska
Has a headstone marker in Memory Grove Memorial at Salt Lake City, Utah.
His name is on the Veterans Honor Wall in the American Fork City, Cemetery as well as the Provo Rose Garden Veteran's Memorial Wall.

He was awarded the Air Medal and the Purple Heart.

This story is a combined effort of the Lehi Historical Society and part of the Stories Behind the Stars project (see www.storiesbehindthestars.org). This is a national effort of volunteers to write the stories of all 400,000+ of the US WWII fallen here on Fold3. Can you help write these stories? Related to this, there will be a smart phone app that will allow people to visit any war memorial or cemetery, scan the fallen's name and read his/her story.

Sources:

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/131574670/kenneth-earl-callahan>

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The Daily Herald Friday, April 21, 1950

The Salt Lake Telegram Friday, April 21, 1950

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Missing Air Crew report <https://www.fold3.com/image/29034414>

1946 The Crusaders: a history of the 42nd Bombardment Group (M), United States Army Air Forces (of special interest chapter 13 https://digicom.bpl.lib.me.us/ww_reg_his/113/)