

Francis Richard Krantz

This is the twenty seventh in a series of articles that we hope to publish for years to come. With this series we want to honor Service Members that served our great Nation. As I mentioned in the last article, we need your help to honor these fine Americans. If you have someone you would like us to include, please help us research and develop articles. Our email address is mhamlegionpost113@gmail.com

This is a reminder of the price that has been paid by men from our community so that we may have the freedoms we enjoy today. Our community lost men in battles around the world in World War I and World War II. These men were serving in places that we have all read about in our history books serving to ensure our way of life was preserved.

This story would not be nearly as personal nor as comprehensive without the assistance of family members Jan Legler and Steve Krantz. I truly appreciate their assistance. Jan invited me to her house to go through the documents and pictures she had. Thank you Jan for sharing the documents, pictures and time to help me tell Francis' story.

Francis Richard Krantz was born to Mr. Joseph M. and Annie Krantz March 25th, 1924. He grew up on a farm in Pine Bluff with his siblings, Walter, Raphael, Leonard, Mary and Harold. Francis attended Saint Mary's Catholic Grade School in Pine Bluff and then Mount Horeb High School. Family members mentioned that Francis loved having fun, sometimes playing practical jokes on friends and family.

Farming is hard work and not everyone wants to do it their entire life. When Francis was growing up, he and his brother Leonard were talking about being able to move on to do other things with their lives.

Francis entered the United States Navy on 18 November 1942. He trained as an ordnanceman at the Aviation Ordnance School, Naval Air Technical Training in Memphis, Tennessee. An Ordnanceman must know how to operate and repair all types of ammunition. After training Francis was assigned to Torpedo Squadron 18 Alameda, California. The Squadron embarked for overseas on 1 February 1943. The Squadron made a training layover in Hawaii training at Kanehoe Marine Corps Base on the island of Oahu.



After training in Hawaii, the USS Intrepid joined the fleet in the Pacific in the fight against the Japanese. Letters to his parents and friends indicate that the Squadron was flying missions daily. The USS Intrepid was now part of the Fast Carrier Task Force part of the Third Fleet under Admiral Halsey. The Task Force by this time had been renamed Task Force 38. On 6 and 7 September, they conducted air strikes on Japanese artillery batteries and airfields on the island of Peleliu. On 9 and 10 September, the Task Force and the rest of the fleet moved on to attack airfields on the

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island of Midanao. The fleet continued their attacks on enemy bases throughout the Philippine Islands on 12 and 13 September.

The Commander of the Air Forces in the Pacific, L. W. Van Antwerp wrote a letter to Francis' parents to extend his and the crew's deepest sympathy for the loss of Francis in an airplane accident while engaging the enemy. According to the letter "the accident occurred on September 13th while on a strike mission against enemy held installations, the flight having taken off from the carrier operating in the Pacific. During the actual attack, the airplane's right wing caught fire as a result of enemy anti-aircraft fire. The airplane went out of control and crashed immediately into the land and burned. The suddenness of the accident and the altitude, necessitated by the type of attack, afforded neither Francis, the pilot, Ensign Daniel Laner, or the Radioman, Alfred Lankford an opportunity to abandon the aircraft. Observations by other aiplanes showed no signs of anyone emerging from the airplane after it hit the ground. Francis will be missed very much. He was not only an outstanding ordnanceman, who did his work willingly and thoroughly, but he also possessed those other qualities which make for an excellent squadron member. If you desire anything at all I will do all at my command to help you in this trying time."

On September 27th Mr. and Mrs. Krantz received a telegram from the Chief of Navy Personnel stating that Francis had been listed as Missing In Action and that additional details were not available, and that once details were available they would inform the family. In October, 1944, Mr. and Mrs. Krantz received the official notification from the Department of the Navy that Francis was listed as Missing In Action. In October, they also received condolences from the Chief of Naval Operations in Washington DC and the Naval Training at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. They suffered through the next several months without knowing for sure and like all families, they held out faith that somehow Francis survived, the Navy had listed him as Missing In Action.

In January 1945 they received a letter from the Department of The Navy informing them that the Navy had received additional information and that Francis was killed in the plane crash in the Philippine Islands. When I talked to Steve Krantz he mentioned that his Dad, Leonard, said that the day the Army Car with the star on it with the local priest inside showed up at the farm everyone knew what they were there for. His Dad mentioned to him that even though they knew what had happened they still held out some hope but that the day the car showed up was a heart wrenching day for the entire family.

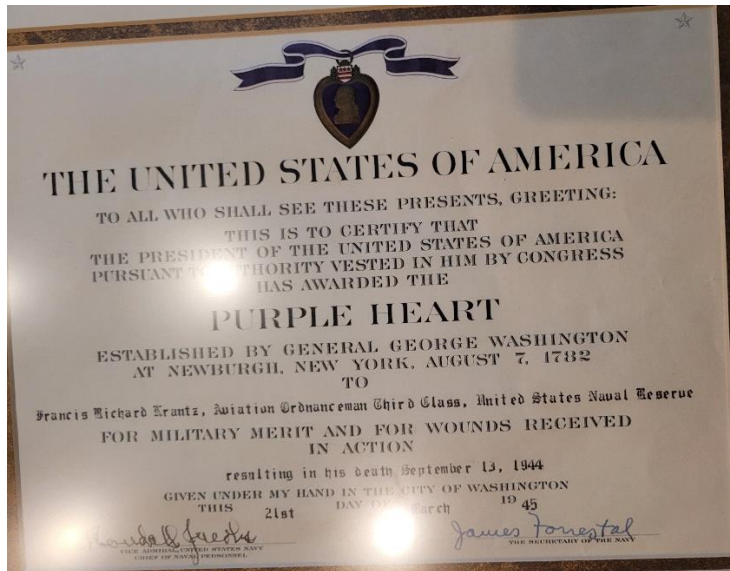
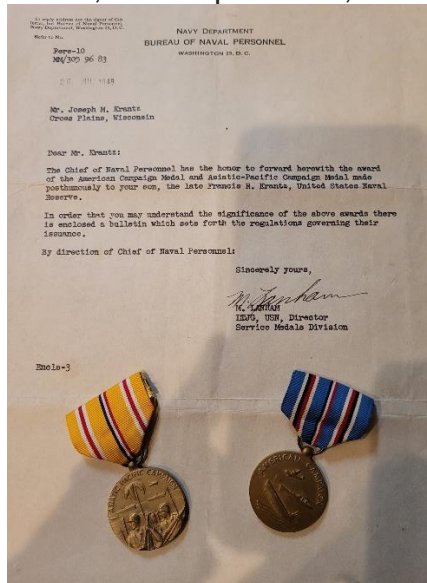
The family held a Catholic Mass for Francis in Pine Bluff 21 January 1945. Mr. and Mrs. Krantz requested and received a headstone from the Veterans Administration in June of 1958, to place in the Catholic Cemetery in Pine Bluff.

In February Mr. and Mrs. Krantz received a letter that gave them more information and must have made them feel a little bit better. One of Francis' shipmates, Donald Brooks, from Pennsylvania, wrote a second letter to Mr. and Mrs. Krantz to say that Francis was shot down over Negros Island (couldn't be released before this letter was written for

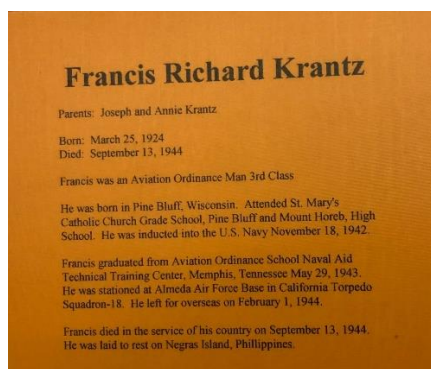
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security reasons), and that Native Philipinos who supported the United States had gone to the plane and found Francis' body and had given him a proper burial with a Priest. He also mentioned that the Priest on board the Carrier said a Mass for Francis. This didn't bring Francis back, but it was a consolation to his parents.

His medals included the American Campaign Medal, the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal, the Purple Heart, and the World War II Victory Medal.



As is fitting Francis is honored in several places around the world. He is honored with a cross in an American Military Cemetery, Fort Bonifacio, Manila, Philippines. From what I understand his body was never moved from the grave that he was buried in on Negros Island. His parents did not want to move his body. Francis has a headstone at the Catholic Cemetery, as well as a plaque in the building at Kalscheur's Park in Pine Bluff. He is also honored in the state list of Service Members that have paid the Supreme Sacrifice. Along with all the other men and women killed in World War II he is honored in Washington DC at the World War II Memorial. He is also honored locally at Monona's Hruska Park as well as at the Mount Horeb Veterans Memorial.



These are our community members, brothers and sisters, their lives cut way too short. These men and women never had a chance to live out their lives with their families, have families of their own. Please take time to that we still have our freedoms today

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because of their service and sacrifice. Please remember Francis and all the men and women who died in defense of our great Country.

I have two other stories that I have to share. As Francis entered the Navy he met another Wisconsin farmhand who entered the service the same day becoming best friends with George Schnieder from the Black River Falls area. Francis and George went on to schools together and remained close. George showed Francis a picture of a woman from a neighboring farm and Francis began writing to her, George was in a relationship with a lady named Jac so George and Francis would spend time together writing to the two of them. Shortly before Francis was killed Jac sent George a Dear John letter stating that she had found someone else. When Francis was killed George requested a transfer out of the Naval Air Corps and he never flew again. George started writing to Mildred after Francis died and after the war the two married and spent the rest of their lives together. One of George and Mildred's daughters, Sandy, made contact with the Krantz family after George and Mildred died and sent letters and a picture of Francis to the family. In the letter to the family Sandy mentioned how her Dad had a picture of Francis that he kept and on the back it said Francis Krantz greatest man I ever knew.

The second story came from Steve Krantz whose father mentioned to him that after Francis died his family found a letter that Francis wrote before he went overseas. Francis wrote the letter and put it in a place that would not easily be seen. The letter was written to the family in case something happened to him while he was serving overseas.

I'll leave you with a letter to Joseph and Annie Krantz, Francis' parents, written by Franklin Roosevelt, The President of the United States. "In Grateful Memory of Francis Richard Krantz who died in the service to his Country, Pacific Area attached to Torpedo Squadron 18. He stands in the unbroken line of patriots who have dared to die that freedom might live and grow and increase in blessings. Freedom Lives and through it he lives – in a way that humbles the undertakings of most men."