

In Memory of
Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Robert “Bob” Vaucher
December 3, 1918 - February 7, 2021



Decorated WWII B-29 Aircraft and Mission Commander
Passionate Civic and Church Leader
Machine Tool & Metalworking Industry Innovator
Devoted Family Man
Steadfast Friend to Countless Young and Old

Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Robert “Bob” Vaucher, 102, has gone west, taking his final flight on Sunday, February 7, 2021 at home with loved ones bedside.

Born to Pioneering Parents

Bob was born December 3, 1918 to Reynold and Ellen “Nellie” (née Wolfe) Vaucher on a citrus ranch in Mission, Texas. Having immigrated from Neuchâtel, Switzerland, Reynold was a horticulturalist at Garfield Park in Chicago and a visionary who pioneered citrus production in the then undeveloped lower Rio Grande Valley, where he discovered and was the



first to commercially produce the ruby red grapefruit. Nellie, born in Lost Nation, Iowa, graduated from Iowa State Normal School, became a one-room school house teacher, and then, in Chicago, a suffragette and, as the story is told, the first female bookkeeper at Sears and Roebuck. She and Reynold lived in the same boarding house and fell in love while she tutored him in English.

An Extraordinary Life Lived to The Fullest

Seventeen years after Bob was born, Franklin Delano Roosevelt in his 1935 inaugural address said, *“To some generations much is given. Of other generations much is expected. This generation of Americans has a rendezvous with destiny.”* And that was true for Bob and so many of his generation, who came to be called “The Greatest Generation.” He fully embraced his rendezvous with destiny and is an inspiration to all who have known him. Living life to the fullest with insatiable curiosity, he never stopped learning, was interested in everything, and, in turn, was interesting to all generations. This kept him young at heart for 102 years and two months.

Lt Col Vaucher was a decorated WWII veteran who made unique contributions to the development of military aviation and the course of history while serving as a heavy-bomber pilot and wing, mission and air commander in the Army Air Corps from 1940 to 1946. He served in the primitive hinterlands of Panama, India, China and the South Pacific, lost men who had placed their lives in his hands and knew others well who, after being shot down, were tortured, starved and beheaded by the Japanese. In his tent at the edge of the world, Bob and his bunkmates talked about their aspirations for a postwar world. Upon returning home, Bob transformed what could have been an ordinary life into an extraordinary one by building it on the bedrock of personal integrity, principle, and authenticity.

He settled in Bridgewater in 1949, raising a family, pursuing lifelong his love of aviation, becoming an innovative leader and designer in the metal working industry for 42 years and continuously serving as an active church and civic leader for over 70 years. His family, friends and community sought and listened to his counsel because they knew that he cared about them. This was his secret sauce to life.

Aviation Beginnings

Bob's aviation interest began as a young boy when Charles Lindbergh flew across the Atlantic in 1927. His fascination with aviation was fueled when his older sister began dating a crop duster and barnstormer, nicknamed "Slats." There were three great aviation visionaries who influenced him: General Henry "Hap" Arnold, General George Marshall and General Curtis LeMay. Arnold foresaw the airplane becoming an important military instrument and around 1934 started guiding youth into aviation through the "Flying Club of America." Bob joined by



mail and got a badge, a model airplane kit and newsletters. In 1935, Marshall started the Citizens' Military Training Camp to install military principles into youth. As a teen, Bob went two summers to Camp Bullis in Texas. During one mock military maneuver, his artillery unit was pinned down in poison oak by mock enemy planes. He said to himself, "Those guys will be back to base in San Antonio, shower, go to dinner and the movies. And here I am pinned down in a bed of poison oak, missed lunch and will probably have a K-ration dinner." So that's exactly when he decided to learn to fly.

The Army Air Corps required a college degree, so off he went to Edinburg College, now The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. When Arnold started a pilot training program for students, Bob, two other boys, and a girl signed on, learning how to fly and getting a pilot's license with two college credits to boot. A few months later, he graduated and immediately enlisted in the Army Air Corps.

Decorated WWII B-29 Aircraft and Mission Commander



He went to primary pilot training at Cal Tech in Oxnard, CA, followed by basic pilot training at Randolph Field, San Antonio, TX, and advanced training at Brooks Field, San Antonio, TX, where, on April 25, 1941, he became a commissioned officer with a pilot rating, class 41C.

He was assigned to the elite 2nd Bombardment Group at Langley Field, VA where he served under General LeMay, who at that time was a Major, considered a top dog bomber pilot and a real task master. LeMay required his trainees to draw from memory the electrical and hydraulic system of the B-17, and Bob credited that knowledge with saving his life in combat on more than one occasion.

He was then transferred to the new Westover Airfield in Massachusetts, training to become a heavy bomber pilot. Although not fully certified when the Japanese unexpectedly attacked Pearl Harbor, he immediately was designated a qualified, combat ready pilot. Bob flew his first combat mission on December 9, 1941, two days after Pearl Harbor, and his last on September 2, 1945 when he led 525 B-29's in a show of force over the Japanese surrender ceremony on the USS *Missouri* in the Bay of Tokyo.

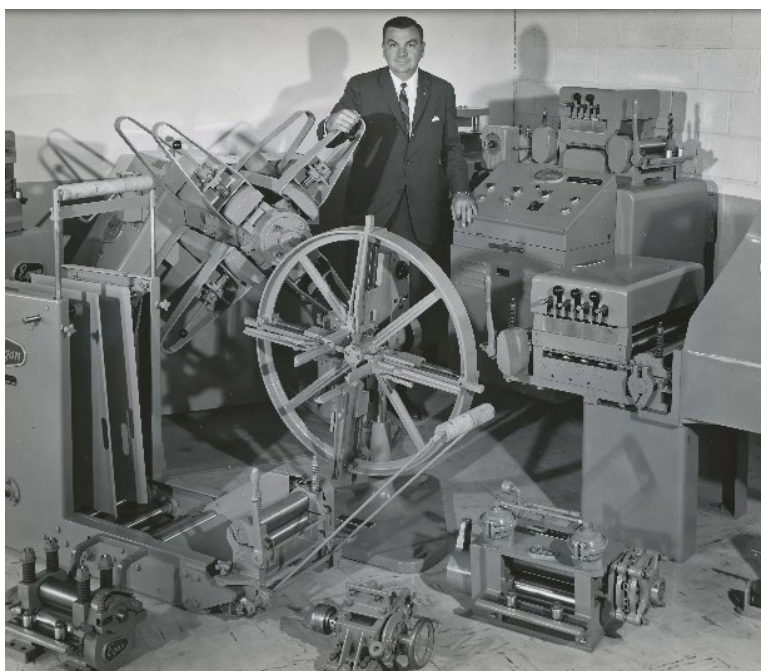
During 46 months of active service, Lt Col Vaucher flew a total of 117 combat missions encompassing patrol, mining, photography and bombing while based in Panama, Guatemala, Ecuador, Peru, Galapagos, India, China and Tinian, including 26 missions in the B-29 over the Himalayas, "The Hump," to support our Chinese allies under Chiang Kai-shek. His military awards include two Distinguished Flying Crosses, five Air Medals, eight Battle Stars and thirteen War Time Commendations and Citations, as well as a set of wings awarded by Chiang Kai-shek that he wore proudly on his sports jacket the remainder of his life.



Machine Tool & Metalworking Industry Innovator

His career was notable as well. It began in 1946 at Palmer Marine Engine in Cos Cob, CT where he outsold everyone, becoming sales manager in six months. He went from Palmer to Niagara Machine and Tool Works in Buffalo, NY, again becoming the leading salesman. He then was recruited to be vice president of Precision Manufacturing with the goal of developing a line of household items using metal manufacturing capabilities. His first innovation was an adjustable height ironing board, an idea that came to him as he lay in a hotel room bed looking up at the device used to open and close the transom window. Niagara then recruited him back as general sales manager in 1957.

In 1960, he left Niagara to start his own business with his ideas for a machine tool product line. The Egan brothers, Ed and Larry, co-owners of Egan Machinery Company in Somerville, NJ, asked him to join them to design and develop coil handling and feeding equipment based on his experience with the innovative electronic control system for the B-29 guns. He became founder and general manager of the Press Partners Division. His Servo-Control design, a computerized system for precision cutting of rolled sheet metal, became a success and is used widely to this day in the metalworking industry. After the sale of his division in 1983, he became a sought after independent consultant to the industry until retiring in 1994.



WWII Aviation Firsts

Lt Col Vaucher accomplished many WWII aviation firsts. He introduced the first radar equipped U.S. bomber, the LB-30, into combat in April, 1942. Subsequently, he flew upwards of 1,000 hours of combat patrol to protect the Panama Canal in LB-30s, B-17s and B-18s in a wide range of weather, including a hurricane, without incident. In July 1943, he piloted the first B-29 Superfortress bomber, delivering it from Boeing to the Air Corps. General Hap Arnold, Chief of the Army Air Corps, personally commended Vaucher for successfully piloting the first test of the B-29 at the then unprecedented altitude of 38,000 feet.

He flew as aircraft commander on the first B-29



strategic combat mission against mainland Japan on June 15, 1944 and also on the longest non-stop WWII combat mission on August 10, 1944, a 4030 nautical mile, 18 hour 50 minute roundtrip between India and Sumatra, flying the aircraft well beyond the official maximum range.

In January 1945, he developed and implemented an improved cruise control system for the B-29, which increased bomb load by nearly 50 percent, resulting in fewer sorties to accomplish the same results. On May 29, 1944, he was the air commander leading 454 B-29s, the

longest
in trail
assembly
of
bombers
in

history, in an attack on Yokohama, Japan that in terms of destroyed target area was the most effective air mission of the war.

He attained the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, becoming Operations Officer of the 462nd Bombardment Group, 58th Bomb Wing, 20th Air Force, nicknamed the "Hellbirds." Most notably, Lt Col Vaucher's final mission was on September 2, 1945 when he was the United States Air Corps Commander of the "Show of Force," leading 525 B-29s accompanied by hundreds of naval aircraft over the USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay as General MacArthur signed the instrument of unconditional surrender.



Lifelong Love of Aviation

He was honorably discharged from active duty in June 1946 and remained in the reserves until 1962. Bob's lifetime love of flying and passion for aviation included owning general aviation aircraft, maintaining his civilian pilot certification until age 82, serving on the NJ Department of Transportation Aviation Advisory Board, as president of the Blue Sky Flying Club and as a member of the Air Force Association's Shooting Star (NJ) chapter. In 2013, Bob was inducted



into the New Jersey Aviation Hall of Fame and was recognized by Representative Leonard Lance during proceedings of The 113th Congress, House of Representatives (Congressional Record). In 2014, he was formally accepted as an eligible nominee for enshrinement into the National Aviation Hall of Fame.

He was inducted into the Somerville Hangar of the Quiet Birdmen, a secret society of elite aviators, in 2017 and served as grand marshal of the annual John Basilone Memorial Parade in Raritan, NJ in 2019.



In September 2020, Bob served as honorary air boss for the Arsenal of Democracy Flyover of the nation's capital in honor of the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II. While there, he was awarded the coveted Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award in recognition of over 50 years of aviation flight experience and a newly re-issued FAA Commercial Pilot license, complete with every type rating of the aircraft he flew during WWII. At the event, he flew for his very last time, in Doc, one of only two B-29's still flying, to his delight and that of the crew and onlookers.

Passionate Civic and Church Leader

After returning from the war in 1946, Bob immediately got involved in the Somerville community, joining the Lincoln Hose Company of the Somerville Fire Department, and after moving to Bridgewater in 1949 was continuously active in a wide variety of municipal, civic, school, church and state affairs for over seventy years. Through vision and persuasion, he enabled Bridgewater Township to achieve better government, safer neighborhoods and excellent schools. He was a member of the Foothills Civic Association since 1952 and served as its leader for over twenty years. He participated in reviews of every Bridgewater Township Master Plan since 1960, including making substantial contributions to zoning laws and planning initiatives to maintain a good quality of life in the township. In addition, he actively worked for the election of numerous officials at the national, state and local levels right up to the most recent 2019 mayoral race.

He was instrumental in establishing the Bridgewater-Raritan Regional School District, including selecting the location of both high schools. He co-chaired and led the committee that recommended



establishment of the Somerset County Vo-Tech Institute and Raritan Valley Community College, persuading Doris Duke to donate the land for the college. He personally worked with the NJ Department of Transportation to relocate the planned route of Interstate Highway 287, saving Hobbstown and the Green Knoll neighborhoods. He was a leader in the campaigns to change the form of Bridgewater Township government from committee to council-mayor and to create the Bridgewater Police Department. He was a

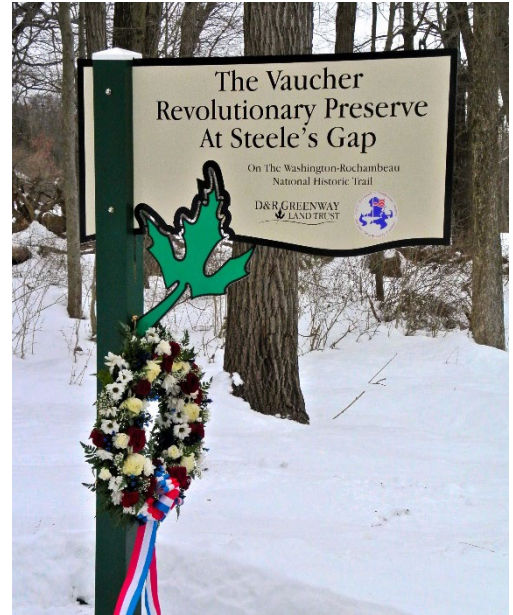


leading proponent of creating a sewerage system for Bridgewater Township, which included devising the financial structure that made it viable. In addition, he was a principal in the campaign to frame and pass a state law that gave the township the ability to foreclose on long-term delinquent tax properties. As it happened, this led to one of his longest and most heated battles, the fight to stop the Bridgewater Commons mall from being built on foreclosed land. Although, ultimately, they did not prevail, the opponents raised important ongoing issues regarding future development in the township.

He was married to Eleanor Carson Hooey at St. John's Episcopal Church in Somerville, NJ on December 15, 1941. Over the course of the next eighty years, he served in almost every aspect of parish life at one time or another, from the vestry and Bible study to the property committee and so much more. He chaired the fundraising committee that ultimately paid for the expansion of the current Parish Hall. Most recently, he contributed a new state-of-the-art hearing loop system in the Guild Room to assist those with hearing difficulties.

Steadfast Friend

Bob was a founding member of the Billionaires, a closely knit group of professional men who faithfully met for lunch every Monday for over 25 years and a member of the Egan Retirees who lunched every Friday.



Lastly, at age 99, his leadership of a near decade long effort to preserve a thirty-five acre Revolutionary War site came to fruition. The property that had belonged to his deceased close friend and neighbor, John Wemple, was purchased by Bridgewater Township as open space, funded by a public and private partnership, fulfilling John's lifelong wish. The National Society of The Sons of The American Revolution awarded him the Silver Good Citizens medal, and he was co-awarded the D&R Greenway Land Trust's Land Preservation Award in May 2019. In recognition of his efforts, the site was named "The Vaucher Revolutionary Preserve at Steele's Gap" in August 2020, and a sign bearing that name was situated on the property so that Bob could see it while sitting on his porch across the road.

Athletic Youth and Fit Senior

Bob was an excellent athlete and avidly pursued a variety of sports throughout his life: from baseball, football and track in his school days to his church's competitive bowling team in the 1950's and early 60's, as well as many decades of



twice-a-week tennis. After retirement, he became more serious about golf and at age 100 was still exercising every morning and swimming twenty laps at a time in his treasured pool.

Devoted Family Man

Bob is predeceased by his wife of 53 years, Eleanor, and his sisters, Evelyn LeClerc and Elaine Vaucher. He is survived by his children, Yvonne Vaucher, MD (Brian Wagner) of La Jolla, CA, Suzanne E. Vaucher (William Stensrud) of NYC, Bridgewater, NJ and Reno, NV, David Vaucher (Gregory Kerr, MD) of NYC and by his longtime partner, Donna Lazartic, of Somerville, NJ.



Due to COVID restrictions, a private burial service will be held at St. John's Episcopal Church, Somerville, NJ with arrangements by Bruce C. VanArsdale Funeral Home.

Memorial contributions may be made to The New England Air Museum (neam.org), Veterans Airlift Command (veteransairlift.org), D&R Greenway Land Trust (drgreenway.org) or St. John's Episcopal Church, Somerville, NJ (stjohnsomerville.org).

Mark your calendars for a Celebration of Life on August 15, 2021, VJ Day, 76th anniversary ending WWII.



High Flight

John G. Magee, September 3, 1941

Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of Earth
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
Sunward I've climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth
of sun-split clouds, and done a hundred things
You have not dreamed of-wheeled and soared and swung
High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there,
I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung
My eager craft through footless halls of air....
Up, up the long, delirious, burning blue
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace
Where never lark nor ever eagle flew-
And, while with silent lifting mind I've trod
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,
Put out my hand, and touched the face of God

This sonnet was sent to Magee's parents written on the back of a letter which said, "I am enclosing a verse I wrote the other day. It started at 30,000 feet, and was finished soon after I landed." He flew in a Spitfire squadron, and was killed at the age of nineteen on 11 December 1941 during a training flight.

Bob knew this poem by heart and would recite it with wonderful lilt and cadence. His family read it often to him in his final days as he was "slipping the surly bonds of earth to touch the face of God."



Watch the Arsenal of Democracy - Veterans Day Tribute with Bob Vaucher and "Doc" on
<https://youtu.be/jKcPWUzXNc>