

Region

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Malin airport to be renamed in honor of pilot

Ehle Reber, World War II B-17 pilot, shot down by German fighter

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MALIN — Malin's own will finally get recognition.

Ehle Reber, who was raised in Malin, died Jan. 23, 1943, during World War II when the B-17 bomber he was piloting was shot down by German fighters while returning from a mission over German-occupied France.

Reber was one of three finalists when officials were naming the then-new air base in Klamath Falls in the 1950s. Those honors went to Lt. David Kingsley, a U.S. Army Air Corps pilot who received the Medal of Honor when his plane was shot down during a 1944 raid over Ploesti, Romania. A street at Kingsley was named in Reber's honor.

Honoring Reber

Last week, at the urging of Malin City Council member Stan Pence and Ryan Bartholomew, president of the Malin Historical Society and an officer at Kingsley Field, the Council voted to rename the Malin Municipal Airport as the Ehle Reber Municipal Airport.

"He was the guy everybody wanted to be," said Bartholomew, noting there are still people who remember Reber.

Born in 1920

Reber, who was born in 1920 in nearby Bieber, Calif., moved with his family to Malin in about 1921, where his father, John, started and managed the Malin Cheese and Produce Company. In the 1940s and '50s, John Reber was a county commissioner.

According to Bartholomew, as a youth, Reber competed with his older brother, Clayton, to see who could finish their morning milk deliveries



Submitted photos

Ehle Reber, back row, left, was the pilot of the Jerry Jinx, a B-17 Flying Fortress which was shot down in January of 1943 while returning from a mission over German-occupied France.

the fastest.

Later, at Malin High, he served as student body president and vice president, was editor of the school newspaper, starred in the senior class play and, more lastingly, was a four-sport, all-star athlete.

On the map

"It was Ehle who would put this tiny school on the statewide map," Bartholomew said of Reber. He was the team's star quarterback, the basketball team's point guard and the only small-school player on the Junior Legion baseball team.

"It was his excellence in track and field that made people around the state stand up and take notice," Bartholomew said, noting Reber set a state record in the long jump that stood for

nearly half a century.

After graduating from Malin High in 1937, he attended the University of Oregon, where he competed in track for four years under legendary coach Bill Hayward, serving as team captain his senior year.

Joining the Air Corps

Reber joined the Army Air Corps after graduating from Oregon in 1941. After flight school, he earned his wings in 1942 and was assigned as a B-17 bomber pilot of the Jerry Jinx. He and his crew flew many missions deep over German-occupied Europe during an era when the Flying Fortresses were unaccompanied by Allied fighter planes.

"Many considered these raids to be 'suicide missions,'" Bartholomew said,

noting casualties were as high as 50 percent.

On the Jan. 10, 1943, cover of the New York Times Magazine, Reber and his crew were featured. Days later, however, while returning to England from a raid over France, German fighter planes shot out two of the Jinx's four engines, causing the plane to crash.

"Many hoped that by some miracle, Reber and his crew were possibly picked up by the Germans and were prisoners of war," Bartholomew said.

That summer, however, Reber was officially listed as killed in action.

He was posthumously awarded the Air Medal and a Purple Heart.

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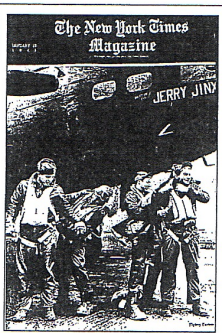
Recalling the crash of the Jerry Jinx

"The day started out like many others," historian Ryan Bartholomew wrote of Jan. 23, 1943, when Malin's Ehle Reber, a B-17 bomber pilot, flew on a bombing mission.

"The crew members of the 'Jerry Jinx' attended their pre-mission brief and received the coordinates for the day's target," Bartholomew wrote in a story about Reber for the Malin Historical Society newsletter.

"Early in the morning, the Jerry Jinx, along with hundreds of other B-17s, took off from England over the low clouds over the English Channel. After hours of flying, the Jerry Jinx successfully unloaded the contents of its bomb bay over (Lorient, France). Reber quickly joined the formation and headed back to England.

"The pilots knew that once they hit the channel they were safe, as the Allied fighters



The crew of the Jerry Jinx was featured on the cover of 'The New York Times Magazine' a week before their fatal mission in 1943.

radioed his wingman that he was losing altitude. His wingman, under strict orders not to break formation, was helpless ... Reber knew that if he and his crew bailed out, they would quickly die of hypothermia in the icy waters. Their only chance was to make it as close to England as pos-

Story a catalyst in renaming Malin airport

An "Object Lessons" story in the June 17 Herald and News helped lead to plans to rename the Malin Municipal Airport as Ehle Reber Municipal Airport.

Ryan Bartholomew, the Malin Historical Society's president, who is also an Air Force officer and historian at Kingsley Field, said after the story was printed about Reber, who was raised in Malin, Malin Councilman Stan Pence wanted to learn more. After meeting with Bartholomew, Pence led Council efforts to rename the airport, which is being upgraded and repaved.

"He's really passionate about it," Bartholomew said of Pence.

The Malin Council will file a letter with the Federal Aviation Administration requesting the name change. Dedication ceremonies at the small airport are tentatively planned in late September or early October.

The "Object Lessons" story tells about a letter written by the father of one of Reber's crew who interviewed an airman from another B-17 bomber. The interviewee, identified only as Smitty, watched as Reber and his crew parachuted from their crippled plane.

"He saw all 10 men bail out and saw all 10 chutes open," the letter says. "And that is the last that has ever been heard or seen of any of that crew."