

Far From Home

The body of Sergeant Baldamore Garcia lies in the Lorraine American Cemetery in France, almost six thousand miles from his home in San Marcos, California. Surrounding him are the graves of other American servicemembers who also lost their lives in World War II. Born in Vista, California on March 8, 1918, Baldamore died on February 22, 1945 near the German village of Hainhausen in northeastern Germany. Around 9:00 a.m. that morning, a B-24 Liberator named the *Iron Duke* took off from a United States airbase near Norwich, England. Baldamore and his fellow crewmen had been assigned to the bomber for that day's mission. The ten-man-crew had arrived in the British Isles a few days before Christmas 1944. They began flying combat missions on January 21, 1945. Four had to be aborted due to mechanical problems, but the crew successfully flew five missions before their departure on February 22nd. The United States Army Air Forces trained Baldamore as a flight engineer. As such, he sat behind the pilot, monitoring the mechanical operation of the bomber. When in combat, he manned the top turret gun. But on February 22nd, the crew had no time to return enemy fire. The *Iron Duke* came under heavy German ground fire, damaging the B-24 to such a degree that the pilot could barely control it. All ten crewmen parachuted out, and all ten were alive when they reached the ground. But Baldamore eventually died of injuries he sustained when he landed. German police purportedly murdered three other crewmembers. Months later, after their liberation from a prisoner of war camp, the six who lived shared details of what happened to the *Iron Duke* and the men who flew it.¹



The crew of the Iron Duke. Baldamore Garcia is the first crewmember on the left.
Courtesy of 458bg.com/combat-crews/duke/

The *Iron Duke* was one of over 2,500 bombers and fighters that participated that day in Operation Clarion. They came from the United States' Eighth, Ninth, Twelfth, and Fifteenth Air Forces; the British Royal Air Force also participated in the mission. Thirty-eight Liberators from the Eighth Air Force's 458th Bomb Group, one of which was the *Iron Duke*, were assigned to the operation. Clarion was the largest air campaign since D-Day in June 1944. It targeted the rail and communication systems in central and southern Germany. The rail system, with its repair shops, stations, roundhouses, and marshaling yards, became a key objective. Up to this point, these parts of Germany's infrastructure had either been undefended or lightly defended. With Clarion, they became the focus of the Allied bombing operation. The Allied Command ordered the 458th Bomb Group to drop its shells over the marshaling yards at Hildesheim and Peine, two towns east of Hanover. Like all of the bombers in Clarion, the *Iron Duke* was to release its explosives at 10,000 feet, not the usual 25,000 feet. While this altitude increased accuracy, it also made the bombers more vulnerable to flak batteries on the ground. The absence of cloud cover that day exposed the Liberators even more to enemy fire.²



B-24s flying in formation

The B-24s approached the marshalling yards in formation, with the *Iron Duke* and another Liberator at the rear of the group. The bombers had just passed Hersfeld, a German town south of their targets in Hildesheim and Peine. An enemy shell from an anti-aircraft gun on the ground hit the Liberator flying closest to Baldamore's plane. It was a direct hit. The shell exploded inside of the B-24, which became engulfed in flames. All ten airmen died. Because of the position of the *Iron Duke* and this downed B-24, Baldamore and his fellow crewmen witnessed the incident. One would guess it made them see how vulnerable they were to the German anti-aircraft fire.³



Lower Saxony in northwestern Germany. Note the location of Hildesheim, south of Hannover. The *Iron Duke's* target was the marshalling yards there.

Within minutes of watching the tragedy that struck the nearby bomber, the *Iron Duke* sustained its initial damage from enemy fire. Three heavy explosions from German guns rocked the *Iron Duke*. One shot occurred in front of the B-24 and another below the aircraft. The force of the blasts cut the plane's control cables and damaged its airframe, most prominently the left rudder and left aileron. As the flight engineer, Garcia must have been occupied assessing the damage, as were the pilot and co-pilot. The *Iron Duke* dropped out of the formation around 12:30 p.m., some three-and-a-half hours after it had left its airbase in England. The pilot decided to make his way to friendly territory, releasing twelve 500-pound bombs to improve the plane's stability. The plan was to fly more than one hundred miles southwest to reach the Reine where the United States Army had fought its way to the river's western bank. But the damage the plane sustained made it unlikely that any particular flight path could be followed. The *Iron Duke* pulled strongly to the right, with the pilot and co-pilot unable to assert their control over the bomber. Its airspeed decreased to about 110 mph, alarmingly close to where it could stall.

Flying now at an altitude of only 7,000 feet, Baldamore and his fellow crewmen must have grasped how dangerous their situation was.⁴

Around 1:15 p.m., the *Iron Duke* flew past Gelnhausen. At Muhlheim, not far from the larger town of Offenbach, a rail-mounted flak battery fired its guns, which consisted of four 128-mm flak guns and two 20-mm weapons. One shell exploded under and in front of the *Iron Duke*. This was followed by three more shells that severely damaged part of the left wing, where flames appeared. The B-24 went into a sharp descent. The pilot ordered most of his crew to bail out. Flight engineer Baldamore Garcia did so, along with the bombardier, navigator, nose turret gunner, tail turret gunner, radio operator, and one of the waist gunners. The pilot, co-pilot, and the other waist-gunner were the last to leave the doomed plane. The *Iron Duke* smashed into the earth, exploding on impact, near the village of Hainhausen. The marshalling yards at Peine, the target the *Iron Duke* had been assigned, were not that far away.⁵

Crewmen landed at various points. The bombardier and one of the waist gunners ended up in two different fields where the local police promptly grabbed them. A sergeant in the SS captured the navigator who landed on the ground near some buildings in Hainhausen; the German soldier turned the American over to the local police. Three other crewmen found themselves suspended by their parachutes--one on a house gable, another in an apple tree, and a third on a railroad boxcar. German police captured them all. The last three crewmen to parachute out of the plane--the pilot, co-pilot, and the other waist gunner--all landed further away, near the village of Bieber and the city of Offenbach. All three would be shot by the police, two for supposedly trying to escape; police shot the third airman in a field in what appeared to be an execution.⁶

Sergeant Baldamore Garcia's parachute landing resulted in more serious injuries than any sustained by his fellow crewmen. Three of them saw Baldamore after they bailed out. Months later, they shared details of the flight engineer's fate with Army investigators. As Baldamore's parachute neared the ground, it hurled him into a storage building with a glass skylight. When German authorities found Baldamore, he was bleeding heavily. His right arm had almost been completely torn off from injuries he suffered when he hit the skylight. The *Iron Duke's* bombardier testified that he saw Baldamore in what seemed to be an old garage. Extremely pale from the loss of blood, the bombardier remembered Baldamore softly repeating the word, "sanar, sanar." (It is Spanish for "to heal" or "to cure.") The bombardier watched as Baldamore bled to death on the floor of the garage. However, another crewmember, the navigator, testified that he had seen Baldamore in a German First Aid Station. The navigator, too, spoke of Baldamore being very pale, his right arm almost completely severed from his body. Later, German authorities took a different crewmember, the tail turret gunner, to a cemetery where

he identified Baldamore's body. The flight engineer was then undoubtedly buried in a nondescript grave.⁷

His mother, Carrie Garcia, knew nothing of this. With four sons in the military--two in the Navy, one in the Marine Corps, and one in the Army Air Forces--she must have worried daily about them. At the end of March 1945, a month after Baldamore died, Carrie received a telegram from the War Department informing her that he was "missing in action." She shared the news not only with her family, but also with her community. Carrie informed the local newspaper about the telegram, which printed a short story in its March 16th "San Marcos" column, reprinting it again seven days later. As a longtime resident of San Diego's North County, her community knew her well. Born on March 9, 1894 in the Sorrento Mesa area of San Diego, Maria Carolina Francisca Ojeda, known as "Carrie," married Nicholas "Nick" Garcia when she was sixteen and he was twenty-seven. At various times, she lived with her husband and children in Oceanside, Vista, San Marcos, and Escondido. Carrie also had uncles and aunts in the area. Before and during World War II, she resided in San Marcos.⁸



Carrie Garcia

Courtesy of Al Haxton, Find a Grave, Maria Carolina Francisca "Carrie" Ojeda Garcia

Carrie's family and community had been there before to help her through difficult times. She appears to have been an exceptionally strong woman, perhaps not physically, but certainly emotionally. In October 1924, when she was thirty, Carrie was physically threatened in her home by a man she knew. Nick was not there at the time, but her children were. Carrie contacted the authorities to report the incident. The court issued a warrant for the man's arrest, accusing him of an "attempted criminal assault." It took a jury just five minutes to find him

guilty. Carrie must have known the attention a trial would draw. Nevertheless, she pursued charges against the man who attacked her.⁹

Like most in San Diego's North County, the Garcia family made its living from the land. Born in Guadalajara, Mexico, Nick immigrated to the United States in 1905 when he was about twenty-two years old. He identified himself as a "rancher" in September 1918 when he registered for the World War I draft; the 1920 U.S. Federal Census used the word "farmer" for his occupation. In both of those years, the Garcias lived in Vista. But by 1927, Carrie and Nick, with their six children, made their home in the Twin Oaks neighborhood of San Marcos. They apparently were renting the Freidman Ranch. In April of that year, tragedy struck the family. Although only in his early forties, Nick died of an apparent heart attack. His body was found on a roadside.¹⁰

Starting at age thirty-three, Carrie lived the rest of her life as a single parent to seven children, five boys and two girls. Her last son was born nine months after Nick's death. In the period that followed the loss of her husband, the community showed its support of Carrie. People donated construction supplies and their labor to build what the local newspaper called a "new cottage" in San Marcos for Carrie and her children. An electrician who lived in the neighboring city of Escondido donated and installed an electrical system in the cottage. One Saturday, as construction was going on, another neighbor drove Carrie and her children down to San Diego for the day. When Baldamore attended Escondido Union High School from 1934-1936, the family still lived in San Marcos.¹¹

Immediately after the United States entered World War II in December 1941, Carrie might have hoped that Baldamore would contribute to the war effort through his work in the defense industry. When he registered for the draft in September 1940, he was employed at Consolidated Aircraft Corporation in San Diego. Next to the United States Navy, Consolidated became the number one wartime employer in San Diego County; at one point, over 45,000 men and women worked there. The United States federal government was its primary customer, ordering thousands of military planes. One of them was the B-24 Liberator; overall, 18,482 were produced, and Consolidated made 6,726 of them. Baldamore left his job, however, in March 1943 when he entered the Army. His enlistment papers recorded his highest level of education as two years in high school and his previous employment as one where he worked "in [the] building of aircraft."¹²

169

169 San Diego

SERIAL NUMBER	1. NAME (Print)	ORDER NUMBER
3035	BALDAMORE GARCIA	302 382
2. ADDRESS (Print)		
Box 54 SAN MARCOS CAL		
3. TELEPHONE		
4. AGE IN YEARS		
22		
5. PLACE OF BIRTH		
Tula		
6. COUNTRY OF CITIZENSHIP		
U.S.		
7. NAME OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS		
Mrs. Carrie Garcia		
8. RELATIONSHIP OF THAT PERSON		
Mother		
9. ADDRESS OF THAT PERSON		
Box 54 San Marcos Calif.		
10. EMPLOYER'S NAME		
Consolidated Air Park Corp		
11. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS		
Pacific Highway San Diego Calif.		

I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.

REGISTRATION CARD
D. S. S. Form 1

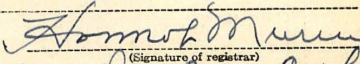
Baldamore Garcia
(Registrant's signature)

REGISTRAR'S REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF REGISTRANT					
RACE	HEIGHT (Approx.)	WEIGHT (Approx.)	COMPLEXION		
White	5'7 1/2	135	Sallow		
			Light		
Negro	Blue	Blonde	Ruddy		
	Gray	Red	Dark		
Oriental	Hazel	Brown	Freckled		
	Brown	Black	Light brown		
Indian	Black	Gray	Dark brown		
		Bald	Black		
Filipino					

Other obvious physical characteristics that will aid in identification.....

I certify that my answers are true; that the person registered has read or has had read to him his own answers; th. I have witnessed his signature or mark and that all of his answers of which I have knowledge are true, except as follows:


 (Signature of registrar)

Registrar for 272 San Diego Calif.
 (Precinct) (Ward) (City or county) (State)

Date of registration

(STAMP OF LOCAL BOARD)

(The stamp of the Local Board having jurisdiction of the registrant shall be placed in the above space.)

00100

U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE 16-17105

Baldamore Garcia's September 1940 draft registration card.

Like all recruits in San Diego's North County, Baldamore would have boarded a train in Oceanside, bound for Los Angeles, for his formal induction into the Army. At Fort MacArthur in San Pedro, the inductees took aptitude tests. As with most in his generation, Baldamore did not graduate high school. He did, however, attend Escondido Union High School for almost two years. Baldamore began his studies there in September 1934 when he was sixteen, so apparently he worked after graduating from San Marcos Grammar School. Once in high school, Baldamore enrolled in a general science course as well as classes in English, algebra, and even typing. He dropped out of high school, however, early in March 1936, four days before he turned eighteen. No doubt Baldamore went to work to help his mother financially. At Fort MacArthur, he must have scored well on the aptitude tests since he ended up in the Army Air Forces, a branch that had the reputation of taking those who scored the highest on the exams. Months of training awaited Baldamore before he wore on his uniform the coveted wings that distinguished him as a member of the Air Forces. His generation had grown up fixated on the glamour of flying, with the name of Charles A. Lindbergh symbolizing the adventure airplanes represented. To fly was to seemingly challenge laws of gravity. For any young American in the early 1940s, participating in the air war, especially by being a fighter pilot or part of a bomber's crew, would have been a point of pride.¹³



Carrie and Baldamore would not have known, however, the high casualty rate of bomber crews. One historian argues that along with German pilots, as well as German and American submarine crews, "American and British bomber boys had the most dangerous job in the war." For the Eighth Air Force, casualty rates support this conclusion. In October 1943, less than one in four crew members probably completed the required twenty-five missions before he could rotate out. Another statistic from the war showed that two-thirds of crewmen might die in combat or be captured by the Germans. When the war ended in Europe in May 1945, three months after Baldamore's plane went down, some 26,000 men in the Eighth Air Force had died.¹⁴

The Allied bombing campaign, with the destruction it brought to the enemy, played a major role in the defeat of the Third Reich. Five years earlier, in 1940, a few of the first Liberators had arrived in England. Reuben Fleet, who owned Consolidated Aircraft Corporation in San Diego where the bombers had been built, accompanied the B-24s. Fleet explained to the British Air Ministry the origin of the plane's name. "We chose the name Liberator because the airplane can carry destruction to the heart of the Hun, and thus help you and us to liberate those millions temporarily finding themselves under Hitler's yoke." Baldamore, recall, worked at Consolidated before he entered the Army. He helped to build military aircraft, although we cannot be sure he worked on the B-24s. What we do know for sure is that he gave his life to help "liberate...millions" who found "themselves under Hitler's yoke."¹⁵

It was not until 1947 that the United States government contacted Carrie Garcia regarding the reinterment of her son. After the war ended, the Army's Graves Registration Service was responsible for locating the initial burial sites of Americans who died in the various theaters of war. Once a grave was discovered and the remains identified, the next-of-kin was notified. The Army posed a simple, yet at the same time complicated, question to that person--Do you want your loved one returned to the States for burial, or should he/she be buried in an American military cemetery in Europe or in the Pacific, depending on where the servicemember died? Sixty-one percent wanted their relative to come home. Carrie Garcia chose the other option, a cemetery in Europe. Perhaps she considered the emotional impact she might experience when she saw her son's casket before her. Burying Baldamore in the San Marcos Cemetery, near or next to his father, could have also made Carrie relive the initial grieving process she had experienced when the military first notified her of her son's death in 1945. So today, instead of Baldamore, Carrie lies next to Nick Garcia. She lived until age ninety-eight. Unquestionably, Baldamore would have been on her mind throughout those many years. Because of the decision Carrie made, Sergeant Baldamore Garcia is buried at the Lorraine American Cemetery near St.

Avold in northeastern France. He is surrounded by the graves of 10,480 other Americans who died in the Second World War. Each one has a story to be told.¹⁶



Courtesy of the American Battle Monuments Commission

¹ abmc.gov/cemeteries-memorials/about-lorraine-american-cemetery/ (accessed April 24, 2025); Baldamore Garcia, WW II Draft Registration Cards (ancestry.com; accessed April 20, 2025); Ron Mackay, Mike Bailey, and Darin Scorza, *Liberators Over Norwich, The 458th Bomb Group (H), 8th USAAF At Horsham St. Faith, 1944-1945* (Atglen, 2010), pp. 232-233; 458bg.com/combat-crews/duke (accessed April 19, 2025); armyaircorpsmuseum.org/Aerial_Engineer.cfm (accessed April 24, 2025).

² 458bg.com/combat-crews/duke (accessed April 19, 2025); Donald L. Miller, *Masters Of The Air, America's Bomber Boys Who Fought The Air War Against Nazi Germany* (New York, 2006), pp. 441, 442; Bernard C. Nalty, editor, *Winged Shield, Winged Sword, A History of the United States Air Force, Volume I, 1907-1950* (Washington, D.C., 1997), p. 317; Mackay et al, *Liberators Over Norwich*, p. 231.

³ Mackay et al, *Liberators Over Norwich*, p. 232 (neither this book nor the website for the 458th Bomb Group gives the name of the plane; it was piloted by Lt. Joseph Szarko).

⁴ Mackay et al, *Liberators Over Norwich*, p. 232; 458bg.com/combat-crews/duke (accessed April 19, 2025).

⁵ Mackay et al, *Liberators Over Norwich*, pp. 233, 299; 458bg.com/combat-crews/duke (accessed April 19, 2025); the distance between Hainhausen and Peine is approximately 377 miles.

⁶ Mackay et al, *Liberators Over Norwich*, pp. 234-235.

⁷ Mackay et al, *Liberators Over Norwich*, p. 234; 458bg.com/combat-crews/duke (accessed April 19, 2025).

⁸ "San Marcos," *Weekly Times-Advocate*, March 23, 1945, p. 14 mentions Carrie's other three sons--John, George, and Alex--who were also then in the military. "San Marcos," *Daily Times Advocate*, March 16, 1945, p. 3 and the *Weekly Times-Advocate*, March 23, 1945, p. 14; "San Marcos," *Weekly Times Advocate*, February 2, 1945. p. 4; Maria Carolina Francisca Garcia, U.S. Find a Grave Index, 1600s-Current (ancestry.com; accessed March 16, 2025); the 1930 U.S. Federal Census ("Carrie Garcia") asked a question as to "age at first marriage," to which Carrie's reply was "16," which means she married in 1910; Carrie F. Garcia, *Daily Times-Advocate*, January 9, 1993, p. 7; Carrie Garcia lived in Oceanside at the time of the 1920 U.S. Federal Census, Escondido in the 1930 census, and Vista at the time of the 1940 and the 1950 censuses (ancestry.com; accessed March 16, 2025); Mackay et al, *Liberators Over Norwich*, in its Casualty List, identifies the hometowns of those killed, with Baldamore Garcia's "San Marcos" listed with his name on p. 276; Baldamore Garcia, WW II Draft Registration Cards (ancestry.com; accessed April 20, 2025); two of Carrie Garcia's uncles are mentioned as helping her dig a well on her property in "San Marcos," *Daily Times-Advocate*, June 28, 1929, p. 3; Carrie Garcia's brother and sister, both living in San Marcos, are mentioned in "San Marcos," *Daily Times-Advocate*, December 18, 1947, p. 6. San Marcos appeared as her residence in more than one newspaper article. When Baldamore registered for the draft on October 16, 1940, he wrote "San Marcos" as the name of the town where he then lived. More significantly, Baldamore's military record gives San Marcos as his hometown.

⁹ "Ramon Romo Accused Of A Serious Offense," *Weekly Times-Advocate*, October 17, 1924, p. 4; "Verdict Of Guilty Is Quickly Returned By Jury," *Weekly Times-Advocate*, November 21, 1924, p. 5.

¹⁰ Nicholas Ortiz Garcia, World War I Draft Registration Cards, which Nick filled out himself, gives his birthdate as February 10, 1883 (ancestry.com; accessed March 16, 2025); however, Nicholas Ortez Garcia, Find A Grave Index, 1600s-Current has his birth year as 1884 (ancestry.com; accessed March 16, 2025); Nicholas Garcia, 1920 U.S. Federal Census, gives 1905 as his immigration year (ancestry.com; March 16, 2025); the Friedman Ranch as the residency of the Garcia family is mentioned in "San Marcos," *Daily Times-Advocate*, August 18, 1927, p. 3; "Found Dead At Twin Oaks," *Daily Times-Advocate*, April 22, 1927, p. 4.

¹¹ "San Marcos," *Daily Times-Advocate*, January 20, 1928, p. 2 on the birth of Alexander Garcia; "San Marcos News," *Daily Times-Advocate*, July 22, 1927; "San Marcos Notes," *Daily Times-Advocate*, August 5, 1927, p. 5; "San Marcos Notes," *Daily Times-Advocate*, August 11, 1927, p. 4; "San Marcos Notes," *Daily Times-Advocate*, July 13, 1927, p. 1; Baldamore Garcia, Escondido Union High School transcript.

¹² Baldamore Garcia, WW II Draft Registration Cards (ancestry.com; accessed April 20, 2025); Katrina Pescador and Mark Aldrich, *Images of America, Consolidated Aircraft Corporation* (Charleston, South Carolina, 2008), pp. 7, 57, 61; Baldamore Garcia, U.S., World War II Army Enlistment Records, 1938-1946 (ancestry.com; accessed March 16, 2025).

¹³ Two publications from 1944 explain the induction process in detail. One is entitled *Answers to Important Questions for the Potential Inductee and His Dependents*, published by the Oregon State Defense Council. Information in it was compiled by the Army Service Forces. A second one is *Introduction to the Armed Forces*:

Suggestions for Pre-Induction Informational Meetings, published by the U.S. Office of Civil Defense. Both are available at arcweb.sos.state.or.us/exhibits/ww2/services/induct (accessed July 17, 2011). Baldamore Garcia, Escondido Union High School transcript lists the classes he took and notes that he had attended San Marcos Grammar School; for a fine study of how enthralled Baldamore's generation was with airplanes, see Joseph J. Corn, *The Winged Gospel, America's Romance with Aviation* (Baltimore, 1983; 2001 edition).

¹⁴ Miller, *Masters of the Air*, p. 7.

¹⁵ Stephen E. Ambrose, *The Wild Blue, The Men and Boys Who Flew The B-24s Over Germany* (New York, 2001), p. 22.

¹⁶ "Baldamore Garcia," *Weekly Times-Advocate*, November 14, 1947, p. 9; Michael Sledge, *Soldier Dead, How We Recover, Identify, Bury, & Honor Our Military Fallen* (New York, 2005), p. 151; abmc.gov/cemeteries-memorials/about-lorraine-american-cemetery/ (accessed April 24, 2025); Carrie F. Garcia, *Daily Times-Advocate*, January 9, 1993, p. 7.