

David R. Kingsley Portland Firefighter, Air Force Bombardier, Medal of Honor Recipient

David Richard Kingsley was born June 27, 1918 in Portland, Oregon. His parents, David Ross Kingsley and Angelina Marie Rutto Kingsley raised David and eight other children. David, the second oldest of the nine children, would attend Mt. Michael's School in Portland.

David's father died in 1928 and his mother in 1939. David and his older brother were left to raise the other children.

David enlisted in the US Army Air Forces at the Portland Airbase on April 14, 1942. He was 5 feet 10 inches tall, weighed 165 pounds, and had brown hair and blue eyes. He was trained as a bombardier and commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in July 1943.

Soon after, David became a Portland Firefighter. Already engaged to Harriet Zalabak, David would begin his firefighting service at age 24 on July 8, 1942. Shortly after his career began, he, like many firefighters, was sent to war. He would find himself deployed to the 97th Bombardment Group, Fifteenth Air Force and be assigned to a B-17F bomber serving in the European theater.

On June 23, 1944, David and his crew would be sent on a bombing run over Romania. The bomber group would be attacked and David's aircraft would be damaged, falling from formation. This prompted additional attacks from anti-aircraft fire from the ground and aerial attacks from German fighter planes.

Even with crippling damage, the aircraft managed to drop its bombs on target, causing severe damage to critical installations on the ground. The bomber was hit by more machine gun fire from enemy fighters, which severely wounded the tail gunner, Master Sergeant Michael Sullivan, in the arm. David made his way to Sullivan and dressed the wound. After caring for Sullivan, another attack on the bomber injured the ball turret gunner. He made his way to David, now in the radio room, and was treated for his injuries.

Within minutes, the pilot, realizing a crash was imminent, gave the order for the crew to prepare to bail out. David assisted the wounded ball turret gunner in donning his parachute. Sullivan, who had been treated and wrapped in blankets, had no parachute. It was believed to have been damaged when his tail gunner turret was shot to pieces. David removed his parachute and placed it on Sullivan. The pilot gave the final order to bail out and David helped both men exit the plane.



Sullivan would later recount *"David took me in his arms and struggled to the bomb bay, where he told me to keep my hand on the rip cord and said to pull it when I was clear of the ship. Then he told me to bail out. I watched the ground go by for a few seconds and then I jumped. I looked at Dave...the look he had on his face was firm and solemn. He must have known what was coming because there was no fear in his eyes at all. That was the last time I saw him...Dave, standing in the bomb bay."*

The bomber would crash near the village of Suhozem in central Bulgaria. David and seven others on the ground would die. His body was later found in the wreckage.

On May 4, 1945, David would posthumously receive the Medal of Honor for his brave and gallant service. Major General Ralph P. Cousins would present David's medal to his older brother, Thomas Kingsley of the US Navy. The service was held at the Archangel Church in Portland, Oregon. David's remains were exhumed from Europe and placed in Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia.

In 1957, the Air Force Base in Klamath Falls, Oregon would be renamed "Kingsley Field" in honor of David Richard Kingsley. In 1978, the Department of Defense chose to close Kingsley Field as an active duty Air Force installation. However, it was transferred to the Oregon Air National Guard and today remains, Kingsley Field.