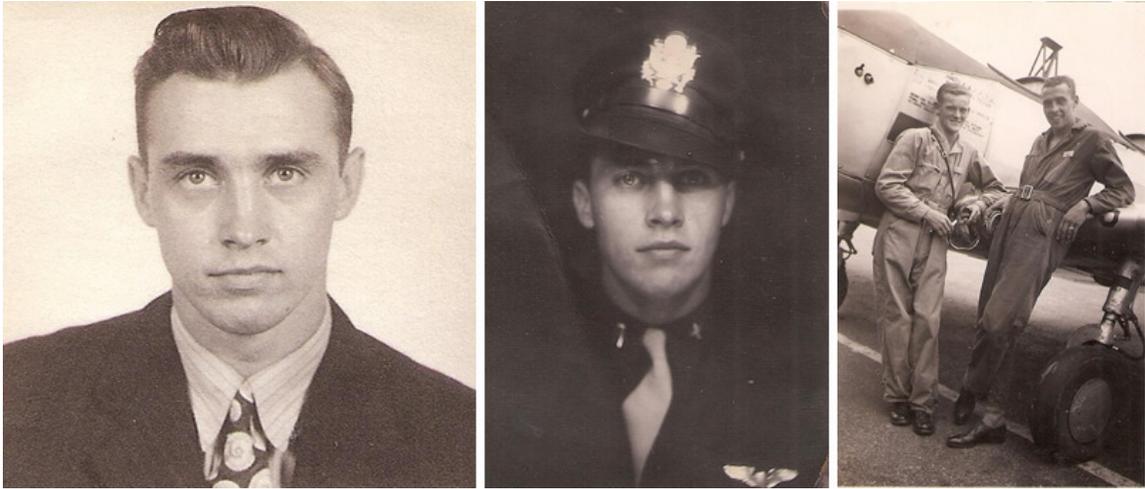




Historical Research on Family, a Famous Photo, and a Postage Stamp by Steven A. Brandt, PhD

Fred V. Brandt and the P-47 Thunderbolt “Angie”

My father, Fred Vertus Brandt, was born September 9th 1923 in Toledo, Iowa at the home of his parents, Vertus Detlef Brandt and Alvena (Boldt) Brandt. In November 1942, at the age of 19 he enlisted in the U.S. Army’s Aviation Cadet program, receiving his wings with Class 44B in February 1944. The majority of this monograph is devoted to describing his experiences as a fighter pilot flying the Republic P-47 Thunderbolt in Europe during World War II.



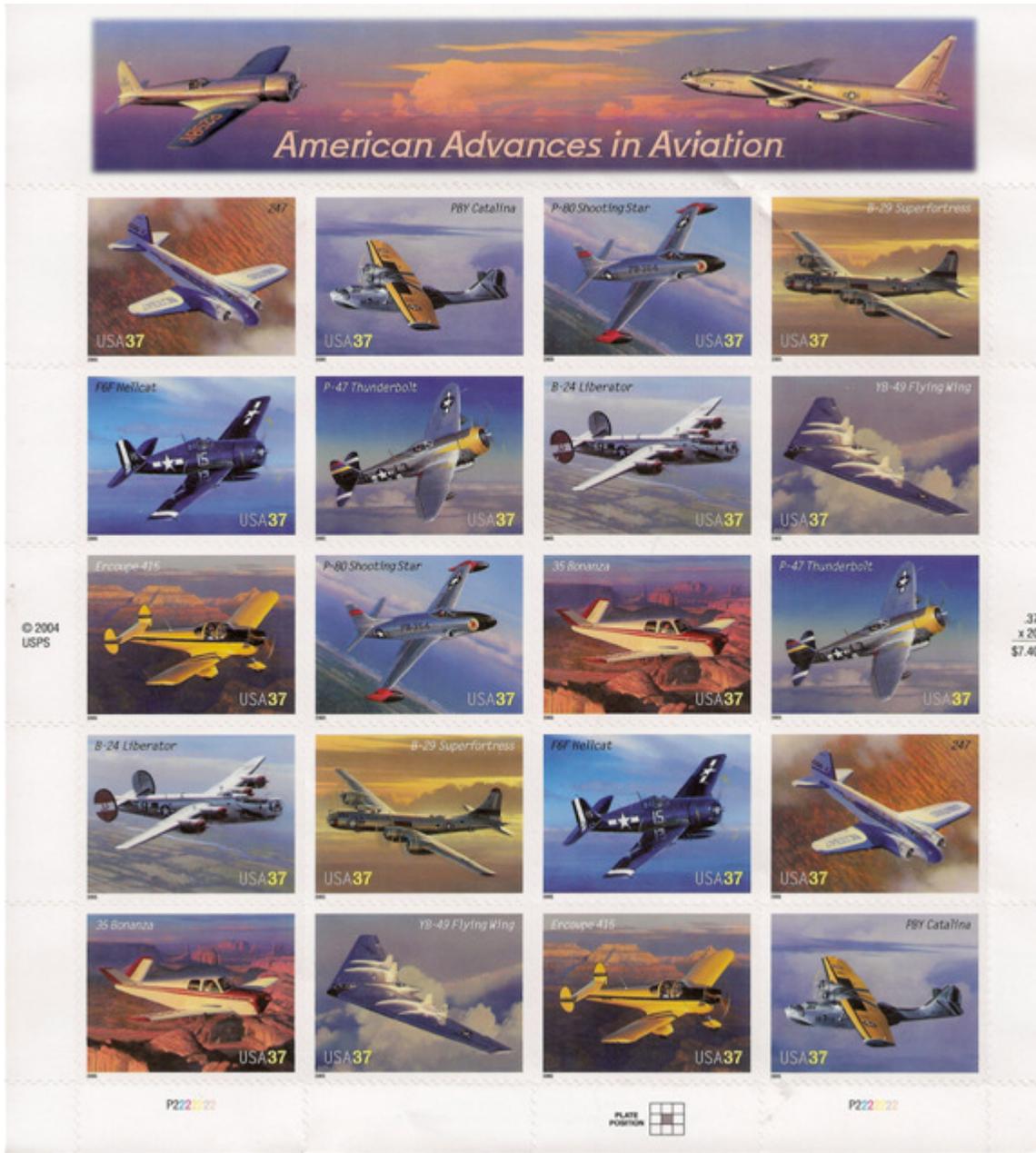
After Dad completed his service with the Army Air Force, he returned to his home town and took up farming. He also worked as a farm tractor mechanic at the local John Deere dealer and a few years later began working for the Post Office as a substitute rural mail carrier. He eventually became a full-time mail carrier, sorting mail and driving the country mail route each day from 6:00 AM until about 1:00 PM, then doing a full day’s farm work in the afternoon and evening.

Dad was proud to be a farmer, proud to carry the mail, and proud of his military service as a fighter pilot. I remember that when I would ask him to draw me a picture, he would usually draw a side view of a P-47 Thunderbolt in a dive strafing something on the ground. I don’t remember what it was he would draw being strafed, but I do remember the straight lines he would draw from the Thunderbolt’s wings down to the ground simulating the plane’s tracer bullets.

I grew up working on the farm, occasionally riding the mail route in the back seat of Dad’s car sitting between the bundles of mail, and hearing stories about flying P-47s in World War II. It was inevitable that I would love airplanes (especially the P-47) and flying as well as farming and stamps.

It was some years after Dad’s death when the U.S. Postal Service released a set of 37-cent stamps titled “American Advances in Aviation.” Imagine my excitement when I noted that they had chosen the P-47 as one of the great historical aircraft they would honor. Dad would be so proud. But then when I actually got my hands on one of the

sheets of stamps, I saw that they had chosen to represent a yellow-nosed P-47 from Dad's 512th Fighter Squadron. Incredible! Had he still been alive, Dad would have been grinning from ear to ear. He would have bought hundreds of those sheets of stamps.



But it got better. The ID codes on the side of the plane in the painting on the stamp were L3-O. Dad had told me again and again when I was young that his 512th Fighter Squadron P-47 had the ID codes L3-O on it. Could it be that Dad's beloved Postal Service had somehow chosen to represent his personal Thunderbolt on a stamp? Unbelievable! If Dad had been alive and he had seen that, I'm confident it would have put an indelible smile on his face and brought tears to his eyes.

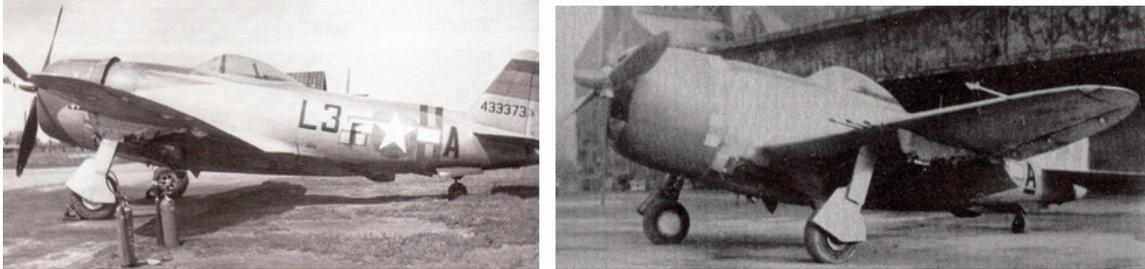


But initially I wasn't sure this really was his Thunderbolt. Dad always carried a picture of his plane in his billfold, and I had seen that picture many times. After he died, no one could find the picture, but I remembered it pretty well. There were significant differences between the Thunderbolt on the stamp and Dad's plane as I remembered it.

The most noticeable distinguishing features on the Thunderbolt on the stamp are the olive-drab-painted horizontal and vertical tails. As I remembered it the L3-O in the photo in Dad's wallet had normal bare aluminum tails. The picture below of L3-N was one Dad let me take to school as a kid and photograph. As I recall L3-O looked almost exactly like L3-N except for the ID code. That seemed to rule out it being the same plane as the one on the stamp. But then, I remember that it wasn't a very good photo, not nearly as good as the one of L3-N. I remember being frustrated that I couldn't read the serial number on L3-O's tail in the photo.



But there couldn't have been two P-47s coded L3-O at the same time. If that happened, one of them would have a horizontal line painted under its letter O so that it became L3-Obar. And neither the plane on the stamp nor the one on the photo in my father's wallet had a bar under its O. So was it the same plane or not?



L3-A and L3-Abar illustrating use of bar when aircraft ID letter duplicated

Time for some research. I started by documenting Dad's combat record, beginning when he arrived in France. This was mostly a compilation and cross-referencing of his logbook and the 512th Fighter Squadron official history. I also filled in with information that I can recall from the stories Dad would tell me as we worked together on the farm.

The squadron history for 3 November 1944 reads:

Four rainy days followed. During this period, Nov 3, eleven new pilots joined the squadron. They were Lts Wm A. Anderson, Berical, Balog, Brandt, Chin, Crocker, Dean, Doss, Harkinson, Maloney, and Pratt. The next day, a lecture was held for the new men to review such essential material as Geography, Navigation, Map Reading and so forth.



Thunderbolts parked at A-80 Mourmelon le Grand

The airfield where this occurred was advanced landing field A-80 at Mourmelon le Grand, France. This was an existing military base, converted for use by the squadron. The squadron history for 20 Sep 1944 (the date the unit moved there, before Dad joined them) describes it as follows:

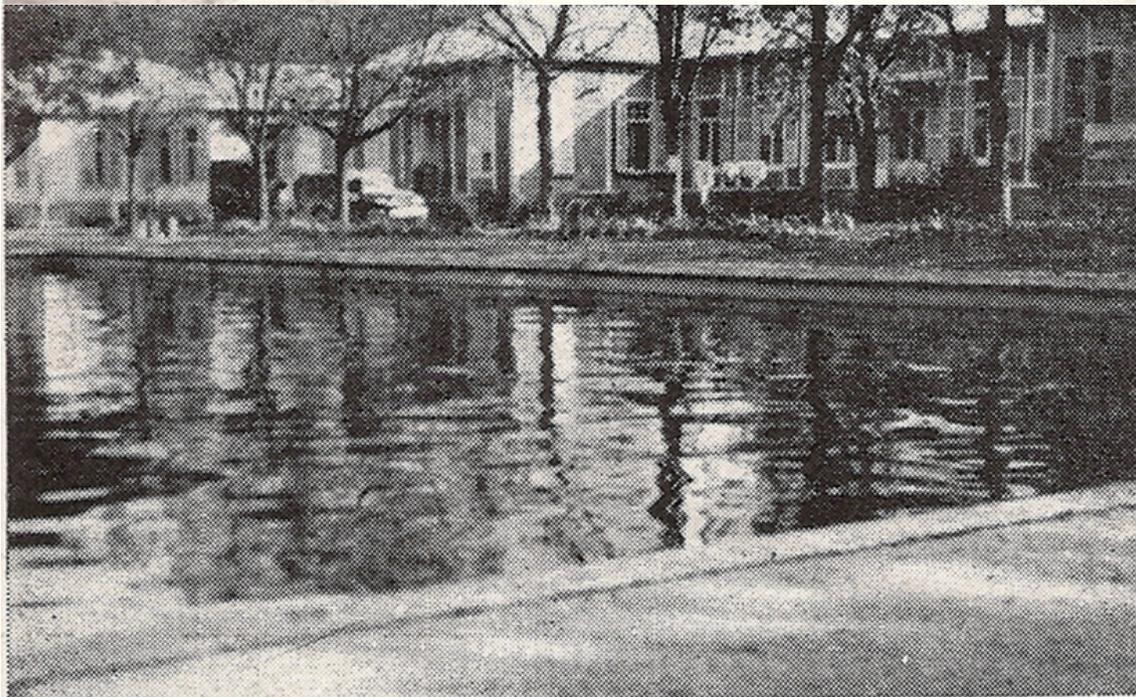
As one GI put it “This is the best set up we have had yet, but it looks like an inspector’s paradise.” We were housed in the predetermined Officers Quarters... This was indeed a nice arrangement and with work it would be quite livable. The enlisted personnel moved into their assigned bays and rooms in a pair of two-storied cement buildings across from each other. The first three graders were given the smaller which had all outside rooms capable of sleeping three men each. The rest of the men were housed fifteen men to a bay in the other building. The Mess Hall, Kitchen, Orderly Room, Supply and Medical Section occupied most of the main floor of the latter.



Living area, Mourmelon, France.



Living area, Mourmelon, France.



Swimming pool, Mourmelon, France.

The Officers’ Club with its large swimming pool and most of the Officers’ quarters were situated a half mile northeast of the landing strip and a quarter of a mile from the Orderly Room. All of the buildings on the field were of brick or cement construction with wood or coal burning stoves for heating. Small cottages with a capacity of two to eight men housed most of our Officers and they were

located close to the Club on the South side with our Operations Building but a step away to the West. Our higher ranking Officers were quartered in a two storied apartment building about a half mile away on the main road from the field to Mourmelon.

This was a former French Cavalry and Artillery Camp founded in Napoleon's day. A permanent sod air field had been added with at least four spacious hangars but our bombers had done excellent work however since the Boche had taken over and with one exception all the hangars as well as the rest of the buildings in the vicinity had [been] demolished almost beyond repair. Our engineers moved in and by the time we had arrived a 5,000 foot strip was ready for use in spite of bomb craters and furrows ploughed by the Germans before leaving.

Dad was housed in one of the cottages with a non-rated officer named Jack Robinson.

Dad's logbook records his first flight in France, a local orientation ride for 1 hr 15 min, on 6 November 1944, during the "three rainy days." He flew another local sortie for 1 hr 30 min on 9 November. Then, on 10 November, he was scheduled for his first combat mission. The squadron history reads:

Nov 10 – The usual sixteen plane formation took off at 1105 to escort B-26s over Germany in the only mission of this type for Nov. Icing and snow were encountered at 1,000 to 1,550 feet. The bombers turned back without completing their mission. No other planes took to the air for the remainder of the day because the weather closed in. General Sanders was scheduled to inspect us today. He couldn't make it.

Dad's logbook reads "Mission (Aborted) 1 hr 30 min".

On 12 November Dad flew another local mission for 2 hrs. This mission is a likely candidate for the one that got him some attention in the squadron. The incident occurred sometime very early in his time at Mourmelon le Grand and it happened on a non-combat sortie. This particular sortie is a likely candidate because it was longer than the other ones.

There were two primary versions of the P-47 in the squadron. The older planes were P-47D-22 or earlier series with smaller fuel tanks and "razorback" cockpit enclosures with framed canopies. The newer ones were P-47D-25 or later series with more fuel and all-round-vision bubble canopies. Naturally, the experienced pilots mostly flew the new airplanes, leaving the new guys to fly the old, beat-up planes with small fuel tanks. On more than one occasion, this led to situations where the flight leaders still had plenty of gas but their wingmen were flying on fumes.



P-47D-11 "Razorback"



P-47D-30 "Bubbletop"

This happened to Dad and another new pilot named George Y. Chin, who arrived at Mourmelon le Grand the same day as Dad. Dad and George had become good friends. This fact is important in understanding what happened next. On the day in question they were flying as number 2 and number 4 on a local non-combat mission with a flight leader who had lots of fighter time as a P-39 Airacobra instructor pilot in the USA but very little time in the P-47. The flight leader got lost.



2Lt George Y. Chin



Chin and Dad

As the flight leader flew around aimlessly trying to find the field, Dad watched his fuel gauge readings drop lower and lower. He knew exactly where the airfield was and he knew Chin was looking at the same low readings on his fuel gauges. But wingmen in a war zone are supposed to stay off the radios.

Finally, Dad could stand it no longer. He keyed his microphone and said, "Chin, let's go!" Then he turned away from his leader and flew directly to the airfield and landed. Chin followed. That took a lot of faith.

This action could have gotten them in a lot more trouble than it actually did. According to Dad, the only thing that saved them was the fact that his engine quit from fuel starvation as he taxied off the runway and Chin's engine quit while he was still on the runway. Still, I'm sure it didn't exactly make them heroes in the eyes of the other squadron members, especially the "old heads" who had already been in combat for 6 months!

Dad's first actual combat mission occurred on 17 November. Segments from the squadron history tell more of the story:

Another 5 days of bad weather hampered operations...

Nov 17 – In support of the XX Corps drive, two Close Ground Support missions of 16 a/c each took to the air. On the first, led by Lt Douglas, a town was bombed and four gun emplacements destroyed by strafing (sic). It was on this mission that Lt Darrough was forced to bail out just west of Thionville in friendly territory after his ship was hit by flak. The second mission was just as eventful. Major Locke and his crew destroyed five more gun positions, bombed a town, [and destroyed] a number of M/T and armored vehicles. Flak put Lt Dean's plane out of commission and he bellied it in close to A-82.

An M/T is a motorized transport, usually a truck or half track. Flak is a shortening of the German word for anti-aircraft artillery or AAA. Dick Dean was one of Dad's good friends, also from Iowa. He came to visit us several times in the late 70s and early 80s. He's one of the four men in the "Fighter Pilots from Iowa" picture, which they re-posed during one of the squadron reunions.

According to Dad, their method of destroying gun positions was interesting. A two-plane element would select a gun and position themselves on either side of it. Then they would both dive on it at the same time. The gun would have to turn and fire at one of them. That plane would break off the attack and turn away. The other plane would continue the dive firing its eight 50 caliber machine guns, killing the crew and setting off unfired shells that would usually destroy the gun.

Dad told about getting into trouble on one of these early missions for destroying gun positions. When the squadron would go in to attack a target, they would leave 2 or 4 planes at higher altitude as "top cover" to watch for German fighters. One time when Dad was fairly new, he was a wingman in the two-ship element assigned as top cover. While they were orbiting with nothing happening, his leader (someone with a southern accent is all I can remember) noticed a couple of AAA guns firing at the squadron. He ordered an attack, using the tactics just described. The first gun they attacked turned to point at Dad, so he broke away and his leader silenced the gun. The second gun turned to fire at Dad's leader, so Dad strafed it and put it out of its misery.

When they got back and landed, as they were going through debriefing, Dad's element leader for the mission stepped up to make their claims. "Ah got a flak gun heyah, and

Brandt got one ovah heyah.” Their mission leader immediately asked, “When did you do that?” The proud but soon to be chastised element leader replied, “When we was toolin’ around up high while you guys was bombin’.”

Fighter pilot, recalls World War II

by Phyllis Thompson

As Fred Brandt of rural Toledo sits by the TV and watches the events happening in Saudi Arabia, his thoughts go back to World War II when he flew a P-47 fighter for the Armed Forces.

In 1943, at the age of 20, Brandt enlisted in the Armed Forces and was sent to Texas for flight training.

“We were all young kids, you know, if you can do it, I can do it,” laughed Brandt.

The P-47 fighter that

Brandt was trained to operate usually carried a 500 lb. bomb on each wing, a frag bomb cluster or napalm on the belly, and 2,700 rounds of 50 caliber ammo for the eight guns on the wings. For special targets they hung 1,000 lb. bombs on each wing for targets such as cement bridges and fortifications, etc. “It was real hairy if one of them hung up,” said Brandt.

The most memorable mission of the 49 missions he flew was on Feb. 24, 1945, a bombing raid over Dusseldorf. The target was a train depot. As he approached his target, traveling 420 miles an hour and 200 feet off the ground, a train blew up in front of him. Debris from the explosion struck the canopy of his plane, tearing it off.

Some of the debris struck him below the eye, shattering the bone. With a tremendous amount of blood flowing from the wound and traveling at

such a high rate of speed, blood from the wound blinded him in both eyes. By spitting in his hand and wiping his right eye he was able to see his controls. “We didn’t have radar so I called radio homing, so they could get a fix on me, and I could find an air strip for me to land,” said Brandt.

Finding the air strip, he circled around to let the radio control tower know he wanted to land and as he came past the tower they reported to Brandt that his flap handle was not down. As he hit the runway, he set the wheels down and hit the brakes at about 60 miles an hour. His plane finally went off the runway into the grass, spinning around in an 180 degree turn until it came to a stop.

As Brandt was finally able to get out of the plane, he noticed the frag bombs on the belly of the plane swinging. The braces had been broken.

Yes, Brandt can surely relate to the pilots in Saudi Arabia. “I think it’s a bad area of the world to be in. But what do you do with a guy like that? I know you can’t let him off, we got to take him out,” said Brandt.

Brandt continued there’s no way to compare his flying experiences to the modern day technology the troops have today. The only thing that hasn’t changed is the same gut feeling each man has as he climbs into the cockpit.

In 1981, Brandt and three of his flying buddies got together in Arlington, Tex., for their 40th reunion. Brandt’s three closest buddies, also native Iowans, were Donald C. Whicker formerly of Des Moines, living now in Arlington, Tex.; Richard W. Dean, (deceased) Council Bluffs; Forrest B. Claxton, formerly of Fayette, Iowa, now living in Eureka Springs, Ark.

Brandt, a retired farmer and rural mail carrier, owns and flies his own plane, that he keeps at the Toledo airport. His son, Major Steven Brandt, flies an F-4 and is instructor for the United States Air Force and is stationed in Colorado Springs, Colo. As far as Brandt knows at the present time, it doesn’t appear that his son will be going to Saudi Arabia.

Military news

Steven A. Brandt

Air Force Maj. Steven A. Brandt, an aeronautics instructor, has arrived for duty at the U.S. Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, Colo.

He is the son of Fred V. Brandt of rural route 1, Toledo.

His wife, Joni, is the daughter of Stanley G. and Velma A. Schreiber of 909 Harding St., Tama.

The major graduated in 1971 from South Tama County High School and received his doctorate in 1988 from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

THE TAMA NEWS-HERALD, THURS., JAN. 24, 1991 5B



The picture above is Fred Brandt, rural Toledo, and his three buddies at the 9th Air Force fighter base in France, January 21, 1945. His buddy to the left explains just why he did not shoot down a German plane on a previous mission. The four fliers from left to right: Donald G. Whicker, Des Moines; Richard W. Dean, Council Bluffs; Forrest B. Claxton, Fayette; and Fred Brandt, Toledo, all members of the 19th Tactical Air Command Thunder Bolts “Raider Group”. The picture below was taken at their 40th reunion in 1981 in Arlington, Tex., with all four pilots standing in the same position.



Dad flew his second combat mission for 2 hrs 30 min the next day. The squadron history tells part of the story:

Nov 18 – Ground targets were again attacked today. Capt Marall and the squadron struck at gun positions, troops and rail transportation. A locomotive and four cars were definitely destroyed and the tracks cut but no results observed at any of the other targets. In the late afternoon, Capt Bronson and the men destroyed four M/T and five buildings on the same type mission.

“The same type mission” involved flying to a designated operating area and contacting the local controller. This was usually an AAF officer, sometimes a pilot, who lived and worked with the ground troops. He would radio the locations of the targets the ground forces needed neutralized at the moment, so the types of targets varied from mission to mission. This was close air-ground cooperation, the type that allowed General George Patton’s tank columns to make their famous dash across France.

The next day, 19 November 1944, was an unhappy one for Dad. He flew his third combat mission for 2 hrs 15 min, but his flight leader, Lt Tomlinson, was shot down. The squadron history tells part of the story:

Nov 19 – Today we flew the most individual sorties for any one day during the past two months. Three missions were flown for a total of 48 sorties. The weather was CAVU and the first bunch of planes with Lt Anderson leading were off by 0825. Col Grossetta took the second off at 1230 with Major Locke taking the squadron up on its last at 1530. Seven towns were bombed with excellent results and a number of gun emplacements silenced. Lt Tomlinson, smiling, genial “Tom”, who has been with the organization since OTU days, was lost to the 512th today. He flew straight into the ground and exploded after he had been hit by flak.

There’s more to the story. According to Dad, they were strafing a wooded area full of troops. Lt Tomlinson was leader of a “flight” of 4 planes in the formation and Dad, as a new guy, was his wingman in the lead 2-ship element. According to the squadron history, Tomlinson led an attack on a gun position using the usual tactic of attacking from two directions simultaneously. The gun turned to shoot at Dad, forcing him to turn away. When he turned back, Lt Tomlinson was gone. As the history said, he went straight in, so he was gone in a second. Dad couldn’t find his leader. This is embarrassing for a fighter pilot wingman any time, but was compounded by the fact that others in the formation knew their good friend had just been killed. Dad tried to call him on the radio, but nobody would answer. As he told the story, he said the exact words that he used on the radio. They were obviously burned in his memory. I wish I could remember them exactly. He said something like, “Basher Blue Leader, this is Basher Blue 2. Say your position.” He made that call several times, but nobody ever answered him. They were probably choked up, or just upset. Eventually, the mission leader (I’m not sure which of the three missions this occurred on) led the remaining planes home, with Dad following the gaggle, not really joined up with any of them. This naturally really upset Dad, to be

treated like that, for whatever reason, when he really didn't do anything wrong. Nobody ever really said anything to him about it, and he was back in the air six days later.



On 25 November 1944, Dad flew his 4th combat mission for 2 hrs. The squadron history reads:

Nov 25 – Four eight ship missions were flown today in support of the Third Army. Our planes were in the air continuously all day. Lt Downey nosed his plane over and ruined the prop but was not injured. It happened while he was preparing to take off on the first mission. All a/c dispatched returned safely and the results in general were fair.



Publicity photo released by War Department captioned "A P-47 Thunderbolt 'rides' a tank column"

The Third Army was General Patton's tanks, completing their dash across France and the low countries. But in December the Germans counterattacked, creating the huge salient in the lines which gave the action the name "The Battle of the Bulge." The squadron history for December begins with a summary of the whole month:

December proved to be a month in which the 512th Fighter Squadron showed the quality of its men and planes. The Nazis made their breakthrough on Dec 16 and on 23 Dec the organization working with the 101st A/B Controller, attacked German Armor and concentrations of supplies, troops and guns. Six days of continuous clear weather was just the Christmas present the “Basher” Squadron wanted and got, much to the regret of the enemy. During the 31 days of Dec only 18 were flyable but in that period 49 missions were flown (one, a weather mission) for a total of 370 sorties; all of these were Ground Support for the XX Corps, the VIII Corps, and on one day, the 29th of Dec, we supported the III Corps.

The 101st Airborne Division was surrounded in Bastogne, Belgium, by German tank columns during the Battle of the Bulge. The 512th Fighter Squadron won a Presidential Unit Citation for their efforts defending Bastogne and keeping the 101st from being overrun by the Germans. When you watch those movies about the Battle of the Bulge and see the planes come and save the day when the weather breaks, it was almost exclusively Dad’s squadron and the other two squadrons in the 406th Fighter Group that directly supported the 101st. Other squadrons attacked the Germans at other places around the salient, but it was Dad’s squadron that the 101st troops could actually see breaking up the German attacks just 100 yards or so away from them.

But I’m getting ahead of the story. Dad flew his 5th combat mission for 2 hrs 15 min on 2 December 1944. From the squadron history:

Dec 2---Col Bratton, RAF Group Cap’t W. du Bake, and another RAF official visited Squadron Operations. Captain Bronson and seven other pilots took off on the first mission of the month. Lt Douglas and the second mission were up a short time later. The weather closed in a little after noon and 13 of the planes were forced to land at A-82. Three, Lts Douglas, Harkinson, and Armstrong on the second mission crashed into mountains near Moulines, France while getting compass headings from Ripsaw.

Dad was one of the 13 pilots that landed their planes at A-82, another airfield a little closer to the front. Two days later, on 4 December, he flew his plane back to A-80 (Mormelon le Grand), spending just 30 minutes in the air.

Actually 16 planes were trying to land at A-82 that day. The three pilots who hit a mountain were part of a 4-ship formation. They were flying in a very close “fingertip” formation in bad weather, getting vectors from the tactical radar controller, call sign “Ripsaw”. Visibility was so bad that they could not see the ground, and could only see each other by flying really close. In this situation, the leader flies on instruments and the others just fly formation on him. Suddenly, numbers 1, 2 and 3 hit a small mountain and number 4 just missed it. Badly shaken, number 4 (2Lt Thomas Downey) managed to transition to instrument flying and follow radar vectors to land at A-82. Flying in the number 2 position as the lead element wingman in L3-R was 2Lt Thomas Harkinson. Lt Downey as #4 was the wingman of 2Lt Thomas Armstrong. According to a map

published by a French researcher who witnessed the accident as a boy, Armstrong had actually moved his element slightly away from the lead element when his plane hit the mountain. That is probably what saved Lt Downey.



That's 2Lt William Cunningham in the foreground but in the background is L3-R, the plane Lt Thomas Harkinson was flying when he hit the mountain. Note that Cunningham is sitting in P-47 42-26860 L3-O which will later have the name Angie painted on it. Also note that the plane's right wing is painted olive drab, which probably means it was salvaged from an older P-47. (Cunningham)

1Lt Arner M. Douglas' plane had the name "Miss Isabelle IV" painted on it and 2Lt Thomas Armstrong's plane had the name "Nan" painted. Apparently the naming of the planes in this way was becoming a squadron tradition.



512th Fighter Squadron P-47s with women's names (and no pin-up art) on them



The plane Lt Douglas was flying on the 2 Dec 1944 when he hit a small mountain in bad weather. Photo was apparently taken before he had the name Miss Isabelle IV painted on it. Names were usually painted on the left forward fuselage, ahead of the cockpit. Also note no specialized unit markings on the plane yet. (Photo: Pima Air & Space Museum)



The plane Lt Armstrong was flying on the 2 Dec 1944. Note aircraft has the Group marking of three stripes, red, blue, and yellow painted on the vertical tail but does not have the yellow nose flash. Two other planes in the photo do have the nose flash. (Photo: Pima Air & Space Museum)

Dad flew his 6th combat mission for 2 hrs 15 min on 6 December 1944. The squadron history says:

Dec 6---With Captain Akin in charge, the Basher Squadron was off at 1510 with 14 A/C. Two failed to make it to the air due to mechanical difficulties. Five towns were attacked in conjunction with the XX Corps bridgehead drive near Saarlautern. Four were left burning and our men claimed one locomotive, one railroad car, and 8 M/T's damaged.



There followed some bad weather during which only a few missions were flown. Dad's next mission, his 7th combat mission for 2 hrs 15 min, was on December 16th. The squadron history reads:

Dec 16th---For the first time this month we were able to put three missions into the air. The weather was 10/10 (ed note complete overcast) with haze below but rapidly clearing over the target so that at 1025 Lt Booth and the pilots were able to take off. Captain Marall with 8 A/C took to the air a couple of hours later, followed by Captain Akin's crew at 1420. A town was bombed with fair results, troops were attacked, M/T's were strafed (sic) with no observed results and a factory destroyed.

Dad didn't fly on the 17th and then the weather closed in, as the German's launched their counterattack which became known as the Battle of the Bulge. The squadron history reads:

Dec 18 thru 22nd---Although anxious to fly in support of our troops which were putting up such a heroic fight north of Luxembourg, the organization was grounded for the period because of bad weather. At this time, all personnel were ordered to carry their arms and wear helmets. A number of night alerts were sounded when enemy a/c made their appearance near the field and we were strafed (sic) one night without damage to the installations or personnel. Lt Cox made a special trip to A-82 to get his plane so it would not fall into the hands of the enemy.

The weather broke on 23 December 1944, and Dad flew a 30-minute local area sortie, then a 2 hr combat mission (his 8th) that day. The squadron history reads:

Dec 23rd---On this first of five clear cold days we flew three missions in support of the 101st Airborne Division cut off in Bastogne, Belgium with good results. 2 Armored Vehicles, 4 guns, and 29 M/T's were destroyed during the day while 10 M/T's were damaged.

Dad flew a 2-hr mission on Christmas Day, 25 December 1944, a 2 hr 15 min mission on the 26th, and a 2 hr 30 min mission on the 27th. These were all combat missions, his 9th, 10th, and 11th. His log book for Christmas Day notes "hit A TREE STRAFING". Strafing of course involves pointing your plane at the ground and shooting while in a dive. As you start to see your first bullets hit, it's tempting to correct your aim and try to

“walk the bullets into the target.” Do this too long trying to kill another German tank and you can get too low. Dad got pretty low. He hit a tree during the pull out from his dive. The squadron history for this period reads:

Dec 25 thru 27th---As on previous days we supported the 101st A/B again and we were up on a record of 6 missions which we equaled on the following two days (the 26th and 27th). On these 18 missions large amounts of enemy armor, M/T's, guns and supplies were knocked out by the aggressive action of our pilots. All this was accomplished in spite of large flak concentrations by the enemy. On the 27th, Lt Eymer was hit by flak and while attempting to belly in, he nosed over at 500 ft., after going out of control, and went straight in.

The following excerpt from *To Win the Winter Sky* by Danny S. Parker (Combined Books, Inc. ISBN 0-938289-35-7) suggests that there was more than just the normal professional connection between the 406th Fighter Group (512th, 513th and 514th Squadrons) and the 101st Airborne Division holding Bastogne.

Mourmelon, France was home to Col. Anthony V. Grossetta's 406th Fighter Group with the XIX Tactical Air Command. As the Thunderbolt flew, from the shack city of Mourmelon-le-Grand to Bastogne in the Ardennes was not more than 80 miles. Mourmelon did have some pluses. The field was an old French military base dating back to the Franco-Prussian war and had been used in turn by the various armies that had swept back and forth across Western France. The camp was close to Reims with its famous towering cathedral, and although restaurants were off limits to American soldiers, there was no shortage of champagne with the source at Epernay. In the late fall, part of the 101st Airborne Division moved to Mourmelon at the other end of the airfield. The airmen quickly made friends with the rowdy “Screaming Eagles.” Booze was common currency at Mourmelon, and some of the 406th guys bartered the whisky-loving paratroopers a bottle of bourbon for souvenirs...A treasured bottle of bourbon could be traded for a captured Walther P-38 pistol or even a German flag. And during the extended bad weather period when no one was flying, everybody got together for raucous USO shows...Then the 101st Airborne guys had been whisked off on flatbed trucks before dawn on December 18th. Rumor had it they were headed for the front...

Somehow the 406th learned that their former GI friends were at a Belgian town called Bastogne...When the weather suddenly cleared on December 23rd, the 406th Thunderbolts were all lined up on the airfield. They were armed to the teeth.

First light. Without delay, the 406th launched one flight after another of the weighted down P-47s before the sun rose over the frosty landscape. In less than half an hour the fighter-bombers were over the battlefield...

Captain James Parker, the emissary General Quesada had sent to the encircled enclave was constantly radioing instructions from within Bastogne. Presently he sent some of the planes to the west where German soldiers were reported concentrating in the woods for an all-out assault on the town. Without

sufficient ammunition, the Bastogne garrison had been powerless to do anything about it until now. As the P-47s swarmed in, they could see the tracks of the German tanks leading into the woods. Napalm set the trees on fire and sent the Germans running. After the bombs were loosed, most of the pilots moved down to strafe the enemy...

Inside Bastogne, Captain Parker was amused to find himself now the darling of the 101st Airborne. Whereas during the days of poor flying weather, he had been ignored, now praise for the air controller was quick in coming.

The Thunderbolt's eight .50 caliber machine guns were formidable weapons, but it's a little unexpected that they could kill one of the fearsome German Tiger or Panther tanks. The tanks carried armor several inches thick, thick enough that .50 caliber bullets and even larger cannon shells would bounce off. However, when a Thunderbolt strafed a German tank on a road or frozen ground, many of the bullets would hit the ground around the tank and ricochet up into its underside, where the armor was much thinner. The bullets would pierce the underside armor and then "rattle around inside" disabling the tank. Bullets would also enter through the tank's exhaust system, destroying the engine and if the tanks' crew hatch happened to be open, it was curtains for that tank. A hail of bullets could also jam or break a tank's tracks, immobilizing it.



American fighter pilots inspect a German tank destroyed by a strafing P-47

Dad's next combat mission, his 12th for 1 hr 30 min, was on New Year's Day 1945. The squadron history reads:

Three ground cooperation missions were flown composed of 8 a/c each. On the first mission, Lt Francis flying "I" had his wing damaged by a falling bomb and was forced to land at A-82. Results for the day were fair with two tanks and one M/T destroyed and 6 tanks and SP (ed note self-propelled) guns damaged. This was on January 1st.

The planes of the 512th Fighter Squadron carried letter and number codes, with the first two characters identifying the squadron and the third character, a letter, identifying the individual aircraft. All 512th planes displayed the code "L3" on the fuselage ahead of the national insignia (stars and bars). Each plane displayed its individual identifying letter on the fuselage between the national insignia and the horizontal tail. The plane suffering damage was L3-I. To be hit by a bomb means he accidentally flew beneath another plane when it was dropping its bombs. I guess things got pretty hectic sometimes.



Andy, the 512th Squadron mascot on L3-I



512th Squadron patch featuring Andy

The next 10 days held bad weather, few missions for the squadron, and no sorties for Dad. According to Dad's logbook, his 13th combat mission for 2 hrs 30 min was on 11 January 1945. The squadron history says this mission was on the 10th:

January 10th---Major Bronson and Lt Booth each led a mission during the afternoon. The former took off at 1225 and the latter at 1530, attacking and destroying a number of M/T's and causing extensive damage to a town.

Dad's 14th combat mission for 2 hrs 15 min was on 13 January 1944.

January 13th---Captain Marall and his pilots hit a large motor convoy on the first mission of the day, with no observed results and Major Bronson's crew attacked a town, and in close support, a strong point in a woods marked by phosphorous smoke.

Dad said that many times, by direction from the local controller on the ground, they would strafe a wooded area, sometimes marked by a smoke bomb or rocket. They never knew until much later what they accomplished. Of course, the ground troops knew, but for security reasons they wouldn't tell that information over the radio.

Another important event is recorded in the squadron history for January 13th. On this day 1Lt Walker Diamanti returned to the States headed for another combat tour in the Pacific. This is important because Lt Diamanti's plane was L3-O and it was Diamanti who had the name "Angie" painted on it. However, at the time it was Diamanti's plane it did not

have the out-of-place-looking cowl section with a pinup painted on it visible in the famous photo of this aircraft.



The famous photo of 42-26860 L3-O "Angie" taken in early 1945 at Y-29 Asch, Belgium. If the date is in February, then 2Lt Fred V. Brandt was the assigned pilot. Note replacement cowl panel with pinup artwork, the name "Angie" on the nose flash pennant, and olive drab empennage with white ID stripe.

The 406th Fighter Group Association's website states:

...a letter to the 406th Association over the summer of 2006...was written by Walker Diamonti, a former pilot belonging to the 512th Fighter Squadron. Walker, retired from the Diplomatic Service and living in Washington, DC, had become aware of the interest in the stamp and model and penned the question: "Do you suppose that "Angie" is my P-47 "Angie?" A photograph taken of Walker in front of his Thunderbolt with the painted script "Angie" in clear sight followed up this simple, out of the blue inquiry. Though no numbers were visible, the position of the script spelling "Angie" lined up perfectly in all respects along the fuselage when compared to the Wyglendowski photograph.

"I named the plane after a girl I was very fond of back home, who was the daughter of friends of the family. We never married after the war but remain friends to this day," said Walker in February 2007.

Something however was missing in the Diamanti photograph: The bathing beauty nose art. Walker reported that "I didn't have that nose art on my plane, the cowl was left alone and I have no idea where it may have come from." Here is where a little deductive reasoning provides the likely missing pieces to the story.

The Wyglendowski photograph that authenticates the "Angie" and displays the bathing beauty nose art, was taken in March 1945. Diamanti had been reassigned

back to the United States in preparation for a Pacific tour of duty in February, the month before. Jack Yarger surmises that after Walker left, the plane was taken to be refitted at the 406th Depot - which was a common practice. When it came back into service at the 512th Fighter Squadron the refurbished Thunderbolt also now sported a bathing beauty on its left side cowl to go along with the scripted "Angie" already there, thanks to the guys in the shop. This then, is what is thought to have happened.



The photo Walker Diamanti mailed to the 406th Group Association, showing himself with P-47 42-26860 "Angie" with no pinup girl on the cowling.

But, according to the squadron history Diamanti actually left for the States in early January, not February, so it is easy to conclude that L3-O, still without the bathing beauty art, became Dad's plane at that time. Dad told me that he flew the plane as often as he could, but that the 406th Fighter Group commander, Col Anthony Grossetta, flew L3-O whenever he flew with the squadron. The words Dad used were, "It was Col Grossetta's plane when he flew with the squadron, which wasn't very often. The rest of the time it was my plane."

Significantly, from mid-December 1944 to 22 February 1945 Col. Grossetta was in the States on 30-days leave. So from 13 January to 22 February Dad had the plane all to himself. Did he or his crew chief somehow acquire the cowling panel with the pinup art?

And what about the olive drab vertical and horizontal tails and right wing? How did L3-O get those? A trip to Tucson, AZ to visit the Pima Air Museum revealed some remarkable information on this question. The 406th Fighter Group Association has a display there, and in one of the display cases is a series of photos showing L3-N getting a replacement horizontal stabilizer. The stabilizer, painted olive drab with white ID stripes, was obviously cannibalized off of an older Thunderbolt.



But does the photo of L3-N that I looked at and photo-copied and enlarged years ago show an aircraft with olive drab horizontals? Yes, it does. All these years I never noticed it, but another look at the photo shows a dark, not bare metal, horizontal stabilizer and a definite indication of the white stripe.



However, the appearance of L3-N did change between the time it got its new horizontal stabilizer and the time when Dad took this picture of it. Based on the snow everywhere in the pictures, L3-N's tail change occurred at Mourmelon le Grand. Dad's picture was taken later. In the intervening time L3-N had been painted with the 406th Group ID of three horizontal stripes on the vertical tail in the three squadron colors, yellow for the 512th, red for the 513th, and blue for the 514th. It had also received the group-standard scalloped nose paint in the squadron color. Apparently, L3-O got the same treatment.



512th Squadron P-47s. The nose paint was bright yellow which for some reason looks dark in this photo.

Dad had always told me that L3-N was Chin's airplane and L3-O was his. He said the reason he had a better picture of Chin's airplane than of his was because they had planned to take pictures of each other and each other's planes and then swap cameras. But after Dad got wounded, they never made the swap. Here's another picture Dad took of Chin, probably in/on L3-N. Note the OD stab with white stripes.



This of course by no means proves that L3-O also got OD tail feathers and right wing at this time. Repairs were made as damage occurred. Parts were cannibalized as planes were declared damaged beyond economical repair and written off. That this practice was

common is born out by the following photo of another 512th FS P-47 with OD rudder and elevator.



Dad flew twice on 14 January 1944, his 15th combat mission for 2 hrs 15 min and a local sortie (maybe an aborted mission?) for 1 hr 30 min. The squadron history reads:

January 14th---Lt Booth and Captain Akin led one mission each in cooperation with the III Corps, attacking tanks and gun positions. One gun position was definitely destroyed, one probably and a number of gun positions and M/T's were damaged.

Dad flew again on the 15th, his 16th combat mission for 2 hrs 20 min.

January 15th---Results were excellent on the one mission under Captain Marall's leadership. One of our A/C was destroyed by flak, this plane being flown by Lt Bacon, and another of our A/C, with Lt Mitchell at the controls, had to belly in for a landing but both pilots escaped injury. Lt Bacon was forced to bail out over friendly territory and subsequently returned safely to the Squadron. Twenty-two M/T's, ten RR cars, and eight buildings were destroyed in the day's operations as well as 15 M/T's damaged.

Dad flew again the next day, a local sortie for 1 hr 20 min. This is probably when the squadron moved its planes and began operating from airstrip A-82. A spring thaw had made the ground around A-80 a muddy quagmire and the perforated steel plank (PSP) runway and taxiways at Mourmelon le Grand were literally sinking into the mud. The

squadron moved its planes to nearby A-82 to keep operating until a more permanent move could be arranged.

Dad's next combat mission, his 17th for 2 hrs 30 min, was on the 21st. The squadron history makes it sound like a fun mission.

January 21---Although only one mission could be flown the results were gratifying. Major Bronson took off with 16 A/C under his command and destroyed a supply dump, blocked both ends of a tunnel full of railroad cars and cut the tracks in three places.

He flew again the next day, his 18th combat mission for 2 hrs 30 min.

January 22---In the biggest day of the month for this Squadron, Major Bronson and Captain Marall on their respective missions hit a M/Y (ed note railroad marshalling yard) at Clotte, Germany and a motor park. 28 M/T's, 3 RR cars, 6 buildings, a storage tank and a roundhouse were totally destroyed, and 82 M/T's and 25 RR cars were damaged.

Following a week of bad weather Dad flew his 19th combat mission for 1 hr 40 min on 29 January 1945.

January 29---Today, two Armed Recce missions got off the ground but the weather over the target was poor. On the first, Captain Booth and his crew were forced to bomb through the overcast of 10/10. The second was more fortunate and 15 M/T's were destroyed.

The squadron history goes on to describe their move from Mourmelon le Grand to Metz, France.

Jan 31, 1945, the Air Echelon left for the new base at Y-34 (Metz). In spite of icy roads the convoy reached its destination without mishap about 1600 hrs. Temporary quarters in the billet area were provided for the men that night. The move was completed 2 February 1945 when weather finally permitted the A/C to take off from A-80 and land at the new field.

Dad flew twice on 2 February 1945, his 20th and 21st combat missions. For the first mission his logbook notes (no load) which probably means no bombs. Maybe that was the mission when he flew as number two in the top cover element, when he and his element leader got in trouble for strafing AAA guns. It might also have been a mission when he took off from A-80 and landed at Y-34. Or maybe the move made it hard for them to load bombs right away. The first flight lasted 1 hr 50 min (maybe "no load" means no external fuel tank) and the second 2 hrs 15 min.

Feb 2---The flight Echelon arrived at Y-34, some taking off from A-80 on a mission and landing at the new base upon its completion. Captain Booth led the

latter group but failed to return with the Squadron. Sixteen A/C took off on the second job at the Nazis with Lt Draney flying number 1 red. The ground echelon also arrived and brought news that the squadron had been awarded a Presidential Unit Citation along with the rest of the 406th Group for smashing a huge convoy between Chateaufoux and Issouden, France on 7 September 1944 during the headlong retreat of the Nazis across France toward the Belfort Gap.

The 512th had just finished setting up and had run two missions when orders came to proceed immediately to Y-29 at Asch in Belgium. With everyone putting his shoulder to the wheel, all equipment except the little to be brought by the ground Echelon was packed and ready to go in short order. At 0700 on 6 Feb all men of the Air Echelon and their equipment were on quartermaster's and the organization's trucks ready to go. At 1630 the convoy arrived at the new base without mishap after an interesting drive through historic towns which mean much to our Squadron, such as Bastogne and Houffalise in Belgium. Tents were set up at once in our assigned area and "K" ration suppers were eaten. Feb 7th and 8th were again rainy with clearing weather on the latter day. During this period additional tents were erected for all personnel and line tents were put up. The move was completed on the 8th when the squadron planes flew in and the ground Echelon arrived.

Feb 8---Clearing weather permitted ferrying of the Squadron aircraft from Y-34 at Metz to Y-29 in Belgium. The Air echelon had arrived 2 days previous and all was in readiness when the flight echelon touched down at the new base. The planes were immediately loaded and at 1015 the only mission permitted by the break in weather took off with Major Bronson at the helm. A commendation from Brig. Gen. O F Weyland was received citing the fine job this organization has done while with the XIX TAC.

Airfield Y-29 was a vast sea of mud, punctuated only occasionally by PSP runways, taxiways, and hard stands. The living area had trees. The rest was mostly mud.



But apparently, the mud at Y-29 was not as bad as it had been at Mourmelon le Grand, because the Group remained there for two months supporting the Army's drive to the Rhine. Still, it seems to me like a lot of mud.



P-47s of the sister 513th Fighter Squadron on their PSP hardstands in the middle of the Y-29 mud.
(Photo: Pima Air & Space Museum)



The 512th Squadron area was apparently a little better. There is some grass among the mud.
(Photo: Pima Air & Space Museum)

Dad flew once on the 8th, his 22nd combat mission for 2 hrs even, then didn't fly again until the 13th. On that day he flew his 23rd combat mission for 1 hr 30 min.

Feb 13 – Two missions were flown this day. Misc M/T and RR stock was attacked with fair results. Lt Maloney was lost on the second of these. Flying Blue 2 on Lt Draney's wing, Lt Maloney failed to reassemble after dive bombing a road bridge at Zieverick, Germany and a low level straffing (sic) attack on a M/T immediately afterward in the same vicinity.



The 514th area also looked a little better, or at least a little dryer by March 1945 when this photo was taken
(Photo: Pima Air & Space Museum)



A 514th Squadron Thunderbolt taxis past more grass by the taxiways at Airfield Y-29, Asch, Belgium.
(Photo: Pima Air & Space Museum)

Dad flew again the next day, 14 February 1945, his 24th combat mission for 1 hr 45 min.

Feb 14 – Between 0845 and 1725, the Basher Sq. flew five missions of eight ships each with particularly good results tabulated on the first led by Lt O. F. Baldwin. On this mission, two M/Ys were attacked, resulting in the destruction of a live locomotive and damage to 260 rail cars. Two 512th pilots, Lt Byerly and Lt Whicker, were forced to bail out over friendly territory due to flak damage to their planes. Both returned safely.



Lt Donal (not Donald!) Whicker was another of the pilots from Iowa. He's the one in the picture describing why he did not shoot down a German plane on a particular mission. Whicker, by the way, had the highest aerial kill score in the 512th squadron with 4 confirmed kills.

Dad's next combat mission, his 25th for 1 hr 45 min, was on 16 February 1945.

Feb 16 – Two D/B and Armed Recce Missions took off during the afternoon. Results were poor.

Armed Recce, or armed reconnaissance missions involved “flying around, looking for trouble.” A D/B and Armed Recce Mission probably involved taking off loaded with 500-lb bombs with a specific target to drop them on, maybe a bridge or rail yard. Then, with the bombs gone and plenty of fuel in their tanks, they would fly around looking for targets of opportunity. The fact that results were poor suggests the enemy was not out and about. The German offensive had been stopped in its tracks by air power... and some tenacious paratroopers.

The P-47 was not a great dive-bomber. A good dive bomber, like the German Stuka or American Navy Dauntless, can make a vertical dive. Aircraft designed as dive bombers have huge “dive brakes”, surfaces that stick out into the airflow when deployed and create drag equal to the aircraft's weight. That way, in a vertical dive, a dive bomber reaches a stabilized “terminal velocity” of 100 to 150 mph. This gives the pilot time to aim and drop bombs very accurately. Also, since the aircraft is going straight down, when you release a bomb doesn't make much difference in where it hits. Dive bombing attacks like this were very accurate.



OFFICIAL NINTH AIR FORCE PHOTO
MNV

HEADQUARTERS
NINTH AIR FORCE
PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Mr. and Mrs. Vertus D. Brandt
To: East Madison Street
Toledo, Iowa

A NINTH AIR FORCE FIGHTER-BOMBER BASE, FRANCE----Second Lieutenant Donald G. Whicker, 1812 Southlawn Drive, Des Moines, Iowa, does a bit of "hangar flying" to explain to his squadron buddies, Iowans, (left to right) Second Lieutenants Richard W. Dean, 122 Bluff Street, Council Bluffs; Forest B. Claxton Jr., Fayette, and Fred V. Brandt, East Madison Street, Toledo, just why he did not shoot down a German plane he had attacked on a previous mission. The four Iowa fliers are all members of a squadron in the 19th Tactical Air Command's Thunderbolt "Raider" Group commanded by Colonel Anthony V. Grossetta.

-30-

CURRENT AS OF 21 JANUARY 1945

The P-47 was designed as a fighter, so in a vertical dive it would literally go supersonic. They probably never dove steeper than 45 degrees when they dropped their bombs, and their speed often got over 300 mph. They also had no bomb-aiming sight, just their gunsight which really wasn't much help. They decided when to release their bombs

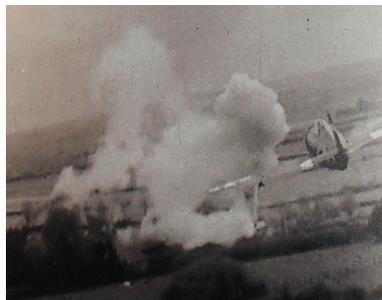
using the TLAR (that looks about right) method. Under the circumstances, a D/B and Armed Recce Mission with poor results was not too surprising.

The date 16 February 1945 may be very significant to the story of Dad and the P-47 L3-O 42-26860. A movie taken by a U.S. Army film crew and dated 16 February 1945 shows L3-O with the pinup nose art coming in to land. The name "Angie" is gone!



Photo of 42-26860 L3-O "Angie" extracted from a movie taken at Y-29 Asch, Belgium and dated 16 February 1945. If date is correct then this could be 2Lt Fred Brandt at the controls. Note that the yellow squadron cowling markings have been painted around the pinup art and the name "Angie" has been removed. Also note olive drab/gray right wing and empennage.

My first reaction when seeing this movie and the supposed date was that this didn't look like February weather. However, the War Diary of the Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada says that the weather on the continent on 16 February 1945 was bright sunshine, so the date of the movie could be correct.



Dad's 26th combat mission for 1 hr 20 min, in which he once again (hit A TRee STRAFFING) was on 21 February 1945. The squadron history for that day only records:

Feb 21 – The two missions flown were led by Capt Akin and Lt Draney.

About this time the squadron received leather covers for their Pitot tubes. The Pitot tube, named for Frenchman Henri Pitot who invented it, is literally a tube that sticks forward out of the wing and measures “total pressure.” Total pressure is the pressure you feel on the front of your hand when you stick it out the window of a moving car. This pressure is made higher than normal air pressure by the movement of the air. The difference between total pressure and normal air pressure is proportional to the square of the aircraft’s velocity. An airspeed indicator is a differential pressure gauge, calibrated in mph instead of psi, displaying the difference between total pressure measured by the Pitot tube and normal air pressure measured by a static pressure port somewhere on the side of the airplane.

All this matters because, on Dad’s next flight, on 23 February 1945, he didn’t notice that the ground crew had put one of these new leather covers on his Pitot tube. The purpose of the cover was to keep foreign objects, bugs, dirt, snow, freezing rain, etc. from plugging the tube. When not removed, however, the cover very effectively disabled Dad’s airspeed indicating system. He flew around for about 15 minutes trying to use the Pitot tube heater (used to melt ice and boil off moisture that may block the tube) to try to burn off the cover. No luck. He landed again without any airspeed indicator, not an easy task with an airplane loaded with bombs and a full load of fuel. His next flight, his 27th combat mission on that same day, was shorter than most, only 1 hr 45 min. That suggests to me that he landed, removed the cover, and took off again to join the squadron on one of their most exciting days of combat.

Feb 23 – The Basher Squadron received a commendation from the XXIX TAC for the fine job accomplished on this date. Lt Baldwin took off with the first 12 ships at 0815. On the mission, Lt Claxton scored two direct hits on the abutment of a railroad bridge while Lt Baldwin cut the tracks on the approach. Shortly after, a train and 40 cars loaded with new M/Ts was spotted. Diving to the attack, Blue and Yellow Flights put six bombs directly on the target with the balance (ed note probably 10 bombs) near misses. A through (sic) strafing (sic) followed completing the job in which the entire train and its cargo of 80 M/Ts were either destroyed or damaged severely. The second mission under the leadership of Capt Akin was equally successful. Attacking a M/Y with 125 railroad cars on its sidings, the squadron put all its bombs in the yard but two, cutting the main track in three places and destroying or damaging 61 box cars. To finish off right, 12 light flak guns were also destroyed as well as a number of M/Ts. Not to be outdone, Capt Marall took the last mission up at 1400 and achieved even better results. A live engine and fifty cars loaded with M/Ts, tanks and ammo were located in a M/Y. The squadron put all their bombs in the yard with six direct hits on the train. Two ammo cars exploded, the tracks were cut in many places, 25 RR cars were destroyed, 20 M/Ts and Armored Vehicles were definitely destroyed as was the locomotive. One bomb demolished a building in the yard and when the runs had all been made a number of fires were burning. A locomotive and eight RR cars were strafed (sic) in the vicinity, stopping the train and damaging the cars. Before returning to base, a motor park was located

containing about 200 M/Ts. Since all bombs had been expended a through (sic) strafing (sic) attack was carried out resulting in at least 100 M/Ts damaged.

The next day, 24 February 1945, Dad flew his last combat mission for 2 hrs.

Feb 24 – Flying three Armed Recce Missions, the 512th attacked rail and motor traffic with fair success. On the second mission of the day, Lt Braxton (ed note, probably Lt Claxton) was reported missing in action. Lt Claxton was flying number 3 position (ed note I think Dad was number 4, Lt Claxton's wingman) in Blue Flight on an Armed Recce Mission over Germany. A live train was spotted at Wohwinkle, just east of Dusseldorf and Blue Flight went in to bomb. There was an explosion in the yards when someone in blue flight bombed. Lt Claxton called in to squadron leader Capt Wm Anderson, Jr just after his bomb run to say he was hit and was bailing out. His plane was on fire and Lt Yarger called to him to bail out; he answered that he wanted to get above the clouds. Above the overcast the plane started to nose down at about 2,000 feet and a chute was seen to open. Capt Anderson saw the aircraft and chute on the ground about 100 yards apart and believes he is all right. He landed about 4 miles north of Wohwinkel, Germany.

It's still not clear exactly what happened. Dad's log book says (hit By 40mm – Hospitalized) and in later years, after discussing the event with the other pilots involved at squadron reunions, he wrote below that (Ammo TRAIN Exploded – STRAFING). In any case, Dad and his element leader, Lt Claxton, were badly damaged by flying debris, shrapnel, and AAA fire. More about this in a moment.

Dad also used to tell a story about flying over a solid deck of clouds and then letting down through them and not knowing exactly where you were. On one occasion they broke out of the clouds and found themselves over the German city Mannheim. Mannheim was notorious among AAF pilots for its massive, accurate flak (AAA) batteries. For this reason, they avoided flying over the city, especially in the daytime. It was easy to identify from the air because of a characteristic bend in the large (Rhine?) river flowing through it. On that particular day, they let down through the clouds and found themselves over a large city at low altitude. Then, to their horror, they noticed the characteristic bend in the river that told them they were flying over the deadliest flak batteries in Europe! Oddly, not a single gun fired at them. Maybe the low clouds had lulled the gun crews into thinking they wouldn't see any action that day.

On 24 February 1945, on the other hand, the squadron let down through the clouds and found themselves over Vohwinkle, a small German railroad town near Dusseldorf. They found a train in the marshalling yard. This was a "live" (moving) train, so the first task was to stop it. This was usually done by strafing the engine until it gave off a huge plume of steam signifying they had ruptured its boiler. Once stopped, the train was a much easier target for bombs and more strafing. As Dad told the story, he and Claxton had dropped their bombs and, along with the rest of the squadron, were strafing various cars in the train. It turned out the car he was strafing was full of ammunition, and it blew up

right in front of him. Keep in mind he had hit a tree while strafing just three days prior, and you can guess he was pretty low over the train car when it blew up!



This gun camera photo shows Capt Raymond Walsh of the 513th Squadron flying through the explosion of an ammunition-laden truck he was strafing. Imagine the explosion from the ammunition-laden train car Dad was strafing with maybe ten times as many explosives! (USAF)

The force of the explosion and impacts of flying debris badly damaged Dad's Thunderbolt, bending his propeller back so that it dented the front of the engine cowling, shattering his windscreen and showering his face with glass. Now it happened that Dad wasn't wearing his flying goggles. Goggles were mandatory in the days of open-cockpit biplanes, but with the advent of enclosed cockpits this was a practice left optional to individual pilots. In the humid winter weather goggles tended to fog or even frost over, so many pilots didn't wear them. I made the same decision, for the same reasons, when flying F-4E Phantom II fighter-bombers in the humid air of the Philippines. I usually flew with my helmet visor up.

When his windscreen shattered, several pieces of glass entered Dad's eyes, cutting the cornea and iris muscles in one eye, filling his eyes with blood which immediately dried in the wind blast. Dad was blind!

Dad told me that the plane he was flying that day was L3-G, a fairly new P-47D with a bubble canopy. I'm reasonably certain that the following photo shows that plane. The ID code is only partially visible, and it could be "C", "S", or "G". But, I have identified other aircraft that were contemporaries of this one which were coded L3-C and L3-S. As

I mentioned before, the individual aircraft ID code was unique within a squadron, so I'm pretty sure this aircraft has to be L3-G.



Somehow, Dad instinctively pulled out of his dive and managed to keep the plane upright flying by the "seat of his pants." He probably climbed back up through the clouds. Visibility didn't matter since he couldn't see anyway. He called for help on the radio and someone came over to tell him what to do to keep the wings level, and then to turn towards base. That still wouldn't help him land, but it got him headed toward home base. Meanwhile, Claxton bailed out.

Dad's leader discussed with him and with the folks on the ground what to do. Dad spit on his fingers and finally got sufficient moisture to rub enough blood out of one eye so he could see a little. With this limited vision, he proposed to land at Y-29.



The temporary PSP runway at Y-29 was lined with parked airplanes undergoing maintenance. When alerted of the emergency landing, ground crews cleared out from around the planes and hurried away from the area to watch from a safe distance. Dad made a good landing, then discovered that he had a blown tire and no brakes! With the extra rolling friction of the blown tire, the plane drifted toward the side of the runway even though Dad was applying full opposite rudder. This was critical, because if the bad wheel ran all the way off the steel planks into the mud, it would pull Dad's Thunderbolt off the runway and into the parked planes, some probably loaded with bombs and ammunition for the next mission.



Somehow, full opposite rudder and pumping the brake on that rudder pedal got the P-47 to turn ever so slightly, and it began drifting back toward the center of the runway. But now, the end of the runway was coming up and the 6-ton Thunderbolt was still moving very fast. If he ran off the end, the wheels would sink into the mud, and the plane would likely flip over its nose onto its back, pinning Dad and smothering him in the mud.



A Thunderbolt that flipped over after running off the end of the runway into soft terrain. (Photo: USAF)

Dad slowed down as much as he could, waiting until he had almost reached the end of the runway, then he reversed the rudder pedals, pushing the pedal and brake on the side of

the blown tire. This caused the plane to pivot on the wheel with the blown tire, swinging around in what's known as a ground loop. This dissipated most of the rest of the plane's speed, so that Dad could safely steer it off the runway, coming to a stop in the mud.

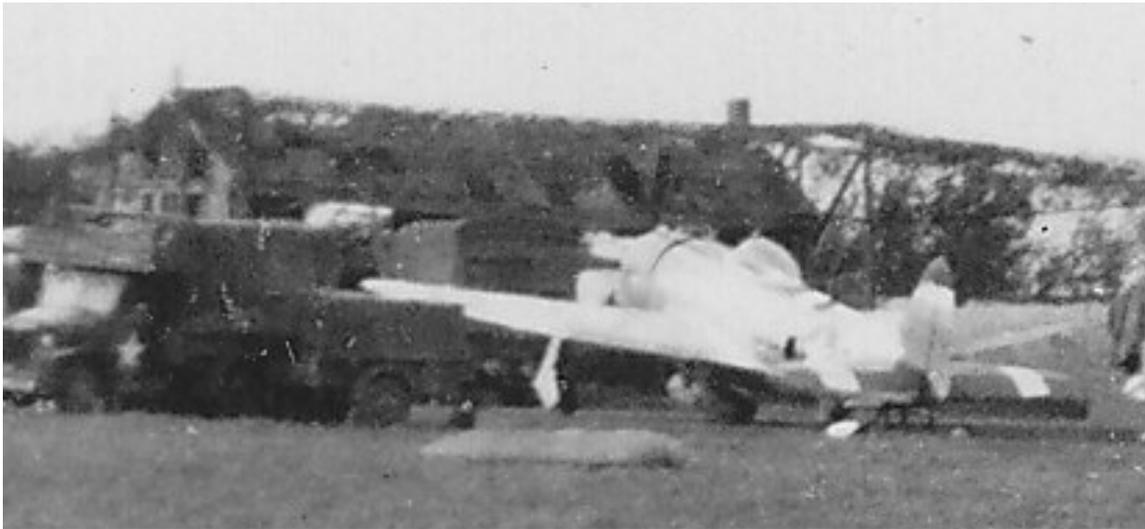
That was the end of the war for Dad. He spent the rest of the war in a convalescent hospital, waiting for his eye to heal. His next flight was on 15 May 1945, just a few days after the war ended in Europe.

But what happened to Dad's plane L3-O? From a French website containing a database compiled on a large number of P-47s comes this entry:

42-26860	P-47D-27-RE	406 th	512 th	L3-O	"Angie" Accidenté à l'atterrissage le 09/03/45 à Asch/Y-29 (Bel.) – Pilote : George Y. Chin
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Source: <http://pagesperso-orange.fr/p-47.database/Database/42-2xxxx.htm>

Translation: L3-O "Angie" was involved in a landing accident or rough landing on 9 March 1945, and the pilot was George Y. Chin! The accident report states that the aircraft landed at high speed, experienced partial brake failure, then ran off the runway and nosed up, damaging the prop and engine. But that was probably not the end for the plane. A photo obviously taken later in the spring and most likely at airbase Y-94 Handorf, Germany shows what is most likely 42-26860 with olive drab wing and tail.



42-26860 at Y-94 Handorf, Germany in April or May 1945. Note olive drab right wing and empennage. (Photo: Pima Air & Space Museum)

So how did L3-O get a pinup girl on her cowling? Pinup girl art was not unheard of in the 512th as shown in the following two photos. But the pinups on those planes are superimposed over the squadron-standard yellow nose marking. The pinup on Angie in the photo looks out of place, as if that cowling panel came from another aircraft.

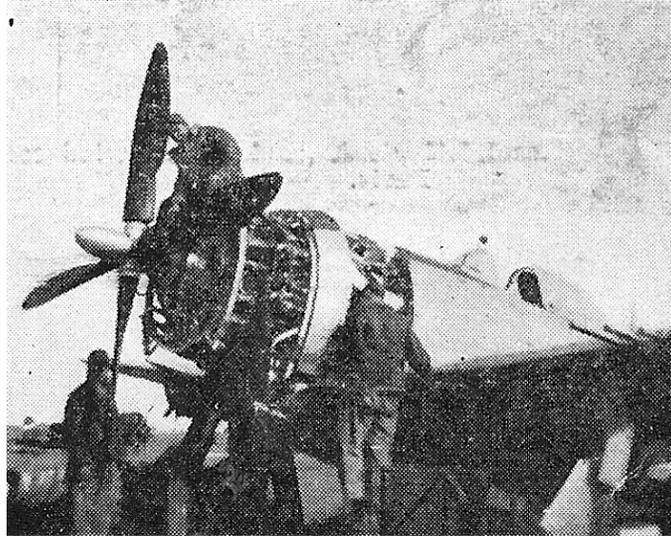


George Y. Chin reclining on the nose of L3-U "Little Ann." Note pinup art superimposed over cowling flash.



L3-Q "Gladys".

The 406th Fighter Group Association's website is probably right. Maybe after the nose-up landing or some other damage, Angie was sent to the depot for repair and came back with the pinup-girl cowling piece. Those cowling pieces were easily removable with quick-release latches, and were frequently removed for the always-necessary engine maintenance. It would have been easy for the depot boys to substitute the pinup-girl panel for a damaged one on L3-O. But where would the depot likely get a cowling panel painted that way?



A removed cowling panel (note quick-release latches open) and a P-47 with cowling panels removed

There were at least two readily-available sources for cowling pieces with black ID rings and pinup girl art. One was the 406th Group itself, which used the black cowl rings on bare-metal Thunderbolts in 1944 before adopting the squadron-colored flashes. Pinup art occasionally appeared on those.



512th Squadron Black Cowl Rings with Pinup Girls...and Dad

A second source was the 366th Fighter Group, which shared Y-29 with the 406th Group and which moved with them to Y-94 at Handorf, Germany. Many aircraft in the 366th carried the black ID rings throughout the period and their aircraft often sported pin-up girl art. It would not be at all surprising if the two units shared a depot function for their similar aircraft or that they at least shared or exchanged cannibalization hulks and parts.



Similar Pinup Girl on 50th Group P-47 and 366th Group Black Cowling Ring with Pinup Girl

That the two units felt free to swap cowl pieces is apparent from the following post-war photo of a 366th Group P-47 sporting what is obviously a 513th Squadron cowling.



Getting back to the 406th Group as a source for the errant cowling panel, here is a photo of Col Grosetta in front of “his” aircraft circa June 1944. Note the individual aircraft ID code “G” and the out-of-place OD cowling panel on this airplane. Since the unit’s maintenance troops would take special pride in the Group Commander’s aircraft, I think it’s likely that OD panel was placed on the aircraft just long enough to take the picture

(maybe to hide a pinup normally carried there). The panels were apparently easily removed, installed, and interchanged.



But wait. A closer look at the data plate stencil on the aircraft in this photo reveals that it is 42-26860! This may give a hint about when the aircraft was badly damaged and repaired. The right wing and empennage on the aircraft in the June 1944 photo are bare metal. Also the propeller is a Hamilton-Standard Hydromatic type, the kind installed at the factory. But in the the November 1944 photo the right wing is olive drab and in the December '44/January '45 photo the propeller is a Curtiss-Electric type. Most likely, the plane was badly damaged some time between June '44 and November '44 and had wing, tail, and propeller replaced at the same time.

And now to the original question: Is that my father's P-47 on the postage stamp? New evidence makes me absolutely convinced that it is. A little while after I started writing this monograph, my younger brother Chuck found a billfold in a box of Dad's belongings. On a whim, he opened the billfold searching for the long-missing photo. And there it was!



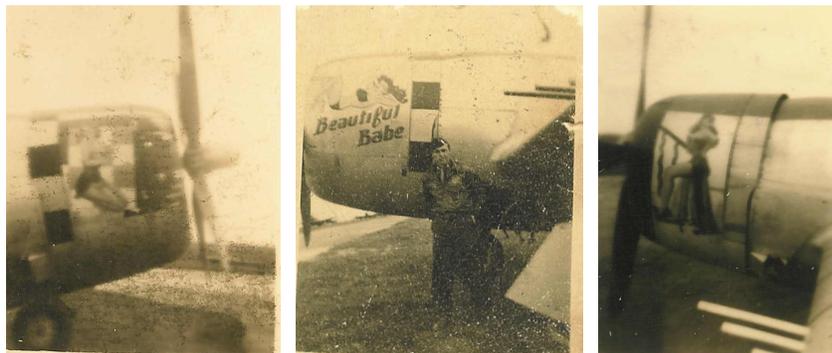
The photo is shown actual size. No wonder I was frustrated at trying to read the serial number. But enlargement reveals the convincing details:



Though worn from 50 years in Dad's billfold and more than one trip through the washing machine, the photo clearly shows OD tail feathers with white stripes on the horizontals. I had remembered it wrong or just never noticed the unique OD tail in that tiny photo. There can be no doubt. Dad's Thunderbolt is the one depicted on the postage stamp. Incredible!

As well as I can tell, the pinup girl could be present. The photo quality makes it difficult to say for sure. The pattern of dark and light patches at the place where the pinup should be fit the possibility of it still being there. Intriguingly, Dad's photo appears to show a bare-metal rudder. There must be yet a little more to this story.

Here's another intriguing possibility. Dad apparently always had an affinity for pinup-girl nose art, as evidenced by almost half the photos he took during that time. You've seen some of them earlier in this document. Here are some more.



It does not seem at all unlikely to me that it was Dad who arranged to have the nose art cowling panel placed on his aircraft. If the 16 February 1945 date on the movie is correct, then it is almost a certainty. I suppose we'll never know.

In any case, this to me is an amazing discovery. What an incredible coincidence! What a fitting tribute to a great man who I am proud to call my father. I miss him.