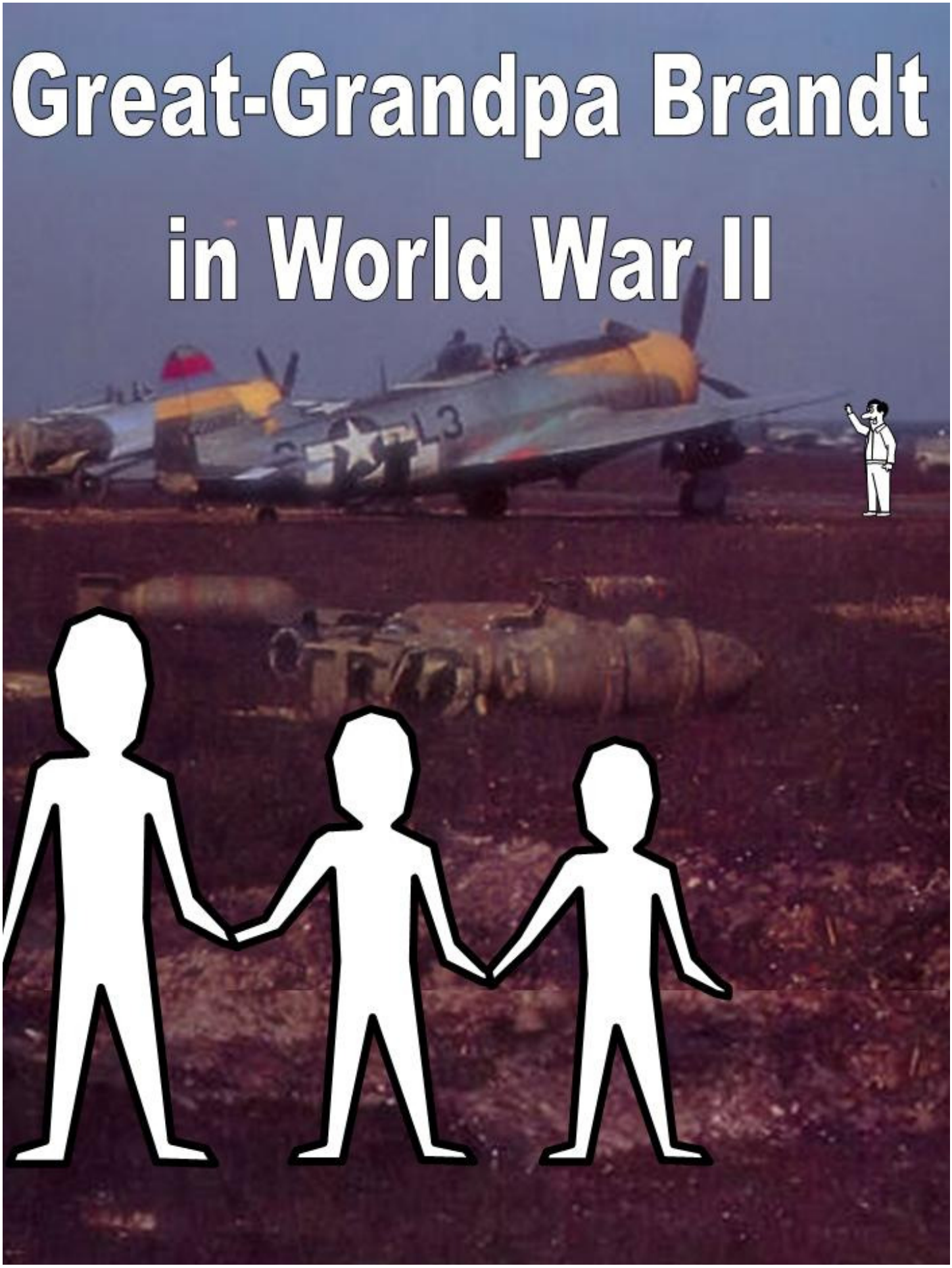
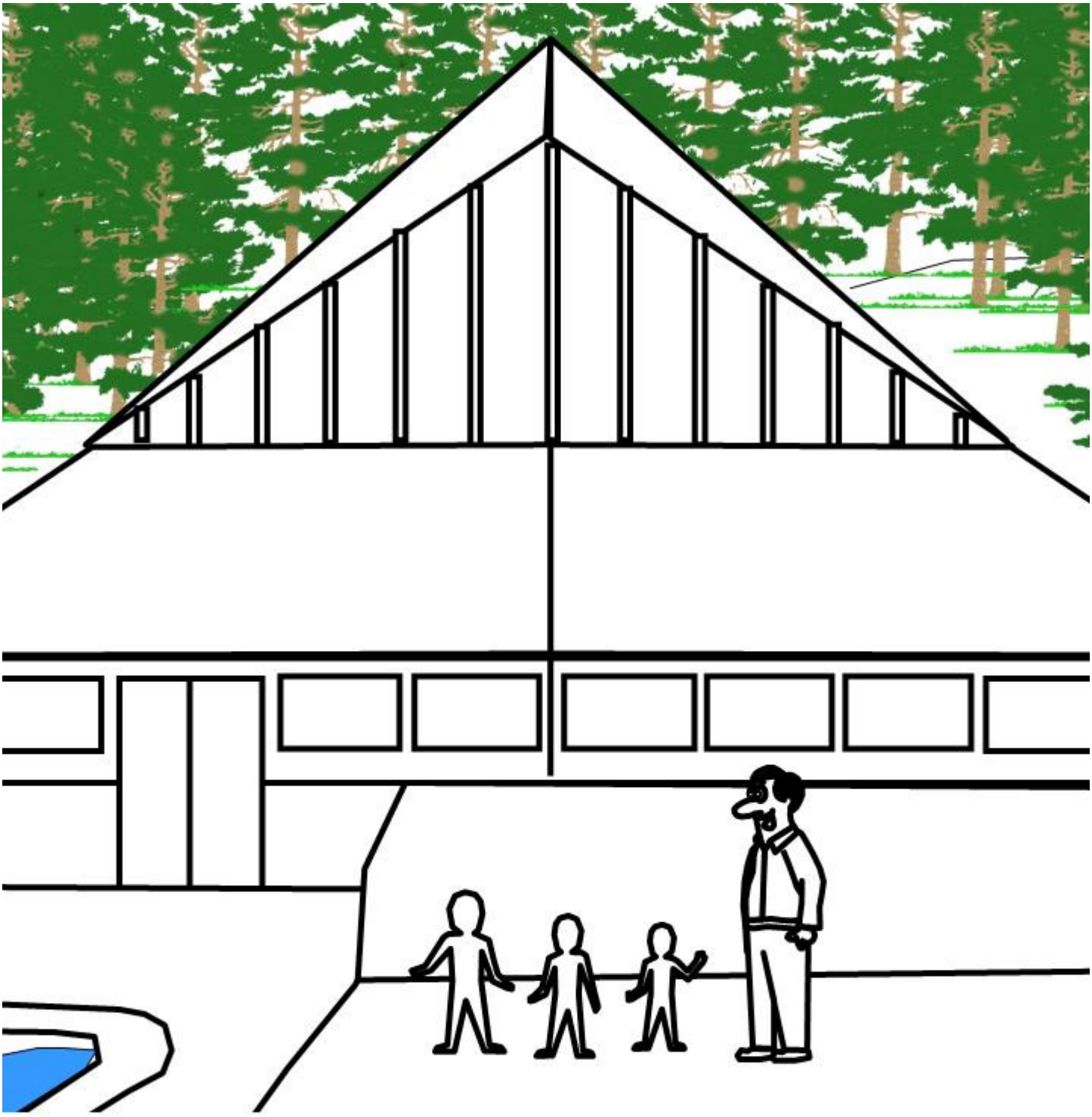
Great-Grandpa Brandt in World War II

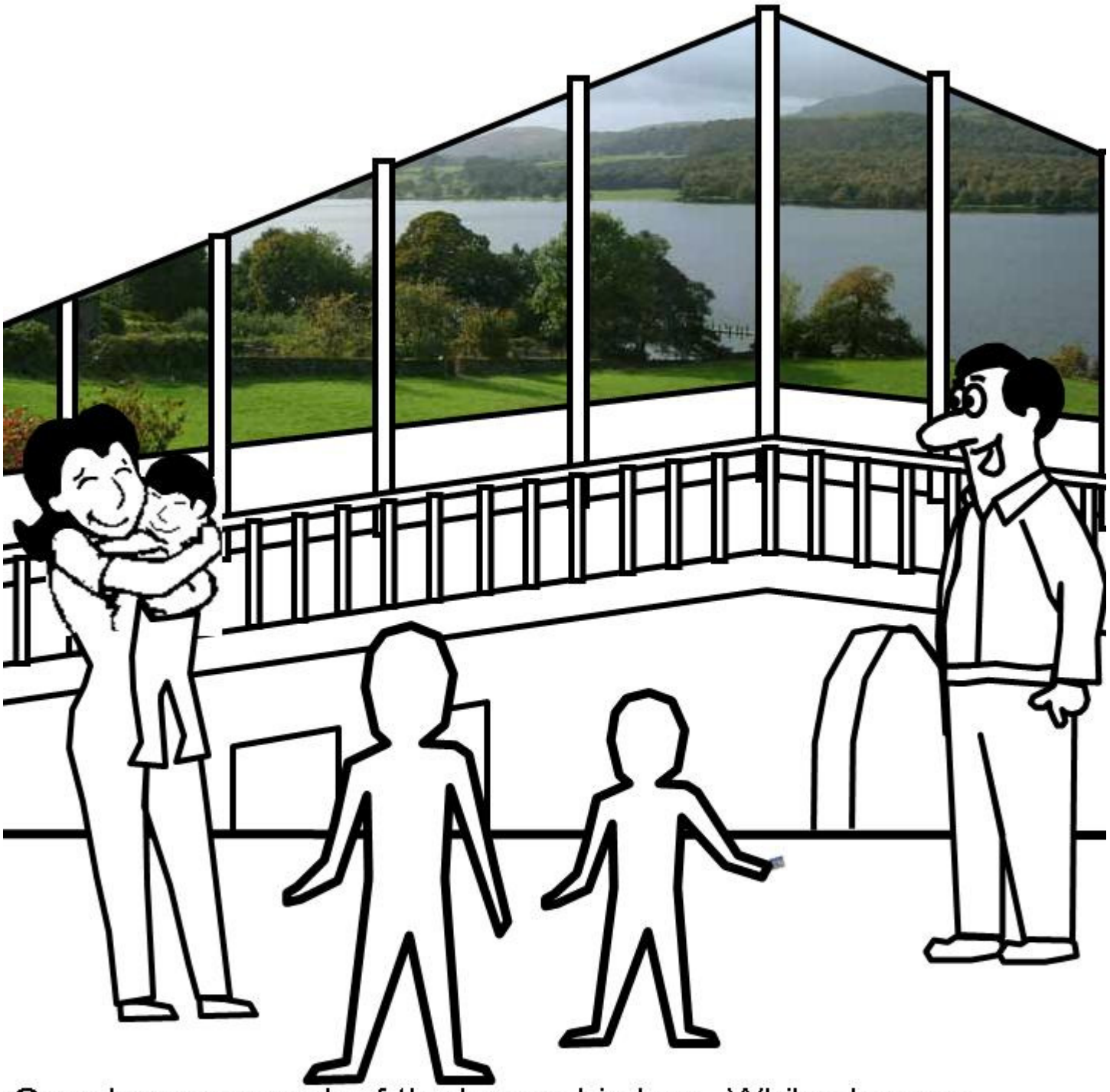




Adam and Lincoln and Peter came to visit Grandpa at his dream house in the woods..

“Hi boys!” said Grandpa. “It’s so good to see you!”

“Hi Grandpa!” said Adam and Lincoln and Peter all together.



Grandma gave each of the boys a big hug. While she was hugging Peter, Lincoln found something.

"What's this?" said Lincoln.

"It's a stamp," said Adam.

"It's an airplane stamp," said Lincoln.

"It's a very special airplane stamp," said Grandpa. "The painting on the stamp shows the fighter plane my father, your Great-Grandpa Brandt, flew during World War II."

"What's World War II?" asked Peter.

"It was a big war fought all over the world a long time ago," said Grandpa. "My father was a fighter pilot who fought in that war by flying the plane shown on the stamp."

“Your daddy flew a P-47 Thunderbolt?” asked Adam, reading the words on the stamp.

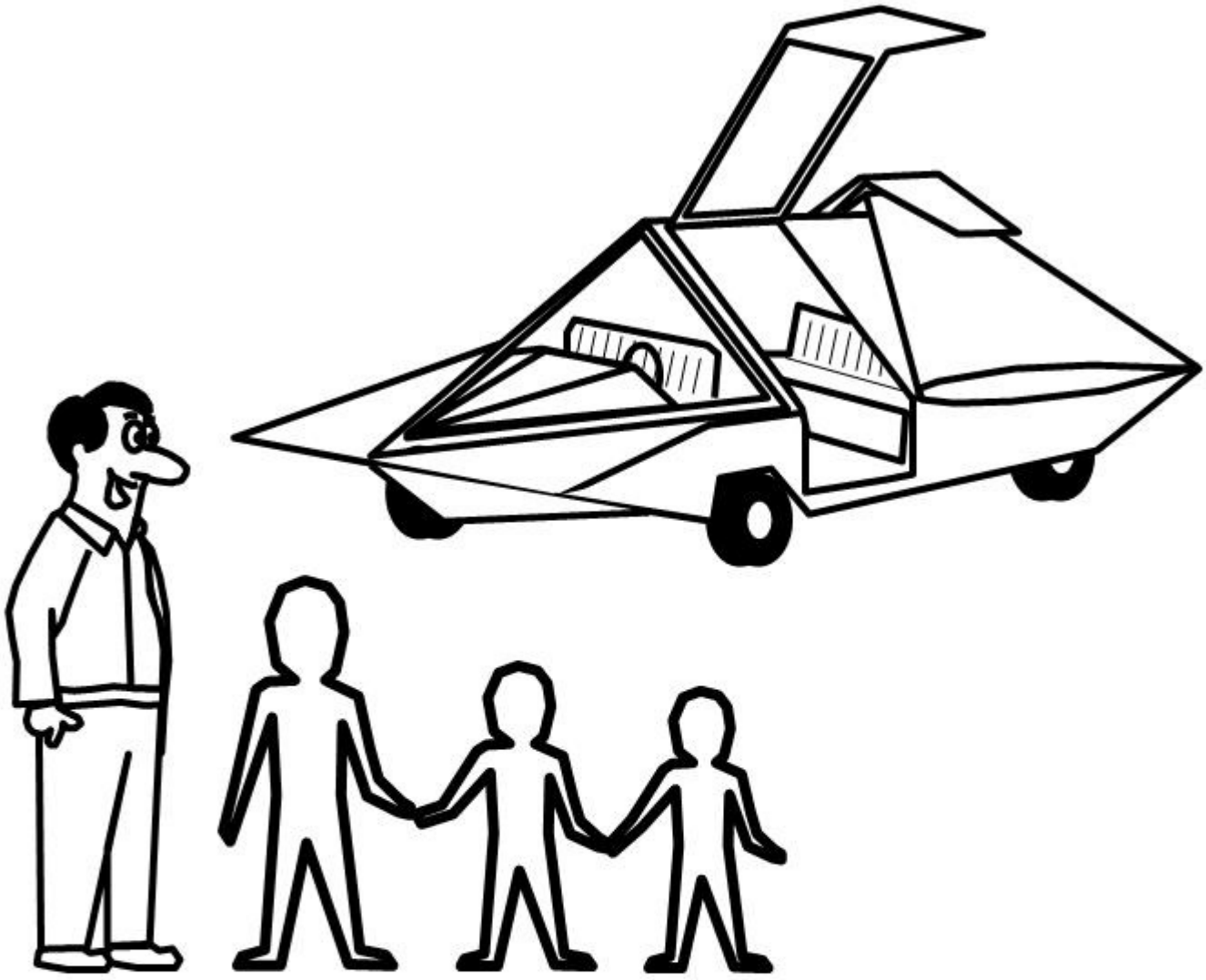
“Yes he did,” said Grandpa, but I believe he flew the exact P-47 shown on that stamp. I believe that was his plane.”

“They made a stamp of your daddy’s airplane?” asked Lincoln.

“Yep,” said Grandpa.

“Are you sure?” asked Adam.

There’s one way to find out,” said Grandpa. “Come with me.”



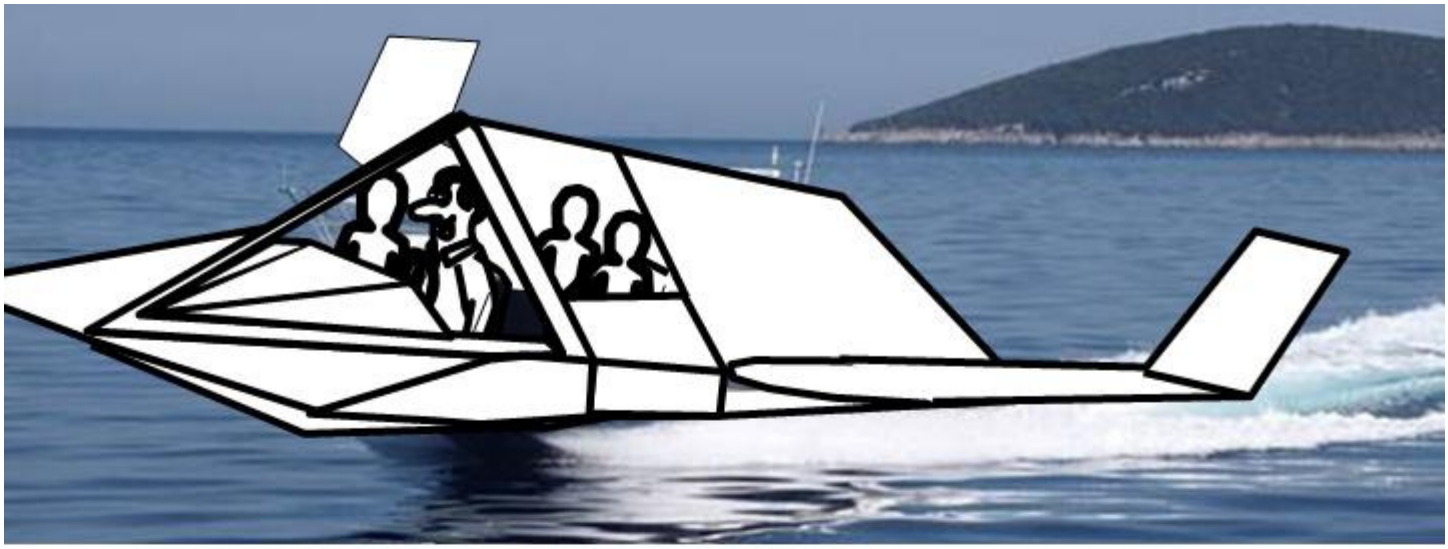
Grandpa led the boys to the garage, where they saw his amazing all-in-one car.

“I like your all-in-one car,” said Adam.

“Are we going for a ride?” asked Peter.

“Yes,” said Grandpa. “I added a new feature to my car that will help us find out if that really is my father’s airplane on that stamp.

“Yay!” said Adam and Lincoln and Peter all together.



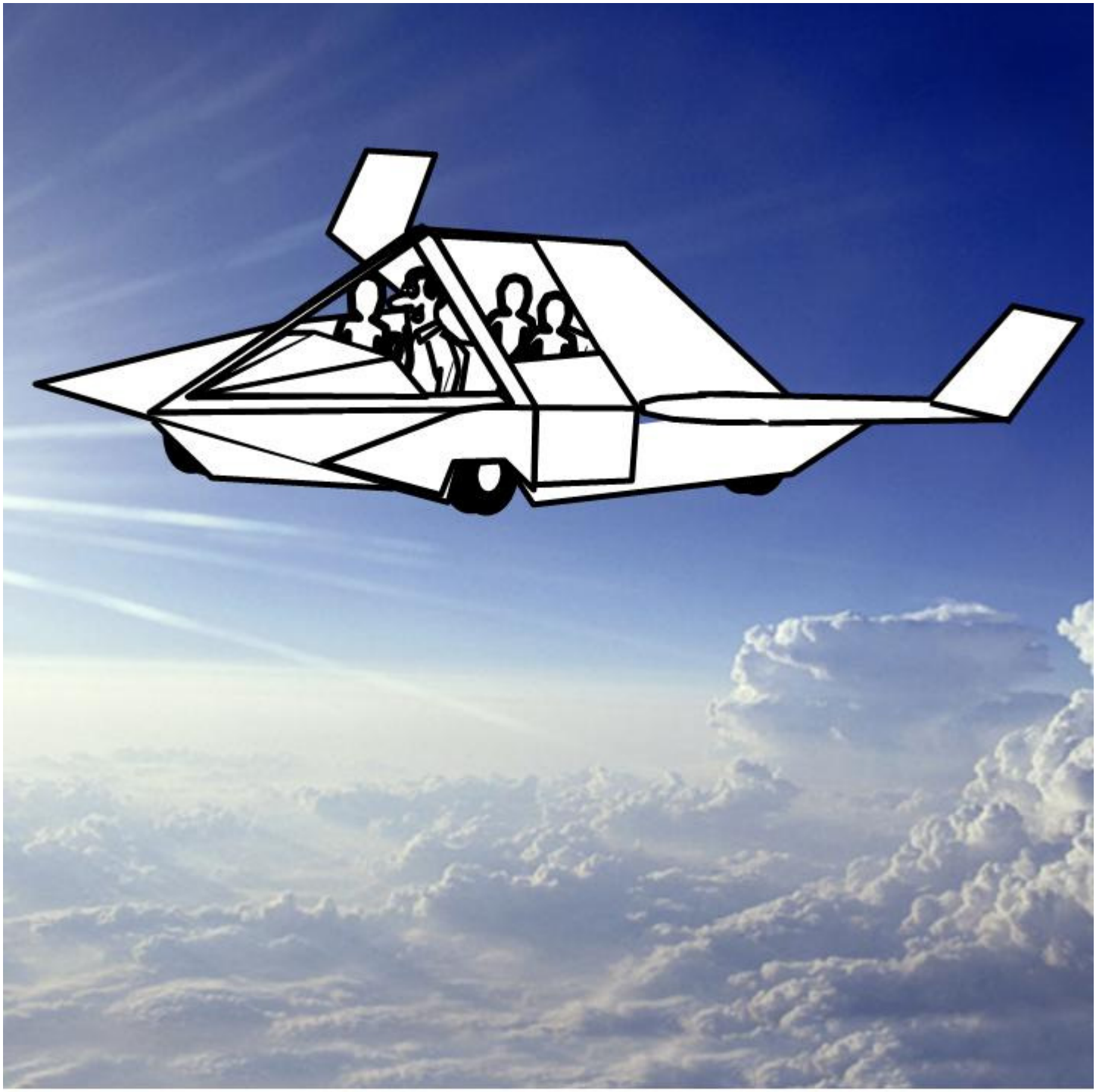
Everyone got into Grandpa's all-in-one car and he drove them down to the lake. Then he drove into the lake! Soon the car was scooting across the water.

Grandpa pushed a button and the car's wings folded out. Now it was an airplane! Grandpa pushed a lever and the car scooted even faster across the water. Then it jumped up into the sky!

Lincoln said, "Cool!"

Peter said, "Fun!"

Adam said, "Here we go again!"



Grandpa flew his all-in-one car high above the clouds. He pushed some buttons and moved some switches.

Lincoln said, “I feel funny.”

Grandpa said, “That’s because my all-in-one car is now a time machine. We are moving back in time while we move through the air!”

Soon Grandpa flew his all-in-one car-and-time-machine back down through the clouds and landed at an airfield.

Adam said, "Look! There are lots of airplanes here like the one on the stamp."

Grandpa said, "We are at Airfield Y-29 near Asch, Belgium in the year 1945. The airplanes here belong to the 406th Fighter Group, my father's group. My father and his airplane should be here somewhere."

Lincoln said, "Wow!"

Peter said, "Cool!"

All the airplanes had bright-colored noses and red, blue and yellow stripes on their tails. Grandpa drove his all-in-one car-and-time-machine over by one of the planes that had a yellow nose.

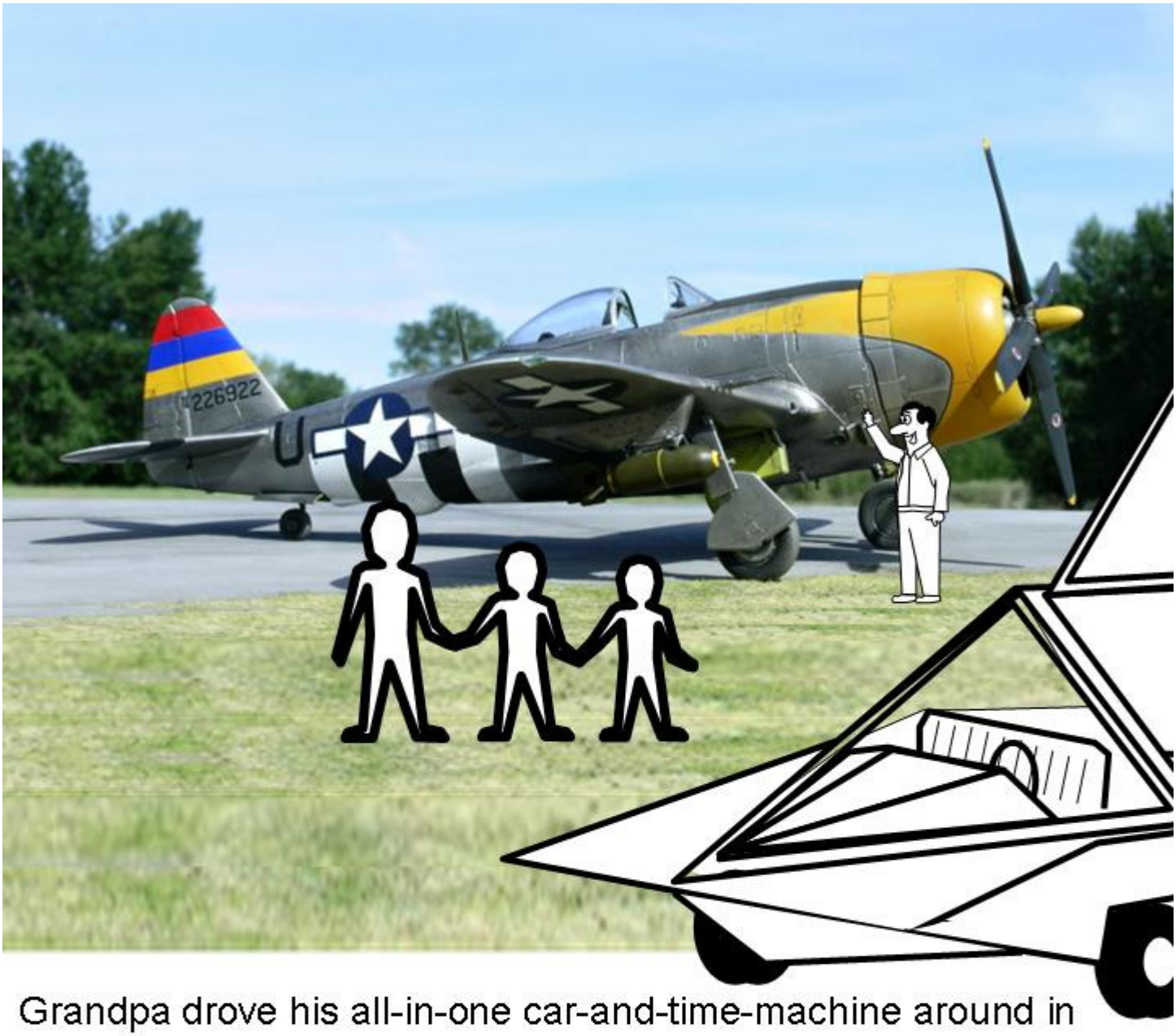
Adam said, "Is that your daddy's airplane?"

"No," said Grandpa.

"How do you know?" asked Lincoln.

Grandpa said, "Each plane has letters on the side. All the ones in this parking area have the letter L and the number 3. That means they are in the 512th Fighter Squadron. The 512th is my father's squadron. The other squadrons in the group are the 513th and 514th. The planes in the 512th have yellow noses. The noses of the planes in the 513th are red and those in the 514th are blue.

"Every plane has one letter painted on it that no other plane in the squadron has. This plane has the letter U and my father's plane has the letter O."



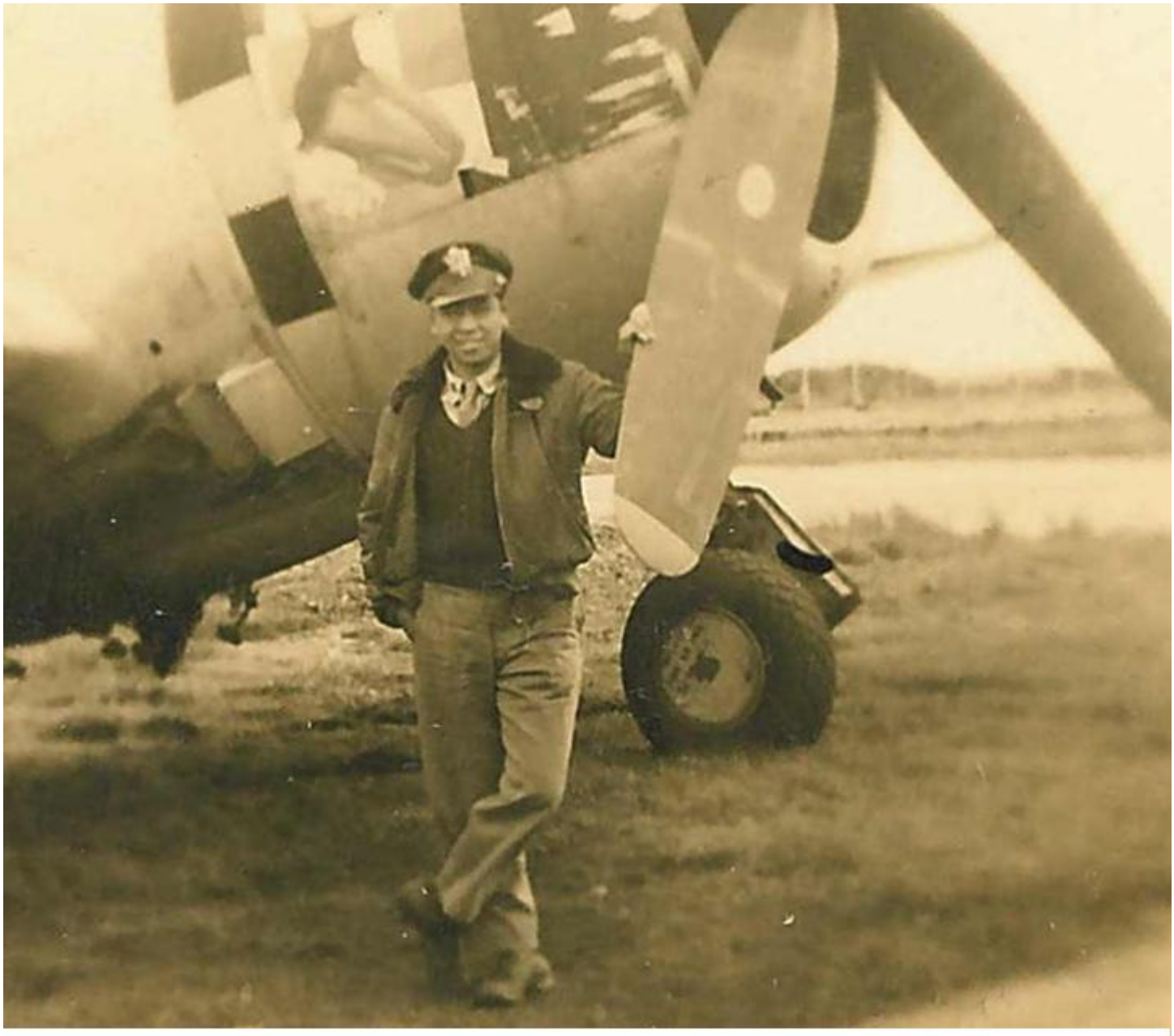
Grandpa drove his all-in-one car-and-time-machine around in front of the plane with L3-U painted on it. He got out and walked over to the plane.

Grandpa said, "There are so many planes. Maybe we can find someone who knows where my father's plane is parked."

The boys got out and followed him.

"Stay away from that plane!" someone shouted.

Adam and Lincoln and Peter jumped. They were scared!

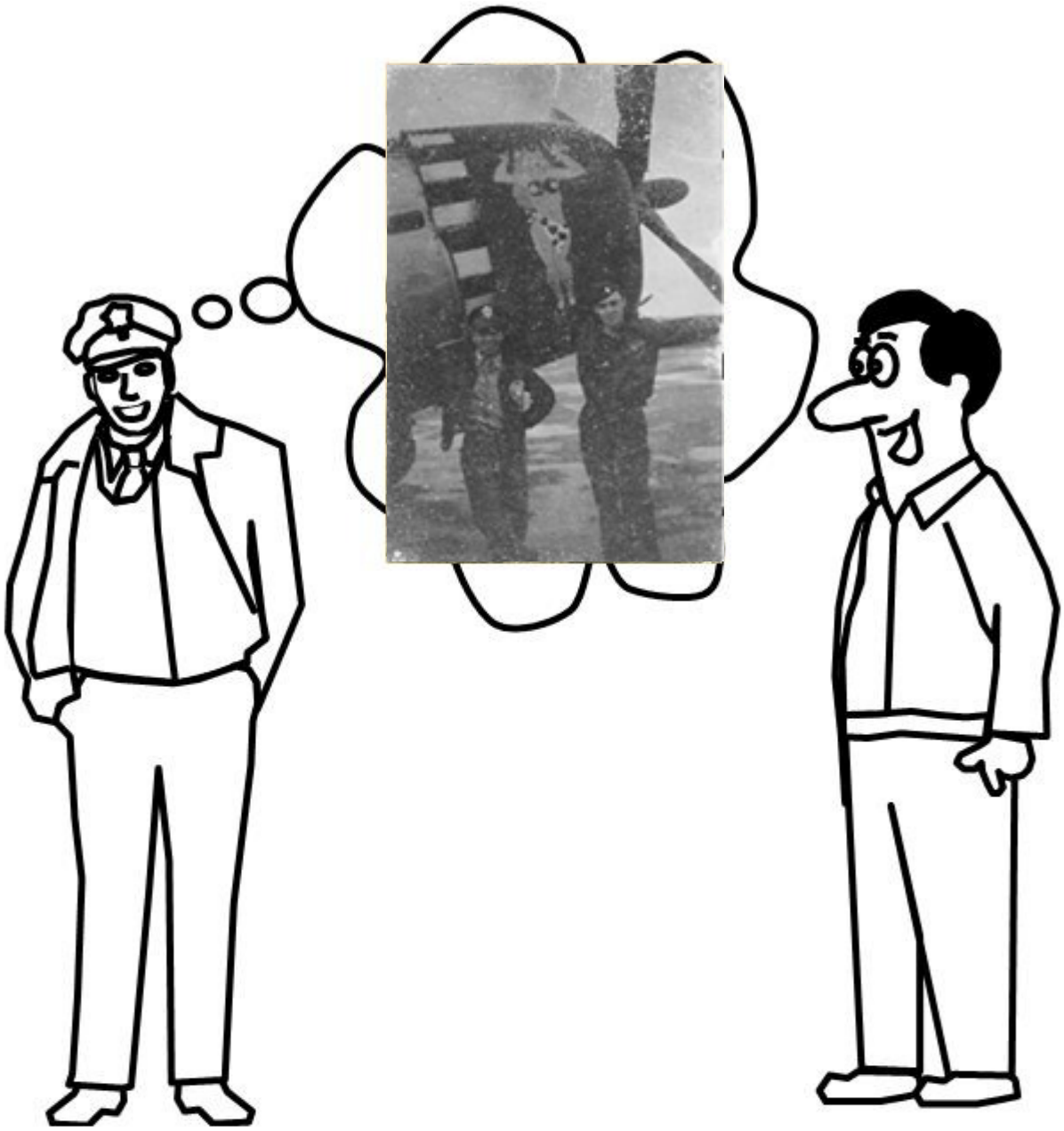


Grandpa and the boys looked in the direction of the voice. A man was standing by another airplane. He had been watching them.

He spoke. "What are you guys doing here? Don't you know there's a war going on?"

"We're looking for Fred Brandt. Do you know him?" Grandpa said.

"Know him?" said the man. "He's my best friend!"



"Best friend?" said Grandpa. "That's great! Do you know where he is?"

"Yes, best friend," the man said. "I'm a fighter pilot too. Whenever we could, we flew together. We did everything together. But a month ago he was wounded. He's in a hospital in London now, I think."

"Oh yes, wounded. In the eye, right?" Grandpa said.

"That's right," said the man. "How did you know? Who are you?"

Grandpa said, “My name is Steve, and these guys are Adam and Lincoln and Peter. We are relatives of Fred’s. We came from the States to see him.”

“Nice to meet you, Steve,” the man said. “My name is George. George Chin. I’m sorry you missed Freddie.”

“That’s OK,” said Grandpa. “Maybe we can visit him in London. But we really came here to see his plane. Do you know where it is?”

“Yes, I do,” said George. “I’m going to fly it in a few minutes!”

“His plane is right over there,” said George. “Come with me and I’ll show it to you.”

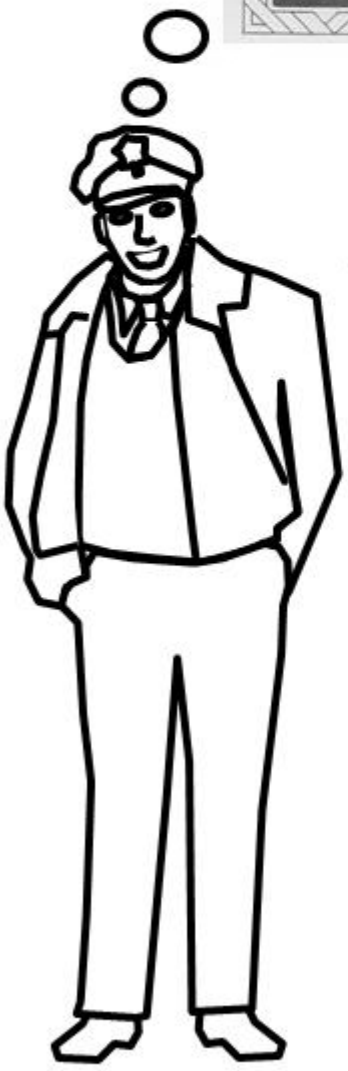
Grandpa and the boys followed George toward the airplane. They were very excited.

“Do you like being a fighter pilot?” asked Adam.

“Yes,” said George, “and so did Freddie.”

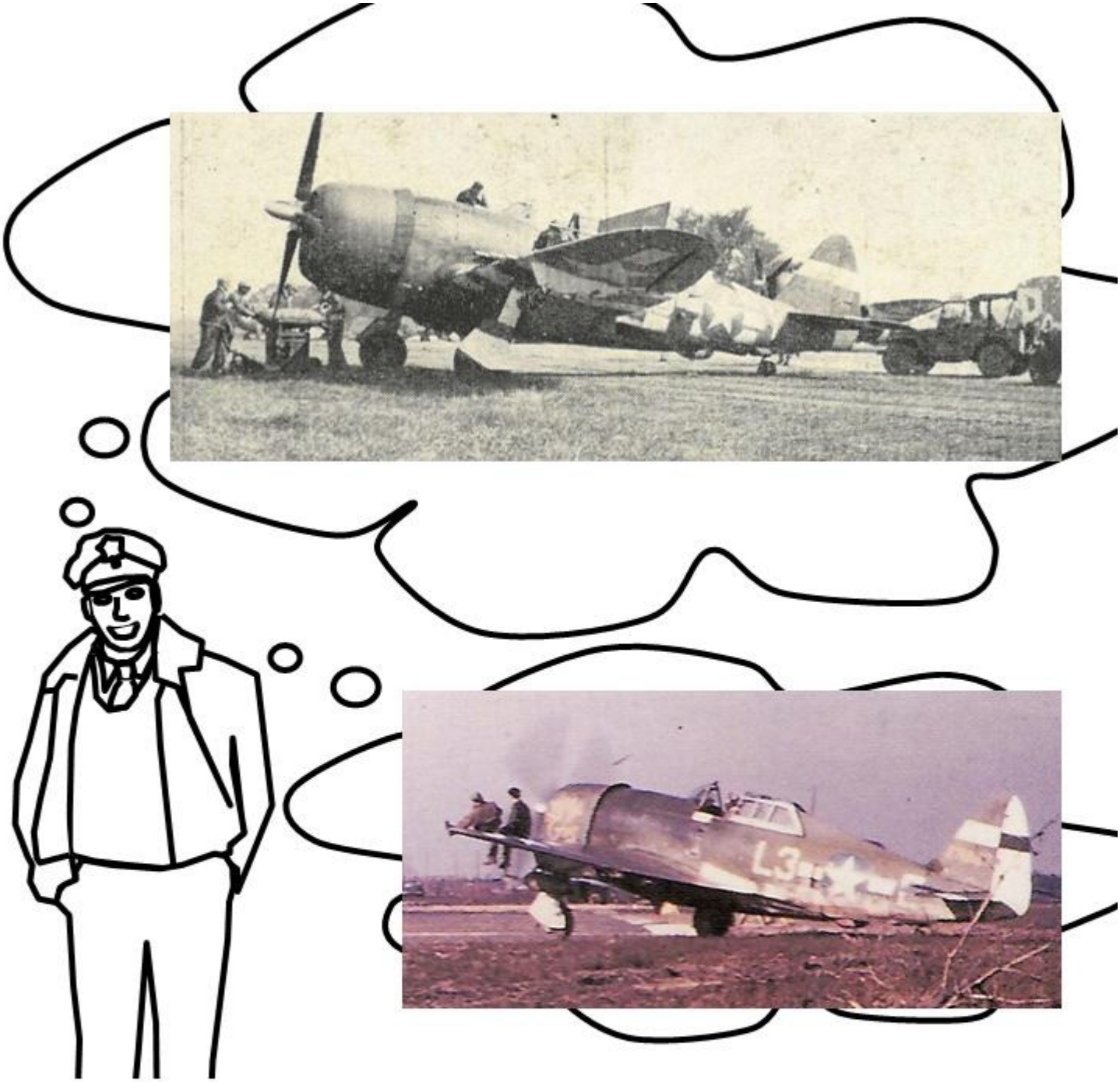
“How did he get wounded?” asked Peter.

“That’s a complicated story,” said George. It will be easier if I start at the beginning.”

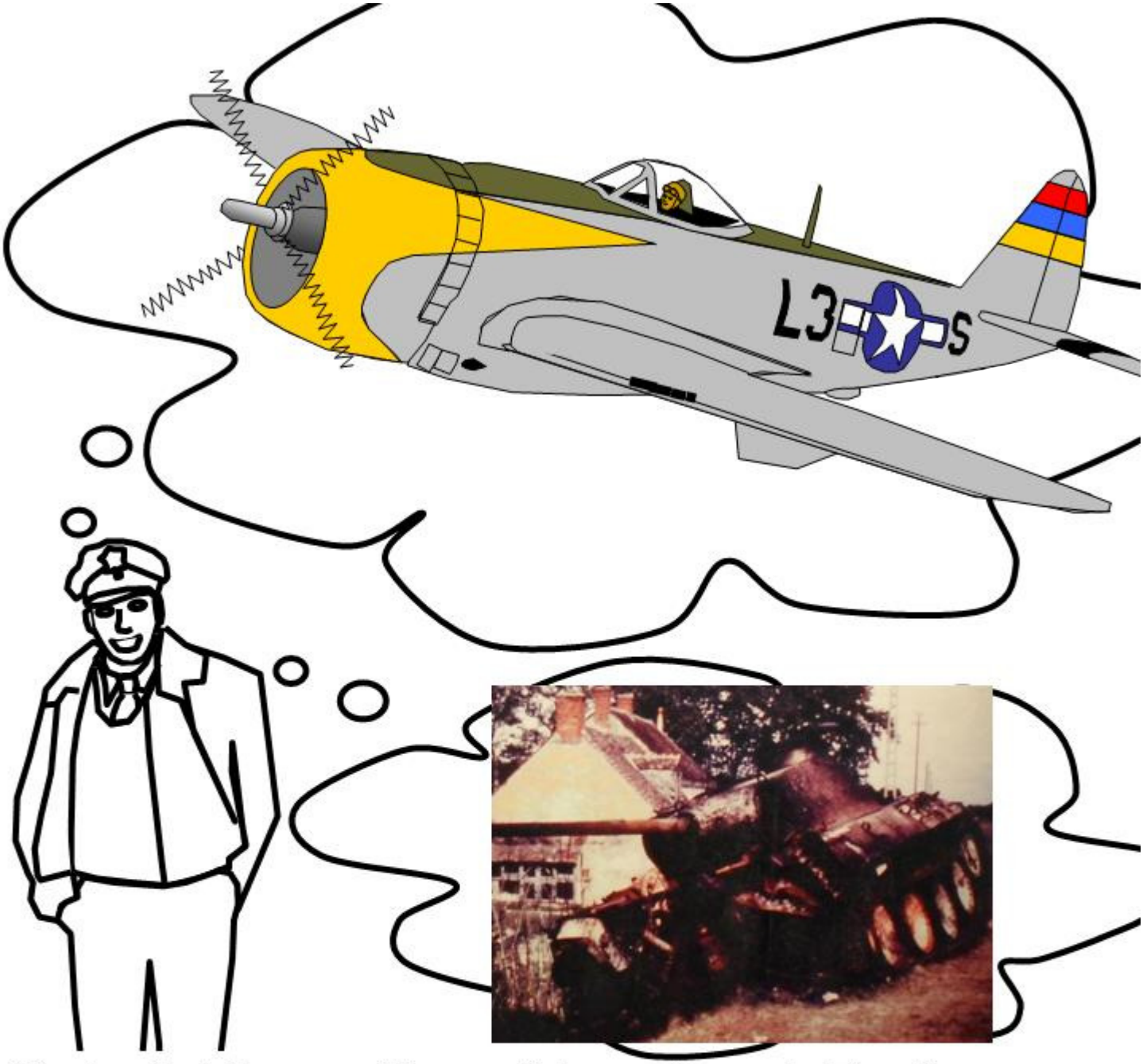


"Freddie learned to fly in Texas," said George. His first solo flight was in a Fairchild PT-19 open-cockpit trainer. He loved to fly."

"Freddie learned to fly P-47 Thunderbolts in Virginia. I met him when he came to our squadron in France. We both arrived the same day. We became friends right away."



"As new guys in the squadron, we had to fly the oldest planes. The newer planes had bubble canopies and bigger fuel tanks. Those of us new guys in the old planes were always low on gas. One day our flight leader got lost, but Freddie knew exactly where the airfield was. We followed the leader around until our gas gauges read empty. Then Freddie said' "Let's go!" and he led me back to the field. When we landed, we were so low on gas that my engine quit on the runway and Freddie's quit just after he taxied off the runway!"



"During that time we did something really good. The Germans counterattacked and made a big hole in the Army's lines. The 101st Airborne Division was surrounded in a town called Bastogne. The weather was bad, lots of snow and fog, so we couldn't do anything. Then just two days before Christmas the weather cleared and our planes attacked the Germans just as they were about to overrun Bastogne. We saved the 101st and stopped the German attack. That was the turning point of what we call The Battle of the Bulge, and we were the ones who saved the day! We killed a lot of German tanks that day."

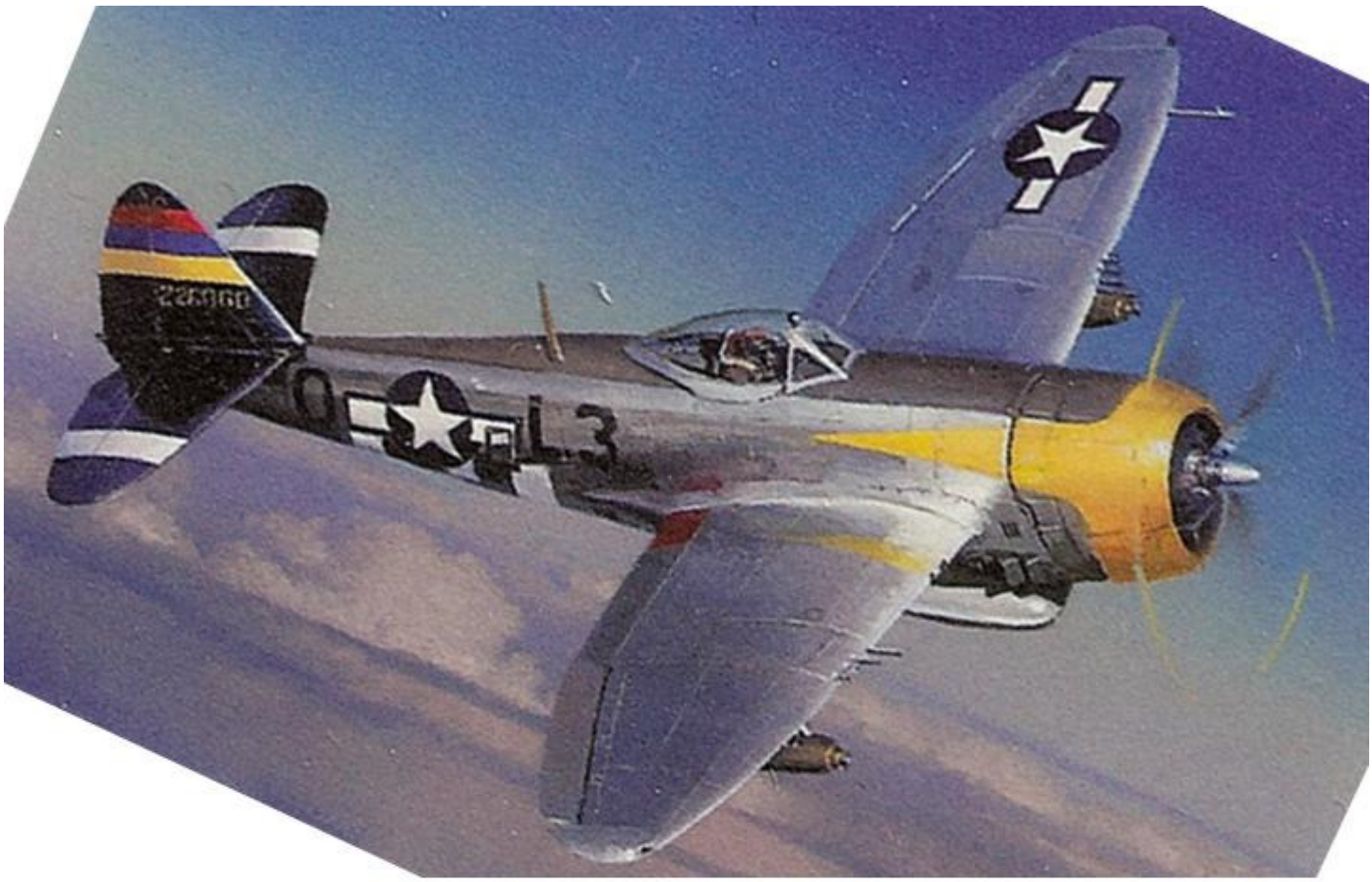
"Well, here we are" said George, "This is Freddie's plane, or what's left of it."

"What's left of it?" asked Peter.

"This plane has been damaged and repaired over and over again," said George. "It is now made up of parts of four different planes. There are almost more replacement parts on this plane than there are original parts."

"What happened to it?" asked Adam.

"It has been fighting a war for the last six months!" said George.

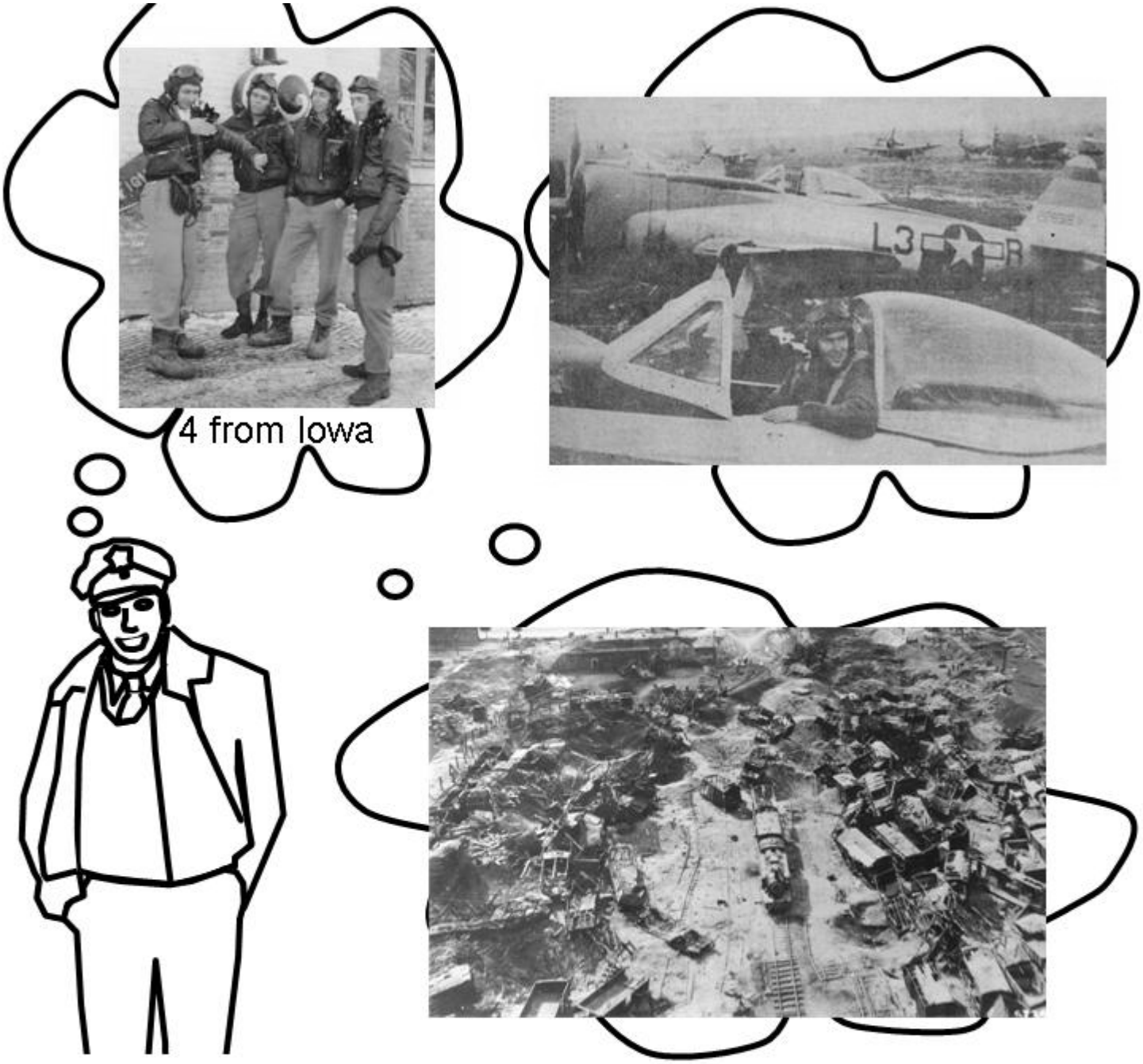


“Was Fred flying this plane the day he was wounded?” asked Grandpa.

“No,” said George, “but he flew it most of the time. When Freddie and I joined the squadron, the plane belonged to a pilot named Diamanti. Diamanti had the name Angie painted on the plane. Angie was a girl he knew back in the States. But in January, after the Battle of the Bulge, Diamanti rotated back to the States. Then this became Freddie’s plane. He flew it whenever he could.

“It was the plane Colonel Grosseta flew whenever he flew with us. Colonel Grosseta was our Group Commander, so the mechanics made sure the plane looked really nice. But the colonel seldom flew with our squadron, so it was Freddie’s plane most of the time. He loved this plane. It’s a shame it got so beat up.”

“How did Freddie get wounded?” asked Grandpa.



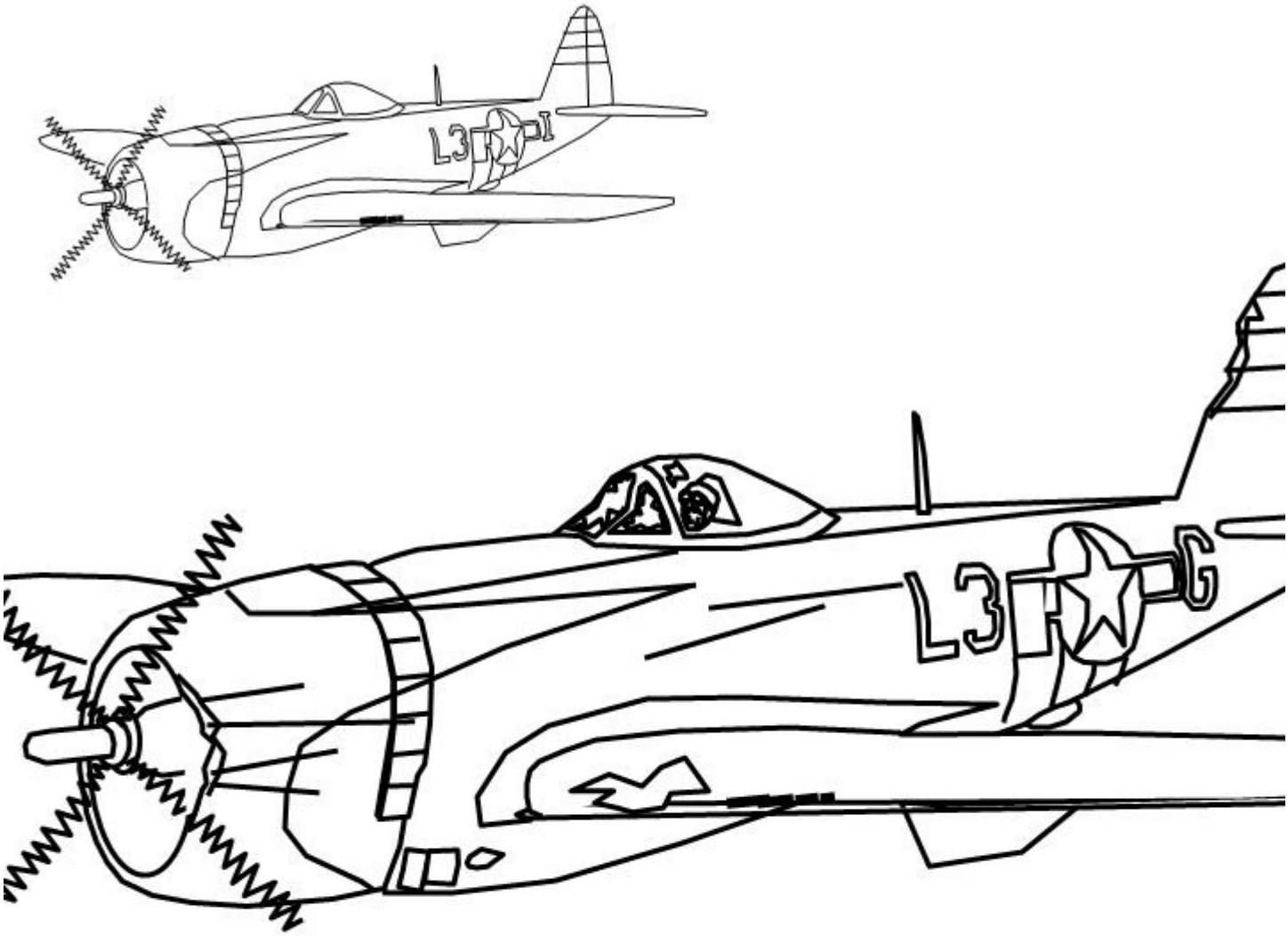
"Well, about a month ago Freddie went out on an armed reconnaissance mission. That's the kind of mission where you go looking for trouble. Freddie was flying with a pilot who was also from Iowa. In fact, we had four pilots in the squadron from Iowa, more than from any other state.

"Anyway, Freddie's flight found a train in a marshalling yard near Dusseldorf and started bombing the train and shooting at it. They made a mess of that marshalling yard! No more tanks or guns or bombs or bullets will get through that yard for a while.

“Freddie was shooting at one of the cars in the train. Suddenly, when he was just a few yards from the train car, it blew up! Freddie had no choice but to fly right through the explosion.”

“The explosion threw pieces of boxcar and railroad track and guns and who knows what else into the air. They hit Freddie’s plane as he flew through the fireball. Pieces battered the plane’s wings and tail. One piece hit a propeller blade and bent it back until it dented the cowling.

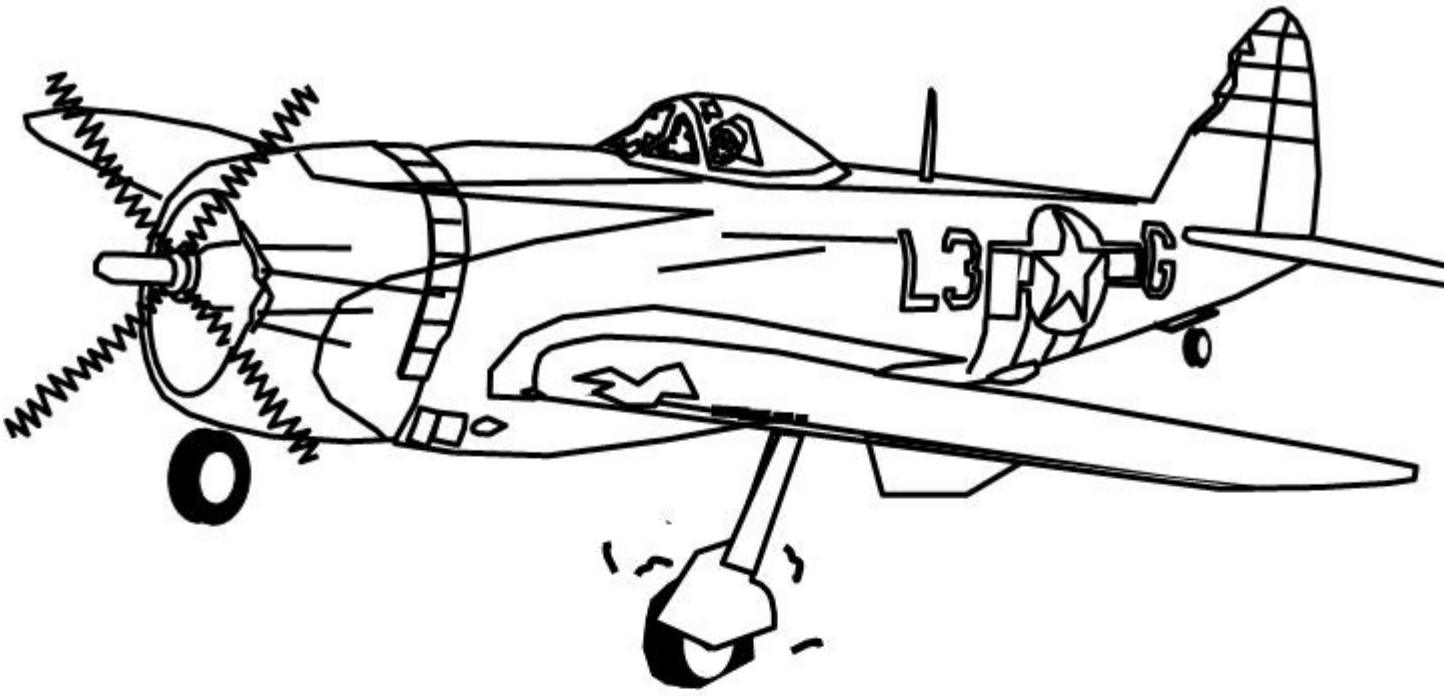
“But worst of all, some debris hit the plane’s windscreen and shattered it. This sent pieces of glass into Freddie’s eyes. Freddie was blind!”



"But Freddie is one amazing pilot. Somehow, even though he couldn't see, he got his plane pointed up away from the ground and climbed up above the cloud deck."

"Another pilot flew with him and talked to him on the radio. He told him where to go and what to do to get his plane flying correctly. Freddie still couldn't see!

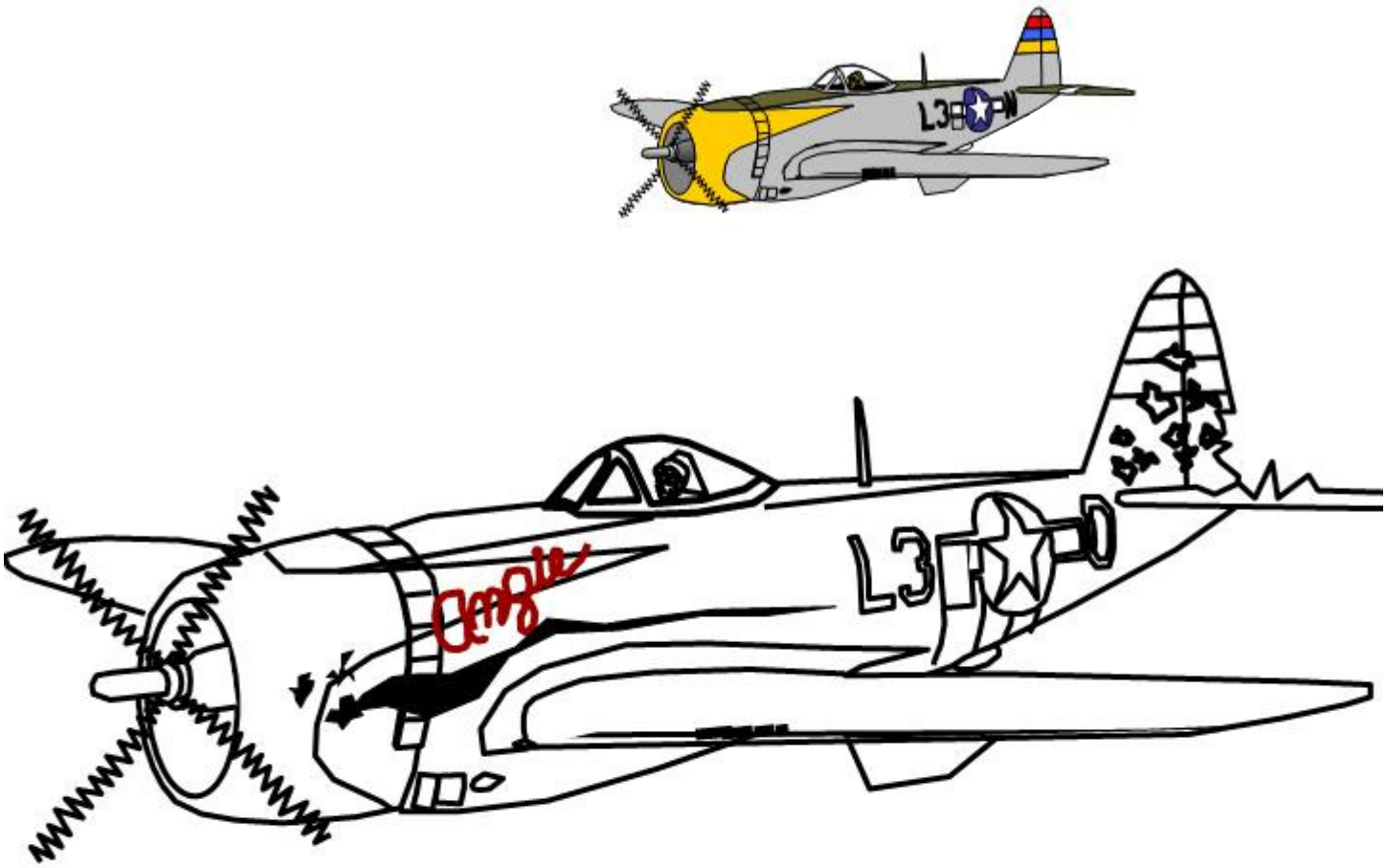
"Freddie finally spit on his fingers and washed the blood out of his eyes, so he could see out of one eye a little. It wasn't much, but it was enough for him to fly the plane back to base and land. But there was trouble with the landing too."



"When Freddie landed he realized one of his Thunderbolt's landing gear tires was flat. The flat tire on one side made it very difficult to steer. But if Freddie ran off the runway he would hit other Thunderbolts loaded with bombs for the next mission. He tried to use the wheel brake on the good tire to steer, but it didn't work!

"Freddie used the rudder to steer and pumped the brake pedal until he finally got the Thunderbolt straight on the runway. But now the end of the runway was coming up. If he ran off the end of the runway into the mud, Freddie's Thunderbolt would flip over on its back, burying him in the mud!

"Just before he reached the end of the runway, Freddie released the brake on the good tire and stomped on the brake of the wheel with the flat tire. This made the Thunderbolt spin around in what we call a ground loop. It was hard on the runway but it kept the plane from going into the mud. Finally Freddie brought the plane to a stop. An ambulance came to meet him."



“Was Fred flying his plane when it was damaged?” asked Grandpa.

“Oh yes, several times,” said George. “This plane took a lot of hits and often it was when Freddie was flying it. The last time was just two days before he was wounded. I was flying with him on another armed reconnaissance mission. We found some trucks and a tank in a small village and went in to bomb them. He got hit pretty bad by anti-aircraft guns.

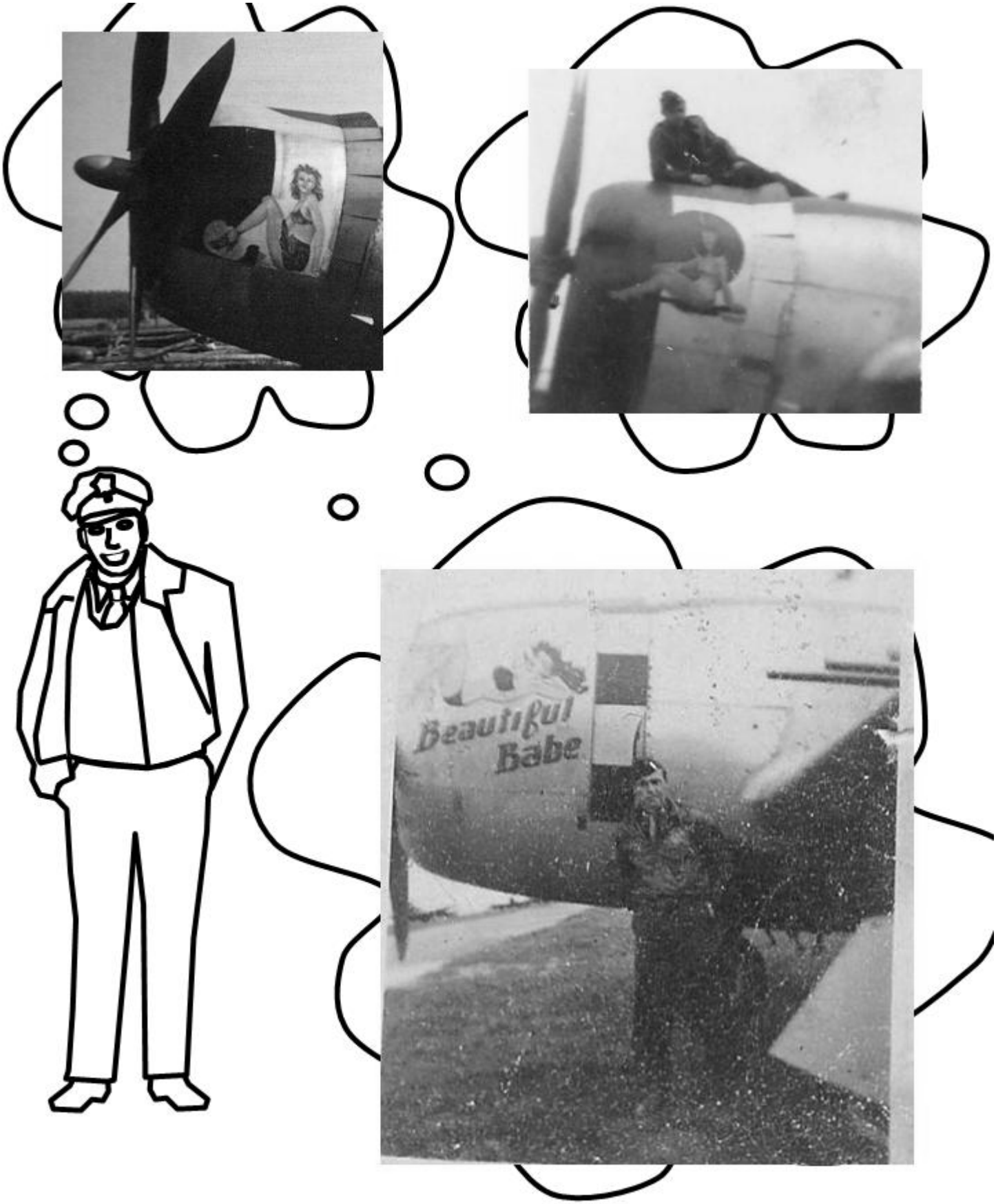
“These were big guns, 40 mm or maybe 88s. They nearly blew the tail off. Freddie just barely managed to pull out of the dive he was in. He hit some trees and almost hit the ground!”

“But old Angie here held together and brought him home.” George patted the nose of the airplane.

"I thought maybe that was the end for this plane, but the maintenance depot boys came and got her and fixed her up again. She's a tough old girl. Our Thunderbolts are the toughest airplanes in the war. No other fighter plane could take the kind of beating these planes do every day and still keep flying.

"Some guys think the P-51 Mustang is the best fighter plane in the war, but I know better. I know I owe my life to the strength and ruggedness of these Thunderbolts. Freddie does too. That wasn't the first time he hit a tree and came home to tell about. A Mustang would have been shredded to bits."

"And Angie is still a good-flying airplane. She may look funny but she still flies great. I like to fly her. She reminds me of Freddie."



"And you know, I think Freddie will like the new cowling on his plane. He always did like planes with pretty girls painted on the cowlings!"

"Well, it's almost time for me to go," said George, "Would you like to sit in the cockpit of Freddie's plane for a minute before I take off?"

"Yes!" said Adam and Lincoln and Peter and Grandpa all together.

George and Grandpa helped each of the boys climb up onto the wing of the Thunderbolt fighter plane, then sit in the cockpit. Each boy took a turn. Even Grandpa took a turn. They all thought it would be really cool to be a fighter pilot!

When each boy finished, George and Grandpa helped them back down to the ground.

Adam said, “That was cool!”

Lincoln said, “There were so many switches and buttons.”

Peter said, “Great-Grandpa Brandt must be really smart to fly that plane!”

Grandpa said, “Yes, VERY smart!”

Then George put on his flying helmet and got into the plane.

"Well folks, it's time for me to go. It was sure nice talking to you. Have a safe trip back to the States. If you stop in London to see Freddie, tell him his best friend George said 'Hi!'"

"Thank you!" said Adam and Lincoln and Peter together.

"Thanks! Fly safe," said Grandpa.

George waved at Grandpa and the boys. Then he started up the Thunderbolt and taxied off to join the rest of his squadron.

"So that is Great-Grandpa Brandt's plane on the stamp," said Lincoln.

"But it didn't always look like that," said Adam. "Now it has parts from four different planes."

"Great-Grandpa Brandt was a very smart man," said Peter.

"And he has some very smart great-grandsons, " said Grandpa.