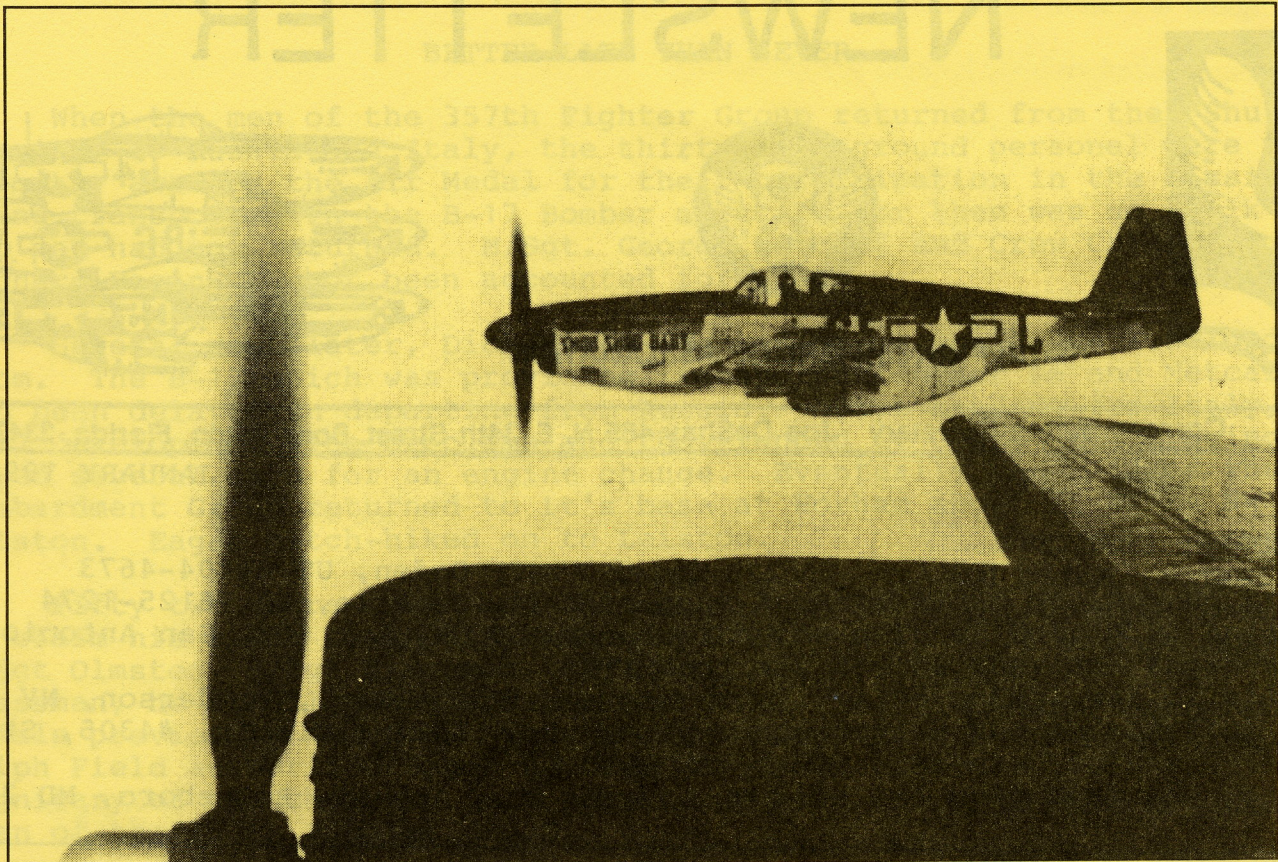




"LITTLE FRIENDS" AT WORK

Above photo came from Stephen M. Hutton of Apex, NC. He obtained the photo from Capt. George Paris, C.O. 803rd Bomb. Squadron (H) Prov. C5-L, "Shoo Shoo Baby" with flaps down to reduce the air speed, along side of the B-17 being escorted home from a mission to Germany. Had to be John C. Howell piloting the little friend in 1943. We made it possible for Hutton to contact John Howell with a copy of the photo.

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LITTLE FRIEND

Sometime in 1944 over Europe apparently between June 6 and Sept. 11, a B-24 Bomber Waist Gunner from the 458th Bomb Group photographed an escorting P-51 fighter aircraft nicknamed "Kalamazoo Kid". This incident occurred during the return from a mission possibly involving bomber aircraft damage.

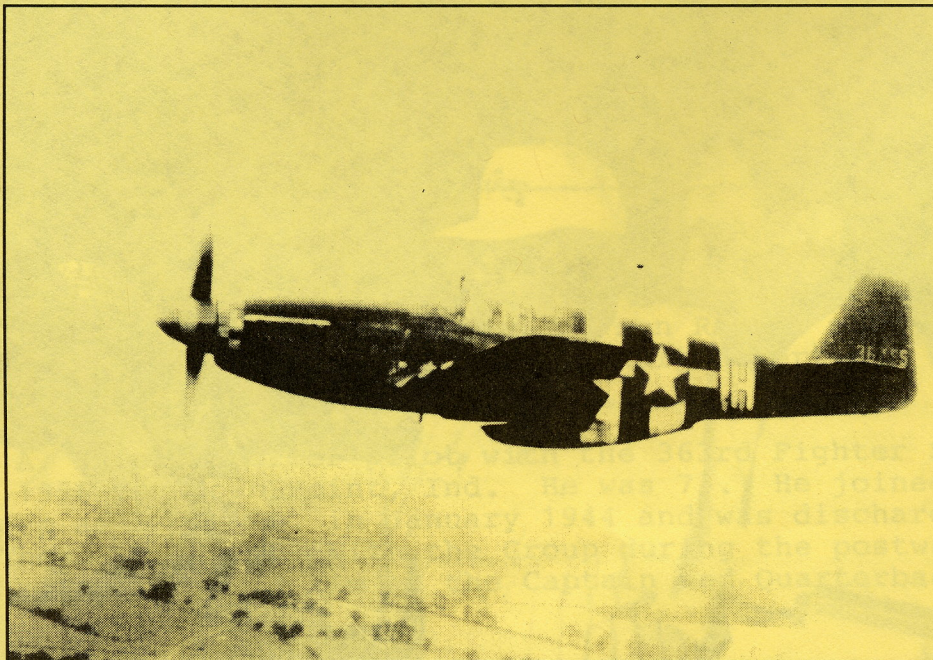
The top turret gunner on the bomber aircraft, Harold Armstrong of New Albany, Indiana has this photo and has spent years attempting to identify the "Little Friend" pilot, simply because he want to know who he was.

In 1994, he was referred to the Kalamazoo, Michigan Museum and volunteers searched their donated scrapbooks and newspapers. The searchers found that the escorting fighter pilot was Charles S. Pearson of the 363rd Fighter Squadron of the 357th Fighter Group. Also he was one of the 357th "Lost Sheep".

This story came from Museum Volunteer Richard Verdon of Kalamazoo who corresponded with Historian Merle Olmsted, Joe De Shay and Chuck Yeager. Even though the markings on the escort P-51 were not too legible, we have identified the "Kalamazoo Kid" aircraft as B6-H and serial # 43-6755.

In June of 1996, "Chuck" Pearson became an active member of the 357th Fighter Group. Since Pearson was one of the 80 pilots of the 357th Fighter Group who flew the shuttle mission to Russia, "Operation Frantic V", we have also assisted him in applying for the Russian Citation and Medal for his participation in that mission.

The Kalamazoo Museum is preparing a display of Charles Pearson's memorabilia. A fine ending to an escort mission by a thoughtful "Little Friend".
by Joe De Shay



THEY ARE STILL WITH US!

When the 357th Fighter Group moved into the Leiston Air Base, there were a goodly number of men in several units who we refer to as "our supporting units". When we shipped out to Neubiberg, Germany they followed us.

When we went to Louisville, KY to our 1996 Reunion, there were several men of the supporting units still with us. It was good to see them and to spend some time with them. May they stay on with us until the day comes to close the hangar doors, lock up the mess hall and pass the orderly room records on to the Archives.

We never took the time to tell them how much we appreciated their help back then but as time passes, we look back and realize what a great group of men they were as they made our duty a lot easier during WW II.

Joe De Shay

REUNION

The hotel now is quiet,
The halls are empty too.
The elevators idle
Our reunion now is through.

They came from near and far away,
To see their friends once more.
To meet and eat and tell the tales
Of their part in the war.

The days we waited for so long
Have now come and gone,
The chance to spend some time with friends,
They made when they were young.

We watched the Aces and their planes
Soar through the air once more,
An old sweet song to all of us
To hear the engines roar.

Reunions are so special
To all of us still here,
We miss those gone before us
The ones that were so dear.

But those of us who still remain
Will meet again, we pray
We trust in God that two more years,
Will bring that day again.

By Alice Dewey

20 JANUARY, 1945- TRULY A MEMORABLE DAY

by
Robert G. Schimanski

REFLECTION # 2

A FREE SPIRIT	(becomes)
DISCIPLINED	(in)
LOCKED - IN	(situations)

I do not know the precise definition of a "free spirit," and Webster's dictionary does not define it, it is not in the World Books, and Blacks Law dictionary fails to inform, but I do know that a true fighter pilot fits into the category of a free spirit.

We volunteer to fly, to become a pilot, to choose single engine aircraft, to ask for fighter pilot training, to request overseas assignment, and combat in time of war - just so we can commute and dance with the angels.

A fighter pilot is a wild unbridled stallion, and well he should be for all that he is asked to daily perform in training or in combat. First you fly high, wide and handsome, train, and then gain the necessary calm, serenity, and absolute confidence needed for handling high speed aircraft. You become a free spirit turned loose.

Caveat: Let them go, don't slow them down, don't get in their way, because our country needs fighter pilots. I cannot help but think how badly the Navy has handled the Tail Hookers mess. The women knew what was going on and what to expect. Maybe they got a little bit more than they asked for, yet the careers of valuable fighter pilots were destroyed for the sake of some whining females. I sure as hell would hate to have any of them with me in combat.

Even though he is a free spirit, the combat fighter pilot is taught and trained to fly in an absolutely uniform and disciplined manner. For your own survival and for the success of your mission you are bridled - you become part of a coordinated team. You no longer are a volunteer - you are not only locked into a tight cockpit, you become

locked into situations, day and night, mission after mission, until it is over, ad infinitum (I am a retired attorney so I can say that.)

LOCKED IN

Here is the story of only two pilots of the 357th Fighter Group, the 364th Fighter Squadron, that flew with about 58 other pilots on 20 January, 1945 escorting bombers over the Ulm/Augsberg, Germany area. The field report of the mission states as follows:

LF 1010 Osterd 20,000 RV 1st 3 Grp 4th force 1035 S Charleroi (est) 26,000. Bs 1325 N Luxembourg 27,000. LF out 1415/1435 Overflakkee/ Ostend 0/25,000. Grd target straffed vicinity Ulm. One section left Bs at target to investigate Me 262 at 18,000. Jet pulled away in slight dive at speed estimated 500 plus. After about 5 minutes chase plane shot down over Lechfield AD as it attempted to land. Lt Haydon hit by light flak and bailed. Observed at 32,000 2 contrails over Lechfield circling slowly downward. 1 flight climbed to investigate at 15,000 they became apparent as Me 262s. One of them made a head on pass at an element of the section, which turned into him, whereupon the jet headed toward Munich. In vicinity of Munich the 262 turned north which was one turn too many - the element cut him off in the turn and pulled rapidly within firing range, destroying the 262 whose speed in chase was estimated 500 plus.

Rather dull and uninteresting but it does not describe what happened to two of us who got locked in that day.

When we took off in the morning the weather was atrocious, clouds and instrument flying in formation almost all of the way until we arrived in the Angsburg area and then it was sunny, clear, and blue skies. Soon ME262 jets were spotted and our group gave chase. Lt. Dale Karger states:

As I try to remember this specific mission it was a clear, blue sky, at that time, probably about 50 to 80 miles west of Munich. I remember the snow on the ground when a train was spotted. I don't know what our specific mission was that day or why we were at a fairly low altitude. We started a run to strafe the train. I was flying greenhouse white and Lloyd Zacharie was my wing man. The alps could be seen south of us. We spread out a little as was proper for this kind of run. I can't remember whether we were abreast as a squadron or went in as individual flights. When I was within range I started firing and one of my guns "ran away" (wouldn't stop firing) when the trigger was released. I turned a few

degrees (to keep from hitting anything out ahead of me) and started to climb. I really didn't realize that my wing man (Zack) had stayed with me. I can't recall whether I announced my problem over the RT at the time. As I was climbing at about 6,000 to 7,000 feet at this time with gun still firing, someone called out "two jets circling above us." "Pete" Peterson said he would start up to intercept and I said that I was already climbing and would also continue on up. My runaway gun had expended all its ammo at this time.

These two jets continued to circle and were estimated to be about 30,000 ft., but as I think about it now, they were probably closer to 20,000 feet because it didn't take us long to get up there. When we got within about 1,000 ft. below them they decided to split up and started to descend. The one I latched onto headed east toward Munich in a slow descent. Having a speed advantage he began to slowly pull away from me. He was about 4 or 5 miles ahead of me and I was about ready to turn back when I saw him start a steep turn to the left. He was over Munich at about 5,000 feet by this time. I did have the idea that maybe he was trying to draw me over Munich to draw anti-aircraft fire. Anyway, when the 262 started his left turn, I turned 90 degrees to the left. Anticipating his higher rate of speed, I thought I could cut him off and it worked, except he was crossing in front. I had the diamonds on the gunsight all the way closed and decided to lead him slightly with the pipper. Almost immediately as I fired the pilot bailed out at about 3,000 feet. I am reasonably sure that I saw a hit on or around the cockpit area. Of course, at that distance, it could have been a reflection. One thing for sure the pilot had some reason for going overboard at that precise time. The ME 262 immediately crossed into a wooded area where I observed smoke but no flame.

the You know, when the bloods gets pumping with the excitement of the "moment" you sometimes do some dumb things that you wouldn't do under normal circumstances, or things you aren't too proud of, like taking a couple of shots at pilot and a big gold ball on a church steeple at a nearby town. These things you also never forget.

On this particular mission my own plane was in for repairs so I was flying Steve Waslyks's "My Lady Diane." Can't remember C5 number. He told me it was a real smooth running engine, etc. And to make sure I brought it home in one piece. Well! He was right. That engine was so smooth it was scary, but as fate would have it, I didn't bring it home. As Zack and I started back alone we found the weather had deteriorated to IFR conditions in eastern France and went IFR into clouds and snow. By this time we were aware of the fact that we were not going to get anywhere near the United Kingdom. We had really chomped up a lot of fuel in the jet chase and it was down to probably the last 50 gallons. I called a fixer station and got a vector but he was 125 miles away so I decided to gingerly let down through the overcast, not having any idea of this elevation or terrain below. Needless to say the good Lord was with us and we broke out at about 500 feet in a snowstorm. No luck in finding a landing strip and Zack had reported gauges bouncing on empty. I told him to pick a good snowy field and belly it in while I continued to look for a 9th AF field, anywhere. Zack reported he was down and

ok it seemed like only a few minutes later that I came over an air field and was glad to see P47's instead of ME109's parked there.

After making about three passes on a snow-covered runway. and fearing running out of gas. I came in over some wires and seemed to float forever. When I finally touched down, about half way down the runway, on steel mat, with snow, it as like being on a sled. I figured I was home free until I hit the brakes at which time I took a toboggan ride downhill on the runway off the end and into a frozen pile of dirt. That took care of Wasylyk's "M Lady Diane."

After retrieving my gun camera film and being interrogated, by the Lord only knows who, I found out I was close to the town of Rheims (The Champagne center of France). No room for me on the base so I was billeted in a nice hotel in Rheims. Quite a large city park in the middle of town was jammed to the curbs with all kinds of military supplies. They were very lax about blackout and I had no problem doing some pub crawling. I finally stopped at a place with a good dance band and even neon signs in the windows. Very strange, I thought as we were probably within 60 miles of the front lines.

Well, I didn't hear anything about Zack till the next day. He had been pointed to the same base I was by some Frenchies. He had a little problem communicating, as he didn't speak French. We went out that day on a C47 to Paris where we spent a couple of days, then hitched a ride on another C47 to England.

So I guess you could say that the 262 I got cost two good P51's. But at least we lived to fly another day.

Pete told me at the Dayton Reunion that the ME 262 he chased cause him to hit compensability in a dive, and I can't recall where he got him or not.

After Karger landed on the continent he was interrogated by army intelligence officers, who then called our base to advise us of his whereabouts. Karger has not told you all of his combat that day because the intelligence officer wanted to know if we had fed him raw meat for breakfast. Karger had been locked in to a most difficult situation.

Here is my story of that day. I helped chase the jets and tried to box them in but never could get close enough to fire my guns; instead I used up a lot of fuel and then had to think about getting home through absolutely horrible weather. Some of the squadron elected to return with me rather than setting down on the continent. I flew on instruments in a solid overcast for a long time at about 25,000 feet. Miraculously as I crossed the coastline a single hole appeared through the clouds. I could see the coastline and I elected to descend and cross the channel at an altitude of about 200 feet. As I crossed the channel

the ceiling got lower and lower and at about 50 feet I went back on instruments and climbed to about 500 feet. I then called into the tower (Dryden) and asked for a heading home and was told that the base had been closed and that I should return to the continent. I then asked for a heading to any other airfield in England and was told that England was socked in and all based were closed. I was low on gas. I knew I could not return to the continent, and I did not want to ditch in the channel. (Virtually impossible in a P-51) "Locked in." I continued on to England with the other airplanes on my wing and told Dryden that I did not know who closed the field but as leader of part of the Greenhouse Squadron returning I ordered the field to be reopened and all operations would proceed as normal. The flare truck was to be in full operation at the beginning of the runway. Pilots flying with me were advised that we would first try to land under my instructions, and if I could not make it, they were to climb to 1,000 feet, make sure they were over land, and bail out. I now find it interesting to note that after hearing of my decision to reopen the field, no superior officer on the ground countermanded my orders).

Dryden gave me a heading and I approached the base at an altitude of about 250 feet on instruments with my wing men tucked in already. The flare truck fired it flares. I saw the flares and knew I was over the beginning of the runway heading 240 degrees. I then made a single needle width turn of 180 degrees heading into the downwind leg at 60 degrees climbing on instruments to about 400 feet to give me a little breathing room (at 200 feet on instruments it is difficult to breathe normally - now is the time for self discipline.). I then flew an extra long down wind leg in order to have extra time to again line up on the runway. I completed another 180 degrees single needle width turn, got another heading from Dryden and discovered I was exactly on course. Lowered partial flaps, dropped gear, cut throttle, and started descent from 400 feet very carefully. At 300 and 200 feet I could see nothing but slop all around me. At about 150 feet I couldn't see ahead, but I got the first glimpse of mother earth straight down below me. (When flying a

fighter aircraft in snow, rain or fog it is nearly impossible to see straight ahead, but there is some limited visibility looking straight down).

Full flaps, cut throttle, and saw beginning of runway while looking straight down. I say down on the left side of the runway, with number two man on the right, etc. We landed without mishap, and then had extreme difficulty in taxiing to our revetments because of rotten visibility. My loyal crew chief, Sgt. Wilbur Reich, was there waiting for me. I had brought our airplane home once more. (Sgt. Reich was one of the more experienced crew chiefs, but had already lost two pilots and two P-51's through no fault of his own. He and I got a new P-51 D, C50, serial number 414334; and he and I successfully finished my tour of 70 missions without a scratch, bullet hole, or flax damage. Later I discovered that my aircraft ended up in a scrap yard in England and was bulldozed flat by a D-8 cat. Seems to me the 8th Air Force should have given it to me and told me to fly it home).

The commanding officer, who I am sure had closed the field was waiting for me in the pilots ready room. His only question to me was "Where is the rest of the group?" Seems like a lot more should have been said.

And that is how two of us free spirits got locked in on 20 January 1945, and we were only two of about sixty pilots on that mission. I now wonder what happened to the others.

How do you do it?

Self Discipline. You have to have a lot of ability to fly a fighter, but believe me, you have to have a tremendous amount of self discipline to survive. Discipline from others is a guide, but self discipline is the key to survival.

EPILOGUE

Just imagine how much better off all of us would be if everybody exercised more self discipline. When you consider smoking, drinking, drugs, promiscuity, abnormal sexual behavior, family responsibility, employment, politics, welfare, military.....ad infinitum again.

DISCIPLINE...BE TRUE TO THINE OWN SELF.