

Dear Mother,

The story behind
an otherwise
unremarkable
and workaday A-36

India
6-24-44
Dear Mother,
Received your very nice letter yesterday
so glad to hear that you're all doing
new engraved stationery
Well I'm at
rest



311th FG HEADQUARTERS

528TH FIGHTER SQUADRON ACTIVITY: JUNE 1 THROUGH JUNE 30, 1944

COMBAT SORTIES:
ESCORT AND PATROL SORTIES:
COMBAT HOURS FLOWN:
BOMBS DROPPED [U.S. TON]:
ROUNDS FIRED:
GASOLINE CONSUMED:

612
119
898.5
141.6
272,121
56,364

24

Dear Mother

The story behind
a hum-drum A-36

When most people think of
World War Two, they think of
Pearl Harbor...

...Adolf Hitler and his Nazis...

...sailors kissing girls...



Above - The USS Shaw explodes as a result of the Japanese December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor. **Right** - a Navy Sailor steals a celebratory "victory" kiss upon hearing news of Japan's surrender on August 15, 1945. **Bottom** - Adolf Hitler doing what Adolf Hitler did best.



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...big flamey explosions...

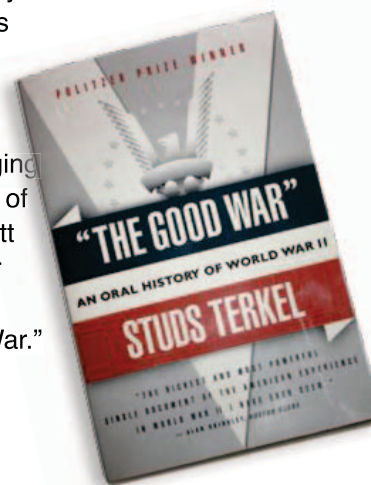
...crazy Japanese pilots...

...funny propaganda posters...

...and tough-talkin' soldiers.



Clockwise from top - a still from Michael Bay's "Pearl Harbor" movie. Many people liked this movie more than I did. **Next** - Japanese Kamikaze pilot, Kyoshi Ogawa. He killed himself crashing into the USS Bunker Hill in 1945. **Next** - a propaganda poster encouraging Americans to be lazy. **Next** - the DVD cover of the movie "Patton." The way George C. Scott portrayed the General, he almost makes war seem cool. Almost. **Next** - Studs Terkel's definitive oral-history on WW2, "The Good War." The way Studs interviews people, he makes war seem ordinary. Almost.



*"No poor bastard ever won a war by dying for his country. He won it by making the other poor bastard die for **his** country."*

Pearl Harbor © Touchstone Pictures Patton © Fox Entertainment

But we mustn't forget war's grind.

And a case can be made that the grind
of WW2 first started in China.



Photo: H. Wong, U.S. National Archives

Above - A baby is the lone survivor of a Japanese bombing raid on a subway station in Shanghai, China, August 28, 1937. I remember seeing this photo when I was a little kid (maybe 4 or 5 years old) and thinking that the baby should stop crying because no one was around to hear it. Later, when I understood what really was going on, I realized the photographer could hear it's cries and wondered how he stood still long enough to take the photo.

In fact, I'll go farther and assert the first sparks of WW2 flared in 1931. That's when China and Japan started going at it.

Ten years later, Japan was on top, controlling a tremendous amount of China, Korea, Burma (Today Myanmar), Thailand, the Philippines...

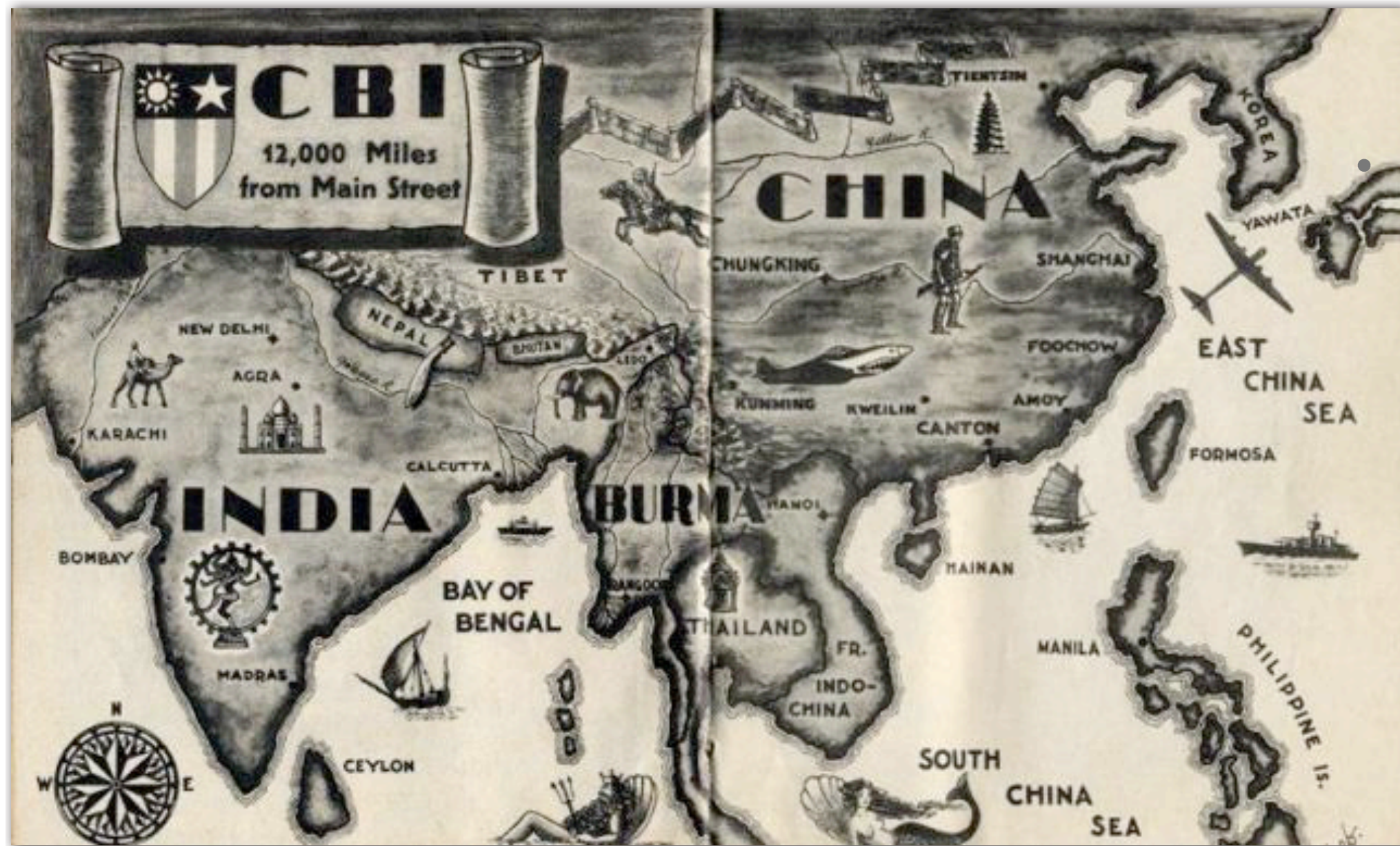
Japan's expansion in the 30s and 40s were the nation's first real foray into "modern" empire building.



By 1942, Japan was readying to invade India.

India, however, was a long-held British territory. Losing India to the Japanese was NOT going to happen. So the “CBI” - China-Burma-India Theater - was minted.

If you think you don’t know much about the CBI, chances are good you’ve heard about...



***Really!** Did you know that Australia was bombed by the Japanese in WW2? Just to show how capricious “history” is, had the Japanese gotten courageous enough to invade Australia, the war in the Pacific would have changed dramatically. Regardless, Australia shouldered a stout load of combat in the CBI and rightly so - had things gone badly for the Allies, Australia was the next target.

...the famous “Flying Tigers.”

They were mercenary American pilots
hired by the Chinese government.

In six short months, the Flying Tigers
created a Legend for themselves, being
the only **real** air force to oppose the
Japanese during those first few months
of the war.

July, 1942 however saw the fun come to
an end when the U.S. Air Force absorbed
the AVG and started running the show.

Anyway, back to the CBI.

The Curtiss P-40B was powered by
an Allison V-12 engine, generating
about 1,100hp.



Adam & Eve



Panda Bears



Hell's Angels

There were three squadrons of “Flying Tigers” and each one had a logo.

“68” was the mount of
Charles Older. He went on to
shoot down 18 airplanes.

**Helter
Skelter**

And even later, Older
presided over the
Charles Manson trial.

The shark-mouth was
actually a German idea,
cooked up by ZG 76 in 1940.

No single military unit has the cult status of
the Flying Tigers. Controversy and
conspiracy only add to their tremendous
success against the enemy. If you want to
know more, you'll have to get the book(s).

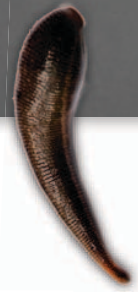
When referring to Japanese fighters, the word
“Zero” is used like a brand name. But actually,
only the Japanese Navy used the Zero. At
the time, the Japanese Army used “Nates”
and “Oscars.” Most clashes between AVG
and Japanese were with the Army and
therefore, no “Zeros.”



Above - I did this Curtiss P-40B in 1995. At the time, I was very proud of my reproduction of the yellow
“Flying Tiger” on the fuselage. So, I uploaded a scan onto America Online and was thrilled to see how
many people downloaded it. Though I've never interviewed any of the AVG pilots, I credit them for inspiring
me to get into the new technology as a communication medium.

Left - a Messerschmidt Bf-110 “Heavy Fighter” of ZG 76, May of 1940.

Psst - want to see the BEST painting of an AVG P-40? Look up John Shaw's “Shark Sighting.” I'd put a picture here, but I have no
permission and quite simply, this space is just not worthy.



The CBI wasn't "historic" like Europe.
It wasn't *exotic* like the Pacific islands.
It wasn't **dramatic** like the
Mediterranean.

Instead, the CBI was dirty, isolated,
full of disease, populated by strange
ethnicities and full of things that bite.

...and the Japanese *owned* the show.

Putting it bluntly, the CBI didn't make
popular press.



Warfare too was “different” in the CBI.

Instead of pitched infantry battles or island landings, war in China-Burma was fought much like Vietnam would be 20-some years later - *bands of commando-type soldiers coupled with air-support.*



Left -If you're bored, look up "General Orde Wingate" - the British leader of the Chindits. While in Burma, General Wingate would command while naked, ate raw onions and tied an alarm clock to his arm. He was weird, but also a peerless military tactician. Winston Churchill referred to him as "a man of genius and a man of destiny." Wingate died in 1944 in an airplane crash. But when I saw Marlon Brando's portrayal of the fictitious Jungle King "Colonel Kurtz" in the Vietnam-themed movie, "Apocalypse Now," I thought of Wingate in Burma. But in contrast, Wingate was no Crazy. I'm serious - look him up.

The Brits had their brand of commando - they were called “Chindits.

The Americans had theirs too. They were called “Merrill’s Marauders.”

Their story is the stuff of Hollywood. But suffice it to state, they were *bad-asses*.



*General Frank Merrill was in charge, hence the name.



Above - This is a photo of Sgt. George E. Feltwell, a Marauder. I chose this photo because to me, it exemplifies the look of a group of men who killed their own food, slept against trees and didn't have the time/energy/reason to shave.

In case you're wondering, Feltwell survived the war but didn't survive bone-cancer. He died October 17, 1980. <Salute>, Sergeant.

Anyway...

Merrill's Marauders, as self-reliant as they were, often needed aerial help in their brutal battles with the Japanese.

When they needed help, the code words they used to call for air support were:

"DRAGON FLY - DRAGON FLY..."



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a hum-drum A-36



And for the most part, one squadron did
Merrill's Marauder's bidding.

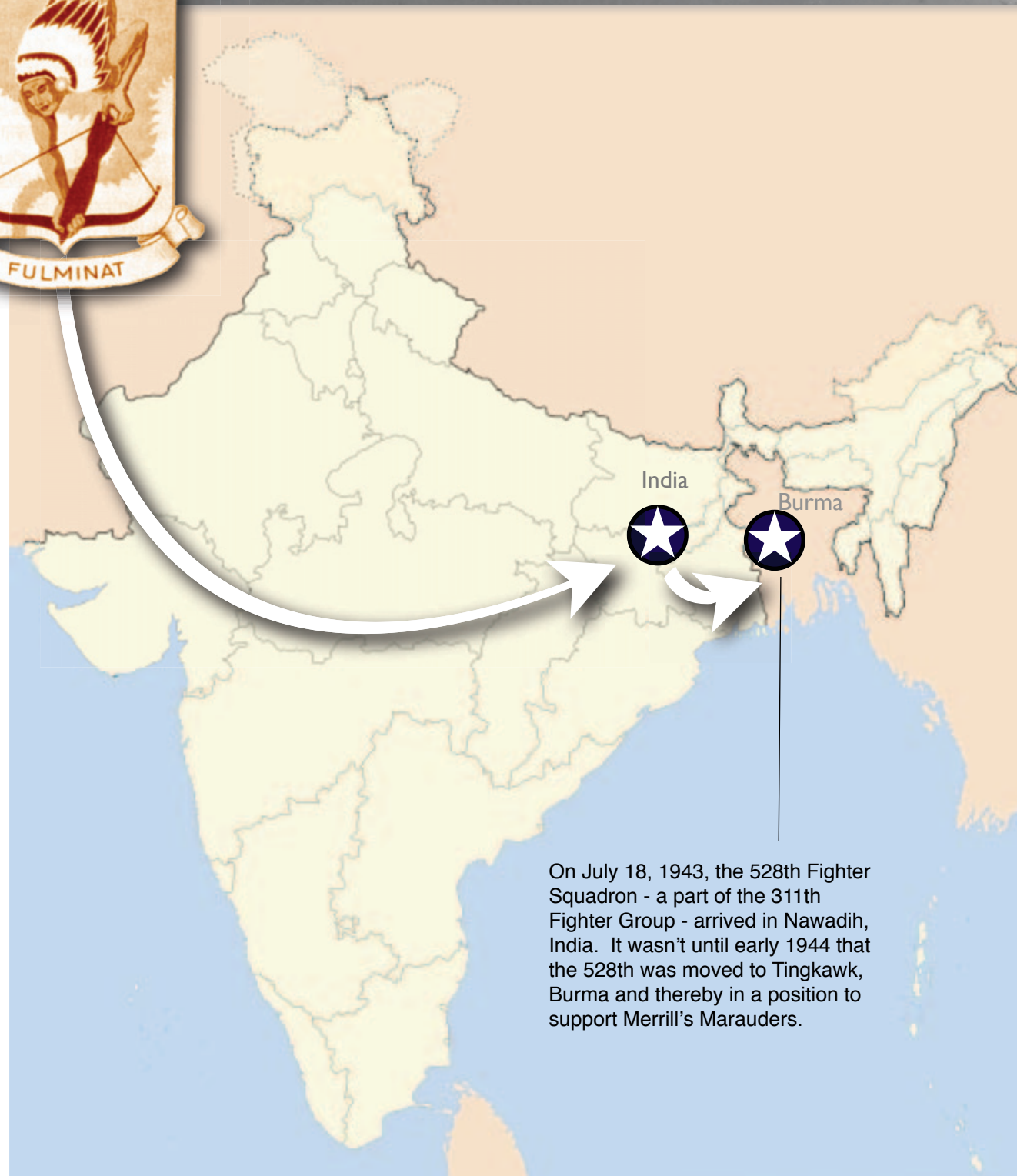
The 528th Fighter Squadron.

The code word became their mascot.

"The Dragon Flys."



Let's meet one.



On July 18, 1943, the 528th Fighter Squadron - a part of the 311th Fighter Group - arrived in Nawadih, India. It wasn't until early 1944 that the 528th was moved to Tingkaw, Burma and thereby in a position to support Merrill's Marauders.



Where did the Dragon Fly
come from?

The 528th's reptoid-insect
was the brainchild of two men:
Bill Lackey and William Lamb.

Both were graphic artists -
Lackey was ground crew, Lamb
was a combat pilot.

I couldn't get a photo of
Lackey, but Lamb's the guy in
the photo below.



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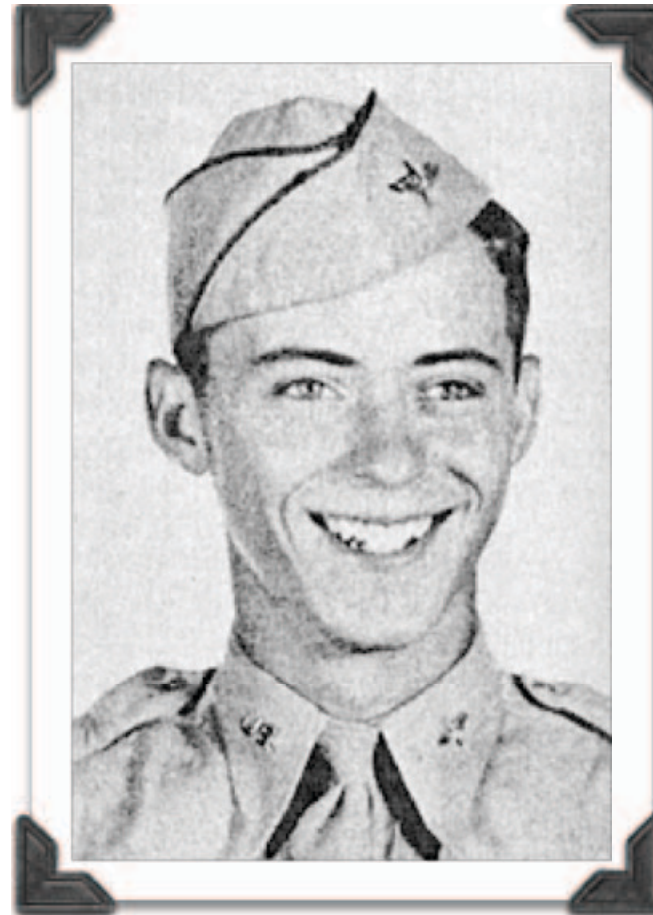
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Dear Mother

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a hum-drum A-36

Meet William “Bill” Creech.



Dear Mother

The story behind
a hum-drum A-36

Bill was born in Benson, North Carolina to Decker & Alvah Creech on October 11, 1923. Decker was an undertaker, Alvah was a mom.

When the Depression sunk in, Decker saw that his job would only pay less and demand more. He couldn't stay put and lead his family forward.

So, he put the family into the farming business and by age 8, Bill was driving a car and caring for the farm animals.

But it wasn't to last.



Today, Benson is a town of 3,200 people, south, south west of Raleigh.

They have a website.

© www.townofbenson.com

The farm went broke and the Creechs moved back into town where Decker raised chickens.

Eventually, he went back to being an undertaker.

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Yet, for all of the obvious instability in the Creech family's work life, no one thought much about it as a curse.

It simply "was."

And Bill learned how to adapt to change, earn his own money, make profitable decisions...



And in Boy Scouts, he learned how to light a fire in the rain.

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flying airplanes!

All this time, there wasn't a moment
when he wasn't "absolutely enthralled!"
with

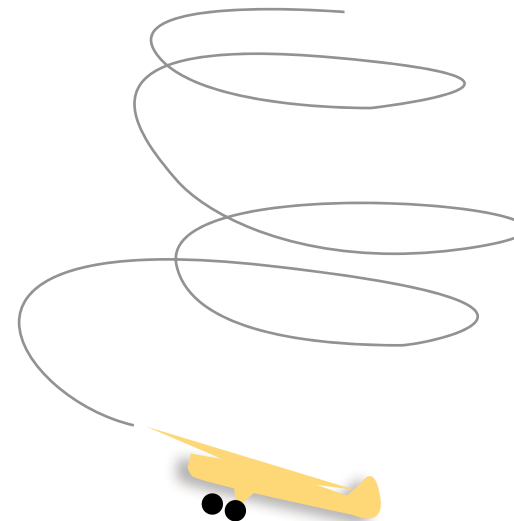


August 2, 1939, Bill got his first
flight in Piper Cub N622972.

Soon, Bill was taking regular flight lessons from Mr. H. L. Lambert.

H.L. Lambert believed that Bill should learn how to fly the airplane when it was flying.

And also, how to fly the airplane when it WASN'T flying.



3 hours into lessons, Lambert started teaching Bill “spin training.”

If you’re not a pilot, this means nothing to you.

If you’re a pilot, you can pick your jaw up off the ground now.

But suffice it to state, when Bill signed up for college at North Carolina State in 1940, he enrolled in the Aero Engineering School.

But on December 7, 1941, it was pretty clear that Bill (and millions of other young men) would soon have other plans.

He was inducted into the Army Air Force on December 5, 1942.



Above - Here he is again. Bill looks 12 years old. But in reality, he's 19 at the time, smiling at a fate that he could not possibly know.

Flight training went as expected for a guy who started “Spin Training” at fifteen years of age.

It was a *breeze*.

Bill’s October 1, 1943 graduation as a bona-fide American Fighter Pilot was simply a matter of not screwing up as opposed to working hard.



Bill’s wings were unavailable, so I’ve used Burt Hawley’s. Burt was a recon pilot in Italy in 1944. Some day, I’ll tell Burt’s story - he and Bill were men cut from the same cloth. Burt died in May of '09 and I think of him often.

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a hum-drum A-36

On March 22, 1944, Bill arrived in
Karachi, India as a Replacement Pilot
for the 528th Fighter Squadron.

The Dragon Flys.



Above - This is a photo of the Dragon Flys. circa June, 1944. To help you get your head around the "Replacement Pilot" position, consider that the Dragon Flys had about 55 pilots in total and suffered 16 deaths. So, if you to pick 5-8 guys out of the picture and considered them DEAD, and picked another 12 and sent them home on completion of their tour, those are the pilots who need replacement. Ground Crew, however, typically stayed in for the duration.

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P-40 flies along level at about 250mph.

This had to be unnerving.

P-40 shadow, travels over the
ground at 250mph.

Before going into combat, Bill was informed that most of the work he'd be doing was "Air support" - pin point bombing & strafing.*

Using fast-moving fighters to put bombs onto small targets is **intense** work.

So, it's not surprising that the Dragon Flys had rather **intense** methods of training.

One of these methods was called "Shadow Strafing."

* The Japanese Army Air Force was certainly around, but the Japanese ground forces didn't have the commitment of air support like the Allied forces had. So, the Dragon Fly's didn't get the opportunity for air-to-air dueling.

Bill angles in for a shot at the shadow, keeping his attention on the fast-moving "target".

To hit the shadow, Bill is pointed at the ground. He has just a few moments before having to pull up.

No!



If the Air Force tried this kind of training today, lawyers would shut'em down like THAT!

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a hum-drum A-36



In addition to their work, the Dragon Flys worked in an **intense** environment.

Monsoon season would bring 100-150 inches of rain, temperatures were regularly above 90 degrees, humidity hovered around 80%...and we already know about the critters.

Photo above left - Dragon Fly ground crew pose with a snake they found. And killed. This had to be an early photo because Dragon Flys quickly got bored of photo ops like this one.

Photo right - Lt. Creech props himself on an A-36 at Tingkaw, Burma. The wear & tear on man and machine is clearly evident here, especially on Creech's 3-sizes too big flight suit.

I'm sure there's a "Lose weight the CBI way!" diet here but no one would want it.

Photo lower left - I found this photo on the internet. It's a Malayan soldier circa 1956, with a bunch of leeches on his back. Bill Creech's personal record was 60 leeches even.



Actual size.

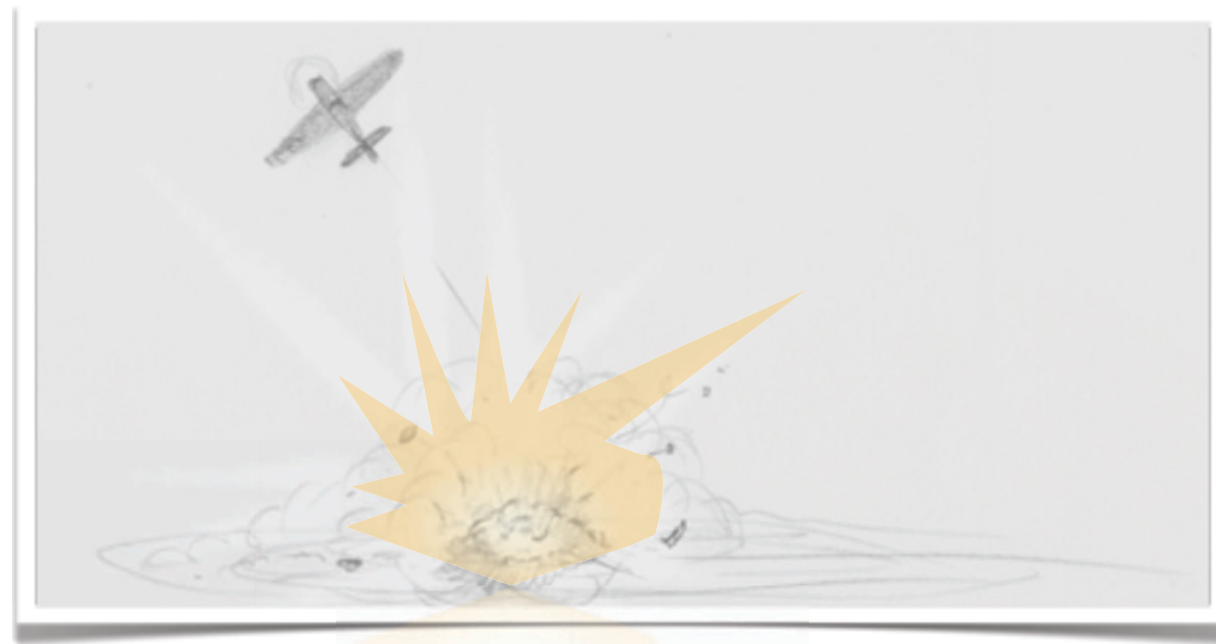
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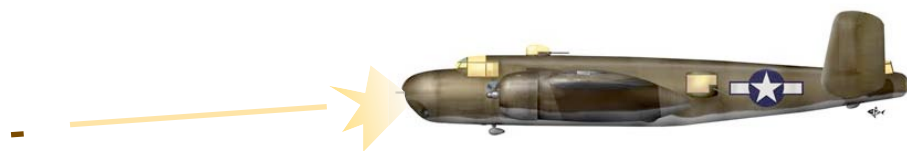
I couldn't find any photos of actual
Dragon Fly combat, so I drew one.

As you can see, the Dragon Flys
hit hard and hit *low*.



My buddy Wendell Hanson flew B-25H's in the CBI. The "H" model B-25 was a nasty thing - a regular medium bomber with a Sherman Tank gun in the nose. It was used to strafe ground targets - essentially the same thing the Dragon Flys did but only a whole lot louder.

I asked Wendell how low he flew and he said, "I asked (General Chenault) how low we should (come in on the target) and he said, 'if your props are green (from hitting grass), then you're low enough.'"



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a hum-drum A-36

The A-36 airplane was the tool at-hand for the 528th.

If you're an airplane nut, you know the A-36 was essentially a P-51 with an Allison engine instead of a Rolls Royce engine.

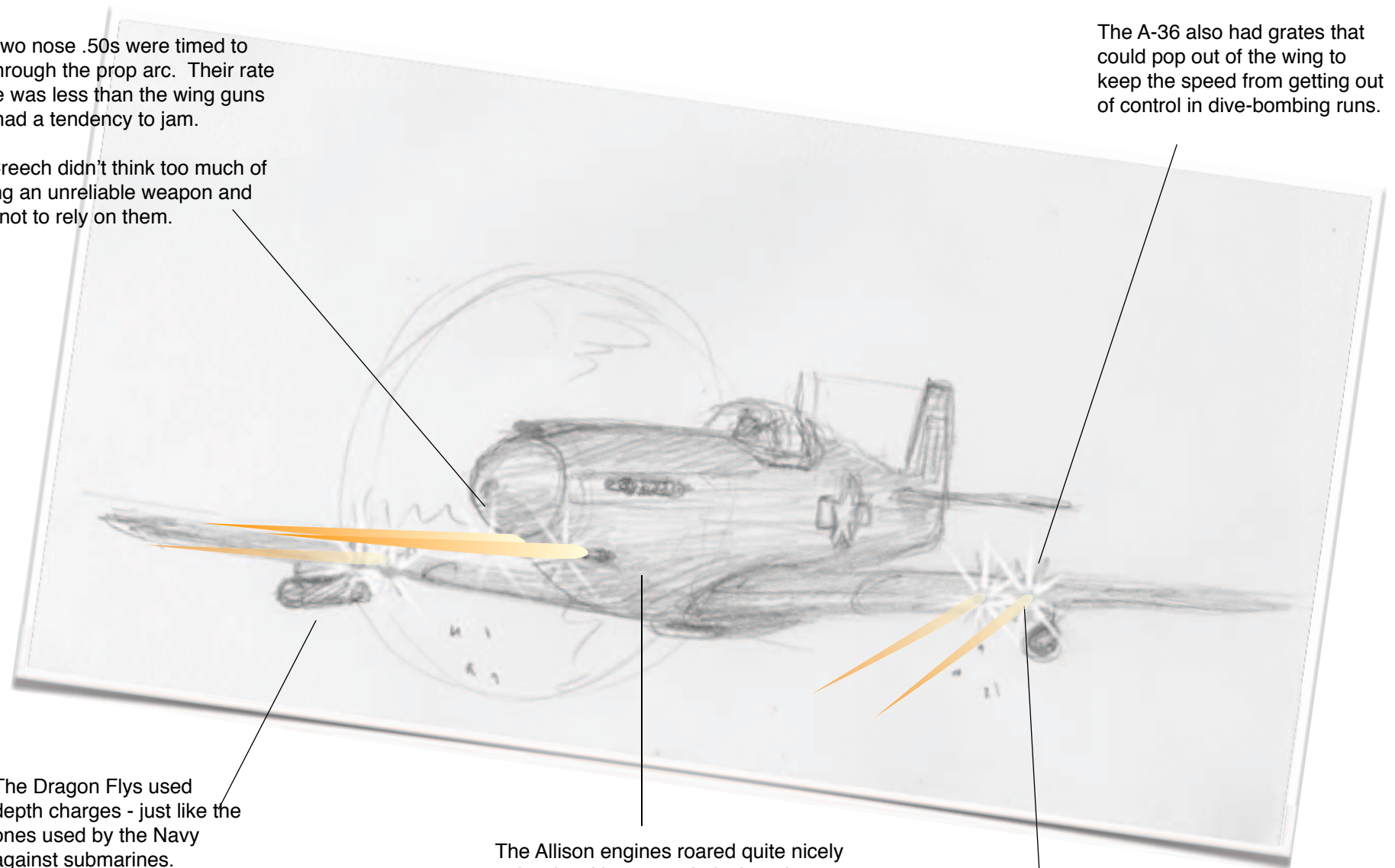
In many ways, the A-36 was like the bug dragonfly - at low level, the airplane was quite a predator.

Regardless, the Dragon Flys worked their A-36s **hard**.

The two nose .50s were timed to fire through the prop arc. Their rate of fire was less than the wing guns and had a tendency to jam.

Bill Creech didn't think too much of having an unreliable weapon and tried not to rely on them.

The A-36 also had grates that could pop out of the wing to keep the speed from getting out of control in dive-bombing runs.



The Dragon Flys used depth charges - just like the ones used by the Navy against submarines.

Dense jungle tended to absorb the blasts from fragmentation or "High Explosive" bombs.

But the jungle couldn't absorb the brain-pounding **BLAM!** of a depth charge.

The Allison engines roared quite nicely at low level but weren't designed to run in thinner air above 14,000 feet altitude - just as well because the Dragon Fly's targets were on the ground.

2 .50 caliber machine guns were in each wing, firing at a rate of about 800 rounds per minute, per gun.

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Let's take a look at a month's work for
the Dragon Flys - June 1944.

If these numbers are meaningless to you,
think of the Dragon Flys as a professional
football team playing every day for a
month solid - wearing the same helmets,
uniforms and shoes.

And 80-100% of everyone has dysentery.

But lucky for Bill - he ended up missing
half of June's work.

Well, maybe he wasn't so lucky.



311th FG HEADQUARTERS

528TH FIGHTER SQUADRON ACTIVITY: JUNE 1 THROUGH JUNE 30, 1944

COMBAT SORTIES:
ESCORT AND PATROL SORTIES:
COMBAT HOURS FLOWN:
BOMBS DROPPED [U.S. TON]:
ROUNDS FIRED:
GASOLINE CONSUMED:

612
119
898.5
141.6
272,121
56,364

AVG. SORTIES PER DAY:
TYPICAL NUMBER OF AC AVAILABLE/DAY
TYPICAL NUMBER OF PILOTS READY/DAY

24
20
25

DAY'S RECORD:
79 SORTIES.
THAT'S EVERY
PLANE, EVERY
PILOT FLYING AT
LEAST 3 TIMES IN
ONE DAY.

On June 17, 1944, Bill suited up for a mission to bomb a Japanese officer's quarters near a place called "Moguang."

To insure accuracy of bomb placement, the plan was to come in low and send the bombs into the target from the side, or "through the front door." This technique was called "Skip Bombing."

"Skip bombing" was done with time-delayed fuses that detonated the bomb about 10 seconds after initial impact.



Map - Moguang is 56 miles south, south-east from the Dragon Fly base at Tingkawk. The time between "wheels up" to target was about 20 minutes.

To get a sense of perspective on mission lengths:

Typical fighter mission lengths:

Europe (ETO)	4 hours
Pacific (PTO)	4 hours
Mediterranean (MTO)	2 hours
CBI	90 min

To be sure, missions flown in the CBI were much shorter than any other Theatre of operations.

But, I wonder if a belly full of dysentery didn't make the time-scale more even?



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a hum-drum A-36

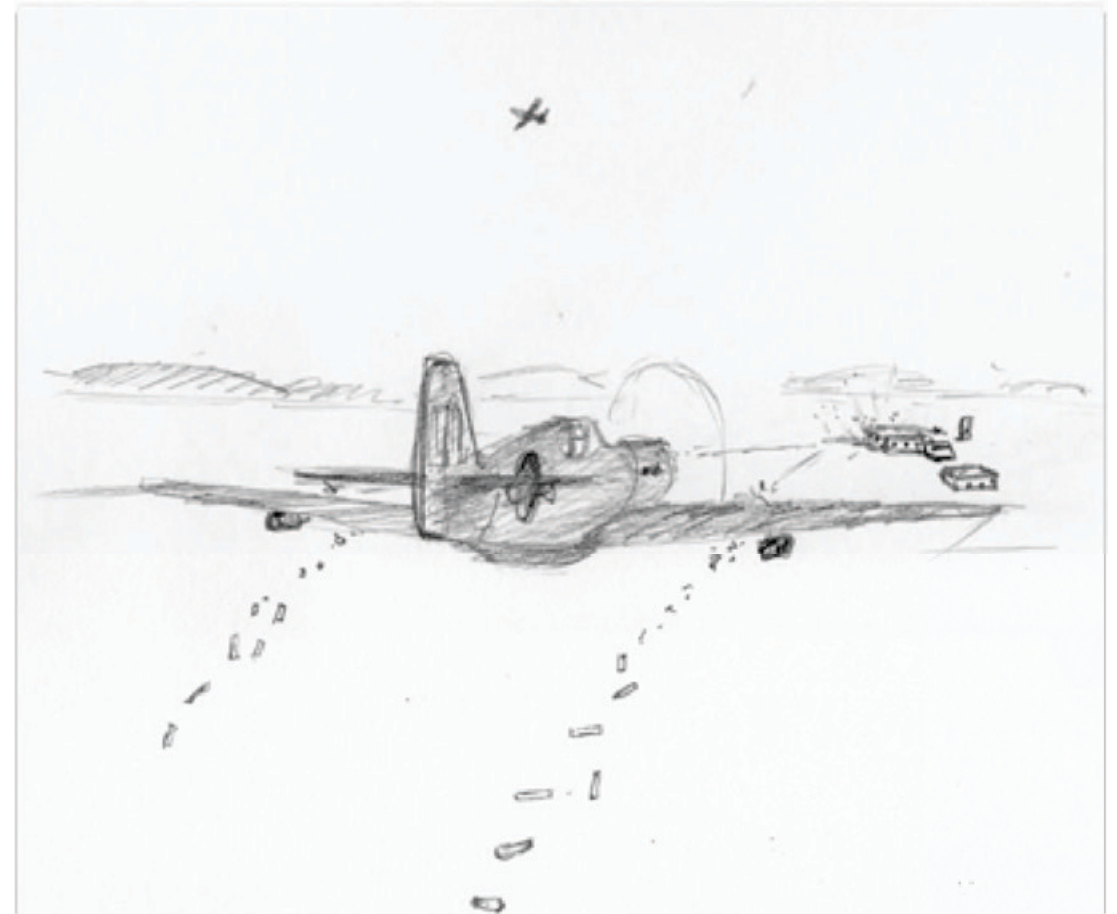
The flight of 4 found their target, lined up in “trail formation,” and made their run.

Now, understand,

at 300mph, things happen, *fast!*

Drawing right - Lt. Creech fires on the Japanese HQ. The element leader has pulled up, Bill's JUST about to pickle his bombs.

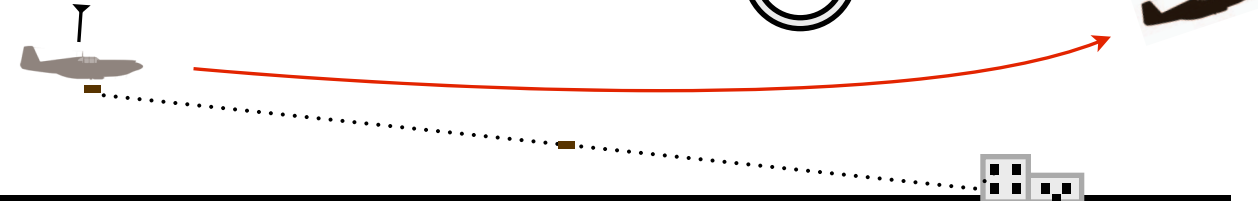
Diagram below - another perspective on the attack, but Bill wouldn't be firing his machine guns just yet as his element leader is still within gun range.



Bill is flying about 200 yds behind and at about 300 mph.



Element leader drops his bombs, the timers start ticking,



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→ BOOOM!

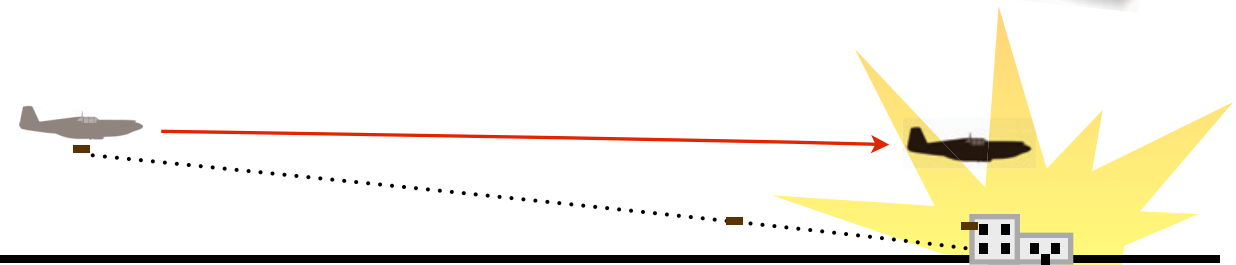
Drawing right - Bill's A-36 gets a cowl full of shrapnel and debris from the exploding building,

This wasn't supposed to happen.

Was Bill flying too far behind his Element Leader? Did the Element Leader's bombs have too-fast fuses? Did Bill's bombs have too-fast fuses, too?

The fact will never be known.

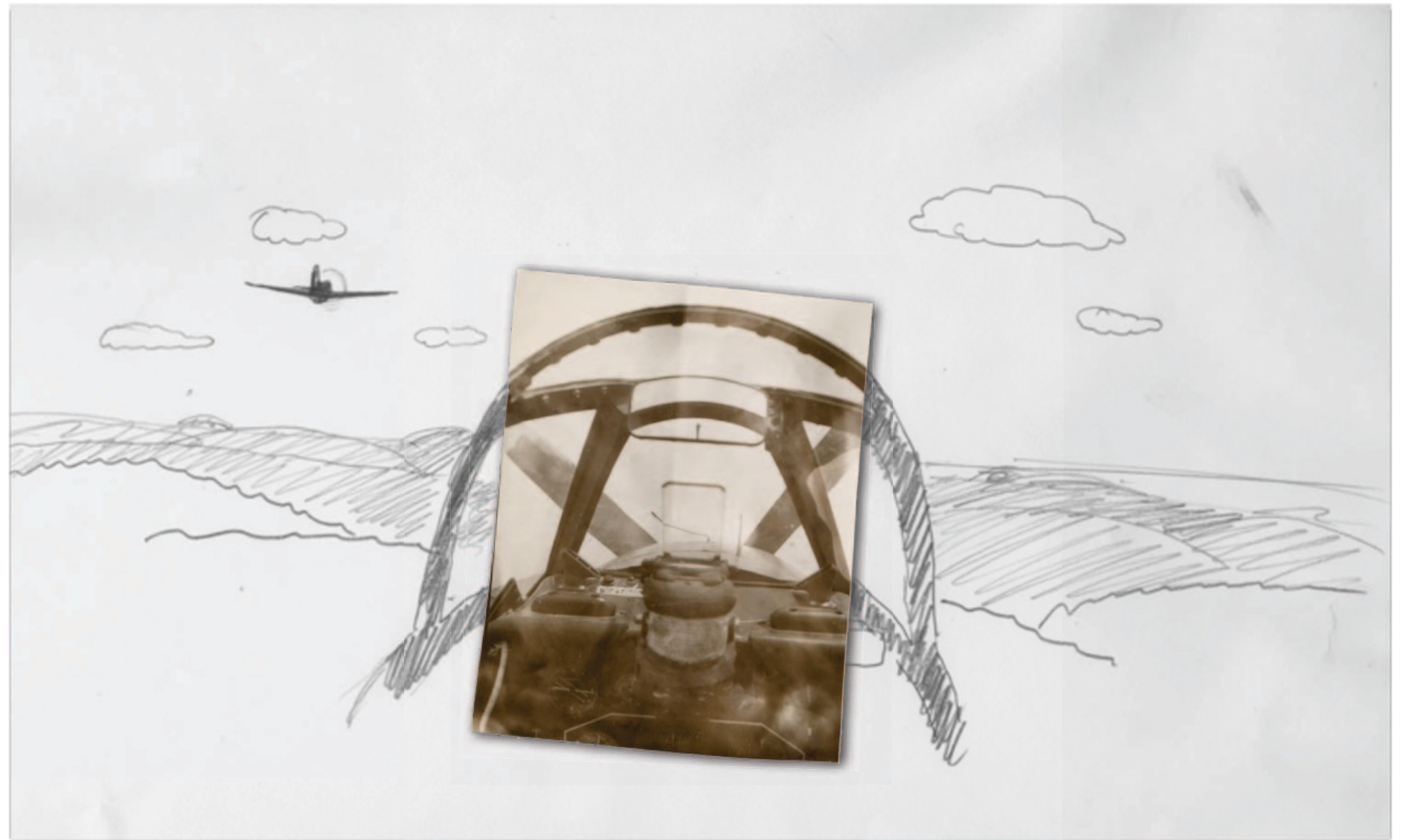
Regardless, Bill suddenly had much more important things to think about.



The blast blew a hole in Bill's right wing, disabled the airspeed gauge and also severed coolant and oil lines.

Glancing at his watch and scouring the gauges, Bill quickly figured that he had about six minutes before the engine would seize up and die. And it did.

He looked for a place to crash in the sea of green jungle ahead.



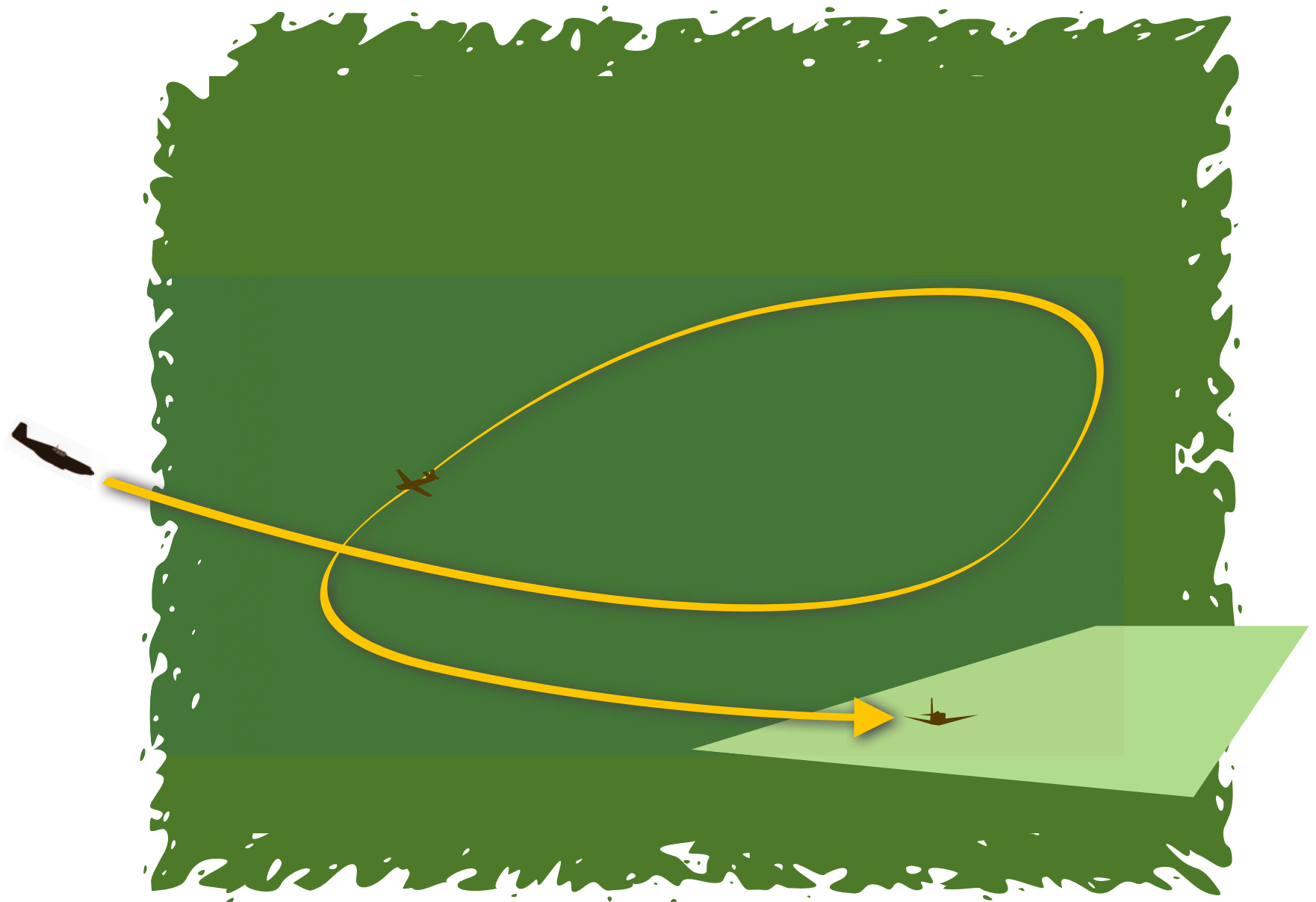
*Why didn't Bill bail out? Bill made the choice to glide as far as he could away from known Japanese territory. If captured, the likelihood of his being tortured was assured. Better to die running than live dying, then die anyway.

The quick drawing/photo above is my mind's eye of what Bill must have been seeing, looking a place to his "dead bird down." The cockpit shot is from a P-51B, hence the obvious four-bladed prop. In reality, the engine quit so suddenly, the gearbox sheared and the prop continued to "windmill" - turning in the wind without generating forward lift.

Then, he spotted a *meadow* below!

Using the remaining “energy” of flight,
he nosed his airplane down and managed
to squeeze a circuit around his hopeful
landing spot.

Bill focused on controlling what little he
had of his falling, powerless airplane.



*Pilots - without an airspeed gauge, Bill flew
the A-36 by feel, keeping speed around 120kts.

Dear Mother

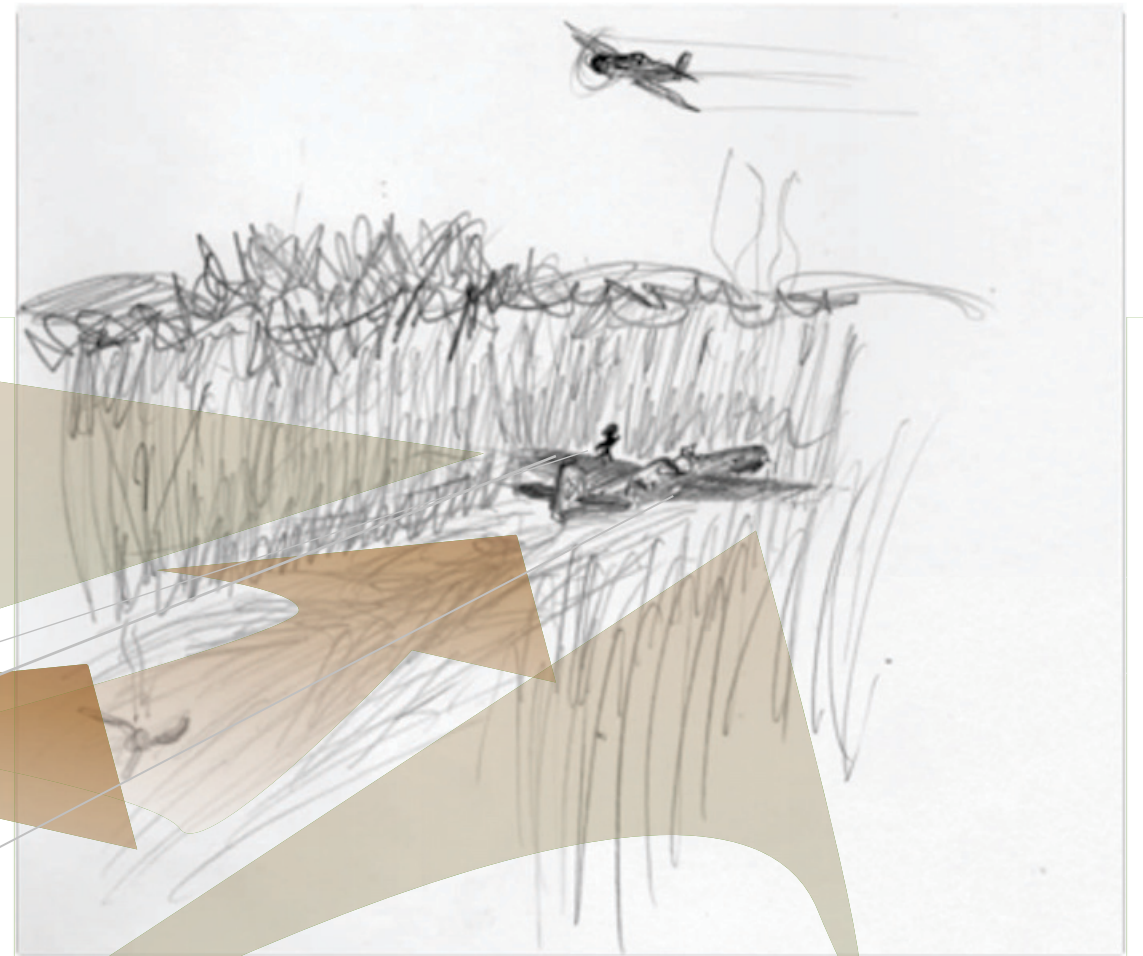
The story behind
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But it was no meadow. It was actually a swath of 10 foot tall elephant grass growing in a swamp.

Out of options, the A-36 was going in.

The airplane became a 100 mph machete and slashed through the growth, sending a violent spray of muck and airplane parts into the air.

But Bill was alive.



Fortune deals a strange hand some times. The elephant grass concealed Bill from the Japanese, it also concealed him from the Allies. The soft mud eased the crash landing but it put Bill smack dab into a malarial factory.

In this drawing I try to show Flight Leader Jesse Townsend's last "wing waggle" over the downed

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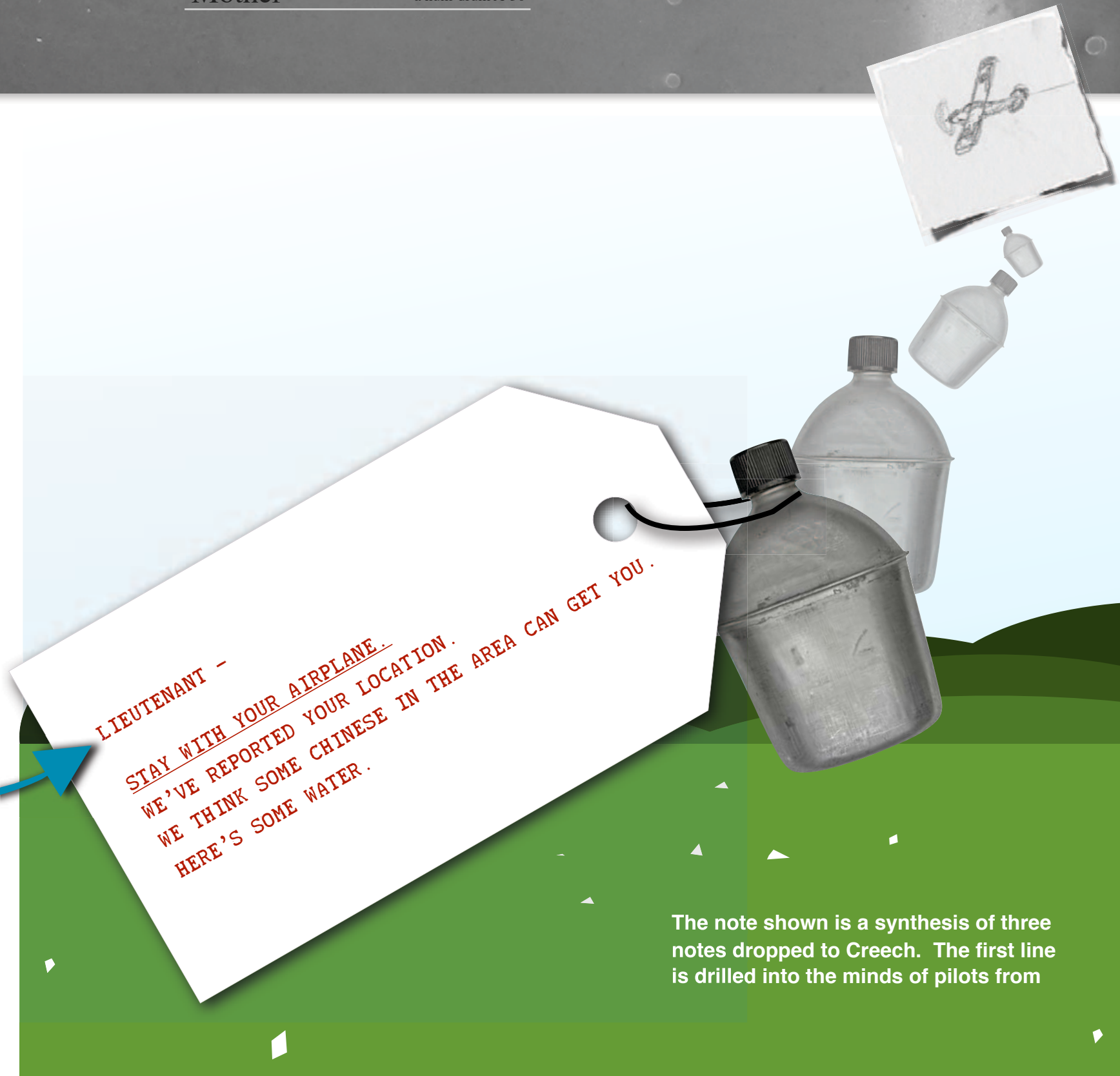
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Flight Leader Townsend returned to base, loaded a survival canister onto his bomb rack and boogied back to Bill's crash site.

He dropped from too low an altitude and the contents smashed all over the place.

The next day, an L-4 observation plane dropped half a canteen of water with a note...

An L-4 was a military spec Piper Cub - almost identical to the airplane Bill flew in learning to fly - except it was green instead of yellow.



LIEUTENANT -
STAY WITH YOUR AIRPLANE.
WE'VE REPORTED YOUR LOCATION.
WE THINK SOME CHINESE IN THE AREA CAN GET YOU.
HERE'S SOME WATER.

The note shown is a synthesis of three notes dropped to Creech. The first line is drilled into the minds of pilots from

Dear Mother

The story behind
a hum-drum A-36

India

Burma

The satellite map here is circa 2008, 64 years after Bill's crash. The locations are approximate. What you can't see is the dense jungle growth or the hilly terrain.

Crash

Target

But the **reality** of his situation was that he was smack dab in some of the most unnavigable terrain on earth.
Anyone coming to get him was looking at four to six day journey on foot.



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India

Tinkawk
160 miles

Ledo Road - approximate.

Satellite photos from 1944
are, frankly, impossible to find.

Therefore, my brown line is a
general idea. Besides, the
real road was curvy with lots
of tight switchbacks.

The Ledo Road was built
as a military supply artery
between China and Ledo,
India. After WW2, the
road deteriorated.

Over 1,000 Americans died
in its construction.

Burma

Crash

Target

Staying with the crash meant stretching rations out to six days, trying to keep the bloodsuckers away, staying dry in a waterlogged airplane and hoping the Japanese didn't find him first. However, the "Ledo Road" was (Bill figured) about 20 miles West/North West. If he could make that, it would be possible flag down a friendly.

Bill had some **serious** thinking to do.

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Actual size.



Top to Bottom: **Top** - an M-1 Carbine. Bill's had a stock cracked in half due to the cannister crash. **Middle** - a first-aid kit circa 1944. It's about the size of a Nintendo Game Boy and is packed with all kinds of little medical gizmos. **Bottom** - a machette; the first hand-held weed wacker.




ASSETS

Taking stock of his situation, Bill
counted his assets,

subtracted his liabilities...



- ☒ Broken M-1 Carbine & ammo
- ☒ A .45 pistol
- ☒ Machette
- ☒ Bottle of Halizone tablets
- ☒ A big piece of parachute silk
- ☒ K-rations
- ☒ Chocolate bar
- ☒ Canteen
- ☒ Mosquito "repellent"
- ☒ A signal mirror
- ☒ A shaving razor
- ☒ A flag 



LIABILITIES

- ☒ An airplane slowly filling with swamp goo
- ☐ Japanese soldiers



Shown: This flag was found on a dead Japanese soldier on Guam, 1944. The script tells a story of well-wishes and friendship and the silk is of amazing quality. But the Japanese army flags in Burma were undoubtedly similar if not identical.

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...and decided to walk out on his own.

He left for Ledo.

And he left his airplane.



For a man used to a “20,000 foot view” of life, hacking through a jungle, one foot at a time was...unfamiliar.

He was constantly swatting mosquitos and cleaning his body of leeches.

Then, he remembered that he could be back at his airplane *constantly swatting mosquitos and cleaning his body of leeches*.

And that made him hack **harder**.





Dear Mother

The story behind
a hum-drum A-36



By the third night in the jungle, Weird
dreams were his only sleep and picking
parasites his only rest.

But those weren't the worst of it. Bill
began to experience utter loneliness.



He started to “talk to God.”

On his fourth night, Bill came across an abandoned Japanese patrol camp. He ducked down and watched it from afar - for many hours - until he felt confident they weren't coming back.

At the camp, he found a lean-to.

He crouched inside and discovered a ratty shirt, left behind by one of the soldiers.

Wadding the shirt into a ball, he made a pillow and toasted the soldier for his gift with halizone-treated stream water.

It started to rain...



He lit a small fire...and fell fast asleep.

No nightmares, no bugs, no leeches, no Japanese. It wasn't a great night's sleep, but it was a lot better than the prior.

But his meager refreshment was quickly absorbed by two realities:

1. He was out of food.
2. He'd only traveled about *5 miles*.



There was no returning to the airplane.
There was no reaching the Ledo road.

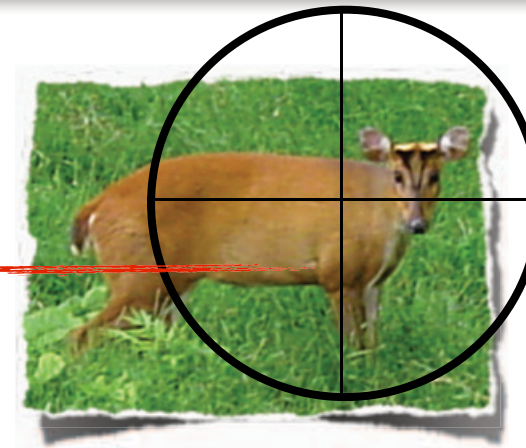
There was only the “now” of putting
one foot in front of the other, heading in
a vague direction.

Then, suddenly, he heard - and saw - a
small Barking Deer.

For a second, he was struck by the
creature’s delicate lines and natural
beauty. But quickly, he realized it was
something even more wonderful -

It was **FOOD!**

Bill raised his Carbine, took aim and gently released the safety...



Clink-thumph!

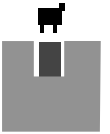
“What the?!”

The deer looked up at the sound and
scampered away.

Bill had unwittingly hit the clip release
instead of the safety, allowing the ammo
to drop to the jungle floor.

His spirit dropped, too.

On the M-1 Carbine, the safety and clip-release
lever are very close. In his inexperience, Bill
simply tapped the wrong one.



Actually, Bill’s carbine would
have had iron sights like the
one directly above instead
of a scope reticle as shown
with the deer. I just thought
the crosshairs looked better
for this screen.



Hope was gone.

And “one foot in front of the other”
was simply a way to kill time.

Until he heard a boat motor off in the distance.

“*Would that be the Hukawng River?*”

Hope flickered again and Bill bolted
towards the sound.



Reaching the bank, Bill looked downstream and saw a guy on an empty boat wearing an Australian hat!

A FRIEND!

Bill quickly unfurled his U.S. Flag, shot a few .45cal bullets into the air and shouted - "*HEY! HEY!*"

The Australian looked, shouted something back...

...and kept on going.

"HEY! HEY!" COME BACK!"

The Australian didn't even look back.



Bill's anger flamed. Rifle in hand, he was tempted...

Yet, it was *especially* good that Bill didn't shoot that Australian boatman.

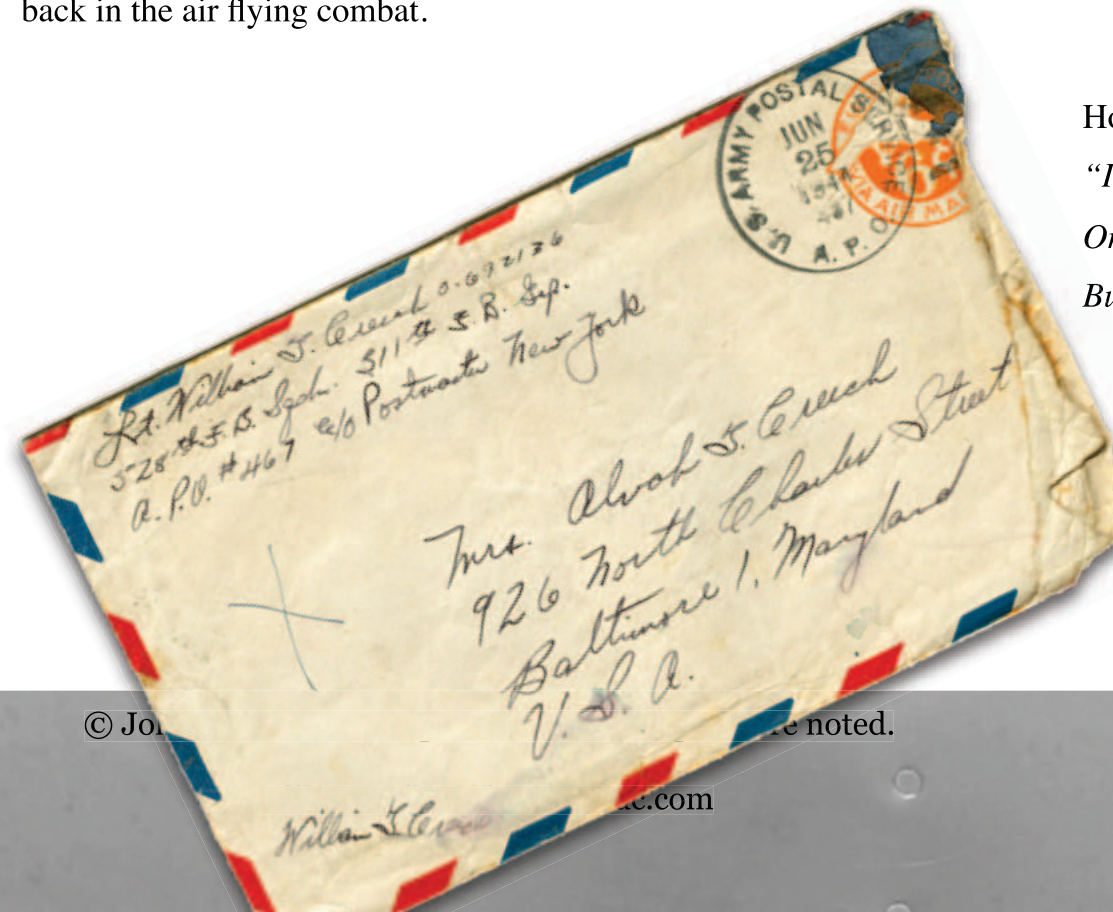
A few minutes later, an American boat carrying combat wounded came into view and this time, the boatman pulled over.

And fate would have it that there was room for Bill.

During Bill's two-week recovery, he gained back the weight and blood he'd lost and on July 7, 1944, was back in the air flying combat.

The rest of WW2 was just as eventful for Bill. For now, that story will have to wait.

However, in 2007, Bill called me up and said, *"I found a bunch of letters I wrote my mom. One of them is just after my first 'walk out' in Burma. Want to see it?"*



Dear
Mother

The story behind
hum drum A-36

Of course! And here they are.

The first thing I noticed was the crinkly blueish parchment and the tidy penmanship. I expected that from 70 year old paper and old-school education.

But what I didn't expect was the letter's tone. Frank, clear and factual, it was almost...well...hum drum.

I was disappointed.

Because, perhaps, I subconsciously wanted some drama. But mostly, I knew Bill and knew that if anyone could write a dramatic letter, it was him.

I mean, where was the "OMG!" factor?

India
6-24-44

Dear Mother,

Received your very nice letter yesterday and was so glad to hear that you're all doing all right. Your new engraved stationery is very pretty.

Well I'm at Wing Headquarters now on a short rest (4 days) after a very trying experience. I was a little undecided whether to tell you about it before but I guess you would have found out sooner or later. You see, I was missing in action for 5 days and nights. We were on a bombing mission and I caught the blast of the fellow's bomb who was ahead of me. It blew out my coolant and oil system, but I had time to get out of enemy territory and make a nice wheel up crash landing in a valley of tall grass. The plane was smashed up pretty bad but I didn't even get a scratch. My element leader went home and brought me an emergency kit of rations, supplies, etc. which he dropped to me. I spent the first night in the ship and the next morning I started walking out. A search plane spotted me and dropped a note and some rations. The note said to return to the plane and a search party would reach me about noon. Well, I returned but the search party never did.

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But, folding up the ancient letter and stuffing it back inside the well-traveled envelope, I perceived a common thread connecting so many of the people of ‘*that*’ generation.

While **my** generation naturally valued the “amazing!” and “awesome!” *his* naturally valued the obvious and factual.

To Bill, rising above an extraordinary circumstance was not Headline News. It was simply the *right response*.

And that’s when I knew
what airplane to draw next.



Our *amazing, awesome, OMG!* lives are going on right here! That is *sooo cool!* I mean, *OMG!*

(laughs)

Sometimes, when I get around these old guys, I feel like I haven’t lived a single day.

Documentation and verification of the specific airplane Bill flew that June day in 1944 was impossible to find.

But, I did know the probability of Bill flying EVERY airplane assigned to the 528th, at least once, was very high.

So, I picked one. And Bill blessed the decision.

I have to tell you, the result sure isn't spectacular or "OMG!"...

The paint scheme will have to reflect the hard life Dragon Fly airplanes had to endure. Frankly, these planes were, as the cowboys say, *"Rode hard and put away wet."*

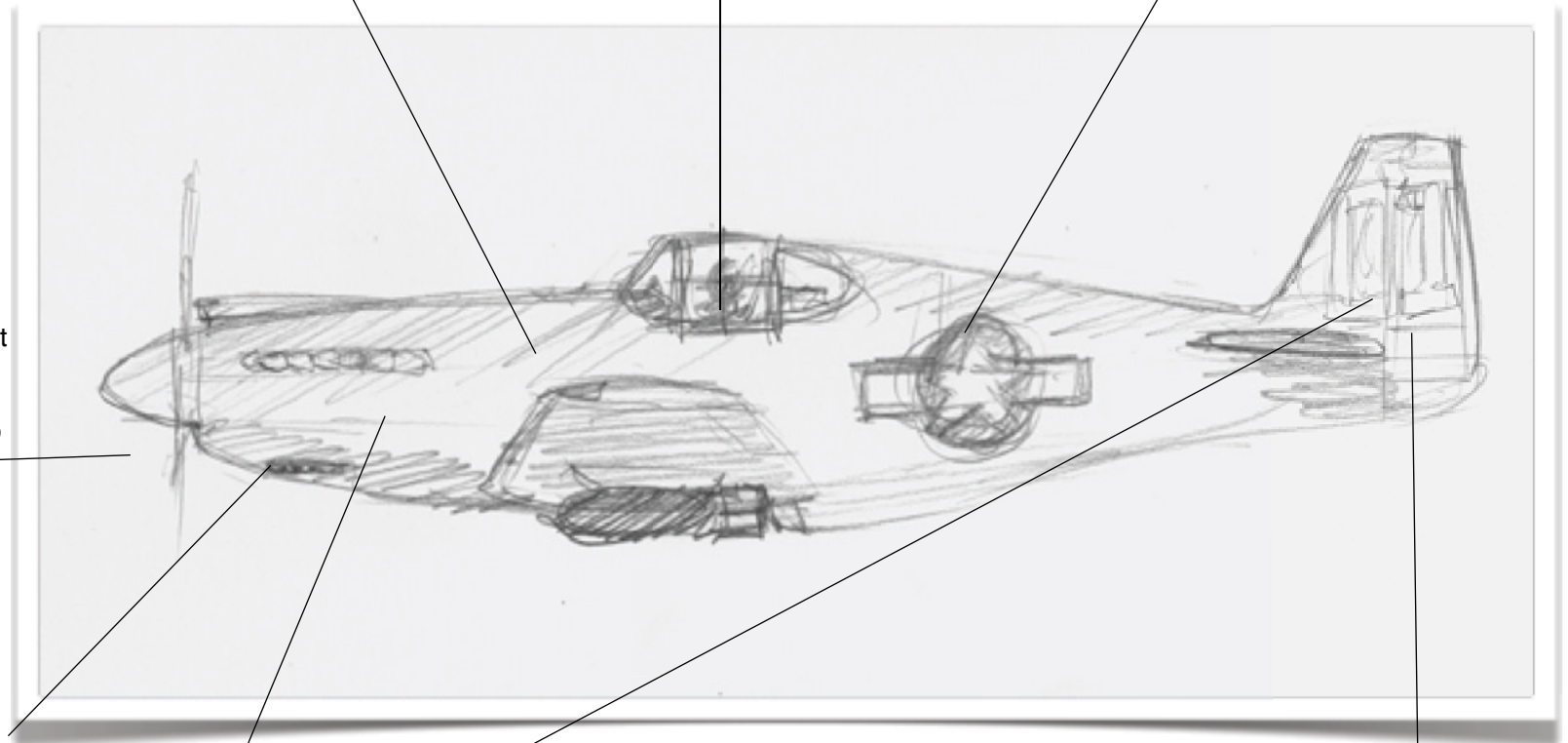
One 528th pilot explained how "everyone in the squadron had dysentery." Then added, "You know what it's like to hold your bowels while "pulling G? Can't be done!" He scowled, I laughed. Then scowled too.

528th A-36s were hand-me-downs from the Italian campaign where the American insignia was outlined in red.

Japanese insignias were red, so why tempt confusion? Paint the red lines over with dark blue paint!

Ha! Mistake! Allison engine "Mustangs" didn't have the air intake under the nose. Chalk it up to a fubar in this sketch.

A-36s had chin-guns, P-51As didn't. And now you know.

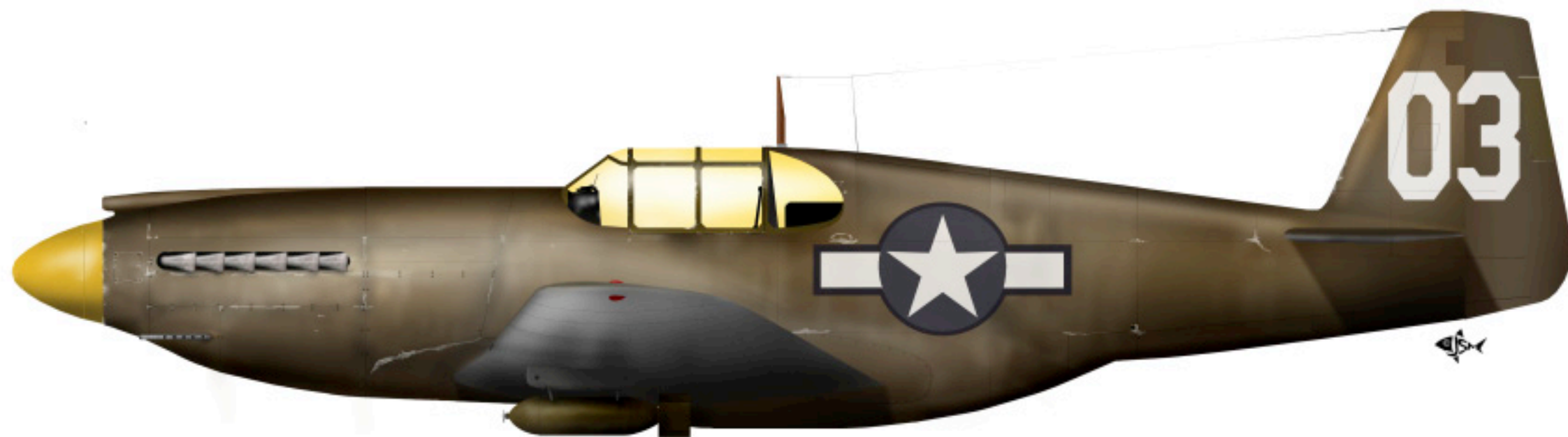


"03"
North American A-36 as flown by
William "Bill" Creech, 528th FS, 311 FG

Very few of the 528th A-36s or P-51As had nose art. And within the squadron, individual tail numbers would vary in style and size.

And - at least in the early days - the 528 pilots just took the plane they were assigned for the sortie.

Hmmm. I should go back and reread Bill's book...



“03”
North American A-36 as flown by
William “Bill” Creech, 528th FS, 311 FG

...but it is quite *real*.

Just like her pilot.

Dear Mother

The story behind
a hum-drum A-36

Bill dedicates this presentation to

God Almighty...

(The First Greatest Fighter Pilot)

...the men and women who were a part of his
military service & command...

(The Second Greatest Fighter Pilots)

...and the most beautiful women in the world.

(wife, 4 daughters, **and Mother**).

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Dear Mother

The story behind
a hum-drum A-36



Gracious, analytical, fearless and fair,
Bill remains my Standard
for these qualities.



I do believe he is indeed the
“3rd Greatest Fighter Pilot.”

Ever.



Why Simoniz?
Email me.

Dear Mother

The story behind
a hum-drum A-36



The class of 43-I at Chickasha, Ok. There's one in every crowd.

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