

World War II Story

As my husband approached his 85th birthday, I asked him to tell me again the following story of WW II so that I could write it down.

It began in 1944 when he sailed for England on the Queen Elizabeth. He was in the Army Air Corp., a fighter pilot from Abilene, Texas, headed for Duxford Air Force Base. There were rumors that aboard ship was a Lt. Bill Crump who had his pet coyote with him. Later, this was confirmed. Although this was reported to Lt. Larry Nelson, officer of the day, and he was told to get rid of him, Larry refused to do it. Bill later flew missions in his P51, with his coyote alongside him. The coyote, named Jeep, was the mascot of the squadron. Jeep lived about a year after he arrived in England before he was hit and killed by a truck. He was given a military funeral, with four planes flying overhead; one peeled off, signifying "missing man." He was buried on the base.

Lt. John W., "Wild Bill" Crump was from Washington state. He had worked in forestry and had found the baby coyote, keeping it as a pet. He later joined the Army Air Corp., taking the pet with him. He was in the 356th Fighter Group, stationed at Martlesham Heath, England.

In the interim, my husband, Lt. Huie Lamb, Jr., stationed at Duxford Air Force Base in England, was flying P-51's over Germany, escorting bombers. After one mission, his wingman, Lt. John C. Childs, Jr., lost his radio contact, so Huie was escorting him back to Duxford. While flying over the North Sea, Huie lost his coolant in his engine which got hot and caught on fire. He wasn't able to glide to land, and his only choice was to head into the wind and ditch into the water. He first loosened his seat belt, but was unable to open his canopy until he was too low to bail out. He stalled just above the water; his right wing hit the water causing the plane to cartwheel. He was able to stand and get into the water seconds before the plane sank. He inflated his "mae west" and his dingy, but was too weak to get into it. He hung onto it in the freezing water.

In the meantime, John Childs flew to shore and saw an airfield where, unbelievably, an amphibious plane, called a Walrus, was taxiing down the runway. He stepped out of his plane and told the pilot that there was a man down and to follow him, and he would lead them to him. John, at his greater speed, circled the walrus, and led it to Huie, where it landed in the water and pulled him from his hold on the dingy.

Amazingly that day, Bill Crump was test flying his P 51 and saw Huie's descent into the North Sea, immediately sending out a "mayday" for help. That's why the Walrus was already taxiing down the runway, but, of course, Huie didn't learn this fact until 2001! Bill landed and awaited the arrival of the Walrus. As it landed, an ambulance pulled up alongside it. The base doctor clambered inside the aircraft and felt Huie's pulse. The doctor felt that Huie had little chance, but Bill helped to lift the litter from the Walrus to transfer Huie to the ambulance. Once inside, Huie was rushed to the base hospital where his lip was sewn up. Ten days after the ditching, he was back in the air, and finished the war with credits for 5.5 enemy aircraft. Luck had played a large part in his survival, as, at that time, only one other pilot had survived a sea ditching in a mustang, and he had broken both legs and never flew combat again. Huie's only injuries had been a cut lip and broken tooth, plus the hypothermia.

Years later, in 2001, a British citizen named Shaun Crump, no relation to Bill Crump, an engineer with a university in London, heard stories about Bill Crump. He contacted Bill, wanting to write a book about his life. Bill said that he would like the book to include the story of his spotting Huie's plane ditching in the North Sea, and his seeing the pilot getting out into the water, plus his part in Huie's rescue. It was Bill's quick action in alerting the Walrus, and John's leading the already-running Walrus to Huie, that saved his life that day, December 29, 1944.

Shaun Crump got in touch with Huie and told him the story of Bill Crump's part in his rescue. Huie and Bill began a correspondence, and the last Christmas card that Huie received before Bill died in 2008, included a picture of Bill sitting in his plane with his coyote.

Thank God Bill and John were there
12-29-44. They saved my life.

Best Regards,
Huie