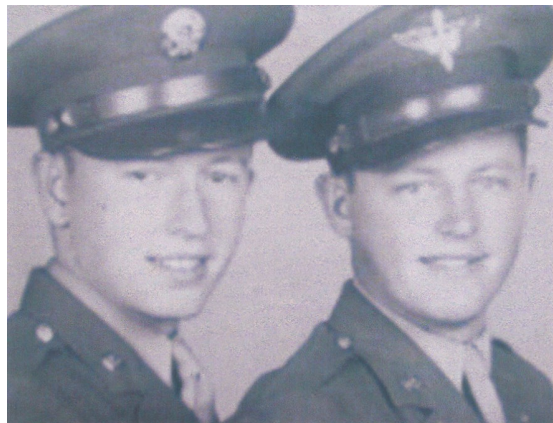


Unauthorized Flight to a Wartime Family Reunion By Don Fieldhouse

A very special bond existed (and still exists) between the cousins on my mother's side. We are the grandchildren of **Wallace** and **Emma Shaunce Power**, and we all came together at their home every Thanksgiving and Christmas plus times in between. The stories of our great grandfather **Thomas Shaunce** were told and retold in our family including the digging of the shaft and tunnel at Tower Hill State Park, his adventures during the Black Hawk War, and the struggle his wife **Mahala** had after his death. The "Tyrer Cholera Cure" which was administered by our great great grandparents, **Asa** and **Chloe Tyrer**, was part of our early heritage.

This close family tie was greatly altered by 1943 with four of the cousins in the armed forces, I (Don) was the last to join with my brother **Gerald** plus cousins **Robert** and **Clifford Bowers** already serving in the armed forces.



The Bowers

Robert (Bob)
1921-

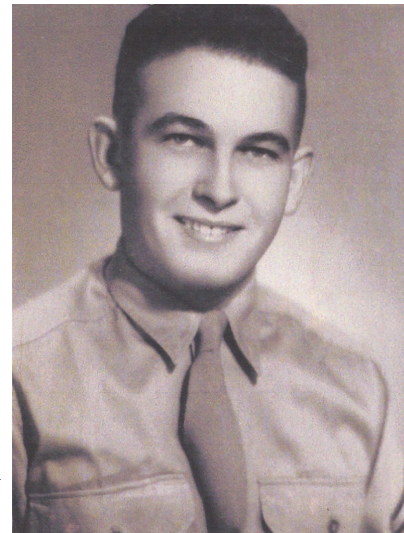
Clifford (Bud)
1923-2010



Gerald
1923-1995

Fieldhouse

Don
1925-



I arrived in England in October of 1944 and soon learned from my father's letters that cousin Bud was not far away. Bud (Lt. Clifford Bowers) was a fighter pilot. He was stationed somewhere in England and made daily flights across the channel for missions over France and Germany. I continued to hear exciting reports from home about Bud's missions, but I never dreamed of ever seeing him. It was not permissible for me to write and tell him where I was located. Actually, we were not even allowed to tell our family exactly where we were. Eventually, in early 1945, I had a good friend from the WAAF (British Women's Auxiliary Air Force) write to my parents and tell them my location which was along the coast of the Bay of Bristol at Weston-Super-Mare. Our unit, The 1270th Engineer Combat Battalion, was billeted in little hotels, one platoon per hotel. We were the only U.S. troops in town which made it nice for getting acquainted with the local girls.

In early March, as we were loading up our trucks to cross the channel to catch up with General Patton's Third Army, a messenger from Battalion Headquarters found me and gave me the message that I had a phone call. I had never received a phone call. The messenger didn't know who was on the phone, but I ran down to find out. I almost passed out when my cousin Bud told me that he was at the nearby British Airbase and he could only stay for a very short time. I told him that I'd be right there even though I didn't know how I was going to get there. I didn't even know where the airbase was located.

Our trucks were half loaded, so I couldn't even beg for a ride and I'd never seen a taxi in our area. So, I pried the lock off a friend's borrowed bicycle and headed in the general direction of the airbase. I kept calling out for directions as I peddled and, after what seemed like an eternity, I saw the guards at the gate. I hardly slowed up as I waved to the guards, who just waved back, and I peddled up to the building nearest the control tower. I ran in and asked for the pilot of the P-51 which I could see parked on the runway. Sure enough there was my cousin Bud and his now well known P-51 "Skunk Chaser".

I have reminisced about his reunion many times and finally asked cousin Bud to write his half of the story.



Cousin Bud & the Skunk Chaser

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Bud's half of the story

Anyway, it was quite a procedure to find you. No member of the armed forces was allowed to write each other and tell where they were located (the letters were strictly censored). To get things done, Don had a young lady write to his dad Virgil back in Dodgeville with directions to where he was located. Virgil sent these directions to me. I was on the East Coast of England with Don on the West and the directions were quite fuzzy.

In between missions, I had my P-51 gassed up and took off with a full load of gas, 235 gallons. It used just under 60 gallons per hour. My control tower recorded the time I took off and knowing how much fuel I had, calculated when I would return. I headed straight west and when I got to the Atlantic Ocean, as any fool would know, I knew I had gone too far.

Doubling back, I found a little town with a stream to the south of it with some small barracks which seemed like the directions I had been given. It had a small pasture so I squeezed in, taxied up to a small shack where they asked what I wanted. I told them that my left wing tank cap was loose and I was losing lots of fuel so then I just tightened it. I then asked where this British Airbase was located. They said it was about 10 to 12 miles due north.

So, I took off using all 1650 HP of the Rolls Royce engine to clear the trees at the end of the pasture. A few moments later I saw the small town with a stream to the south with barracks, a control tower and a runway heading SW to NE, but small planes were landing SE to NW across the runway. I slowed down to 120 mph and got in the pattern with these small planes landing SE to NW across the runway, taxied up to the tower, climbed up and asked them to call the orderly room at the U.S. Army unit and find out if they had a Corporal Donald Fieldhouse. They called and sure enough, he was there somewhere. Donald was located and I let him know where I was and emphasized that I could not stay long. He said he would be right out so I sat down at the base of the tower and in a little while I thought I



The Skunk Chaser in flight

could see dust coming down the narrow road. I guess it was smoke coming from the tires of the borrowed bike. So in just a moment more, off jumped my handsome cousin Donald.

We hugged each other, asked how things were, what do you hear from home, are you getting enough to eat and other small stuff like that. Then it was time to say goodbye because my time was running out. So we said goodbye and I told him to take care and if he came my direction on the way to Germany then stop in for a drink. I took off on the runway to the SW and circled back for a very low buzz job in honor of our event and headed home.

Back up to 10,000 feet my radio was buzzing with my call from home base. I assured them I was O.K. They said the Squadron CO wanted to see me when I returned to base. He didn't have much to say because we were friends, just said he would appreciate it if I used my flying time for missions. So we went to the club and had a beer.



A closer up of Bud & the Skunk Chaser

So ends the saga with Cousin Donald Fieldhouse.

How great to have family! I remember it like it was today!!!! I (Don) second cousin Bud's declaration of

Unauthorized Flight to a Wartime Family Reunion

By Don Fieldhouse

how great it is to have family. May we all continue to keep in touch with our living family as well as to dig into our family history

As Bob and I reminisced about this great reunion we thought about what happened to the four cousins? Where were they at this time (near March 1, 1945?)

Troops in Europe were preparing for the big spring offensive. Bob had just survived the Battle of the Bulge and a gruesome winter. As Bob put it, "Being shot at was bad enough, but the lousy cold rainy, snowy weather in the winter of 1944-45 made everything muddy and miserable. Standing guard in the rain at our gun position in our leaky "poncho's" was at least a change of pace to being drowned in a "Pup" (two man) tent with your partner, listening to the pitter-patter of rain on the cloth tent and have it seeping through spots in the tent where you might have touched it.

Bob was a member of a gun crew in the 3rd section, Company A, 959th Field Artillery Bn, attached to the 3rd Armored Division, XIX Corps, 1st and 9th Armies. On March 1, 1945 he was getting ready to cross the Roer River, preceded by a 3000 piece artillery barrage that lasted two hours. Bob with his unit then moved across Germany to the great Victory.

Meanwhile, Bud was carrying out daily flights over France, Belgium, Germany and Austria preparing the way for the rest of us. He was stationed at Wattisham, England with the 434th Squadron, 479 Fighter Group in the 8th Air Force. With his P51-D "Skunk Chaser" he survived 54 missions during 1944 and 1945. This doesn't include his flight to Weston-Super-Mare to visit his cousin Don.

Meantime, brother, Gerald was in Luzon in the Philippines working in intelligence with the 8th Bombardment Squadron "Grim Reapers" of the 3rd Bombardment Group in the 5th Air Force. Gerald took part in the air offensive of New Guinea, China, Luzon, Southern Philippines and Japan including the liberation of the Philippines. He entered Japan with one of the very earliest flights for the Army of Occupation.

Then we have me who spent the cold winter of 1944-45 in England. Guess it wouldn't help Bob to know that the hotel was unheated. I left for France on (about) March 5 and soon arrived in Luxemburg to become attached to the 3rd Army. I was in the 1270th Engineer Combat Battalion, Co. B. which was attached directly to General Patton's headquarters. Our time was mostly spent building and taking down the famous Bailey Bridge. We then stayed on for a few months for the occupation of Germany.

Thankfully all four of us cousins came home safely.