

VETERANS DAY

SECTION C

No sugar, or Morse Code, please

Only once during his military career did pilot Bud Turner ever fear he'd finally "bought it." Even today, nearly 70 years later, he can still tell you the exact color of the sky that day.

He had been flying with the 315th Squadron over Pantera Airfield in Sicily in a P-40 escorting bombers. They'd done several sweeps that afternoon without seeing any signs of the enemy. Bud was in the tail-end position when his flight commander called them down. He doesn't remember what he'd been thinking as he turned on a wing to descend, but he does recall the jolt of adrenaline that shot through his spine at the first flash of yellow propellers, emerging out of a steely pouf of clouds like angry hornets pouring out of a hive.

White propellers, signifying Germans, would have been bad enough. Yellow meant that the pilots had at least five victories under their belts.

"They came right out of the sun," Bud recalls. "There was nothing I could do but turn right into them."

With two planes above and behind him and two more flanking his sides, Bud hovered for several nail-biting minutes before he did the only thing he could: pull back the rudder and plummet down. Somehow this worked, and though he has no idea how he and his wingman managed to pull it off, both ended up out-flying the Germans to land down safely back at base, where everyone was surprised to see them alive.

"They thought we'd bought it," he says, with a wry smile. "I don't know how we pulled that off, but we did."

He even managed to escape without getting shot that day. That's another story, but before he talks about that one, he recalls the hole in his wing. Another day, another story from WWII.

"It was the largest hole anybody ever came back with," Bud says, laughing as he points to the photo of a much younger version of himself standing next to a plane with a hubcap sized hole in the wing.

That day he'd been circling above Anzio Beach in Italy, covering the American soldiers on the ground who were building a beachhead. He was in the lead position after several 30-minute sweeps across the five-mile radius. Another squadron was ascending to relieve them when German ground fire came out of nowhere and blew a hole in his wing.

Dipping down through the sky at full-throttle, hands clenched on the stick, fighting gravity as he attempted to keep the wings steady and the plane from flipping. Bud somehow managed to bring it down hard, landing in a grove of walnut trees and grapevines near Naples, praying until the plane finally spun itself to a stop.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. Bud's stories could go on for hours, each one more riveting than the previous one.

At age 94, Bud's memory is better than most 23 year olds'. Sharp as a tack and with a memory full of vivid details, Bud's three-year stint in the service reads more like an ac-



Bud Turner, 94, is a veteran of World War II and lifelong resident of Douglas. After signing up to fight in 1942, Bud flew 80 missions as a P-40 Warthog fighter pilot, compared to the average pilot who only flew 25 missions before returning home.

tion adventure novel starring a tough, wise-cracking hero who can somehow make the most terrifying moments seem almost romantic:

Germans shooting and hurling helmets at him as he buzzes the tops of trees.

Dinner in Tunis Bay with a Frenchman and his wife, who somehow magically culled together a mouth-watering feast out of a few simple ingredients.

A completely improbable call for help made on a gold telephone from a nomadic camp out in the middle of nowhere in the vastness of the Sahara Desert.

"That was the damndest thing," Bud says, shaking his head.

Like several of his stories, it begins with a crash landing. He'd been test flying a P-40 en route to Cairo. He'd just cleared the emerald gash of the Suez Canal and was somewhere over Saudi Arabia when he was slow-timing it. A Spitfire made a pass at him. He responded full-throttle. The new engine sputtered and died. Bud had no choice but to land belly-down in an ocean of sand.

Once down, he loosened his grip on the stick and looked over his shoulder for traces of the nomadic camp he'd seen from the air. He nearly set the "damned plane on fire" as he attempted to destroy the radio per protocol, before setting off in knee-high sand, taking two steps forward, one step back, he recalls.

He finally made it to a circle of tents surrounded by camels and mules. An Arab sheik in a white headdress stepped out from one of the tents and peppered him with questions.

German? No.

English? No.

Americano? Bud nodded.

The Sheik smiled and immediately gestured him into his tent, an enormous enclosure the size of a large living room with



Bombs weighing 1,000 pounds were often strapped to the P-40s. Pictured is Bud's flight crew and the one millionth pound dropped by his squadron.

a thick floor of cozy Persian rugs and animal skins.

Perhaps it was the softness of the rugs, but Bud quickly fell asleep. When he finally awoke, he was slightly unnerved to see a circle of smiling Arabs surrounding him.

"It's funny," he remembers. "There were lots of men in that tent, but I never once saw a woman."

He recalled the customs of Saudi Arabian culture from the Air Force-issued manual, including that it is rude not to eat and drink what you are given. So despite the cup of tea with a side dish of sugar full of small rocks and the plate of beans sprinkled with sand and rocks, he finished both off only to be handed another round.

"That's it," he thought. "No more. I'll just have to offend them."

To this day, he won't put sugar in his tea.

And when his host walked to the corner of his tent and returned with a tiny, gold French telephone, trailing a thick line of cord, Bud thought he'd been served a bill of goods.

"I couldn't believe it when I saw that phone," he laughs. "I thought for sure someone had sold this fella the Brooklyn Bridge."

Bud was astounded when, 30 minutes later, he was on the line with an officer from the American base in Port Said.

"That phone cord must have stretched for miles and miles," he muses, "and think about the unlucky sucker who has to con-

tinually restring that line every few days when the nomadic camp moves."

When help arrived, the officer tried to give the sheik the customary \$250 fee for aiding a downed pilot, but the Sheik refused it, asking only that Bud call him to let him know that he'd landed safely.

"I tried and tried to call him," Bud says, shaking his head, "but I never could get through."

Even his entry into the Air Force is a story unto itself. At the time, he had been an engineering student at the University of Wyoming in Laramie when he decided to drop out of school in January 1941 to join the Air Force.

"Some days I have regrets," he says, "but I thought I needed to get in the war before it was over."

His first meeting with the traveling board confirmed he had to be 21 before enlisting as an officer. So, shortly after his 21st birthday, he went back to the board and was told during his physical that not only did he need to have his tonsils removed but that an extra bone in his nose needed to come out or he'd have trouble getting enough oxygen.

"It hurt like hell," Bud says. Without anesthesia, Bud faced the surgery. His dad held his head. His brother grabbed his feet. The doctor burned the bone out of his nose. Luckily, he says, he got ether for his tonsils. After surgery, it took two weeks and some stitches for his nose to stop bleeding.

More than surgery, Bud dreaded taking the three days of "mental tests." When officials found out he'd been studying engineer-

ing, he got an instant pass.

"I was so relieved," Bud says, though it didn't get him out of learning Morse Code, which he still hates to this day.

From there, Bud was sent to Santa Monica, Calif., for a whirlwind eight months of flight school, where he says lots of guys "washed out." Upperclassmen hazed the new officer recruits like crazy, making them sing alma maters and state songs. If they refused to do it, they were told there's no place for guys with attitude. Bud sang all the songs.

Today, Bud is one of only two survivors out of 27 pilots in Squadron 315, having outlived them all, a fact he reticently acknowledges with a shrug before launching into a story about a found box of German hand grenades.

"They made good fishing," he smirks. With every launch into the Bay of Tunis, he got about 24 fish. They didn't work so well, however, when he tossed one above the heads of a group of Arabian nomads who were attempting to

‘I thought for sure someone had sold this fella the Brooklyn Bridge.’

Bud Turner, upon seeing a gold phone in the Sahara Desert

loot their washed out camp.

The rain came down in buckets that day and when it finally stopped, their belly tanks were floating as they attempted to flee for higher ground.

"Some of the best duck hunting in the world, that region of Africa," Bud says with a smile.

As the caravan moved out with Bud sitting on the top of a truck, he watched the Arabs emerge out of the fields to come take what the soldiers had left behind. One man in particular caught his attention. The man was riding sidesaddle on a donkey, walking alongside the caravan as it inched forward. At this point, Bud decided to toss one of those German hand grenades over his head to give him a scare, which worked. Within seconds, the Arab nomads made a beeline back to the fields. What he didn't realize was that the truck drivers had just narrowly escaped action at Kasserine Pass and were rightfully spooked by Bud's grenade. They jumped out of their trucks and ran.

"I caught hell for that one," he says, laughing.

They took his grenades away. His stories continued:

Dive bombing missions, during which they sunk several ships and hit other targets with their 1,000-pound bombs. All total they dropped a 1,000,000 pounds of bombs as a squadron, with Bud dropping the final 1,000 pounder.

He even has the nametag of one ship they sank: the S.A. Ansaldo, a new Italian freighter hauling air supplies in Africa. When it sank in the shallow waters off the coast, he swam out to retrieve the name tag.

In total, Bud flew 80 missions throughout Italy and Africa, a figure well above the 25 required missions in a tour, a feat achieved in part with the help of a bag of aspirin.

The African heat wreaked havoc on Bud's sinuses, and it was so bad that his commander wanted to send him home after his 19th mission. Bud asked to stay until he reached 25, at which point a flight surgeon handed him the aspirin and agreed to let him stay. After mission 25, Bud was still flying as there was nobody to replace him. After mission 40, his commander stopped bringing it up.

When he returned from number 80, he had no idea it would be his last. He remembers feeling elated at the news. He was ready to come home. First, though, he decided to go find his buddy Ty Moore from Douglas, who was over in Africa fighting the war.

But that's another story.



Turner's plane shows damage from one battle.