

M.A.R.C.S. SPARKS

Monthly Newsletter of the Madison Area Radio Control Society
Madison, WI

AMA Charter # 665

Volume 41 - AUGUST 2002 - Issue 8

Meeting, July 11, 2002

by Burr Fontaine, Secretary

The meeting was called to order by President Wayne Lanphear at 7:10 p.m. with 40 in attendance.

New Members: Andrew Morrow is a new member. Andy is a sophomore at DeForest High School and has flown an electric Sky Scooter. More recently he has been flying an Extra Easy with coaching from Wayne Lanphear.

June Minutes: The minutes of the June meeting as written by Dave Rush and printed in the July issue of SPARKS were accepted as published.

Treasurer's Report: We had 186 members at the end of June and have added three more since then. At this time last year we had 194 members and ended the year with 207, the highest ever for the club.

Old Business: Chris Spierings reported the Warbirds Over Dane 2002 event on June 8 was very successful with 25 pilots registered and 37 planes on display. Chris gave a big "Thank You" to the large number of volunteers that made the event a success. More details are in the July issue of SPARKS. Segments from an 80-min video that was made of the event will be available on the club's website.

The June 22, Big Bird Fly-In was well attended by local pilots with enough airplanes to keep the action in the air continually interesting. The total attendance was less than usual this year due to a scheduling conflict with an Illinois meet for the same day. However, the Big Bird event managed to show a profit which was turned over to charity.

The June 29 Fun-Fly didn't materialize as a Fun-Fly because only two members showed up to participate. However, there were several club members flying planes during the day for the group of autistic youth and their parents that were there to observe the festivities. President Lanphear thanked club member Sylvia Kinney for working with the autistic group. They apparently had a good time and sent us a "thank you" poster expressing their appreciation.

Come Fly With Us

MARCS meetings are held on the first Thursday of every month at 7:00 P.M. in Room 201B of the Madison Labor Temple, 1602 S. Park St. in Madison. Visitors are always welcome. We think we have a great hobby and we invite you to come and see and consider joining us.

Officers:

Pres: Wayne Lanphear, bgbird@charter.net

Vice Pres: Don Weigt, weigt@mailbag.com

Secty: Burr Fontaine, 233-9063

Treas: Ed McDonald, enmcdonald@prodigy.net

Membership information:

Ed McDonald

Phone 249-0734

Flight Instruction Coordinator:

Dan Dudovick

Phone 273-4339

Mail address for official business, other than for publication in SPARKS:

PO Box 8864

Madison, WI 53708

MARCS Web Site: www.marcswi.org

Web Master: William Velez

william@velez.org

The MARCS web site contains links to War Birds and Electric Flyers Special Interest Group web sites

Editor:

Jerry Buss

1809 Browning Rd

Madison, WI 53704

e mail: jbuss@itis.com

Phone: 244-8534

Contribution of articles is encouraged. Deadline for submittal is the 20th of the month

The other 2002 Fun-Fly, scheduled for August 24, was discussed and new members were encouraged to participate.

Dave Rush indicated that 20 pilots with 65 planes turned out for the July 6 Electric Fly-In. Planes ranged from a 15" biplane to a 80" Lazy Bee plus one plane with a 102" span. Attendees included people from Minnesota, Wisconsin Rapids, Sparta, and Milwaukee. Dave had special thanks for the volunteers that helped out and for the raffle sponsors.

Dogs at the field continue to be a problem. The rules are simple. Please do not bring an unleashed dog to the field and if the need arises clean up after your dog when you leave.

Fireworks also have been a problem. The noise bothers the dogs in the kennel to the north of us and the residue from the fireworks is a mess for us to clean up. There is no indication that club members are involved, but the local people in the area intend to call the police the next time fireworks are observed.

New Business: The raffle was back in operation tonight thanks to Dick Sutton who has volunteered to run the raffle for the general meetings.

The July SPARKS carried an article detailing recent problems with the buddy boxes that are kept at the field. Buddy boxes are stored in the shed at the field and are available for general use at the field. If you find a buddy box or cable that needs repair, please attach a note to it or let one of the board members know about it so we can get it repaired. When you use one of them you have the responsibility to treat it as you would treat your transmitter. If you damage a buddy box while using it the repair is your responsibility just as the repair of your transmitter would be your responsibility if you dropped and damaged it while you were using it.

Harley Nelson has modified the two drawers in the shed that contain equipment that is accessible to anyone with a gate key. The bottom drawer holds buddy boxes and cables. The top drawer has the first aid kit, emergency phone, and two working, hand-held radios that were donated by Bob Miracle. If you go looking for a plane away from the field please, for everyone's peace of mind, take a radio and keep in contact with someone back at the field.

Jerry Buss said eight Scouts and four adults "and possibly a few more" are expected for the Boy Scout Fun-Fly on July 13. Activities will start at 9 a.m. with some ground school, AMA Dart building, buddy box flying until noon, and lunch.

Charlie Schultz announced that The Riley-Deppe

Park Float Fly & Family Picnic on July 21 will include a pig roast again this year. Bring a dish to pass, drinks are included.

Events coming up in August include the 1.5 Meter Hand Launch at the Long Island Sod Farm on 17th and the Ken Kindschi Scale Rally at Kettle Field on the 18th.

The Board has adopted a policy covering the sale of items at a scheduled meet. If a vendor wants to offer items for sale they must pay a fee and set up on the west side of the shelter. This does not apply to a Club member or registered pilot with a couple of items for sale in the pit area.

The Board also adopted a policy of free advertising in SPARKS for a MARCS member with personal items for sale. Requests from nonmembers for advertising will be accepted but a fee will be charged.

Raffle Winners: Art Hurckman - Plane alarm; Bob Stowell - Plane & Hat; Dave Rush - Y extension & Hat; Charlie Schultz - Hat; Dick Brandt - Tool; Vince Aman - Hat; Dan Sutter - Hat; Joe Krug - Hat; Brian Strang - Cup; Wendell Hottman - Y Extension; Bill Rewey - Cup.

Show & Tell: Dan Sutter brought a very nice amphibian that was scratch built from beaded Styrofoam and two Flutter wings and was powered by 2400 GWS motors.

Dustin Buescher displayed the completely restored BVM Aggressor 2 that was heavily damaged in a tree crash during the 2001 Warbirds over Dane. Great work, Dustin.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:45 p.m.

Philosophy 101

One should never stop trying to learn and one should strive never to be judgmental. A six year old boy once brought home a note from his teacher saying that he need no longer come to school, since he was too stupid to learn. His name was Thomas Alvah Edison.

1.5 Meter Hand Launch/High Start Contest

Saturday, August 17, 2002

By Larry Landucci -- CD

Our annual "little" glider fling is here again. The contest is limited to sailplanes with wingspans of 1.5 meters or less. Membership in AMA is required and unless noted otherwise all AMA regulations and policies will be in effect. Pilots briefing at 9:30 AM and first round of flights at 10:00 AM. Entry fee is \$7.00 per pilot and there will be trophies

MARCS 2002 Calendar of Events

| <u>Event</u> | <u>Date</u> | <u>Location</u> |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| 1.5 Meter Hand Launch | August 17 | Long Island Sod Farm |
| Ken Kindschi Scale Rally | August 18 | Kettle Field |
| Fun Fly | August 24 (25, if rain) | Kettle Field |
| Fall Thermal Soar | September 7 | Long Island Sod Farm |

through 3rd place. Specific tasks will be announced at the contest. To access the contest site, exit I94 at exit #250 and take State Road 73 north 0.5 mile to W. Medina Road. Go west for about 3 miles and turn right (north) on Ridge Rd. Go about 1 mile and turn right on road to Long Island Farms. Follow the SOAR signs.

For additional information contact: Larry Landucci; phone (608) 845-7961;

Roster Changes

Please note the following phone number and e mail changes in your roster:

Dave Rush 608 838 9704 dgrush@hotmail.com

Following are corrections to corrections listed in last month's SPARKS:

Ralph Henricks ralph@netwurx.net
Deborah Kunz misnitemar@aol.com

SIG Articles

Articles from the War Bird and Electric special interest groups have not been received as of the time this issue goes to the printer.

Boy Scout Fly In

Eleven scouts and four adults showed up at the Boy Scout fly in, along with a large number of MARCS members. A ground school was put on, teaching the science of flight, buddy box flights were conducted, Bill Rewey flew his Pietenpol in and AMA gliders were built. Then we had lunch. I think the members had more fun than the scouts did. Thanks for coming out, guys.

I have a letter from Dennis Harrison-Noonan, Scoutmaster of Troop 23, thanking the club and highly praising the event that we put on for them. Such appreciation really make doing something like that worthwhile. The letter will be read at the August club meeting.

The Bent Bird

OOPS! My Fault

It has been said that 90% of our model mishaps (bad landings, crashes, etc.) are caused by pilot error. If we add those due to mistakes building and maintaining our models, the percentage probably is much higher. It's hardly ever the plane's fault, or the radio's, it's almost always ours. That said, perhaps instead of dual receivers and battery packs, with multiple servos, switches, and so on, maybe we need to have dual controls copilots!! In meets, when a spotter is required for each flying plane, in effect we have almost the same thing, and it does make flying safer.

Usually, when we talk about pilot error causing a crash, it's crashing his/her own plane, or sometimes colliding with another and causing both to crash or be damaged. But, sometimes the damage can be to another pilot's plane. I must admit I did just that.

During our inaugural Electric Meet a few weeks ago, we sometimes had 4 and 5 planes flying at a time. Our flight line is set up with more pilot boxes than that, but when did you last see 6 or more models flown there at once? Anyway, the flight line was busy. There often was a gaggle of folks near the gates where we release our planes onto the runway, or step out to hand launch our models.

I had assembled my Raven electric motored glider, and was anxious to fly it. The radio was turned on and the controls checked. It was ready, and I was eager to get it airborne.

I got to the flight line and saw Dave Rush's little biplane landing on the northwest corner of the field. Dave, and Pete Aarsvold who was spotting for him, were at the east edge of the gate. I waited until Dave's plane was nearly down, and there was no chance of our models colliding, and stepped out the gate, took a few quick steps to the west and launched the Raven. Ooops!

Just then I heard Dave yell, "Don, do you know you

blocked my view of my plane?" No, I didn't know... But, I should have. In my haste to get airborne a few seconds sooner, I'd not waited for Dave's model to touch down. I should have waited. I should have seen I'd block his view of his plane, just as it touched down, which we all know is one of the most vulnerable times.

Dave's plane suffered some damage to its nose. I don't know how much, but he says it's fixable. Would it have happened anyway? Maybe. But, by blocking his view, I probably caused the damage. I'm responsible for his plane's damage... Dave's been very kind and not asked me to pay for the repair, but I caused a good friend extra work. Do that often, without thinking, and he won't be my friend anymore.

What lessons should I, and all of us, learn from my mistake? Here are my suggestions:

Let's all be careful on the flight line! Let's not block another pilot's view, especially in those critical times when their planes are taking off, landing, or flying low. It's never pleasant to have a broken model to repair. It's painful to know it was your own dumb mistake that caused it. But, it's

got to be even more annoying to know it was caused by someone else's dumb mistake! I know it's very humbling to realize I've caused harm to another pilot's model.

Let's get away from the gates and to one of the pilot's boxes after we release our models. They are spaced to minimize interference between transmitters, and between pilots. Let's make sure everyone, including all the new fliers at our field, know where the pilot's boxes are. We all know that's what those little concrete slabs are for, right? And, maybe we need to trim the grass around them so they are easier to find.

Let's not distract pilots in other ways. It's in our rules not to talk to pilots except about safety issues. But, let's also not fly in ways that distract other pilots. When a model flies by just a few feet in front of someone, especially if it's big, fast, and loud, it's only natural for the person to be worried about whether it's going to hit them. They can't concentrate on their own models as much as they need to for safety.

Let's also not fly, launch, or take off our models toward the flight line and pits. Any pilot aware of a model coming straight at him will be concentrating on what that model does, not what his own flying model is doing. Besides, this is in our safety rules.

In summary, let's be careful out there! Let's not behave like many of the drivers on the Belt line. Let's be careful for others and their planes, as well as our own.

Luckily, in my case nobody was hurt, nothing

besides one airplane was damaged, and my friendship with Dave wasn't destroyed. It could have been a lot worse. All those things are possible. So, to make sure you don't have to walk around knowing you interfered with someone else's enjoyment of our hobby, and did something unsafe, please try to do better than I did!

Foo Fighters

By Jerry Buss

A Gospel Song says, "Ezekiel saw the wheel, away up in the middle of the air," a reference to an Old Testament story about a prophet who saw a very strange thing. Whatever it was, perhaps it couldn't be adequately explained with technical knowledge that existed at the time. Did the ancient language have words sufficient to relate it? Elsewhere in the Old Testament, another prophet, Elijah, was transported bodily and alive to heaven in a "fiery chariot." Again, scientific knowledge and a language that didn't contain sufficient words to convey what may have really happened create a hazy picture that adapts easily to the notion of the roaring, fiery ascent of a rocket. Perhaps latter day interpretations of the original texts are wanting too., but is it possible that Unidentified Flying Objects have been around that long? Is it possible that UFO's are the explanation of what happened to these ancient men? What was the Star of Bethlehem? Science has no explanation for it. Is some other world peopled by super beings out there someplace? Or, perhaps, are there time travelers from future earth? Is there another dimension to existence? Jules Vernes submarine seemed pretty far fetched once too.

Modern sightings have mostly been explained as common phenomena, but a few defy logical explanation. The US Air Force has pooh-poohed the notion of UFO's being of extra-terrestrial origin after a long and often tedious series of investigations that raised about as many questions as they answered. Some ufologists say they made numerous cover ups. Did they?

In the modern era, UFO sightings have been most intensively associated with the 1940's and 1950's, although there have been reports of observations both before and since. It was only a few years ago that a rash of unexplained sightings occurred near Madison, at Belleville.

Between 1935 and 1973, a syndicated comic strip called *Smokey Stover* ran in Sunday papers across the country and enjoyed considerable popularity. Smokey was a fire fighter who used uncommon language to describe common things, like "Notary Sojak" and "telemagaff." He called his fire truck a Foo Mobile and he referred to himself as a Foo Fighter. As far as anyone seems to know, this is

the origin of the term American pilots used to identify UFO's that were sometimes seen by them during World War II over Europe. Many of the Foo Fighter sighting reports were given credibility by the public despite an official stance that, at least initially, denied their authenticity.

Some reports of Foo Fighter sightings were, indeed, hoaxes. In his book, *Black Thursday*, Martin Caidin reports that on October 14, 1943, as the bombers of the 384th Bomb Group turned on their IP's for their bomb runs in to the ball bearing factories at Schwienfurt they were confronted with what appeared to be numerous small, shiny metal disks a couple of inches across coming at them at high speed and in formation on a collision course. Unable to avoid them, the B-17's simply passed harmlessly through them as though they were mere holographic images. Caidin cites a "secret report" as his information source. If it was secret, how did he get access to it? No one else admits to having seen it. None of the bomber crewmen admit today to having seen the disks, contrary to Caidin's statement that they reported seeing them in debriefing. It is interesting that Caidin co-wrote *Samari*, the autobiography of Saburo Saki, the surviving Japanese ace of aces in which he identifies the planes that were involved in seriously wounding and nearly killing Saki as TBF's. Saki was at a loss to explain this, as he had clearly said they were SBD's and post war US Navy records agree. Crewmen from the dive bombers are known and have spoken publicly about the event. Despite being in deep poverty at the time the book was published, Saki never received a nickel in royalties on his own story which Caidin merely put on paper for him. In the late 1960's and later, Caidin wrote for several science fiction magazines and it seems likely that his first Sci-Fi effort may have been contained in *Black Thursday*. Other encounters with unexplained flying phenomena cannot be written off as the imaginings of a writer in pursuit of book sales, however.

Through the war American flyers actually did report seeing what they called Foo Fighters, shiny objects that sometimes flew with them in formation, often just off their wing tips. Then, suddenly, they would break away in a severe, physics defying, right angle turn and fly away at incredible speed. British pilots were seeing the same things, which they described in the same way the Americans did. There were UFO sightings over the Indian and Pacific Oceans as well during the war, but descriptions of their appearance differed, their behavior didn't involve flying formation with aircraft and sightings were infrequent as compared to those in Europe. While Army authorities interrogated pilots who reported such objects, there was no

intensive interest in them on the part of the army, which often doubted pilot veracity.

Still, many of the reports by otherwise highly credible witnesses were convincing albeit no explanation of them could be found. The credibility of denials of their existence by authorities began to decay, causing a change in official attitude. How better for the Army to solve their credibility problem than to agree with the pilots? As a result, they theorized publicly that Foo Fighters might have something to do with some kind of German experimental secret weapon program. This interpretation didn't question the veracity of the pilots, nor did it admit to acceptance of unexplained phenomena. Since the actions of the objects didn't seem to pose any immediate threat and since they didn't really believe in them anyway, Army officials gave Foo Fighters little serious consideration. No explanation of them exists to this day. Interestingly enough, after the war, it was learned that Luftwaffe pilots were seeing the same phenomena and their descriptions of them and their behavior agreed exactly with the Allied version. More interestingly still, German authorities attributed the sightings to some kind of Allied secret weapon experiments.

The men who saw these things, American, British and German, were skilled aviators and, no doubt, most of them were skilled observers and reporters. That some may have been deceived by explainable events or objects is likely, but it is a tough pill to swallow that all of them were deceived or lying, yet there was and is no plausible explanation of what they did see. Neither is it explained why Foo Fighters are not being reported today over Europe.

In the years since World War II, the Roswell incident alleging the crash of an alien space ship and recovery of alien bodies has been denied by the Air Force and given credence by some ufologists who say the Air Force is covering up something. Strange things have been seen near Area 51, sometimes referred to as "Dreamland." Kelly Johnson, of Lockheed Skunk Works fame, referred to it as Paradise Ranch. This is an Air Force installation tucked away in a remote corner of the Nellis target and atomic test range about 90 miles north of Las Vegas, Nevada, near Groom Lake and the proposed atomic waste burial site. It has a 27,000 foot runway. It is said that there are shelters along it, in which objects can be hidden when a satellite is due overhead. Publicized reports of nocturnal UFO sightings in that area have been quickly and vehemently denied by the Air Force. Some of these sightings undoubtedly were F-117 and B-2 stealth aircraft. Others are still unexplained and keep out signs indicate that one's life may be forfeit for trespassing. The Air Force denies the existence of a super aircraft called Aurora that

some say is kept at Area 51. The Air Force denied the existence of the U-2 and the SR-71, both of which were tested in the dark of night at Area 51, as well. Are they more credible now that the Cold War is over?

So what were the Foo Fighters? What's going on today at Area 51? Is there some kind of connection? What were Ezekiel's wheel, Elijah's fiery chariot and Bethlehem's star? Hey, don't look at me. I'm just telling the story and I don't have a clue, but it's certainly interesting to speculate. All you need is an open mind where the possibility that we are not alone is concerned.

Gabby Gabreski, Flying Ace in WWII, Led an Incredible Life. Djoni Murphy Remembers Her Father, a Humble and Heroic Man

By Bill Thornley

Spooner (Wisconsin) Advocate

Wednesday, April 10, 2002

He was known to the world as Gabby. And he was one of America's true heroes in World War II. Time caught up to Gabby, as it has to so many veterans of that war. Francis S. "Gabby" Gabreski, America's top air ace in Europe during WWII, passed away from a heart attack at Huntington Hospital on Long Island in early February at the age of 83. But what an incredible life he lived ...

REMEMBERING HER DAD His daughter, Djoni Murphy, of Chicog, fondly remembers her father, and is proud of his impressive accomplishments. She and her husband, John, were among the family members who attended the military funeral of an American hero.

Djoni and John, who is a native of Hawaii, met while the Gabreski family was living in Hawaii. They married and when John retired, sold their house and moved to Wisconsin with their sons Kiko and Jay to "get back to nature."

"He was the son of immigrants," said John of his father-in-law. "He was old school. When I was young he was gone a lot," recalls Djoni. "When I was a little older he made me learn my times tables. Having nine children was tough, and we moved from air base to air base. He was career military until he retired in 1968 and went into business."

Following WWII, Gabreski worked at Douglas Aircraft in Santa Monica, Calif., but rejoined the military in 1947 as a test pilot. In 1951, he went to Korea where he

became commander of the 51st Fighter-Interceptor Wing. He became only the eighth man to earn an ace designation flying a jet. (An ace is a pilot who shoots down five or more enemy planes.)

Following Korea, he worked as a civilian at Grumman Aerospace and became president of the Long Island Railroad. He also ventured briefly into politics. "He was a warrior, not politician, that is for sure," said John.

He didn't talk much about the war with his family," said Djoni. "But he believed strongly in sharing his place in history with children and groups as a speaker. He knew he was a hero, but at the same time he was humble."

Gabreski's son-in-law has become a student of the ace's accomplishments and seems genuinely in awe of the man. He was one of only six fighters who got up during Pearl Harbor," said John. "And he is the only one who flew both over Pearl Harbor and D-Day.

The war was going so badly for the United States early on. But he was so successful he was used to bolster morale. Think of what he saw flying over Pearl Harbor ... and then flying cover during D-Day. He saw the worst of it, then saw the best of it. Then he was an air ace in Korea, and one of very few who went from propeller to jets. "There will never be that type of fighter pilot again. Today they have so much technology. He had a 900-foot-kill-range, flying at 350 miles per hour -- that is close, and it is tough. He would get so close he could see the enemy pilots looking back at him from their cockpits. "When he landed he'd have telephone wires and clothes lines he clipped, bullet holes, and unexploded shells lodged in his fuselage. The ones who were the most successful were the aggressive ones. If they hung back, they didn't make it. He flew 266 missions, climbed into that plane and loaded his guns 266 times -- and every one was kill or be killed."

"I feel very privileged to be his oldest daughter," said Djoni. "I got to see much of his career. Some of the younger kids, and he had nine children to raise, only knew him as a businessman. "His main concerns in life were God, family, and country. Those were his key words, and that is how he lived his life. He was very religious. He went to church every day."

WWII VETS PASSING Those who fought WWII are often called America's "Greatest Generation" today, as a grateful country sadly says good-bye to so

many of them. WWII veterans are dying at the rate of more than 1,100 a day. In Wisconsin alone, an average of 43 WWII veterans pass away each week. An estimated 406,000 Americans died in WWII. Of the 16 million who came back, more than 10 million have since died. Today, only about 5.6 million remain. Time is doing what Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan could not -- America is watching the passing of the Greatest Generation. And as they pass into history it seems that America is developing a brand new appreciation and respect for those who fought WWII. Through their sacrifice and patriotic determination, they did nothing less than save the world.

And as far as military accomplishments go, "Gabby" Gabreski was one of the greatest of the Greatest Generation.

BEGINNINGS Gabreski was born in Oil City, Pa., on Jan. 28, 1919. His parents, Stanley and Josephine Gabryszewski, had immigrated from Poland. Young Francis later shortened his last name. At the age of 13 he attended an air race in Cleveland with his father. There he found a lifelong hero in the winner of the race -- Jimmy Doolittle, who would go on to command the 8th Air Force during WWII.

Gabreski attended Notre Dame, following in the footsteps of an older brother, but left college after his sophomore year. He had started taking flying lessons, and in 1940 he joined the Army Air Corps cadet program. Upon completion of the cadet program, Gabreski graduated from basic mission training in March of 1941. His rank was second lieutenant.

PEARL HARBOR Gabreski had met a pretty 16-year-old named Kay Cochran several months after arriving in Hawaii to join a fighter unit at Wheeler Field. She was attending high school and living with her aunt and uncle, Col. and Mrs. Newton Bush, at the time.

On the night of Dec. 6, 1941, the couple had a date to go to the Saturday night dance at the officers' club. The next morning he was up early shaving at about 6 a.m. He and Kay had had a falling out the night before, and he was trying to figure out if he should go to church services at Wheeler, or head over to the services at Schofield to see Kay and work things out. He never got the chance to do either. It was Dec. 7, 1941, and the Japanese were about to attack Pearl Harbor.

"We never knew what hit us until it hit us," he said, recounting the morning that launched the United States into WWII. "My father was 21 years old at Pearl Harbor," said Djoni. "He was up shaving to go to church. My mother was only 16 at the time, and she was at another base called Schofield. They weren't yet married."

"The Japs hit Wheeler first, trying to knock out the planes," told John. "They evacuated Schofield, and the women and children, including her mother, were running down a trail. A Jap plane flew over them, saw it was all women and children, wagged his wings and turned back. She thought she was dead when she saw that plane, but he didn't shoot," said Djoni.

It took him two hours, but Gabreski managed to get one of the few remaining P-36 fighters still intact at Pearl Harbor up into the air. But by then the Japanese were long gone. He flew over Pearl Harbor at 4,000 feet and witnessed history, as the American ships burned, rolled on their sides, and sank.

"When we were younger we really didn't appreciate what a mighty oak tree he really was," said John. "Now we do. A lot of people are realizing, especially since Sept. 11, just what those people did for this country. And the guys who flew the planes, what a life those guys led."

MAKING OF AN ACE Gabreski was only a 24-year-old fighter pilot when, on Aug. 24, 1943, he was escorting American bombers, flying at 27,000 feet near Everux, France. He put his plane into a dive when he spotted seven German Focke Wulf 190s flying at 10,000 feet, and attacked the flight leader, watching moments later as the plane fell out of the sky. America's future flying ace had just shot down his first German plane. His thoughts, he said later, were, "I said, 'Oh, my God, somebody can do that same thing to me.' It scared the hell out of me."

From Aug. 24, 1943, to July 5, 1944, flying a single-engine P-47 Thunderbolt, Gabreski downed 28 German Messerschmitts and Focke Wulfs over France and Germany, destroying three more German planes on the ground. On June 6, 1944, D-Day, Gabreski led his squadron in long fighter sweeps over the beaches of Normandy. Three weeks later, he surpassed World War I ace Eddie Rickenbacker's record, and on July 5 recorded his 28th kill, making him America's leading ace and earning him leave back to the United States.

By July of 1944, Gabreski was a hero and a celebrity, the top American air ace in the war. The War Department wanted Gabreski home to help sell war bonds, and he was ready to go. His wedding to his sweetheart, Kay, had already been postponed because of Pearl Harbor. He wrote to her and asked her to again begin wedding plans. His hometown of Oil City raised \$2,000 as a wedding present for their American hero.

POW Gabreski was set to depart for 30 days leave from the air field at Boxted, England, on July 20. But on that day he volunteered for one final mission at the last minute, escorting B-24 Liberator bombers that would attack German railroad yards near Frankfurt.

Gabreski strafed a German airfield near Koblenz during the mission, causing heavy damage, but came in too low. His propeller clipped a stone wall, causing him to crash-land in a wheat field. He survived the crash, and began moving through the German countryside behind enemy lines with German soldiers in hot pursuit. He eluded them by sticking to the thick woods for cover. Five days later he was picked up by a farmer who turned him over to German authorities.

"We've been expecting you for a long time," Gabreski said his German interrogator taunted, as he held up a file containing press clippings about the American air ace. He was interrogated by the infamous Hanns Scharff. Gabreski's parents and his fiancée Kay were informed 10 days later that he was missing in action, and about a month later were told that he was a prisoner of war. He was taken to a prisoner of war camp on the Baltic Sea. For the next 10 months, Gabreski was a POW. He was transferred to Stalag Luft I, a permanent prisoner of war camp north of Berlin holding Allied air officers. His barracks were 20-man shacks surrounded by two rows of barbed wire. The food was bad, and punishment came often, though he later told Djoni that he was not terribly mistreated.

But the tide of the war was turning in favor of the Americans as Adolph Hitler's forces began to crumble. Following the German surrender in May, 1945, Gabreski was one of 7,700 American and 1,500 British POWs liberated from Stalag Luft No. 1 by Russian forces.

Before he became a POW, Gabreski was America's top ace in Europe. By war's end, only three American fliers -- Maj. Richard Bong with 40; Maj.

Thomas McGuire with 38; and Navy Commander David McCampbell with 34 -- had surpassed him. All of them were in the Pacific battling the Japanese. Gabreski was the only one who fought the very experienced German aces.

RETURNING HERO Lt. Col. Frances "Gabby" Gabreski returned two months later and finally married Kay Cochran after twice postponing his wedding, first for Pearl Harbor, second after being taken prisoner. They were united in marriage on June 11, 1945, in Prairie du Chien. Their marriage lasted 48 years and produced nine children. Kay Gabreski died in a car accident in 1993. "When mother died it really took a toll on him," said Djoni. "He wanted to die. It was really awful. He was so lonely."

Gabreski returned to a hero's welcome complete with parades and parties. He had destroyed 31 enemy planes, but America's ace wasn't done yet. When war broke out in Korea, he returned to the skies, shooting down another 6 1/2 enemy aircraft in jets, for a combined total of 37 1/2 enemy aircraft during 266 combat missions spanning two wars. He was highly decorated, earning the Distinguished Service Cross, Silver Star with Oak Leaf Cluster, Distinguished Flying Cross with nine Oak Leaf Clusters, Air Medal with four clusters, the Bronze Star, the French Legion d'Honneur and Croix de Guerre with Palm, Polish Cross of Valor, British Distinguished Flying Cross and the Belgian Croix de Guerre. In 1978 he was inducted into the Aviation Hall of Fame. In 1992, the Suffolk County, NY, airport was renamed for him as Francis Gabreski Airport.

THE FUNERAL Djoni and John attended Gabreski's funeral, an event Djoni remembers as, "Very impressive." "There must have been 40 motorcycle police," said John. "They closed down 17 miles of the busiest freeway in the United States, the Long Island Expressway, for his funeral. The police all saluted as the casket went by. There was a full military honor guard, a 21-gun salute, and Taps were played."

Perhaps the greatest tribute they said, was a squadron of F-16 fighters performing a maneuver known as the Missing Man Formation. "They flew right over the grave," said John. "One plane cut in the afterburners and shot straight up, representing the soul going to Heaven. The others went on, representing the continuation of the mission." "It took my breath away," said Djoni. "He's