

distinguished World War II
crashed plane in 1945

Billy Stulce leaves Grundy County legacy

By TOM JARRETT

On Tuesday, the
of Sept.
started out
normal day
for residents
of the area.

They were tending
the fields while their
husbands were at the
Swiss Colony School.
The war with Germany
was over and just
as a kind of
truce had
been declared.

The husbands,
and brothers
were coming
down the
of their enlist-
ment and were
soon to be
coming home. It
was time to be

Editor's Note: This is the story of U.S. Navy Lt.j.g. William Everett (Billy) Stulce, whose Hellcat fighter plane crashed in 1945 in Grundy County.

Writer Tom Jarrett, of Altamont, a retired 20-year Navy veteran who has spent months researching the incident, was first told about the crash by Ronnie Stulce, Billy's second cousin.

Ronnie, also a pilot, was flying over the Grundy County mountains with his friend Tom Jarrett as a passenger when he told how Billy's plane had gone down somewhere in the area.

Jarrett dedicates his story to Billy's 91-year-old mother, Mrs. Lillie Stulce, and brother, Arnold Stulce. ●

gone to the back porch.

Earl Pickett and his brother Norman were working the fields. Homer Nunley, his sister Helen and

one-room Swiss Colony School. It was around noon and the kids were outside on their lunch break. Many of them were playing ball or chasing each other



Navy Lt.j.g. William Everett (Billy) Stulce, a distinguished World War II fighter pilot, lost his life when his plane went down in the Grundy County mountains on Sept. 18, 1945.

FROM BETTY SUMMERS

DENTAL IMPLANTS

What Are They?

Grundy County Legacy

By TOM JARRETT

Tuesday, the 18th of September, started out as a normal day for the residents of Gruetli.

Many were tending their fields while their children were at the Swiss Colony School. The war with Germany and Japan had just ended and a kind of peace and calm had finally set in.

Sons, husbands, fathers and brothers were winding down the last days of their enlistments and were soon to be heading home. It was a good time to be alive.

This tiny community, located on the Cumberland Plateau between the towns of Laager and Coalmont, was sparsely settled and heavily wooded. Highway 108 was the main road through the community and it was lightly traveled. There were few telephones and the radio was the only means to get the news or entertainment.

It was a fine September day, the sky was blue with only a few scattered clouds and the temperature was quite pleasant. Margaret Stampfli was eight months pregnant with her first child and was in the house getting dinner ready and her mother, Ruby Smith, and Fannie Nussbaum were picking corn and had just

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one-room Swiss Colony School. It was around noon and the kids were outside on their lunch break. Many of them were playing ball or chasing each other (Continued on Page 3)



Navy Lt.j.g. William distinguished World his life when his Grundy County mo

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(Outside

Continued from Page 8)
 that he did not realize
 the was so low because,
 to escape the plane, he
 jumped it upside down
 and dropped out of the
 cockpit.

It was his apparent
 attention to drop free of
 the plane and then
 open his parachute, but
 the was too low to the
 ground. The plane went
 into an immediate dive
 and blew up when it
 was only about 30 feet
 from Billy. He crashed
 into the ground with
 his parachute partially
 opened.

CIRCLED AREA

Eldridge circled the
 area several times, try-
 ing to get the attention
 of the local residents.
 He would dive on a
 house and then fly to
 where the plane had
 crashed and dive on the
 spot in an attempt to
 get someone out there.
 Several residents
 responded and went to
 the crash site. Un-
 fortunately, nothing
 could be done for the
 downed pilot.

During a recent in-
 terview with Billy's
 mother, Mrs. Lillie
 Stulce, she said
 Eldridge told her that if
 she had not been able to
 get someone to the spot,
 she would have at-
 tempted to land in a
 field and make his way
 to the crash. At this
 point, he didn't know if
 Billy was badly injured
 or had been killed.

When he was
 satisfied that someone
 was there, he flew into
 Chattanooga and called

the Army base at Ft.
 Oglethorpe, Ga., just on
 the outskirts of Chat-
 tanooga, and told them
 about the crash. They,
 in turn, called Camp
 Forrest in Tullahoma,
 and a search party was
 formed. The Army ar-
 rived at the crash site
 in the early evening. A
 perimeter was
 established and guards
 were assigned to
 protect the site.

Billy Stulce was a
 very popular young
 man. At his funeral,
 there were too many
 people to get them all
 into the church and the
 funeral procession was
 very long.

Not long afterwards,
 Mrs. Bertha Holmes of
 Sale Creek, Tenn., a
 family friend, wrote the
 following poem as a
 tribute to the young
 pilot who had served
 his country so well:

*When My Soul Took
 Its Flight to Heaven*

*When I flew the great
 Pacific*

*Many times I thought of
 home,*

*I could see my Dad and
 Mother*

*As they waited there
 alone.*

*Seems I often heard
 them praying*

*For the victory soon to
 come,*

*When we could all be
 home together,*

*They prayed "Lord Thy
 Will Be Done."*

*And my brother how I
 miss him*

*For he is many miles
 away,*

*When at home we were
 together*

*When we were at work
 or when at play.*

*But you will take care of
 our dear Daddy*

*And our Mother kind
 and true,*

*For I soon shall fly my
 last great mission*

*And I'll not be coming
 back to you.*

*For I can hear my
 Savior saying*

*"Billy, here on earth
 your work is done,*

*And for you a crown is
 waiting*

*Up in a bright and
 better home."*

*And up there I'll see my
 Savior*

*In that bright land fairer
 than day,*

*And the one who cares
 for sparrows*

*Will pilot me across the
 way.*

*For now I hear the
 angels singing*

*And I'm not flying all
 alone.*

*I'll be waiting for you
 just across the river*

*And sing to you your
 welcome home. ■*

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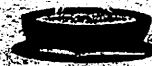
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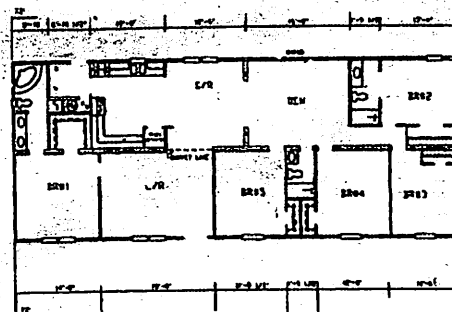
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Sight of plane in Grundy County rare thing in earlier day

(Continued from Page 2)
through the trees.

Suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, a loud noise caused the children to stop their play and Earl and Norman to stop their work. The noise was the sound of a plane. In those days, especially in that part of the country, the sight of a plane was a rare thing and as most children and adults did then, they looked up to see if they could spot it.

Then they saw it. It was low, real low. In fact it was skimming the treetops and black smoke was pouring out of it. They could see the propellers knocking branches loose as it flew over the school and then disappeared behind the trees. A few seconds later, there was a loud boom.

One of the girls said in an excited voice, "that plane fell" and

the teacher said, "No, it just went down behind the trees." The teacher then made them all go inside.

Earl and Norman saw the plane smoking and go down behind the trees a little over a mile away. They both started running through the woods towards the smoke. Ruby Smith and Fannie Nussbaum didn't hear the plane, but after the crash another plane kept buzzing their house and they followed the plane to the wreckage. They were the first ones on the scene.

Ruby Smith, who is now 93 and a resident of Hamilton County Nursing Home in Chattanooga, remembers it well. She describes what happened after Stulce's plane had crashed and another pilot flying in the same formation was trying to

get someone to go to the scene.

"I had been in the yard and was on the porch when the plane came over the second time. Fannie Nussbaum was with me. We run all the way. We was both out of breath when we got there. We found a note that the (second) pilot had dropped, I think it had a wrench around it and it told us where to go.

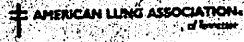
"He (Billy) was on the ground when we saw him. We turned him over and he was dead. It wasn't far from the top of the bluff and if he could have made it over there he would have lived. I thought he was so pretty. To me he was so beautiful, he was just beautiful. There was a lot of trees and there was this one little tree where he came down that he hit the limb."

Margaret Stampfli remembers it this way:

"It was a real pretty day and my mamma

My husband, Henry, was in the Army and away from home. "A plane had come

over and was buzz my house, dipp down over it, and tl
(Continued on Page 4)

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(Continued from Page 2)

through the trees.

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Margaret Stampfli remembers it this way:

"It was a real pretty day and my momma and Fannie Nussbaum was cutting corn and I was eight months pregnant with my first child. I was 25 years old and my momma, Ruby Smith, was visiting from Texas to help me while I was pregnant.

My husband, Henry, was in the Army and away from home. "A plane had come



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Billy Stulce, left, on board the USS Rudyerd Bay, a World War II escort carrier, listens to fellow pilots describe some of their aerial maneuvers against the Japanese.

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TEMPO

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Circling pilot dropped note below wrapped around wrench

(Continued from Page 3)

I realized that something was wrong because that kind of plane didn't do that way. One plane had stayed behind out of the formation that went on over. It felt like he was taking the roof off!

My mother came in cause they were outside and wondered what was wrong because he circled and went down again at the Evans place and he circled again and went towards where the plane was down and he dipped there. We could see a thin line of smoke, just a small amount. One of the Evans said that the pilot dropped a note to them wrapped around a wrench.

I would say it was a mile from the house. The plane was still going around and my mother and Fannie started to go over there. They had to walk and I walked down to the road with them and I wanted to go with them but they wouldn't let me. My kid brother was with me and we sat on the steps in front of the house while they went out to the woods.

"I don't know if they went through the woods or up the road and cut across because it was all woods but they was heading to where they could see that line of smoke. That plane kept dipping down till they found him (Billy), and my mother had on her apron and she took it off and waved it at him." (referring to the plane overhead.)

"I would say it was about an hour before I went down there. I was with a neighbor friend who was pregnant also. The first thing I saw was him (the pilot) laying on the ground and my mother, she seen us coming and she came and pushed us back.

"In the meantime, there had been a lot of men there that came from different directions and they was some that were looking in his pockets. Fannie was about to get into a ruckus with them for doing that.

"I remember seeing some cords or ropes or something. They were in the trees and wreckage was scattered everywhere and I guess there's still wreckage

there. That was at noontime and the Army didn't come out till late in the evening. I guess they came out from Tullahoma. I was at home then and I seen them go past the house. In the meantime a doctor from Palmer came out to check the boy.

His name was Doctor Clements.

"After they carried the boy away they had two soldiers to camp down there and guard the plane, what was left of it. I think they stayed one night in there and they was one from Virginia and the

other one was New York.

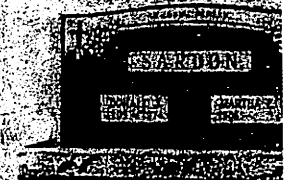
"I was cutting the field and ran over to the field my mother and loading the hay and the boy Virginia was bringing the hay and

(Continued on P

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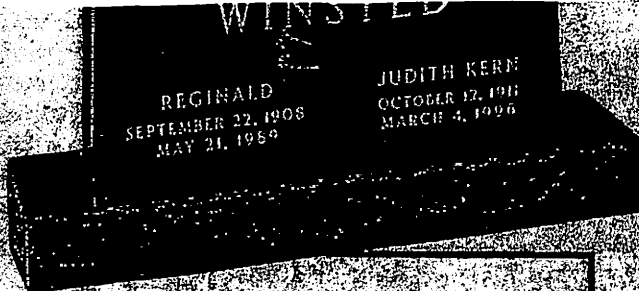
A LOVING FAITH

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Ruby Smith, 93, a resident of Hamilton County Nursing Home, and her daughter, Margaret Stampfli, right, are among the Grundy Countians who remember the fatal day of the plane crash. Billy's brother, Arnold Stulce, left, is District 31 state representative to the General Assembly.

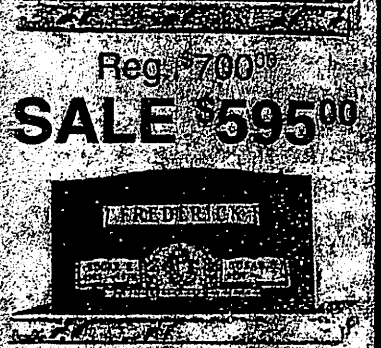


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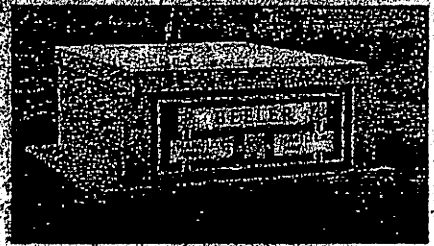


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...he was afraid
it the booger in
ogerland was going
get him. He was just
rally scared to stay
k there in the
ds. While they were
iping, people would
e by and give them
and different
gs to cook on their
n-pfire

heard a bang. There
was another plane with
him because this plane
kept coming over. I
guess he seen the
schoolkids and what he
was trying to do was,
he would come back
and make a big circle
and we went behind the
school down the hill.
"It came out later



mother, Mrs. Lillie Stutze, 91, holds a
e of the son she lost at the end of World
I. At right is Billy's brother, Arnold
, District 31 state representative to the
see General Assembly.

HOUSEhold ITEMS
Hall & McCoy Pottery
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Opalescent Footed Bowl
Several early pattern glass cake stands
Covered Glass Boxes
Several old Fruit bowls (nicc)
England Bowl & Pitcher
Several Mustache Cups
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Several Lamps
Lobster dish
Several Hoop on Nest
Decorative Cups & Saucers

2 Depression Era Bedroom Suites
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Claw Foot Piano Bench
Theater Seats
Oak Rocker
Oak Child Dresser
Cedar Chest
Willett Maple Chest
Dropleaf Table & 4 Wood Chairs

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Old Kerosene Carriage Lanterns
Old Radios
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Hand Bells (School & Dinner)
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Soldier from New York feared night in Grundy County woods

Continued from Page 4)
me to drive the tractor. And the New York boy was having a fit. He said 'Your husband is gone and left you with all of this' and I said 'yeah' and he said 'My wife wouldn't even look at this hay.'

"We had a lot of fun out of them.

"I don't remember how many days it was until the Army come and got the plane but it was a couple of days when they got what was left of the plane. The boys pulled their camp out next to the road because the boy from New York was just scared to death to stay back in the woods. I guess he was afraid that the booger in Boogerland was going to get him. He was just literally scared to stay back there in the woods. While they were camping, people would come by and give them food and different things to cook on their camp fire.

"The last night they was there, we had a big supper for them. And they left and promised to write but we never did hear from the boys anymore. I had their names written down but I don't know if I still have them. We often wondered what happened to them. I thought about them lots of times."

Homer Nunley remembers the crash this way:

"I went with Earl and Norman (Pickett) and my daddy. Well, you know, he was in the treetops and he was smoking and kinda burning and then we heard a bang. There was another plane with him because this plane kept coming over. I guess he seen the schoolkids and what he was trying to do was, he would come back and make a big circle and we went behind the school down the hill.

"It came out later

that he was trying to get us to follow him there because he didn't know if anybody had seen it or heard it. And that's the only communication they had because in that terrain, they couldn't land or nothing, and back then there wasn't but only

one telephone, that was over at Jack Schild's place.

"The plane was hauled out by the military. They put a big, old ribbon thing around it and wouldn't let nobody back there. After they got there, they run everybody off.

See, some people carried some of that plan out of there. The probably are some pieces left back there.

"They (the military) hauled out the fuselage and the wings and the tail section on a big old military truck and i

(Continued on Page 6)

ABSOLUTE AUCTION

Saturday, March 22nd - 9:00 A.M.

2430 Hwy 41A - Just outside Tullahoma City Limits
Huge Glassware Collection, Collectibles & Antiques
Owners: Mrs. Floy Stone & the late Mr. Shirley Stone

GLASSWARE

Numerous Blue Satin Glass Pieces
3 Face Satin Glass cov. dishes
Vinegar cruets
Hull & McCoy Pottery
Early various pattern decanters
Opalescent Footed Bowl
Several early pattern glass cake stands
Covered Glass Boxes
Several old Fruit bowls (nice)
Several Musliche Cups
Numerous Tea Pots
Old Whiskey Bottles
Ironstone plates
Crack Jugs
Carnival Glass Bowl & Bud Vase
Wall Hanging Salt Box

Pressed glass spooner & celery
Crucifix glass candle holders
Hersey Covered condiment
Old candy dishes
Cow Cookie Jar
Pink Depression glass vase
Moonstone Glassware
Pressed glass condiment containers
England Bowl & Pitcher
Early Blue Willow Dishes
Blue Cornpot Glassware
Green Depression Glassware
Coal Oil Lamps
Numerous Hobnail Glassware pieces
Salt Glaze Pitcher
Original Aladdin Floor Lamp

Hand Painted Nippen Hat pin holder
Milk Glassware
Numerous compotes
Early etched glasses
Numerous Sugar & Creamer sets
Salt & Pepper shakers
Crystal pressed glass baskets
Collectible Fruit Jars w/tops
German & Bavarian Bowls & Decorative Plates
Bavarian Shaving Mug
Assorted early Water Pitchers (2 Iris)
Several Lamps
Lobster dish
Several Hon on Nest
Decorative Cups & Saucers

ANTIQUE FURNITURE

Wood Wash Table w/Enamel Top
Gold Leaf Pictures
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Occasional Tables
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Foyer Table
Platform Rocker & Footstool
Ornate Oak Sewing Rocker
Dining Room Set - Table/China Cabinet/buff
Butcher Block
Singer Treadle Sewing Machine
Single Oak Bed
Oak Butlers Table w/carving & Marble Top

2 Depression Era Bedroom Suites
Porch Rocker & Swing
Claw Foot Piano Bench
Theater Seats
Oak Rocker
Oak Child Dresser
Cedar Chest
Willet Maple Chest



'It put knots in my stomach,' witness Homer Nunley reca

(Continued from Page 5)
took 'em quite awhile to get that sucker outta there. They kept that thing blocked off back there for about two or three days.

"You know how young boys are, we were going to shoot back there on our bicycles and see what we could find and got back there and they said no, you ain't coming no closer.

"You very seldom see a military plane come across over there and then when one does it crashed. But I remember it, I remember it. It was a bad thing, you know. It put knots in my stomach, you know."

Betty Creighton Coffelt was 17 years old and was at home when the plane crashed:

"Now we went down there (to the crash site), my mother and daddy and my sister Patsy, but I didn't think she remembered it. We were talking about that, and she said 'don't you remember how we

put our hand up there so we wouldn't look at this boy.'

"You know, we was sad about it and we didn't want to look at him. We had to pass right by him, it was real wooded, you know. My mother stayed in the car because my brother was in Europe and she didn't go up there to see it because she said that my brother was in the war.

"Seemed to me that the military was coming in one time when we were there and I don't know how many times we went down there. I was just about seventeen years old I guess when that happened. There was this huge hole where the plane went down. I don't remember if the plane was close to the creek but this boy was close to the plane, he was real close to it.

"We heard that this boy that got killed in the plane crash, that his buddy kept flying over and dropping notes at this man's house so that he could

guide him in there to where this plane had crashed and this boy had gotten killed.

"Back then there wasn't any phones, let's see, they had one up here at Mr. Gordon Northcutt's store and then they had one at Schilds, just a very few. They just wasn't a big number of phones around."

Earl Pickett was working in a field when the plane went down:

"We saw the plane smoking and saw it go down. It went down in Boogerland. We ran through the woods and when we got there, the pilot was laying on the ground. He had a piece of hickory limb around his neck. I guess every bone in his body was broken. There was already some people there but I can't much remember who they were."

* * *

NEW ASSIGNMENT

The pilot's name was William Everett Stulce. He was a lieutenant junior grade in the U.S.

Navy and had just reported in to Mayport, Fla., from leave in Soddy-Daisy, where his

parents live signment was new group of (Continued o

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Oriental Rug Show
& Sale



know."

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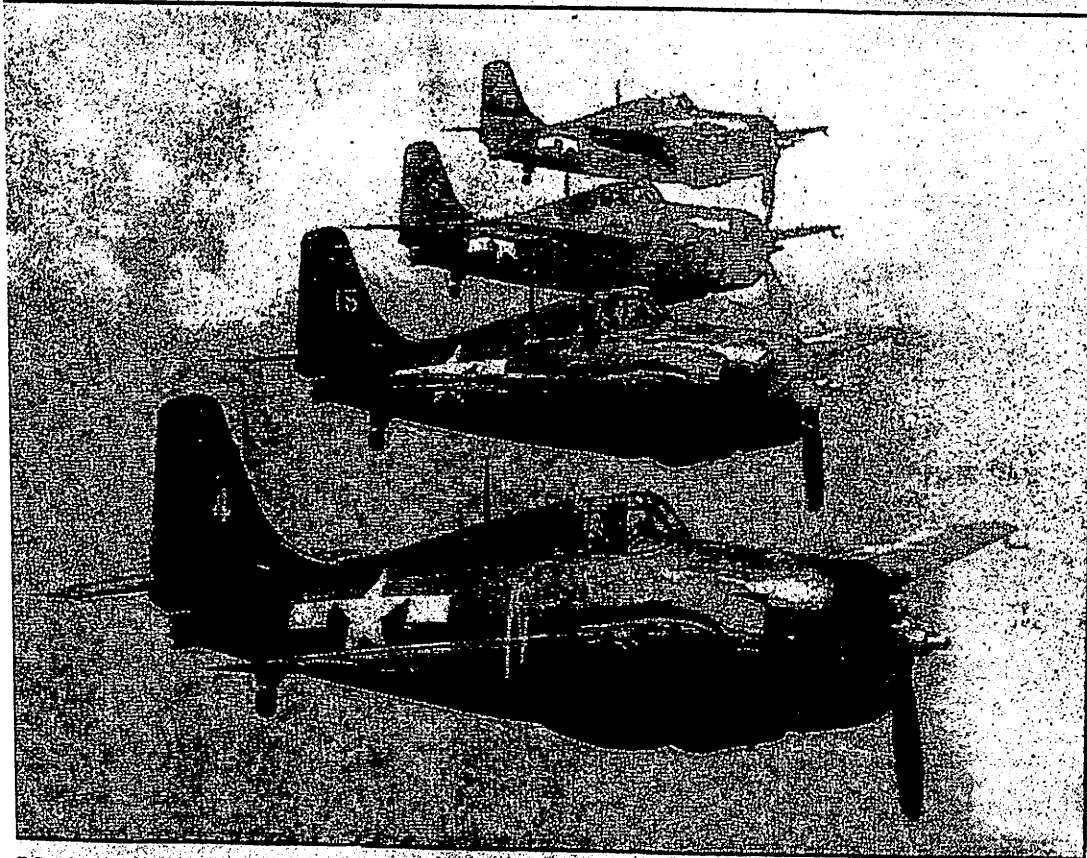
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NEW ASSIGNMENT

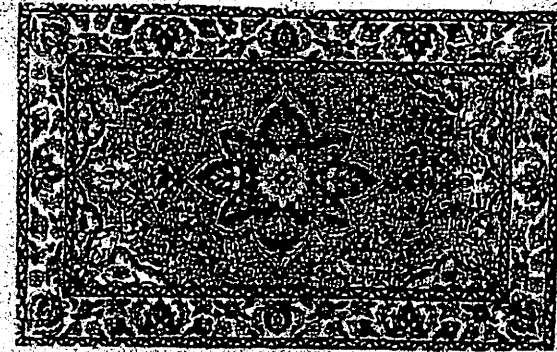
The pilot's name was William Everett Stulce. He was a lieutenant junior grade in the U.S.



Navy Lt.j.g. William Everett (Billy) Stulce is the pilot in the foreground flying in a formation of F4U/FM2 Wildcat fighter planes during World War II. He was flying a Hellcat when he crashed in Grundy County.

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Pilot had proven himself in war

(Continued from Page 6) take them back to the Pacific Theatre.

While he was on leave, the war with Japan abruptly ended but he reported in to his new duty station as ordered.

Although the people at the crash scene described the pilot as a boy, he was 22 years old and a man in every respect. He may have looked younger, but he had proven himself many times over in the war with Japan. Billy, as his friends and re-

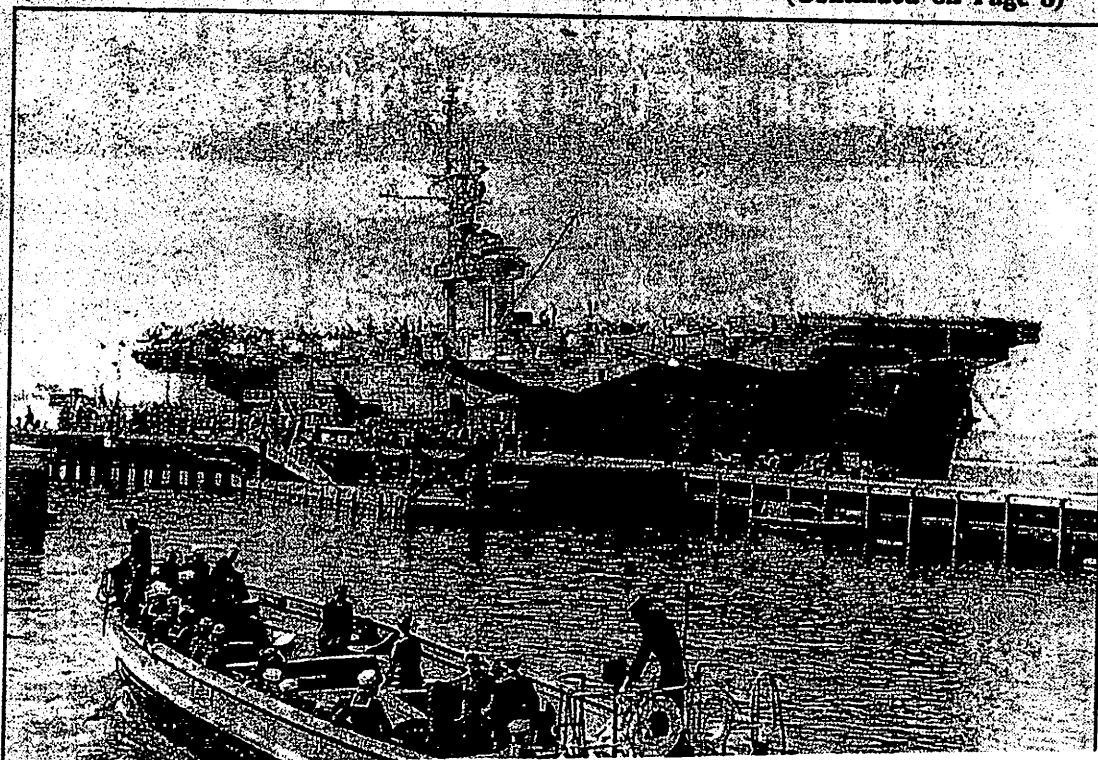
latives knew him, was a fighter pilot. This handsome young man had engaged the enemy many times, sometimes on strafing runs and other times in air-to-air combat.

Billy flew the F4F/FM2 Wildcat, a stubby fighter plane that was not as agile as the Japanese Zero but more heavily armed and armored. He flew in a composite squadron which contained more than one kind of aircraft. In most cases, along with the

fighters, was a detachment of torpedo or dive bombers. The squadron he flew with was VC-96 and was assigned to the USS Rudyerd Bay, CVE-81, and the USS Shamrock Bay, CVE-84, small escort aircraft carriers.

Unlike the large carriers, the small carriers were assigned various duties such as ferrying aircraft across the ocean or supporting amphibious operations. While Billy was aboard, the carrier was as-

(Continued on Page 8)



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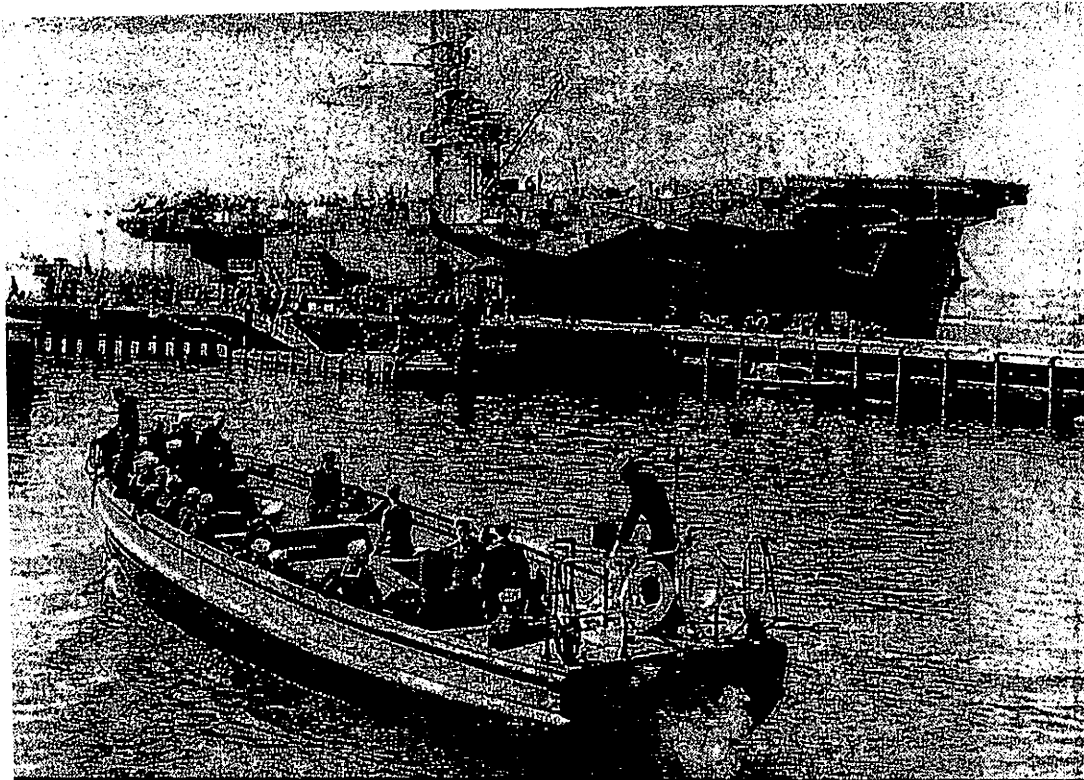
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Lt. Stulce's squadron was based aboard the USS Rudyerd Bay CVE No. 81 during a part of World War II. In the foreground is what was called a Liberty boat.

ALLERGY SUFFERERS!

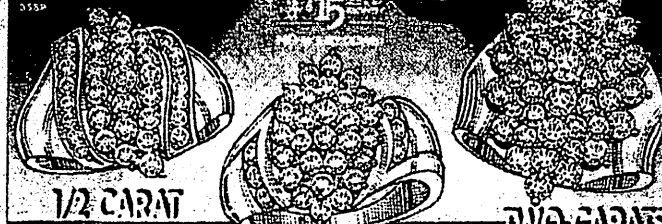
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Kamikaze pilots posed new threat

(Continued from Page 7)
signed to support troops on shore as they mounted attacks on the islands.

PRIME TARGETS

This meant a lot of strafing and bombing runs at low altitudes, thus exposing the pilots to intense ground fire. However, the small carriers were more often than not in the thick of battle and were prime targets for the new threat that the Japanese had, the Kamikaze.

Protecting the carrier and the rest of the fleet were the responsibility of the fighter pilots. It was their job to go after the attacking planes and destroy them before they could crash into a ship, destroying many lives. During the battle of Okinawa, Billy was credited with assists in downing two Kamikazes. Even though he helped shoot down two enemy planes, his official tally was a total of one plane destroyed.

Flying on combat

Corps pilot. His name was William (Bill) Eldridge.

Eldridge told him there was a hurricane heading their way and they were going to move planes to the Smyrna, Tenn., airfield. "We're going home," he told Billy. Billy boarded an F6F Hellcat fighter and the two of them flew side by side along with another group to Smyrna, stopping in Atlanta for refueling.

In Atlanta, Billy met another pilot who joined them in the flight. When they arrived in Smyrna, Billy invited him home to Soddy-Daisy for the night. His mother and father drove from Chattanooga to pick him, his new friend and Eldridge up to transport them home.

Eldridge went to his home and Billy and his friend spent the night at his parents' home. The next day, because gasoline was still under war rations, Eldridge's parents drove them to Smyrna.

When the danger

Billy started to climb out of the cockpit to jump but the engine started to smooth out and Billy, probably thinking that he could make it to a safe landing spot, got back in the plane. By this time, he was very close to the ground. He once again radioed Eldridge that he thought he had better jump and Eldridge told him that he better. It is a good possibility

(Continued on Page 9)



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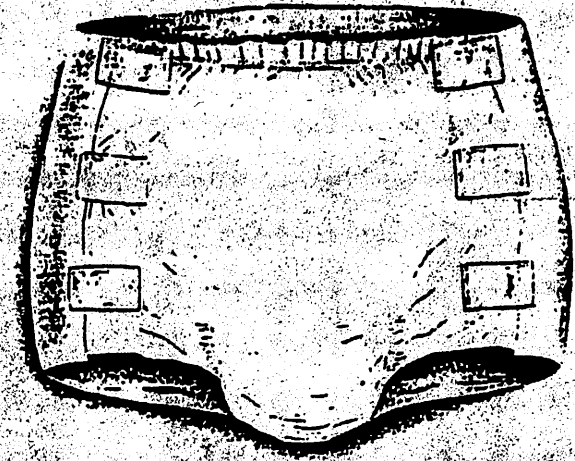
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TALK TO US ABOUT

Kamikaze.

Protecting the carrier and the rest of the fleet were the responsibility of the fighter pilots. It was their job to go after the attacking planes and destroy them before they could crash into a ship, destroying many lives. During the battle of Okinawa, Billy was credited with assists in downing two Kamikazes. Even though he helped shoot down two enemy planes, his official tally was a total of one plane destroyed.

Flying on combat missions, as many pilots would tell you, means hours of complete boredom punctuated by moments of sheer terror. Coupled with that are the hours of sitting in a vibrating aircraft on a hard parachute pack.

For his actions while with VC-96, this brave young man received the Distinguished Flying Cross and five Air Medals.

MEETS FRIEND

After the retirement of VC-96 from war action, Billy was ordered to the Naval Air Station in Mayport, Fla., to train a new group of pilots. Upon his arrival there, he met a former classmate from the Fla.

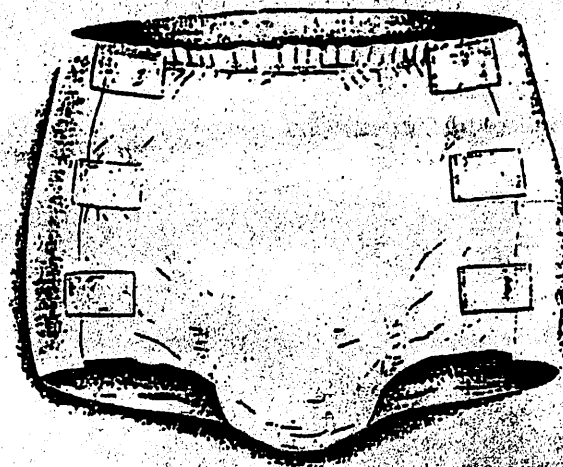
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When the danger from the hurricane was over, Bill Eldridge and Billy Stulce were in the last flight to leave Smyrna to head back to Florida. Billy was flying as Eldridge's wingman when he radioed the flight leader that he was having engine trouble.

The squadron continued on to its destination and Eldridge stayed behind with Billy. The original flight altitude was 3,500 feet, which placed it about 1,500 feet above the mountains of Grundy County. The plane started to lose altitude and the engine began smoking. Billy radioed Eldridge that it did not look good and he thought he ought to jump. Eldridge

TO BLADDER CONTROL PROBLEMS...



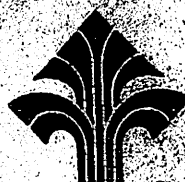
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