



An Epic Story of Evasion from Capture during WW II

Major (later Colonel) William Jones USAAF

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William (Bill) Jones was raised in Ontario, California. Every so often he would see P-38's fly over from the Lockheed plant in Glendale, Ca. William worked all through school and delivered newspapers that would later report on his war activities.

Bill signed up for the Army in 1939 and requested pilot training.

Prior to the War in Europe he served protecting the Panama Canal with air patrols as well as establishing pre-war bases and conducting "x" missions which were likely to be submarine tracking for the Admiralty to reduce German sinking of allied shipping carrying wartime materials mined in Venezuela amongst other countries.

When he came to Europe, my Dad, then Major William Jones, was CO of the 393rd Fighter Squadron, part of the 367th Fighter Group. Because Colonel Young, the Group CO and others left for Europe early, Dad became the temporary head of the 367th for their train trip across the US and the sailing across the Atlantic. Their ship was the Duchess of Bedford and it sailed from New York on 24th March 1944. After 11 days at sea they arrived at Greenock, Scotland. They then boarded a train for the 14-hour trip to Ashurst station. They finally arrived at Stoney Cross on the 15th of April 1944.

Dad said that most of the pilots of the 367th arrived at Stoney Cross expecting to fly single engine fighters such as the P-51 Mustang, you can imagine their surprise when they arrived to see a line up of twin engine P-38 Lightnings. However, Dad knew that the Lightning with its 4 machine guns and its cannon concentrated on the nose and with two engines was a good plane for ground support or bomber escort. With its huge fire power, it could inflict a

lot of punishment to the enemy, and it could bring its pilot back to the base on a single engine.

After a lot of local training and for many, conversion to twin engine aircraft, the 367th became operational on the 9th of May 1944. Dad remained the 393rd's squadron commander until he was shot down on the late afternoon/evening of May 24th, 1944.

It was his second mission of the day. The first mission into Berlin that was problematic as the fighters and bombers failed to link up. Dad said he and, his wingman were the only ones over Berlin. Radio issues and cloud cover may have been the problem. I think that's why he decided to fly the second mission that day to Saint-Brieuc. He reported that he was tired, but after sitting in on the briefing, he decided to go. This was a strafe and dive bomb-type mission. He did not have the lead on this mission. When over the target Dad's left engine was hit and on fire and then the plane itself caught fire. The cockpit filled with smoke, and he couldn't grab the "canopy release wire" as it was swinging behind him.

To cut a long story short, Dad managed to bail out, but was hung up on the cockpit and was knocked unconscious. He came to and was being battered against the fuselage and passed out again. He awoke mid-air and pulled his chute at about 500 feet. His chute opened just in time to break his fall, which fortunately, was into a deeply ploughed farmer's field. His eyesight was damaged during his escape from the plane, and he had flak embedded in a thigh.

Dad escaped to England two months after bailing out and having been hidden, sheltered, given medical treatment, food and clothes by various French civilians, resistance members and groups and British/French and Allied military secret teams before and after the D-Day invasion. His journey through Brittany was long, complicated and his escape involved many brave French men and women who provided shelter and medical care while hiding him from the Germans.

During his time in Brittany, Dad met some SAS, SEO, MI.9 and SIS personnel working with the French resistance and was ultimately taken to the North coast of Brittany and what is now known as Bonaparte Beach. From here he was returned to England by the 15th Motor Gun Boat Flotilla, operating as part of Operation Bonaparte, an operation that helped over 100 pilots evade capture and escape from occupied France whilst carrying out its mission to support allied agents operating in the area.

It is truly amazing that Dad survived. Many who helped dad did not or they suffered greatly as a result. He was surrounded by heroes and heroines from Brittany farmers, chateau owners, to many maquis' groups along with French and British soldiers and Special Air Service personnel. After returning to England Dad was repatriated to the US as his injuries meant he was not fit to fly, and he needed further medical treatment.

After the War, Dad served in the U S Strategic Air Command, including the fighter interceptor groups in Montana, Florida and elsewhere. He is also thought to have been working in the Pentagon during the Cuban missile crisis and was scrambled with others to bases in Florida.

Dad loved flying and loved training men to fly. He was posted to Ankara, Turkey as part of the NATO peacekeeping forces. He also served as military attaché to several countries in

the Middle East and Japan. His last posting took him to Tinker A.F.B. where he was helping to establishing radar installations, including those on Easter Island.

Dad retired to California in 1969 and built a home with Ida "Laura Lee" in Alta Loma, Ca near his mother, brother, and other family members. He volunteered to teach aeronautics at the local junior college and was about two thirds of the way to completing a home-built aircraft when he died.

Dad died at Balboa Naval Regional Medical Centre in San Diego, Ca on October 31, 1977, of acute myelogenous leukaemia, just six weeks after its diagnosis. He is buried at Bellevue Cemetery just east of Ontario, Ca.