

Today 74/53
Partly Sunny

Saturday, May 21, 2016

Sunday

79/63



Monday

76/60



Atlantic News-Telegraph

Serving Cass, Shelby, Guthrie, Audubon and Pottawattamie Counties for over 141 years. Volume 235 - No 121

\$ 1.00



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Atlantic News

When Lightning Strikes



Atlantic's Jim Tyler, right, stands in front of a Lockheed P38, similar to the one he flew in WWII. The plane is owned by the Fagen Fighters WWII Museum in Granite Falls, Minn. and was flown to Atlantic by Evan Fagen.

Photos by Jeff Lundquist

Atlantic man reunites with plane he flew in WWII - the P38 Lightning

By Jeff Lundquist

NT Publisher

In April, 1945, the future Kansas Senator Bob Dole was shot and so badly wounded by machine gun fire that fellow soldiers gave him the largest dose of morphine they dared and then printed an M for 'morphine' on his forehead in his own blood, so that nobody else who found him would give him a second, fatal dose.

At the same time, 150 miles south, Atlantic's Jim Tyler was serving as a pilot flying a Lockheed P38 fighter,

bomber out of Salerno, Italy. On Thursday, standing on the taxiway at the Atlantic airport, Tyler was able to recount some of memories of that time, thanks to a special delivery of a piece of military - and for Tyler - personal history.

Evan Fagen, whose family owns the "Fagen Fighters WWII Museum" in Granite Falls, Minn. and whose company is working on the ethanol plant in Atlantic, had become friends with Airport Manager Barry Reid. One of the planes in the families museum was the Scat III, a Lockheed P-38L "Lightning" similar to the one Tyler flew in the war.

"Barry told me about him and that he as a P38 pilot and there's not a lot of P38 pilots around," Fagen said. "So Barry and I tried to figure out either when they could come up to Minnesota or I could come down here."

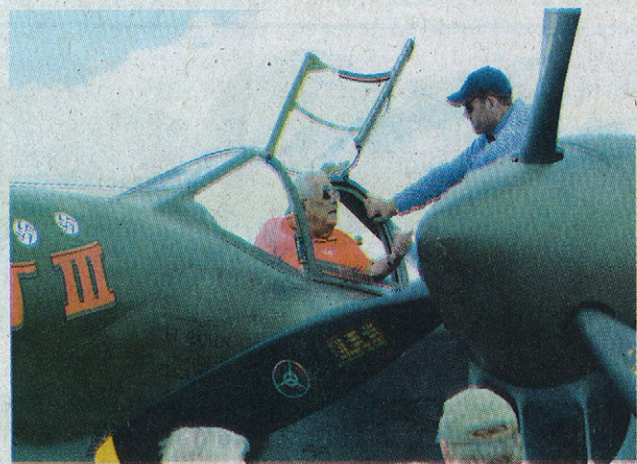
On Thursday, the plan came together when the plane, which had been in an airshow in St. Louis, needed to be flown back to Minnesota - with a brief stop in Atlantic.

Tyler flew 15 missions in the plane doing everything from escorting bombers, dropping chaff, making dive bombing runs and strafing enemy positions and the emotional connection to the plane and memories it brought with it were clear.

"You have no idea what this means to me," an emotional Tyler told Fagen. "You have no idea."

Tyler told the story of being just 150 miles south of Bob Dole when Dole was injured, and then later meeting with him in his office to talk about that time. He also told of

Tyler see page 12



accidents where pilots he knew were killed, the stories trailing off without ending.

Over 10,000 P38's were produced during the war, and today just eight are still flying. The Scat III was built in 1945, but never deployed and survived the war without seeing combat service.

With an internal fuel capacity of 410 gallons that could be increased to 1,010 gallons with two external drop tanks, the Lightning had a combat range of 450 miles, and an astonishing maximum range of 2,600 miles—making it the first long-range bomber escort. In addition to its devastating nose armament (four .50 caliber machine guns plus a 20 mm cannon—enough firepower to sink a ship), it could carry up to 4,000 pounds of bombs—almost as much as the Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress. Its distinctive twin booms and a single, central nacelle containing the cockpit and armament, earned it the name "fork-tailed devil" from the Germans.

Tyler has fond memories of the plane, noting "how easy it is to fly, it's so easy to fly, really easy to land." Then recounted the one piece of advice he never forgot. "One thing they always said was never turn into a dead engine, I saw a guy take off, our base was Salerno, Italy, right after he took off, left engine went out - turned to the left, right straight in," his voice trailing off.

The most famous mission of the P-38 was the attack on Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto. Yamamoto was the commander of the Combined Fleet of the Imperial Japanese Navy and the mastermind behind the attack on Pearl Harbor. He was killed on Bougainville Island when his converted Mitsubishi G4M1 "Betty" bomber was shot down by P-38s operating from Kukum Field on Guadalcanal. The mission entailed flying 600 miles (965 km) at wave top level with a return trip of 400 miles (644 km). Only P-38s (with drop tanks) were capable of performing the 1,000 mile (1,610 km) long mission.

It was also the plane that America's top Ace, Richard Ira Bong, flew shooting down at least 40 Japanese aircraft.

Tyler, who despite celebrating his 90th birthday last year, climbed into the cockpit one last time Thursday, taking the yoke in his hands and describing to Fagen some of his moves using hand motions familiar to pilots. He says he no longer flies - though he looks as if he could still take off without missing a beat - still he said you have to know when to quit.

"I flew after the war, but finally came to a place where I got uncomfortable with other folks with you and it's time to just hang it up," he said. "Enough is enough."

Tyler said Thursday that we had no idea what it meant to him to be able to see, feel and climb into that plane one last time. But we saw what it meant in his eyes, and heard it in his voice - and for a short time Thursday we knew what it meant to take one last dance with the fork-tailed devil.

Looking for a job?

There are more than 43 job listings in today's paper!



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School Calendar

SATURDAY, MAY 21

- Honor Marching Band Auditions at Atlantic
- TBD - Tennis: Boys Varsity Sub State-Team at IHSAA
- TBD - Track and Field: Boys Varsity State Meet at Drake Stadium
- TBD - Track and Field: Girls Varsity State Meet at Drake Stadium
- 9 a.m. - Tennis: Girls Varsity Regional Team at Atlantic Washington Elementary

SUNDAY, MAY 22

- 2 p.m. - Graduation

MONDAY, MAY 23

- TBD - Golf: Girls Varsity Regionals at IGHSAU
- Honor Marching Band Auditions at Atlantic
- TBD - Soccer: Boys Varsity Substate at IHSAA
- TBD - Tennis: Girls Varsity Regional/State Team at IGHSAU

Inside

- ObituariesPage 2
- Neighbors Pages 3-4
- AgriculturePage 5
- Sports Pages 6-7
- Comics.....Page 8
- TelevisionPage 9
- Classifieds.....Pages 10-11