The Adventures of Jim, Sr â€“ Part III

Description

I have posted two parts of this story previously. It is the story of the a glider pilot that I had the opportunity to meet in person and hear this story myself. Read all of it to get a picture of the life style of those who hauled troops and freight to the front lines. He flew 41 combat glider missions, but the best part of the story is how he celebrated VJ day in Paris.

Part I of the Adventures of Jim, Sr

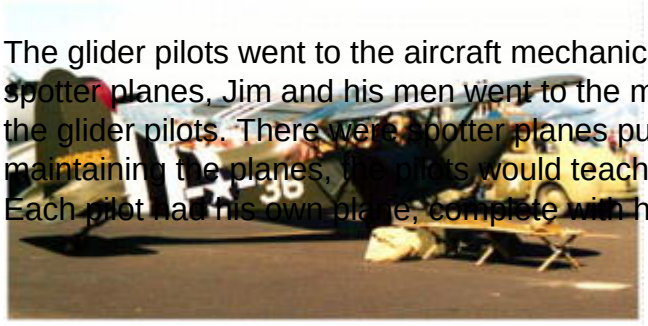
Part II of the Adventures of Jim, Sr

Jim tells a story of a wartime romance that began in Paris, before the war had ended. JimÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s unit was stationed at St Andre, about 60 miles west of Paris. One day, Jim and his co-pilot, Eddie, were sitting at the CafÃƒÂ© de la Plait in Paris, having an aperitif when a young French woman, wearing a white angora sweater walked by. Jim said to his friend â€œI bet I can get her to have a drink.â€• In typical aviator fashion, his co-pilot spurred him on with a â€œGo for it!â€• response. Jim took off down the sidewalk and caught up with Denise Bellicord and asked if she would have a drink with him in, as he described it, very bad French. She looked at him and said â€œI speak English.â€• He said â€œI bet him an aperitif that I could get you to have a drink with us.â€• Denise asked: â€œIs this your first time in Paris?â€• â€œYesâ€• was JimÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s response. â€œYou donÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t just try to pick up a girl.â€• â€œI wasnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t trying to pick you up.â€• She went back and had a drink with Jim and his co-pilot, and that began the romance for the next year. Jim met the parents, and spent their free time together. Later Jim moved east, as the war progressed into Germany. Jim left Denise and did not see her again until after the war. She thought Jim had been killed, because she never heard from him after he left to go east.

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The war in Europe ended, but with the war against Japan still being underway, and planning for the invasion of the Japanese Homeland in the work, there was still some uncertainty as to what would be the lot of the servicemen in Europe. While waiting for a decision on whether would be shipped to the Pacific Theater, the glider pilots would fly the C-47s. Jim saw an opportunity in the process of downsizing the troops in Europe.

The Signal Corps were the ones who had flown the light spotter planes over the front lines. When the war ended, the Signal Corps troops were sent back to the states. They left their Stinson L-5 spotter planes behind in Europe to be burned. Jim and his fellow glider pilots, who were stuck overseas for the moment, had a better idea.



The glider pilots went to the aircraft mechanics at the base, who had been assigned to dispose of the spotter planes, Jim and his men went to the mechanics and asked that they hold one L-5 for each of the glider pilots. There were spotter planes pulled from the pile, on the promise that in return for maintaining the planes, the pilots would teach them how to fly after work. It was a great deal all around. Each pilot had his own plane, complete with his name painted on it, to fly as they wished. Jim used this

to his advantage. More on this later.

On August 15th, 1945, Jim and his unit were still stationed at St. Andre, in France. On this day, the war with Japan ended. In order to celebrate this momentous occasion, Jim hopped in his â€œpersonalâ€• aircraft and headed into Paris. The glider pilots had been using Renault Field as their local airfield, since the Renault Factory was not in operation, building aircraft. Arriving in Paris, he met Denise at a Paris cafÃƒÂ©. Jim got a case of champagne, and they began drinking to celebrate. Then they decided to go to into the center of Paris, but the traffic was so bad, and the people so numerous, they couldnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t get to the Champs de Elise. Jim had a better idea. They could view the massive celebration from the air, in the comfort of his Stinson O-5 spotter plane, that had been tied down to a tree in at Renault field. They got in the plane (recall some champagne had already been consumed) and took off, heading to downtown Paris, he in the back seat, she in the front.

Off they went, crossing over the Seine River. JimÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s trained eyes picked out a bridge, and being the valiant aviator he was, he proceeded to fly under it. He saw more bridges around Paris, and proceeded to fly over and under about 20 of them, then he had a better idea.

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Jim flew around the Eiffel Tower and scanned for obstacles and guy wires near or attached to the Tower. He saw none. Checking the SunÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s angle, he repositioned his plane. Jim did something that then put he and Denise Bellicord into the history books. He then flew under the Eiffel Tower, and quickly away into the sun. The next day, there was an article in the 15 August Paris Edition of the London Herald-Tribune, page one covered VJ Day, and on page two, there was an article saying a crazy American pilot had flown under the Tower, but could not be identified. Witnesses reported there had been two people in the plane celebrating the moment.

After the war completely ended, Jim volunteered to stay in Europe. He was assigned as the Special Services Officer for the Munich Base. He was the man responsible to make sure there was something the keep the morale of the troops up. He was also responsible for two rehabilitation hotels, as well. He had his own jeep andÃ¢â‚¬Â¦his own plane. While at Munich, Jim felt he had to see his French girlfriend, Denise one last time. Jim approached the Base Commander, a colonel, and the conversation went something like this:

Jim: â€œColonel, we have a problem.â€•
Col: â€œWhatÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s that?â€•
Jim: â€œYou know the movie theater? The lens in the projector is cracked.â€•
Col: â€œCan we fix it?â€•
Jim: â€œNo, we have a spare, but itÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s the only one.â€•
Col: â€œRequisition one.â€•
Jim: â€œIt will take 6 weeks. I have some contacts in places youÃ¢â‚¬â„¢re not exposed to that can help us sooner.â€•
Col: â€œOk, what do you need?â€•
Jim: â€œA plane.â€•
Col: â€œOk, IÃ¢â‚¬â„¢ll get you a C-47.â€•
Jim: â€œIÃ¢â‚¬â„¢ll pick the crew.Ã¢â‚¬Â•
Col: â€œThereÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s something else?â€•
Jim: â€œWe might want to see our old girlfriends one last time. You want us to be happy, right?â€•
Col: â€œYes.â€•

Jim: â€œWeÃ¢â‚¬â„¢ll need to RON (remain overnight).â€•

The rest of the story is Jim took a co-pilot, flight engineer, a crew chief and a navigator. The RON ended up being three nights and 4 days. They did happen to see their old girlfriends, and yes, Jim did see Denise. A new projector bulb was not â€œprocuredâ€• from the black market in Paris, as it seems the first bulb wasnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t cracked in the first place.

At the end of the war, the Rockettes Show in New York was purchased and put on contract to the Army to provide entertainment for the troops who had remained behind in Europe. Jim said the contract for the show required the military to return the show members to the states in the same condition as they went over. Jim, as the Special Services Officer, was responsible for setting up the shows for Munich. With that, and his interaction with the cast and crew, one of the women in the cast, Veronica Bridgette Nolan, caught JimÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s eye. Jim met here and they began dating. Since the show was traveling around Europe, Jim needed some way to get around to see his new girlfriend.

This is where his â€œpersonalâ€• aircraft came in handy. He was able to just go pretty much as he pleased, particularly since the need for the actual flying of gliders had ended when the Germans had surrendered. Occupation duties went on, and he continued to follow his American fiancÃƒÂ©e around the circuit of the Rockette's show in his Ã¢â‚¬Å“privateÃ¢â‚¬Â• plane.

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Jim and Veronica courted, got engaged, then got married in the Catholic Church in Haar, Germany. She wore a nylon wedding dress, made from JimÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s parachute by a local seamstress. They returned to the States, settling first in New York City.

In 1949, as Jim drove to work at MacyÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s, he was listening to the Tex McCrary and Jinx Falkenburg radio program. That day, they were interviewing the only actress in the movie â€œBattlegroundâ€• that had appeared in the list of the stars in the film. She had a French accent, as she promoted the movie over the airwaves. Her name was Denise Darcel. As soon as Jim got into work, he called the radio station and asked to speak to Tex McCrary. He was routed to a secretary, who asked what the call was about. He said heÃ¢â‚¬â„¢d like to talked to Tex privately about his guest. She told him they get a lot of calls and she would take his number and if Tex wanted to call, heÃ¢â‚¬â„¢d hear from him. Jim asked if the secretary would tell Tex he had know his guest years ago as Denise Bellicord. He hung up the phone and went to work. A few hours later, Jim got a call, having put the earlier call out of his mind. It was Tex, saying because he had supplied DeniseÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s family name, which she had told them in the studio, and therefore no one else would have know it, he wanted to hear how Jim and DeniseÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s story had ended. Jim honestly answered â€œIt didnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t.â€• He told Tex how he had been transferred to Germany. Tex told Jim he would pass the story on to Denise, and leave it up to her if she would like to see him.

About 4PM, JimÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s phone rang. It was Denise. He apologized and she asked when she could see him. He said he couldnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t, as he was now married and had two children. Denise said: â€œI must see you.â€• â€œWhen?â€• â€œThe matinee show tomorrow.â€•

Jim arrived at the stage door of the show with a dozen red roses. The stage crew ushered him in and put him in a center front row seat. When Denise came on stage to sing, she began with â€œYou, Jimmy! I think he kaput in the war, you bad boy!â€• From there, she proceeded to tell the story of the two of them flying under the bridges, and the Eiffel Tower on VJ Day, August 15th, 1945.

Jim and Veronica divorced and the Herald-Tribune paper of August 16th, 1945, attesting to JimÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s daredevil flight was lost in the split. Many years later, Jim and his second wife, Jane, traveled to Paris, and stopped in the London Herald-Tribune Office. Jim asked to see the publisher. Upon completing the introductions, the publisher told Jim he had heard the story, and they had a reporter who had been on staff in Aug, 1945. They met the old reporter and he confirmed JimÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s story. The reporter told Jim that he was the first of 6 people to fly under the Eiffel Tower to date. Unfortunately, they told Jim the archives were across town and couldnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t be accessed in time to get a copy of the paper for him.

No story is complete, when you are speaking of an aviator of almost any kind without finding out what their â€œcall signâ€• or peer given nick name. JimÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s call sign was â€œBung.â€• The moniker relates to the name of the wooden plug that is put in the side of large beer kegs. It is placed there after the keg is filled, using a mallet to seat it. It is also the thing that is removed to place the tap and empty the keg.

Jim says his favorite song during the war was â€œMoonlight Serenadeâ€• by Glenn Miller.

On his birthday, Jim occasionally goes to a local airfield and takes a flight in a small plane. He is unable to fly himself anymore due to health issues, but he flies with a certified instructor and gets in a little supervised â€œstick timeâ€• in remembrance of his service time.

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Jim joined the service on his 18th birthday and served with â€œThe Greatest Generation.â€• He returned to the States and has since become a father, and a successful businessman, and part of the economic engine of America. Today Jim Helinger, Sr. lives in St. Pete Beach, Florida, and runs his own business. He is also the Florida State WWII Combat Glider Pilots Association Commander and regularly gives speeches to interested civic and church groups on the eight major combat glider operations of WWII.

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Date Created
August 15, 2005
Author
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