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BACK TO GLORY DAYS - SONS HONOR DADS

As the warbird made its final pass overhead Thursday, two men watched, one marveling and one wishing.

For Gregory Kenny, seeing his dad back in the saddle of a P-51 Mustang heightened the admiration inspired in childhood from faint scrapbook images of the World War II ace.

For Jerry Olson, the moment would have been sweeter only if his dad could have been there too, flanked by his favorite wingman -- just like old times. Still, every so often, the stars align just right. The sons had neither met nor known of their dads' bond 64 years ago. And they might never have known if not for a confluence of coincidences. With his dad approaching 85, Kenny reckoned revisiting his heroic past the perfect birthday gift. In March, he contacted Stallion 51 Corp., a Kissimmee group that provides flight training in vintage aircraft. He booked a \$3,050 hour-long flight in a P-51, the aircraft in which Lt. Edward Kenny flew 85 missions during World War II with the 12th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron. "For me," said Kenny, 55, of Cincinnati, it meant "a chance to experience a bit of my dad's journey in life." Olson's father's journey ended nine years ago, at age 81. A week ago, he got the notion to honor his dad by experiencing shades of being a 20-something dodging Messerschmitt Bf 109s on about 80 recon missions ahead of Gen. George S. Patton's Third Army. He e-mailed Stallion 51 for information, noting that his dad, Lt. Elmer T. Olson, had flown with the 12th Tactical Recon Squadron. Julia Mulcahy, Stallion 51's scheduling maven, noticed the coincidence and e-mailed Olson: Might his dad have known Edward Kenny, who soon would be flying with Stallion 51? Olson searched his dad's military mementos.

Search pays off "When I first saw that e-mail, a light bulb went off," said Olson, 62, of Seabrook, Texas. "I said, 'I think I've seen that name in the [flight] logbook.' I immediately got the logbook and went through it, and I was just numb." Did they know each other? And how. From Dec. 27, 1944, to March 9, 1945, Olson flew all 18 of his missions with Kenny, including this February 1944 mis-

sion chronicled in Aerial Reconnaissance: The 10th Photo Recon Group in World War II: "The 12th TAC R dispatched eight missions to check rail traffic and marshaling yards behind Third Army's front, one flown by Lts. Elmer Olson and Edward Kenny, who found the yards quite active at Giessen, Fulda, and Hanau." Olson knew he had to meet the man who had his dad's back on all those flights. "From the Battle of the Bulge [onward], Edward was the only person he flew with," Olson said. "They're so few of these guys left, they're passing away so fast, and the circumstances, the coincidences that had to happen for us getting together. What are the odds?" On Wednesday, Olson arrived in Kissimmee in his Cessna.

'His dad all over again' "When he climbed out of his airplane, I thought, 'My God -- here's his dad all over again,'" said Edward Kenny of Garden City, N.Y. For Olson, it was almost paternal. "Edward has these same crystal-blue eyes that my dad had," Olson said. "I looked at that, you know, and [thought], 'Here he is looking back at me again.'" On Thursday, Edward Kenny climbed into the converted dual cockpit of the "Crazy Horse" with Eric Huppert, a former Air Force pilot. Soon after, he was cleared for his 86th mission. This time, there would be no enemy airfields to skirt, no pitchforks from angry farmers to dodge, or another Focke-Wulf Fw 190 to force into a belly landing. "It could come out as bragging," he said, "but I really felt that reconnaissance played a very significant role in the war, specifically for Patton's Third Army. He always knew what was five miles, 50 miles ahead of him -- the bridge was out, a road was not there, tanks were over here." As the plane descended, two men united by their fathers' bond stood by, giddy. As Crazy Horse cantered in, Gregory waved. His dad raised his thumb high. "Woo-whee! You did it, Dad." The aging ace unstrapped his helmet, got out and, as he had many times, briefed the ranks. "That was awesome," he said, pumping his fist and swabbing tears. The only thing missing, he said, was the artillery. And his flying mate -- who has gone ahead to scout things out.



Lifetime reunion...Reunited after 60 years

I have just read the article on your organization and Edward Kenny of Garden City, NY.

I was overwhelmed when I saw that Mr. Kenny had flown with the 12th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron in WWII. My brother, Thomas James Woods (Jim), also flew with that same unit. He was shot down on August 8, 1944 and subsequently died in a hospital at a British air base in France. He was 20 years old. He was buried in the cemetery at St. Lo, France and was returned home to Kansas City after the war.

I was only 8 years old at the time of his death. I have very little information on the circumstances surrounding his experiences and death.

Would it be possible for you to contact Mr. Kenny and get his permission for me to contact him?

My only sister passed away 3 years ago and was the last remaining family with any first hand knowledge.

I am a retired Naval Officer and naval aviator. I graduated from the US Naval Academy in 1957 and went on to become a carrier pilot, flying fighter and reconnaissance aircraft. I flew the RA-5C, Vigilante, in Vietnam. I was actually flying a recce mission over North Vietnam on the 24th anniversary of my brother's death.

In advance, I thank you for any assistance you can give me in reaching out to the brother lost so young.

Sincerely,
Frank Woods