

War Era Story Project 2012

Submitted by: Cherry Anderson, on behalf of Ohmer Crowe

Current home town: Camden, Ohio

Age: 81

My Dad, Ohmer Crowe, who turned 81 on March 11, 2012, recounts an experience he had as a youth in 1942. The way he still gets excited, his eyes lighting up when he talks about it, I know that this was one of the most thrilling experiences of his life. Dad was 11 years old when a plane crashed on a farm tenanted by his parents near Lewisburg, in Preble County, in southwestern Ohio. An article in the Thursday, September 3, 1942, edition of the *Lewisburg Leader* told the official story about the airplane crash the previous Sunday:

1st Lt. William L. Mitchell of Drew Field, Fla., was compelled to make a forced landing. Lt. Mitchell was making a routine test flight from Patterson Field in a single-engine pursuit plane and was forced to make an emergency landing when the gasoline supply was depleted. Mitchell suffered numerous bruises and lacerations, but his injuries were not considered serious.

The article reported that a neighbor close to the crash believed that one thousand area people visited the scene of the accident, and further reported that “the plane was the Airacobra type, said to be one of the fastest planes in use, and was armed with a small cannon and machine guns.”



P-39 Airacobra

Dad’s personal recollection of the incident follows:

“Mom sent me to the hog barn to see if any hens had hidden a nest in the top of the barn where we could put corn to feed to the hogs in the winter. There were two barns about 200 feet apart. Planes would practice what they called “hedge-hopping,” where they’d come down real low over the first barn. They’d start over the first and when they’d get over it, they didn’t know there was another barn there. They were practicing for low-altitude flying in Europe, going over trees and such. As I was going to the barn, a plane flew overhead very low, going west. I went on to the barn and was climbing up when I heard the plane coming back. I jumped down and ran outside the barn. As I got outside, I saw the plane

go through the two fences of the lane and into the pasture field. It went through those fences and the wings of that plane cut steel posts in two like you'd cut a piece of wire with clippers. I jumped the fence and ran barefooted through the pasture field, which I would not usually do. When I got to the ravine, I just jumped it. I got to the plane as the pilot was getting out. I saw that he had a cut over one ear. He asked me where he could use a phone. I said that we had one in our house. Two men who had parked by the road came over and said they would haul him there in their car. When he got to the house, he told my dad and brother to take their shotguns and shoot anyone who tried to get in the plane. It only took about one hour for the Army to get there. They stood guard all night. My dad and brother said I looked like a jack rabbit going across the field. The next day, I tried to jump that ravine and could not do it. The plane was gone the next day when I got home from school. The plane did hit that tree a little bit. The left wing cut a gash in the bark about one inch deep."

Dad also frequently ends his retelling of this adventure by adding that he had heard later that the pilot ordered his dad and brother to keep everyone away from the plane because it contained a new type of bombsight that had to be guarded. Dad still lives in Preble County with his wife Zana, on his farm southwest of Camden, about 25 miles from his boyhood home outside Lewisburg, where he ran like a jack rabbit to a plane crash all those decades ago. Dad had three brothers who served in World War II, one of whom was Francis Dale Crowe, whose many decorations included two silver stars and two bronze stars. Francis was killed in action and buried in Epinal, France.