



Local Standouts of World War II

Barnes County Legend D.M.Jones

David Mudgett Jones, son of Barnes County homesteaders David Arthur (Dade) and Grace Mudgett Jones, created a legacy for himself when taking part as a flight leader on the first American raid on Tokyo which would become known as the Doolittle Raid. The raid, executed on April 18, 1942, involved sixteen B-25B Mitchell bombers launched from the USS Hornet. For those who participated, the raid became a lifelong badge of honor. But for Jones, it was the beginning of a remarkable wartime journey.

Jones' next mission was commanding the 319th Bombardment Group 'First Marauders' deployed to Africa to weaken Axis control in North Africa through relentless air operations targeting enemy supply lines and key infrastructure. Although the raids were successful, Jones was shot down and became a prisoner of war for 2-1/2 years. He was a key part of the April 1944 mass escape at Stalag Luft III; his life and story would inspire actor Steve McQueen in the 1963 movie 'The Great Escape.' Jones retired from the Air Force in 1973.



(Above) Major David Mudgett Jones, son of David (Dade) and Grace Jones who homesteaded in Meadow Lake Township of Barnes County, with relatives in Sanborn and Eckelson.



(Left) Lieutenant Al Lieberman of the 9th Air Force 362 Fighter Group, 379th Flying Squadron relaxes on the wing of his P-47 Thunderbolt. Lieberman himself took this photo of his fellow pilots flying over the Bavarian Alps.

Photos and information provided by the Lieberman family and The Minnesota Legionnaire.

Valley City Youth Becomes WWII Pilot

Al Lieberman, son of local businessman and Jewish immigrant Albert and his wife Dorothy, graduated from Valley City High School in 1941. He joined the Army Air Corps when he was 17, intent on becoming a pilot. Lieberman earned his wings in 1944 and was assigned to the 379th Fighter Squadron flying P-47 Thunderbolts.

The squadron began doing missions following the D-Day landings. The unit used many bases across France and Germany as the war continued. Lieberman would participate in missions for the Battle of the Bulge, in the breakthrough from Normandy, and helped defend the Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen - the last bridge standing over the Rhine as U.S. Forces moved into Germany, bringing to close the war in the European theatre. He was on furlough celebrating his 21st birthday and preparing for reassignment when Japan surrendered and WWII came to a close.

Lieberman had flown 74 missions before his 21st birthday.

The U.S. 'Ghost Army' and its Connection to Valley City

Clifford 'Dede' Simenson was born in 1909 in Valley City to Olaf and Louise Simenson; Olaf ran the general store in town for 55 years. Cliff was the fourth of seven sons.

At Valley City High, he was president of the junior and senior classes as well as the quarterback of the football team. Cliff would join an older brother at West Point following a stint at the University of North Dakota. He graduated West Point in 1934, and was assigned to HQ, Army Ground Forces where his work earned him promotion from captain to lieutenant colonel in 19 months.

When war broke out, Simenson was recruited to serve as operations officer for the 23rd HQ Special Troops, a secret unit also known as 'The Ghost Army.' These 'combat con-artists' would play a pivotal role in the war in Europe.

The soldiers of The Ghost Army used inflatable tanks, sound effects, and radio trickery to create illusions and deceive and confuse the enemy forces. Simenson had a vital role in for-

mulating the doctrines and tactics the troops would use to simulate larger units on the battlefield. It's determined this secret unit saved thousands of lives and helped liberate Europe.

The Ghost Army would remain a classified secret until the mid 1990s. In 2022, The Ghost Army and its 1,100 soldiers were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal "in recognition of their unique and highly distinguished service in conducting deception operations in Europe during World War II."

(Above right) Aerial photo taken of an inflatable tank set up as part of 'Operation Viersen,' March 1945.

(Right) Lieutenant Colonel Clifford 'Dede' Simenson

(Below) An inflatable decoy tank made of rubberized canvas was one of many tools used by the Ghost Army to confuse and intimidate the German Army.

Credits: The Ghost Army Legacy Project.



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