

Military Order of the Purple Heart

Texas Capital Chapter 1919 Austin, Texas



RUFUS DYE, JR



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Patriot, Chapter 1919
(AIR FORCE, WWII, Europe) Article January 1997

This is a fighter pilot's story, shot down behind enemy lines, parachuted into the middle of a major German withdrawal, and pedaled to safety by a French boy on his bicycle.

In WWII, Lieutenant Rufus Dye was a 9th Air Force fighter pilot in the 392nd Squadron, 367th Fighter Group. The 392nd was a squadron of P-38 "Lightnings" that normally flew missions of Bomber Escort, Armed Reconnaissance, Interdiction, or Close Air Support. On the evening of September 8, 1944 his unit had been ordered to do something unusual, that was to conduct a very late in the day raid into Germany. Normally the 367th Fighter Group was a daylight operations unit. The squadron bombed a rail marshalling yard in the heavily defended city of Cologne and Rufus' plane was damaged by FLAK. Rufus had lost his radio, apparently damaged, and on the long return flight back over France, Rufus noticed that his wingman had slightly moved away and put some distance between their two planes—then he saw why. One of the engines on his plane had caught fire and he knew that P-38's with a leaking fuel line had a reputation for blowing up in the air. Rufus already had a leg wound from the FLAK hit, and parachuting from a P-38 was especially dangerous because the pilot almost always would hit the tail assembly before falling clear of the aircraft. He didn't have time to think about it. Rufus bailed-out, and sure enough, struck the tail further injuring himself, and just barely in time.

However, most of those injuries were sustained getting out of the cockpit. Moments later as he watched, suspended in his parachute harness, the plane detonated in a spectacular explosion that lit up the nighttime darkness.

He floated down safely and landed in a potato field out in the countryside. Rufus estimated that it was some miles to the northeast of Paris. He stood up but could not walk. Both ankles and his back were badly injured. The night was moonlit and Rufus had come down in full view of a huge mass of retreating German armor and troops that were withdrawing to the east in convoy on a major road that was no more than a quarter-mile from where he had landed. The Germans saw his plane explode and they couldn't miss seeing his parachute descend. None of them would fire at him or break off from the convoy to come and kill or capture him, but Rufus expected they might at the time. As he was collecting himself on a path at the edge of the field, suddenly in the darkness, he was almost run over by a young French boy pedaling along on his bicycle. Rufus had an "escape packet" for downed airmen, and that had quite a lot of French money in it. Despite some language difficulties, Rufus struck a deal with the teenager. In exchange for all the money, he pedaled away down the path through the fields with Rufus perched on the handlebars. The Germans were headed east, and the bicycle headed west as they passed out of sight. After about 5 or 6 kilometers they came upon some British soldiers, he had almost reached the Allied lines before his plane went down. It was decided that it would be best if Rufus remained with the soldiers at their outpost until morning. The British troops put him on a cot and gave him a fifth of Red Label scotch for the pain and it worked. The next morning very early one of the British troops took Rufus to the U.S. 7th Army Field Hospital. There he was given proper medical attention. He remained for several days in their care.

Rufus Dye was improving, but could still hardly walk. The Field Hospital received orders to move before they could locate where Rufus' unit had moved. Since their movement orders routed them through newly liberated Paris, the Hospital Commander advised Rufus of the situation and gave him a choice. Stay with them until they arrived at their future location, or get off the truck in Paris and hope to be picked up by American troops that could get him back to his home base. He decided to take his chances so the hospital unit dropped him off in front of a bistro as they were passing through the city. He sat himself down outside to have some refreshments and contemplate his predicament. While sitting there an American Pilot came up the street, and he and Rufus did a double-take, staring at one another in disbelief. It was one of his friends from the 392nd Squadron, and the friend looked like he was seeing a ghost. Rufus' wing man had not seen him bailout of the burning P-38, so the 367th Group had presumed he had been killed when it exploded. Rufus caught a ride back to the airbase with this friend, who happened to be flying a P-38 "Droop Snoot" version of the fighter aircraft. This aircraft normally carried a bombardier in the plastic nose, but this time it was Rufus perched in the nose. There was no parachute for him and Rufus hoped the floor door wouldn't open on the flight back to his unit.

Rufus was reunited with his squadron and he survived the war without further comparable incidents. He was discharged after WWII, but came back into the Air Force in 1948. He flew combat missions in fighter aircraft in the Korean War (P-51 Mustang) and in Vietnam (F-105 Thunder Chief) but was never again shot down or wounded in action. After a long and distinguished career, Colonel Rufus Dye, Jr. retired from Headquarters, 12th Air Force in 1971

and has remained living in Austin, Texas since that time. As a charter member, he helped to establish Chapter 1919 of the Military Order of the Purple Heart, and he has served as a chapter officer in multiple leadership positions.



**Rufus and His Crew
P-38J15 Lightning
First Combat Tour - Europe**

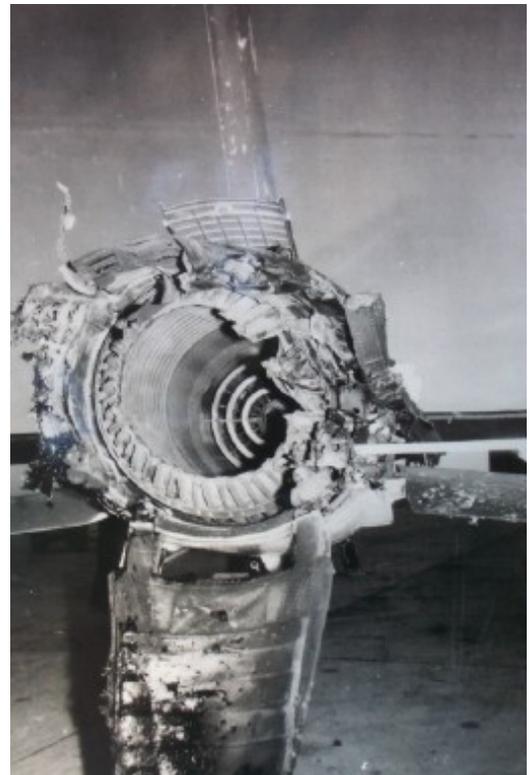


**Ain't Misbehavin
P-47D Thunderbolt
Second Combat Tour - Europe
(With Same Unit After R&R Back to the U.S.)**



**Rufus in Korea
P-51**

**With 18th Fighter/Bomber Group, 12th Fighter/Bomber Squadron
at Airfield K-46 Wonju, Korea**



Rufus in Southeast Asia - Vietnam 1968

F105D
388th Tactical Wing, 32nd Fighter Squadron
Korat Air Force Base - Korat, Thailand
Hit by Air to Air Missile on Trip to Downtown Hanoi



Rufus and Elizabeth
George Washington's Birthday Celebration
February 2007



Rufus Dye
Grand Marshall - Veterans Day Parade
November 2010



**Rufus Dye
90th Birthday Party
2013**

**Rufus Dye
Rufus rides P51 Mustang (Pecos Bill)
Rufus flew a P51 in Korea
2014**

[Link to Jim Connors Video of Ashley Kamrath Interview](#)

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