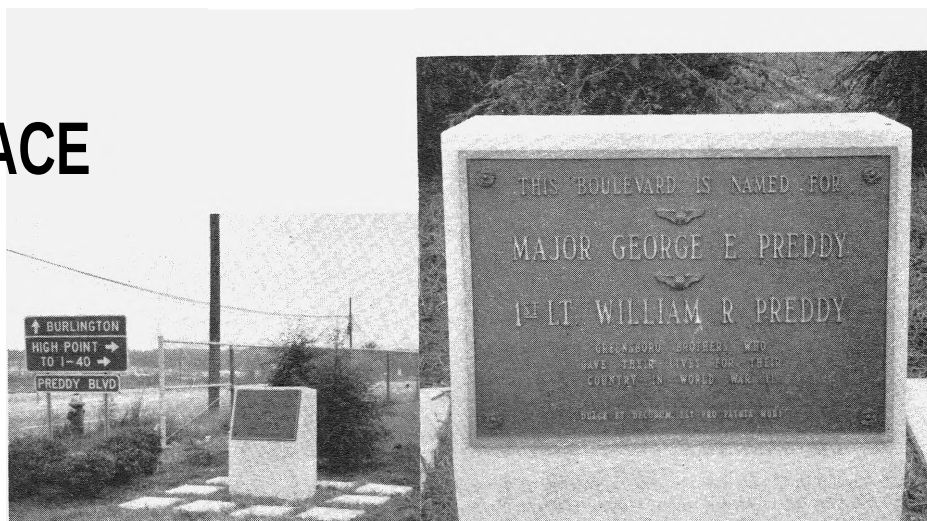


THE UNKNOWN ACE

Major George E. Preddy
U.S.A.A.F.
(KIA December 25, 1944)

By JOHN R. BEAMAN, Jr.



"This boulevard is named for Major George E. Preddy (and) 1st Lt. William R. Preddy, Greensboro brothers who gave their lives for their country in World War II. *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.*"

The mention of the phrase, "American WWII Ace" conjures many names and exploits. In respect to Europe, one thinks immediately of Zemke, Johnson, Gabreski, Schilling, Gentile, Blakesee, Mahurin and countless others. But, except in a few circles, how often does the name George E. Preddy come forth? Who was George Preddy and what did he do?

For the record, he is listed as the third ranking USAAF Ace in the European Theater with 25+ aerial victories and 6 aircraft destroyed on the ground. At the time of his death, 25 Dec. 1944, he was the leading ace in the ETO. He was awarded the D.S.C., Silver Star with Cluster, D.F.C. with eight Oak Leaf Clusters, Air Medal with seven Oak Leaf Clusters and the Croix De Guerre. There is more behind these cold statistics; a brilliant career as fighter pilot, and a tragic death by mistake.

George was born in Greensboro, North Carolina, a textile-based town of 50,000. He enjoyed the normal childhood of a middleclass family in the 'boom & bust' of the 30's. Being of small stature (5'-9", 125 lbs.), he placed early emphasis on athletics to hold his own and this no doubt held him in good stead when he was jockeying a 4-ton airplane through tight turns and pull-outs. During the summer George often ran a concession stand at the local baseball stadium known as the "Mousehole," naturally he was known as "Mouse Preddy." This gave way to "Ratsy" when he joined the 352 F.G. in England as it seemed to be more apt to his aggressive nature in the air.

Like many future WWII pilots George was transfixed by

Capt. Preddy in cockpit, with his Crew Chief, SSgt. Lew Lund.



his first airplane ride and resolved then and there to become a pilot. He doubled up on his courses and graduated from high school at the age of 16. Instead of entering college immediately, he took a job in a textile mill, saving money towards his tuition. He soloed from a small dirt airstrip in early 1939 and became a partner with his instructor in two airplanes. The summers of 1939 and 40 were spent barnstorming around North Carolina in a Waco 10 with his partner. George had been turned down by the Navy for pilot training but after the second tour he took, and passed, the exams for the Army Air Corps. He was told there was a long waiting list and on Air Corps advice he joined the National Guard. After several misadventures and much red tape, he was released from the Guard and reported to flying school at Albany, Georgia in April, 1941. He received his wings December 12, 1941 and reported to the 49th Pursuit Group in West Palm Beach, in time to be on his way to Australia, eventually winding up on the various airstrips around Darwin and Batchelor Field flying P-40Es.

George's first encounter with Japanese planes was a dud; he forgot to remove a gun switch. Considering the nature of the warning system and ground control in those days, it is not surprising that much of his time in early 1942 was spent on false alarms or fruitless missions on which others saw action but he did not. By Summer George was a bit discouraged, feeling that his record of two damaged enemy planes (never confirmed) was a poor contribution to the war effort. On the 12th of July he collided with another pilot when they were practicing passes on one another. The other pilot was killed. George managed to bail out and was convalescent until the end of September.

Upon leaving the hospital in early October, 1942 George was set to report to his old group, then at Port Moresby and seeing a good deal of action. Instead, because of his experience he was promoted to 1st Lt. and sent home. During the next several months George crossed the U. S. six times by train going in order to: Greensboro, San Francisco, Orlando (for a short radio course), San Francisco with 328 F.G. (P-39's), New York with 320 F.S. and then to the 34th F.S. part of 352 F.G. on January 15, 1943. The Squadron was flying P-47's and was commanded by Lt. John C. Meyer.* After training, the 352 F.G. with 34 F.S. renumbered as 487th F.S. embarked for England June 30th and spent the next two months waiting for airplanes.

Capt Preddy's (promoted April 1943) first missions were relatively uneventful with sparse action from his point of view. It seemed like a re-run of Australia with the action generally somewhere else. Then on 1 Dec. 1943, he made his break on a rendezvous with B-17's south of Rheydt,

*Now Gen. John C. Meyer, Vice Chief of Staff, USAF.



SSgt Lew Lund in cockpit of Capt. Preddy's 2nd P-47. His first was ditched in the English Channel. (Photo — Courtesy Mrs. Lund)

Germany, and claimed 1 Me 109 destroyed.

The next few missions in December were fairly uneventful for George and the 352 F.G. Over 500 bombers took off for Osnabruck on December and 487 F.S. was part of the covering force for their withdrawal. George took off, leading Crown Prince Blue Flight, for the rendezvous between Lingen and Zwolle, and a long battle in which his wingman, Lt. Grow, was missing and Preddy claimed an Me210.

Lt. Grow did not return from the fight, therefore could not confirm George's victory but the Group HQ. recognized his claim on the basis of his gun camera film and his combat report. For this mission the 8th Army Air Force awarded George the Silver Star. The citation read in part, "... Though outnumbered six to one, he unhesitatingly lead his flight on an attack on the enemy and pressed it home with such aggressiveness that the enemy planes were scattered and forced to abandon their attack on the bomber. *Captain Preddy personally destroyed one of the enemy aircraft...*" (Italics by author.) In other words the AAF officially recognized George's victory over the Me210 and awarded the decoration for his action. However, when the Fighter Victory Credits Board convened in 1956 and 1957 they did not give Major Preddy credit for this victory. When queried, the Air Force said it was probably an accidental omission but that they could not give him credit since the board had long since recessed and they lacked "official" evidence for proving that the victory was erroneously rather than deliberately omitted. This, in spite of the award and the official citation.

The missions were plentiful. George destroyed one FW190 on January 29, 1944 but had to ditch his airplane in the channel, his first named CRIPES A MIGHTY. Though there were no witnesses, and the film was lost with the airplane, George was credited with the FW190 and the Fighter Victories Credit Board accepted it with no comment.

By July 1944 the Group was flying P-51 D-5s and Major Preddy was on his second 50-hour extension of his original tour of operational hours, with over 250 hours combat air time. Promotion to Major was in April 1944. He felt he was just getting into his stride and was not ready to go home yet. At this time he was credited with 12.5 aerial victories and 4 planes destroyed on the ground. On 18 July the squadron was being led by him on a mission covering the "Big Friends" return from Rostock (Major Meyer was on leave to the U. S.). The squadron ran across about 50 Ju88s with many Me 109s as "cover." Preddy and two of his flight attacked the bombers while the rest of the squadron took on the 109's. Maj. Preddy was credited with 3 Ju88s and 1

Me 109. Later the 8th AAF and the 352 F.G. denied credit for one of the Ju88s based on the fact that his camera film did not show the plane going down in flames or breaking up. At the time of his death, George was still credited by the press with this "4 in 1" mission and much publicity had surrounded the exploit at the time. What George had seen the camera could not. As he stated in his encounter report, the Ju88 in question was seen by him to break apart *after* he passed over it and naturally the camera could not have recorded this. In this instance an encounter report was not good enough for confirmation.

By August 6, 1944, the blue nosed Mustang named CRIPES A MIGHTY 3RD had 23 crosses stenciled across its cowlings. With his last 50 hour extension fast running out (he was denied a request for 100 hours), Maj. George Preddy took off for his most epic mission.

ENCOUNTER REPORT

AUGUST 6, 1944

"I was group leader. We were escorting the lead combat wings of B-17s when 30-plus Me 109s in formation came into the third box from the south. We were a thousand feet above them so I led White Flight, consisting of Lt. Heyer, Lt. Doleac and myself, in astern of them. I opened fire on the one near the rear of the formation from 300 yards dead astern and got many hits

The ensuing battle was fast and furious, in which Maj. Preddy got the first e.a. destroyed. Lt. Doleac got one and then became lost from the formation. Lt. Heyer got another, and Preddy another, and a third, all the while the enemy fighters continued in their attack toward the B-17 formation. Preddy and Heyer were joined by another element of four P-51s. The enemy formation stayed together now but broke off for a lower altitude, Preddy after them, shooting down a fourth and fifth. When one enemy fighter pulled off of the formation he went after him too, and the enemy pilot bailed out at 7,000 feet. Maj. Preddy concluded his Encounter Report with,

"I had lost contact with all friendly and E/A and so headed home alone. Claim: Six (6) Me 109s."

Others equaled, but no one exceeded this record for aircraft destroyed in one mission in the ETO. For this mission Maj. Preddy was awarded the DSC and many

23 score markings were on the nose of Preddy's P-51 by August 1944.



honors and plaudits came his way, including an interview over CBS beamed at the States. He left for 30 days leave in the U.S., his score at the time 29 e.a. in over 400 operational hours. Among the ceremonies and pleasures that came his way while in Greensboro was an interview at a local radio station, but Maj. Preddy spent the entire interview talking about Edward R. Murrow, a man whom he greatly admired. He went to Florida to see his brother Bill who was then in training on P-51s. The pair took off and after sometime spend in mock combat George admitted that he would hate to meet Bill for real over Germany.

Although he did not have to, Major Preddy went back to England for a second tour. There was no talk of not letting someone "beat" his score, he simply told his family and friends he felt it was his duty. On October 28 he took command of the 328th F.S. (Lt. Col. Meyer was 352nd F.G. Commander). Missions during November and early December were largely uneventful but Preddy managed to bring his air/ground total (official at the time) to 32.

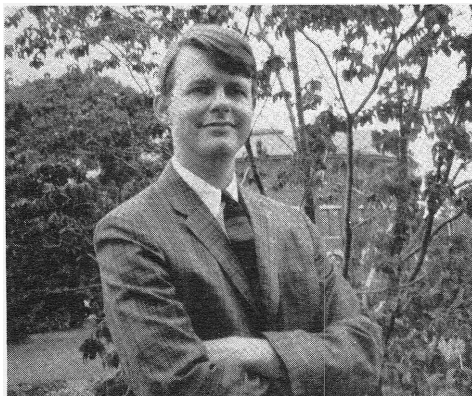
On December 24, the Group flew into a temporary airstrip at Asch, Belgium to help stem the Germans in the Battle of the Bulge, then underway. On Christmas Day George and his wingman took off for a patrol, his 143rd time. What followed is only partially told in:

MISSING AIRCRAFT REPORT DECEMBER 25, 1944

"I was flying Ditto White Two. Near the end of our patrol Ditto White Leader was vectored to a point slightly Southwest of Coblenz where bandits were reported. When we got there a fight was already in progress, but we drove in and Maj. George E. Preddy, Ditto White Leader, picked out a target and started turning with him . . . Getting a new vector, we continued toward Liege where bandits were reported on the deck. We were a three ship flight now, a white nosed P-51 having joined us. Southeast of Liege we were at 1,500 feet when we spotted a FW190 on the deck. Maj. Preddy went down after him. The 190 headed east at tree-top level. As we went over a woods, I was hit by ground fire. Maj. Preddy apparently noticed the intense ground fire and light flak and broke off the attack with a chandelle to the left. About halfway through the maneuver and about 700 feet altitude his canopy came off and he nosed down, still in his turn. I saw no chute and watched his ship hit. Flak and tracers were still very thick. I went balls-out until over it.

This statement can be used as a confirmation of two Me109's destroyed by Maj. Preddy.
(signed) James G. Cartee, Lt. USAAF"

The flak came from a U.S. Army quad-mounted .50 cal. anti-aircraft halftrack. What had happened? The following are excerpts from a recent statement by W. S. Cross, then a member of the 12th A.A.B., USA.



" . . . The high speed of the planes required that the weapons be not only on the alert, but also pointing in the right direction. They had only some ten seconds to sight the plane, traverse to the proper lead, and then fire.*

The radios crackled from time to time with reports from observers who had spotted approaching aircraft. Suddenly the *Flash, Flash, Flash* signal was sounded to alert all guns in the area. The message that followed was clear. *Two enemy Me109s approaching from the south-east, at low altitude, straffing.* This was the direction of the enemy lines and all over the area AA guns swung to point southeast.

An instant later two planes entered the area from the southeast, flying just over the tops of the snow-laden fir trees. The sound of machine gun fire could be heard. From straight ahead the P-51 Mustang looks very much like the Me 109."

The AA machine gunner had only an instant to react as the airplanes suddenly appeared over the trees that surrounded the field in which he was located. They were flying directly toward him and, in his estimation, were the enemy planes. He swung his guns slightly and touched the trigger. The four guns had a top rate of fire of about 3,000 rounds per minute but less than sixty rounds were fired before he realized, to his horror as the planes swept overhead, that these were friendly.

Hit by several rounds, the leading P-51 nosed down and crashed in the same field with the AA. The other airplane (evidently Cartee) made a wide circle and flew back overhead several times before finally heading back to its base. Mr. Cross resumed:

"The AA crew ran to the crashed P-51 which had made a reasonably good landing on its belly. In the opinion of those there, the pilot could have survived the crash, but he had been hit by at least two rounds and he was already dead.

We had all read of Maj. George Preddy in the *Stars and Stripes* and took pride in his accomplishments. As his dog tags were turned over and his name was read, the bitter dark was no match for the bitterness which we felt

George Preddy was dead, not by enemy action, but by a tragic accident. The blow hit his family and friends hard. Though mindful of the possibility, George had been through many brushes with death, and his family had come to regard him as invincible. To his associates, George was more than their group's leading scorer, always serious about aerial combat, but not the type of flyer concerned with nothing but score. George was especially proud of the performance of his Squadron in the Fall of 1944 and went out of his way to confirm other pilot's claims. In short Major George E. Preddy was a fighter pilot's fighter pilot.

*Friendly aircraft had been flying overhead all morning; always at high altitudes and usually unseen above the overcast.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John R. Beaman, Jr. is a landscape architect, presently with the Greensboro (N.C.) Parks Department. He became interested in Major Preddy as a result of his formation of the local IPMS Chapter, whose members were instrumental in the placing of the Preddy Memorial. His primary interest in WWII subjects had led to the collection of a considerable library, and to his editorship of the George E. Preddy Chapter Newsletter, "Contrails." Beside A.A.H.S. and IPMS, he is a member of Gruppe 66 and reviews books on military history for the Greensboro Daily News.

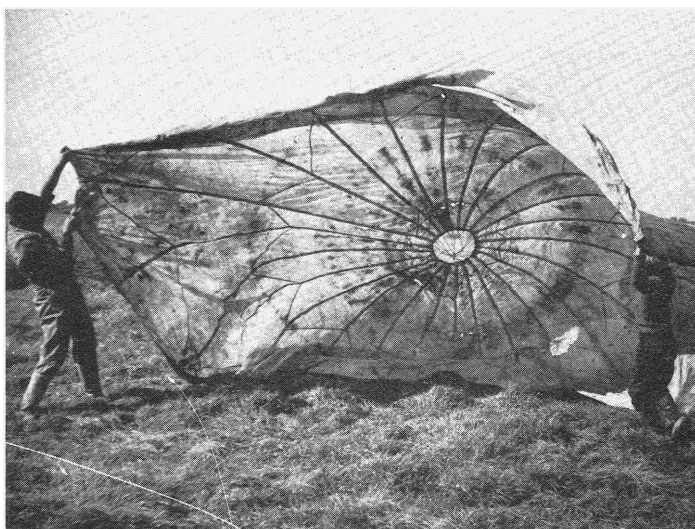
AN HISTORIC PARACHUTE

By IAN McLACHLAN



The author (right) gives Capt. Garry Burns, USAF, Information Officer of the 81st Tactical Fighter Wing, the nylon parachute to forward to the Air Force Museum, Dayton, Ohio. It is one of the first of the nylon parachutes made during the war when the supply of silk became acutely short. (Photo - U.S. Air Force, 15 Nov. 1968)

After drying a short time the parachute was ready to billow out, dirty but intact after twenty years in an English marsh.



INTRODUCTION: One of the first parachutes to be made of nylon lay for twenty years in an English marsh in the wreckage of an American bomber.

Then it was recovered by Mr. Ian McLachlan, A.A.H.S. Member and British aviation historian, and he has presented it to the U. S. Air Force Museum in Ohio.

Mr. McLachlan writes this account of how the parachute was found, and how he traced the history of the bomber from which it came.

In 1964, I decided to try and compile a record of all the aircraft which crashed in this area (East Anglia) during the Second World War. Local records pay scant attention to this aspect of East Anglian history, probably because of the secrecy surrounding wartime events.

One of the crash sites that some friends and I decided to investigate was that of a German aircraft rumoured to have crashed on marshland near the small village of Reedham in Norfolk. Local inhabitants knew nothing of any German aircraft but recounted the tale of two American bombers which had collided and crashed one afternoon in 1944. Because of the nature of the marshes and the passing of time, it was difficult to find anyone who could remember exactly where the aircraft had come down, but we were eventually fortunate enough to be guided to the proximity of the site by the late Mr. Bob Burgess, an old marshman, who had lived in the area for many years. The site itself, a water-filled crater surrounded by pieces of wreckage, was soon located and marked to enable us to find it when we returned to start excavating.

At first it seemed as though the aircraft were most likely to have been B-24 Liberators, as the crash site was only a few minutes' flying time from Seething Airbase, wartime home of the 448th Bomb Group who flew Liberators. This theory was soon discounted, however, by the unearthing of some de-icing equipment as fitted to the model B-17, the Flying Fortress. Local police records produced the date of the crash: 21st February, 1944. Slowly the evidence, both documental and from the wreckage itself, was pieced together until, by May 1965, I had narrowed the possibilities down from any one of the thousands of Fortresses produced to four aircraft with serial numbers ending in "370."

(Continued next page)

THE UNKNOWN ACE

(Continued from page opposite)

Left, Major Preddy in his CRIPES A'MIGHTY 3rd, code PE-P. He was then C.O. of the 328th F.S., October 1944. (Photo — Courtesy of Joseph W. Noah)



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Thanks to Mr. Joseph W. Noah whose unpublished manuscript of George E. Preddy's biography provided much of the source material for this article, and to Mssrs. Samuel L. Sox, Jr. and William J. Moore of the Greensboro Historical Museum. Their efforts in behalf of Preddy were recently rewarded with the dedication of Preddy Boulevard in Greensboro, named in honor of George and his brother William R. Preddy.