



Francis Gabreski



Robert S. Johnson and his crew chief, Penrod.

Mr. Inside and Mr. Outside: In The Skies Over Western Europe

by Ed Turley

Legends stem from publicity. Consider the impact that television has had on the notoriety of some of the more well-known amateur and professional football players. Prior to television, remember the superlative news coverage of the gridiron exploits of Mr. Inside and Mr. Outside. Roughly everyone living in the United States in the forties knew of the running abilities of these two great Heisman Trophy winners, if for no other reason than wars produce heroes both at home and on the battlefield. A captious football fan is apt to downgrade the feats of Glenn Davis and Felix "Doc" Blanchard, pointing out that a number of excellent tacklers were off at war. Speaking of tacklers in uniform, not everyone knows of the heroic deeds of another Mr. Inside and Mr. Outside that took place in the skies over Western Europe.¹ Although they grew up in opposite parts of the United States and met for the first time in England in the darkest days of World War II, they remain very close friends today and in fact live only about five miles from each other on Long Island, New York.²

Mr. Inside is Francis Stanley (or more affectionately known by the sobriquet of "Gabby") Gabreski, a retired Air Force colonel

with a face having definitive features of nobility. On his wing and about 100 yards to his outer side, at least this is where Mr. Outside was when all hell was breaking loose in aerial combat in the skies over France and Germany, is Robert Samuel Johnson, a certified life underwriter with an office on Lexington Avenue in New York City. Ironically, Johnson was born and raised in a state that has furnished its fair share of Heisman Trophy winners, and he too might have parlayed his prowess on the gridiron into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame had he not turned in his football uniform for the chance to fly LUCKY, his P-47 Thunderbolt, to fame but, as he will frankly admit, not to fortune. Even many of his clients do not know that Johnson is generally acclaimed as the best man to have on your wing in World War II. Looking back, football did provide Johnson with fond memories. With a slight smile on his face, he likes to recall the time he busted Jack Jacobs, the Cherokee Indian who ran to immortality on the football fields of Norman, Oklahoma, and Green Bay, Wisconsin.³

Gabby, on the other hand, did not play football either in high school in Oil City, Pennsylvania, or while a pre-medical student at Notre Dame, a school whose name is almost synonymous with

football. But Gabby did make one run on the outskirts of Frankfurt, Germany, which—had it been attested by someone other than a couple of enemy soldiers—probably would be in the record books of avoiding death.

Gabby was attracted to another somewhat sporty endeavor, flying. Like football, flying seems to appeal to every youngster with a flair for excitement sometimes going beyond description. Engendered while in college and precipitated by the war, flying became and still is Gabby's livelihood. Actually, one of his early goals in life was to fly an airplane from South Bend, Indiana, to his hometown of Oil City, a relatively short distance, in a Razor-back P-47 with the throttle shoved all the way forward. So despite that, Gabby neither performed for the Fighting Irish nor flew low over his high school in a reckless manner, his quick and smooth manner of movement, both in and out of a fighting machine, has been witnessed by only a few small audiences and probably more by his close friend and former teammate, Bob Johnson, than any other person living today.

Adversity has a way of binding friendships forever. Today, over 30 years after Johnson left his partner in combat to return to the United States to go on a War Bond tour with Richard "Dick" Bong,⁴ then the leading ace in the Pacific Theater of Operations, Johnson and Gabreski still have the highest admiration for each other, not only as individuals but as running mates in combat. Gabby is quick to say, and he should know since he was the highest scoring ace in the European Theater of Operations in World War II with 31 confirmed aerial victories, that in choosing a wingman Johnson probably would be the number one draft choice.⁵ And, without question, he would go in the first round. Even though Johnson was a little man as far as tacklers go, standing only 68 inches high and weighing only about 160 pounds, Gabby, in selecting someone to cover his tail when he was on the offensive, used his natural instinct as a coach of fighting personnel and opted for tenacity over size. Gabby, like most people who have been placed in control of the affairs of a country or of individuals, knew that it is not the size of a dog in a fight but the size of the fight in the dog. In discussing Johnson, Gabreski has said that "Johnson was aggressive; he looked for and found aerial fights while other pilots were running out of gas looking for enemy planes all over the skies."

Johnson's comments about Gabreski are repetitive. But Johnson goes further and acknowledges that if Gabreski had taken all the shots, or as they say on the basketball court was a "gunner," Johnson's role as a fighter pilot would have been relegated to playing defense. On the contrary, Gabreski was a firm believer that the best players went both ways. If Johnson saw the bogies first, then in this fight he could run with the ball. "Just call them out and peel off; I'll be right behind you," said Gabreski. And as many people learn sooner or later in this game of life, altruism has its own way of eventually being rewarded. So even though Johnson became an ace before Gabreski and the first American in the European Theater of Operations to break Eddie Rickenbacker's World War I record of 26 aerial victories,⁶ Gabreski's final total of 31 (Gabreski's official record according to an Air Force Fact Sheet promulgated by the Secretary of the Air Force is 30.5 counting 2.5 destroyed on the ground) finally nudged Johnson's record performance of 28.⁷ When a total of 10 is an established standard of excellence, the teamwork of the son of Polish immigrants and a young man from a part of the United States once called Indian Territory obviously accounted for their mind-boggling total of 59.

Gabby's memorable run for his life and not for six points took place in July 1944. To vicariously make this same run, first imagine that the Summer Olympics is taking place and that a young, 59-inch lad from Poland weighing about 165 pounds has his right foot in the starting blocks. Then, refocus on another young man of Polish descent with an identical stature who, upon learning that two sharpshooters are about to put an end to his military career, breaks into bipedal locomotion where speed, accompanied by the ability to quickly change direction, is the difference between life and death. Fortunately, few people have had to suffer through such an unenviable experience. However, any person who regularly goes to the movies or watches television has seen numerous similar sprints staged for entertainment.

The recreation of Gabby's run lasting to him from here to eternity begins with an analysis of Gabby's state of mind. The war in Europe is on the wane and he is about to go home to marry Kay Cochran, a girl also with a military background as the daughter of a career Army officer. Gabby had met Kay in Honolulu, Hawaii, long before that day of infamy, December 7, 1941. Thus, the war, at least in his mind, is over for Gabby! But while Gabby was waiting for an empty seat on the plane going home, a bomber escort mission was scheduled over Frankfurt, Germany. And it just happened that the weather was absolutely perfect, a rarity in England at this time of the year—beautiful blue skies, scattered cirrus clouds, and a temperature reading that does not make flying in the small cockpit of a single-engine fighter extremely uncomfortable. Or, as they say in the States, the weather is perfect for football. Days like this one make the red-blooded American boy look for something exciting to do. He may go sailing or play golf if he is a member of the affluent society; otherwise, he may just go kicking the football or shooting in the woods. But if he were in England in July 1944, he might have decided to simply go shooting at some enemy aircraft. Anyway, for some latent reason which may never surface, Gabby decided to take one last crack at the enemy, not to beef up his record but just to have something to do while he was cooling his heels. And, last but not least, Gabby rationalized in his own mind that nothing could happen to him which might upset the girl of his dreams. After all, every fighter pilot who is a hunter and not one of the hunted knows that he will never get shot down (the other guy maybe, but not me!).⁸ There are three kinds of fighter pilots: the aggressive, the moderately aggressive, and the timid. Beginning at the top, the aggressive fighter will score all the



Robert S. Johnson, Hubert Zemke, and Walker Mahurin.

points if he is a good shot. The moderately aggressive fighter may end up with a distinguished record but he will never be a champion. And the timorous fighter's days are numbered. Gabby and his sidekick from Lawton, Oklahoma, being two of the best shots in the war, both were aces fivefold.

The mission over Frankfurt was not only routine but boring. Not one enemy aircraft came up after the big friends. An active combat mission has been appropriately described as hours of boredom and minutes of stark terror, while this mission had been up to this point nothing more than a turnaround over enemy territory.

But no sportsman likes to return from a hunt with a fully loaded gun. He wants to shoot at something even if he sometimes intentionally misses. Consequently, knowing that fighter pilots have a propensity for fooling around, the standing orders are very explicit—make one pass, shoot at any military target moving or stationary, and then point the nose of your airplane straight home. No ifs, ands, or buts, Lieutenant!

As a consequence, Gabby knew that he would get to shoot at something, maybe even a train if he were lucky enough to find one. After crossing the Ruhr, Gabby and the other pugilists accompanying him on this mission finally spotted a number of He. 111s parked on the ground, duck soup for a hunter with eight fully loaded .50-caliber machine guns. Gabby burned up a couple of the twin-engine aircraft on his fly by, and then for some unexplainable reason—perhaps because he wanted to throw one more punch for the cause of freedom—he decided to make a complete circle and to come back over at treetop level with all guns ablaze. Every kid has a burning desire to fly that over something (especially his hometown), even though he has been repeatedly warned that trees and small airplanes do not go well together. Gabreski, however, had decided to settle for a hot, low-level pass over this little airfield west of Frankfurt. Doing about 280 knots just off the deck, Gabby cut loose. However, upon noticing that the trajectory of his bullets was overshooting the enemy aircraft, he pushed the stick slightly forward in order to aim his flying gun right on the bull's-eye. Then, apparently as a result of suffering from fatigue or target fascination, Gabby's tenure in the European Theater of Operations ended in one fell swoop. As soon as he lowered the nose of his P-47, *LITTLE MISS KAY*, he bounced off the ground, creating a terrific vibration that from all indications was going to make his aircraft uncontrollable. But since his jug was still airborne, he in a couple of seconds ran over in his mind the three alternatives, which almost every fighter pilot with any period of longevity is forced to choose from. He could keep on going and hope that he did not get riddled to pieces by some enemy pilot with a penchant for finding cripples. But the odds of survival are not good; you either make it back to the base and live or you get blown from the sky and die. Secondly, he could bail out. But no pilot who is not concerned with his aircraft blowing up likes to jump. Pilots may have no fear of flying but jumping out is another question. With only one choice manifestly left, Gabby became determined to "belly in and live."

Scanning the area as rapidly as possible, he noticed a couple of open fields—apparently wheat fields—that, however, were bordered by trees. To bring *LITTLE MISS KAY* to a standstill before reaching the trees, Gabby just drove her into the ground. To further reduce his speed of about 180 knots, he kicked in full rudder to dig one wing into the ground. Now knowing that he

was powerless to do anything more to keep himself from being killed, he placed both hands on the gunsight and buried his head into his arms.

After coming to a grinding halt, he realized that he may have made a fatal mistake by forgetting to open his canopy on the way down, something no naval pilot with the dark and dingy ocean beneath him would forget to do. When his canopy, an all-plastic bubble type that had been recently made standard equipment on all P-47Ds would not open, he for the first time since the date of his birth was forced to think about the details of his headstone—Francis Stanley Gabreski, January 28, 1919, to July 20, 1944. Further dismayed when more smoke poured from his engine, he placed both feet on the instrument panel and with the assistance of adrenalin not ordinarily prevalent in his body managed to pull the canopy open wide enough for his head to go through. Taking off his helmet, jacket, and parachute, he squeezed his head and slithered his body through the small opening. Finally, grabbing his olive-drab jacket, he jumped to the ground and started to run away from his smoking aircraft.

After running far enough to clear an area in which death was still possible from explosion, he looked around to determine the origin of some unusual clicking and whistling sounds he had heard after jumping from his aircraft. To his disbelief, the sounds were being made by two soldiers firing at him.

Having hurdled his first crisis by surviving the crash landing, Gabby began to run faster than he had ever run in his lifetime. His goal was what appeared to be a covered shrine on stilts. Although sprinters are coached not to look over their shoulder to check on their competition, Gabby knew that he might lose this race to a bullet unless he fell to the ground each time the soldiers stopped running to fire at him. Down when they were firing, up again when they were running after him, down again, and up again, Gabby finally reached the shrine. Crawling under the shrine, he covered himself with leaves, branches, and his olive-drab jacket. When the soldiers arrived at the shrine and stayed for only a brief moment, apparently believing that he had kept on running for his life, they came so close to him that he could have reached out and touched their boots. After taking only a cursory look, however, they scurried on.

Gabby's notable race to safety and not for roses was over. Despite that numerous other people were looking for him, no one thought to look under the shrine. When the sun went down and darkness settled in, he with the aid of his compass started making his way westward in hopes of eventually reaching English soil. Personally he did not know of any downed airman who had evaded capture after landing this deep inside Germany. Pilots landing in other European countries had made their way back to England but they had help from the underground. In fact, one of his and Johnson's friends, Walker M. "Bud" Mahurin, who ended up with 21 kills, reportedly had a ball eating and drinking his way across France with a couple of bibulous members of the French underground. He even gained 10 pounds and it was rumored that the dilly-dallying was way above average.⁹

Notwithstanding that Gabby had repeatedly proven since he was a small boy in Pennsylvania, that he could get tough when the going got tough, walking from the heart of Germany to England without any food and water was asking a little much. Having no water was the biggest problem. He was forced to drink dirty water from various pits, streams, and reservoirs. He



Hubert Zemke

ate his emergency rations and various fruits and berries that he found over the countryside. After walking for five days, mostly at night but sometimes during the day, he made up his mind to reach a certain hill that he could see in the distance. While continuing toward this hill on a rather winding road, he, upon rounding a sharp curve, ran head-on into a farmer and an eight- or nine-year-old boy who were taking some cows out to pasture.

After the farmer and the boy were out of sight, Gabreski, being too exhausted to run, hid in some bushes, knowing full well that the farmer knew that an unshaven, weary, young man in a flight suit was a downed American airman.

After securing the cows, the old man and the boy came back up the road to look for Gabreski. And once he was spotted in hiding, the old man summoned some nearby villagers for help. Gabreski felt that these villagers might be his destiny, since more captured American airmen had been killed by irate citizens than by soldiers. He, however, really did not have any choice but to surrender peaceably. Pilots, as a general rule, did not carry their military .45s, primarily because they believed that it would be fruitless to try to shoot their way back to England. And even if a pilot had his gun with him, he usually gave it to the underground. But for some reason unknown to this day, these villagers were different. They not only were very kind to Gabreski but they gave him plenty of water and food before calling the Wehrmacht. In fact, they were so friendly that Gabby, upon noticing that the farmer's family professed the faith of Catholicism, thought he might be able to bribe them with his rosary into letting him go. But when his attempt at bribery was to no avail, the Wehrmacht arrived and threw him in jail.

Spending the remainder of the war in a prison camp, Gabby did not fly again in World War II. He did, however, also become an ace in the Korean War.¹⁰ Bob Johnson, along with Gabby's other friends, say in jest that Gabreski became an ace three times—in World War II, in the Korean War, and at home as the father of nine children.

Actually, Gabby's efforts to avoid death do not belong in the

annals of sports. His one speedy maneuver on the ground, taking into consideration the time, the place, and the surrounding circumstances, is incapable of being compared to some of the great runs of our legendary football heroes. But history does have a place for Gabby and his run. The valor and skill displayed by Francis Stanley Gabreski in a P-47 when the chips were really down probably never will be equaled by another man in a flying machine. So speaks the record!¹¹

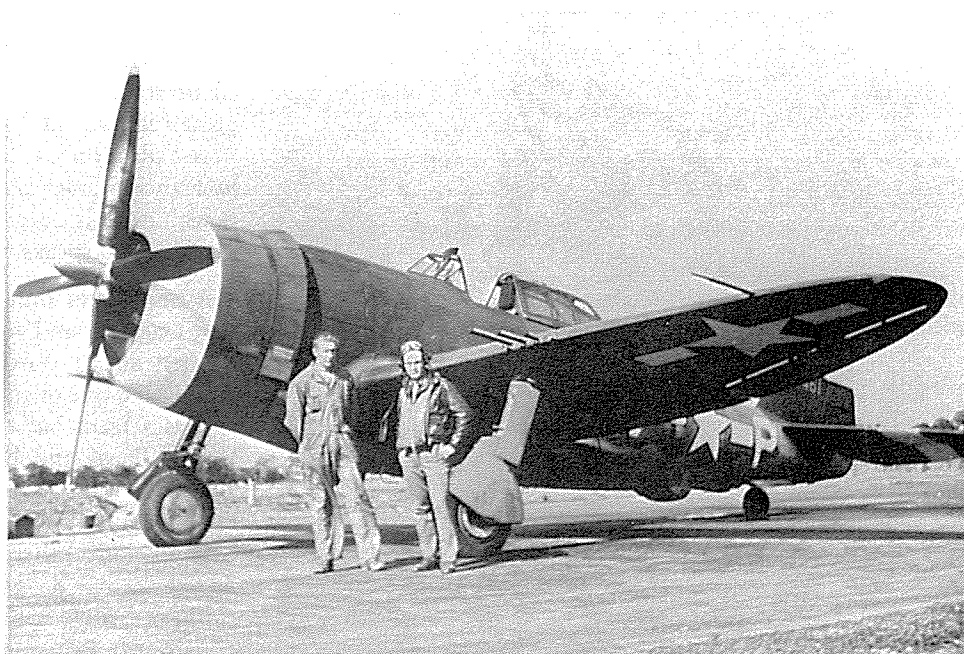
A number of things play a dominant role in understanding how Gabreski and Johnson downed 59 German planes, while the benchmark of five determined which fighter pilots attained the coveted role of an ace.¹² To begin with, they not only worked well as a team but they also had a superlative play caller. As Messrs. Davis and Blanchard were fortunate to have Arnold Tucker, an All-American quarterback at the helm, Gabreski and Johnson also had a professional in charge of the 56th Fighter Group—none other than the indefatigable Hubert "Hub" Zemke (Zemke does not have a middle initial; to paraphrase his mother, "with a name like Hubert Zemke, who needs a middle initial?").¹³ Zemke's tactics, such as requiring the fighters to stay in a formation resembling a fan or screen about 45 minutes ahead of the bombers, and his poignant advice to "go, once you have committed yourself," enabled the American fighter pilots, and especially Gabreski and Johnson, to simply overwhelm the Luftwaffe. Zemke, another ace in the 56th Fighter Group with 17.75 confirmed aerial victories, still keeps in touch with his two most famous students, even though he lives completely across the United States in Oroville, California.

When Johnson finished his first tour of duty, he was one short of Eddie Rickenbacker's World War I record of 26.¹⁴ Zemke, after calling Johnson in and explaining to him what breaking Rickenbacker's record would do not only for Johnson personally but for the 8th Air Force, persuaded Johnson to put in for a 25-hour extension (roughly the equivalent of about eight or nine more missions and two or three additional weeks). And, as soon as Johnson got numbers 26 and 27, Zemke would see to it that Johnson did not have to fly any additional combat missions. Johnson, thinking what the heck, decided to take Zemke's advice. After all, he might get two on his very first extra mission. But as is now history, Johnson did not get any confirmed kills on his first extension and only after putting in for one more extension and finally flying another 10 to 12 additional hours did he break the record of 26.

In retrospect, Johnson's record of 28 confirmed aerial victories in only 97 missions (about 248 hours of combat flying time) is incredible. His record was established in only 13 months! His first mission was in April 1943 and he got numbers 26 and 27 on May 8, 1944 (he got one probable that was later confirmed, running his final total to 28). He had become an ace on October 10, 1943. And furthermore only four of his victims were twin-engine aircraft.¹⁵ Many of the remaining 24 were commonly referred to as "Abbeville Kids," because they were stationed at Abbeville and Saint-Omer, France, only about 25 miles across the English Channel from Hawkinge and Manston, England. Readily identifiable, since the noses of their Me. 109s and FW 190s were painted yellow, these experienced pilots supposedly were the cream of the crop. Most of their experience had been gained at the expense of the British, primarily over the skies of England and at the battle of Dunkirk.



Robert S. Johnson and his crew chief, Penrod.



Robert S. Johnson and "Lucky."

Johnson attributes his success as a fighter pilot to a number of things: his aggressiveness, a characteristic that supposedly is imperative; his quickness in reacting; his shooting proficiency which greatly improved with practice (as a student pilot, he had not done well in gunnery school); his tendency to see enemy aircraft before being spotted by his adversary; and his ability to obtain the top performance from a P-47. And, of course, he admits that he was just lucky—being at the right place at the right time.

In fact, Johnson was not given the lead slot in the "Finger Four Formation" until he had proven that he was only aggressive and not just reckless. He had acquired this infamous reputation when he had broken top cover in an early mission to attack 9 or 10 FW 190s just ahead of Zemke. Needless to say, it took Johnson a number of months to shake the stigma of a wild man. But when he was made a flight leader, his tactics in using all 32 guns in a flight of four, rather than just the top shooter in each flight, were adopted by the entire 56th Fighter Group.

Although Johnson was never shot down, his airplane was hit on five different missions—twice by enemy fighters (once severely) and three times by flak. Ironically, Lucky was damaged so badly on the day Johnson became an ace—October 10, 1943—that he was almost forced to abandon her over Brunswick, Germany. Rolling Lucky over to take on a triumvirate of FW 190s that were attacking a formation of B-24s, Johnson continued in pursuit of the leader even after the leader's wingman had pulled up and turned toward Johnson to drive him away. Just as the leader became number 5 for Johnson, a 20-millimeter shell exploded in Lucky's tail. Momentarily thinking that Lucky could not make it back with a cut left rudder cable, Johnson, after pulling away from the tenacious wingman, opened the canopy and started to climb out of her cockpit. However, when he realized that he was still over enemy territory, he slipped back into the saddle of his favorite mount and hobbled his way back to England.¹⁶ In flying 97 missions, he flew five P-47s: (1) Half Pint, which was finally severely damaged; (2) an unnamed Thunderbolt, while waiting for a replacement for Half Pint; (3) Lucky, which accounted for 25 of his 28 victories; (4) All Hell,

the replacement for Lucky, after Lucky was lost by another pilot in a midair collision over the North Sea; and (5) Penrod & Sam, a P-47 named after Johnson's crew chief, Penrod, and Johnson's middle name.

Two more things also helped Johnson become the second leading ace (Gabreski—31; Johnson—28; George E. Predty—26.83; John C. Meyer—24¹⁸; David C. Schilling—22.5¹⁹; Don S. Gentile—21.84²⁰; Fred J. Christensen, Jr.—21.5²¹; Ray S. Whetmore—21.25²²; Walker M. Mahurin—21²³; and John J. Voll—21²⁴) in the European Theater of Operations. First and foremost, the tremendous diving speed of a P-47—possibly up to mach. 84 or 660 miles per hour—made it almost unbeatable, with the result that if the heavy jug had an altitude advantage, neither the Me. 109 nor the FW 190 was much of a match. As one Polish pilot, after breaking formation to dive for the first time from about 25,000 feet to intercept a couple of Me. 109s cruising along at about 10,000 feet, said upon returning to formation, "Uh! The dive, she is fantastic!"²⁵ The Polish pilot and his wingman, another Polish pilot who was also flying his first mission in a P-47, both were going so fast that they missed the 109s by over a mile.

Gabreski also had a tendency at the outset to get going too fast. Having previously flown Spitfires with the 315th Polish Spitfire Squadron of the Royal Air Force, Gabby, forgetting for a moment that he was no longer in the lighter Spitfire, would fly through a formation of enemy planes so fast that he was unable to do little more than scare their pilots to death. As Gabby's wingman, Johnson would simply cut his speed and shoot the enemy planes scattered by, including those chasing but with no hope of catching, the streaking Gabreski.

But diving was not without its dangers. A P-47 could go so fast that air flowing about it would cease to behave as an incompressible fluid. A pilot, rolling over in a P-47 at about 18,000 feet or above, actually could feel the nose tuck under as the fuselage moved into an absolute vertical position with the ground. To preclude his P-47 from falling from the sky, the pilot was repeatedly cautioned to keep two-thirds power on and to trim the elevators to a slightly nose-up position. In fact, once when



Fred Christensen



Christensen's Jug

flying the wing position to Gerald W. Johnson, another leading ace in Zemke's Wolfpack with 18 aerial victories,²⁶ Johnson pulled up from about 22,000 feet to fly head-on towards an Me. 109 that was moving into position on Jerry Johnson's tail. Upon noticing Johnson, the 109 broke off its attack and went into a spin in hopes of avoiding the tiger on his tail. However, when Johnson's bullets started hitting the 109 as it passed through its second turn of the spin, it then straightened out into a dive with Johnson in hot pursuit. Although Johnson scored a victory when the 109 exploded at about 18,000 feet, he was going with such velocity that he reached the compressibility effect as he flew through the debris of the 109. Being virtually out of control

until he could feel some play in his controls at about Angel's 13—a very appropriate epithet for 13,000 feet considering that Johnson was apparently responding to the Omnipotent's beck and call—he began to do everything possible, even shooting his guns, to slow down. At about 4,000 feet he can remember pressing the veins in his throat with his left hand to delay blacking out. That was the last thing he remembers; after apparently pulling out of his dive and climbing back into the heavens, he finally regained consciousness at about 19,000 feet.

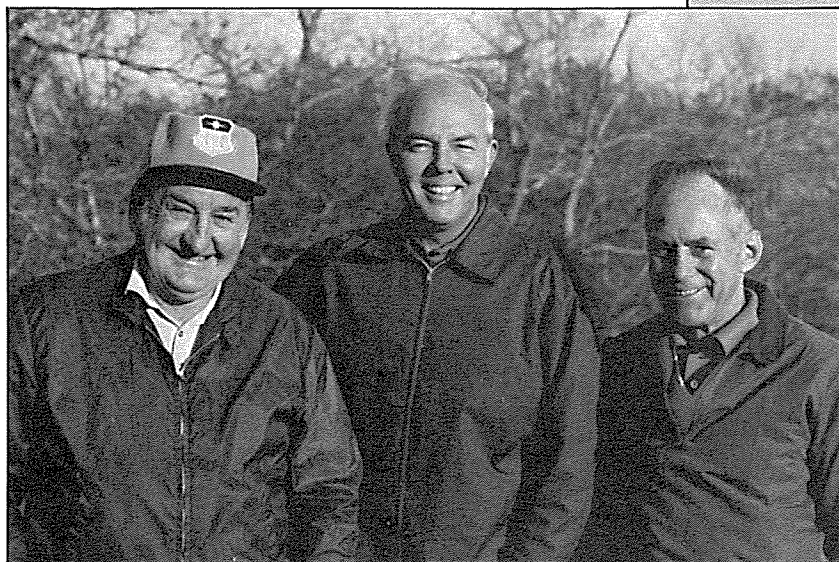
Although Johnson had almost plummeted to his death while protecting his former instructor (Jerry Johnson had checked Bob Johnson out in the P-47 at Windsor Locks, Connecticut, in July 1942), he liked having this top gun within striking distance. After all, the Wolfpackers quickly realized that Jerry Johnson, now a retired Lieutenant General living in Little Rock, Arkansas, had "all the moves," both on and off the playing field. To quote Johnson, "It didn't seem unusual for Jerry Johnson to shoot down 18 enemy aircraft; it was expected of him." As running mates, the "Johnson Boys" accounted for 46 air-to-air combat victories. And if top aces are classified by surname, the Johnson family, including Gerald R. Johnson,²⁷ the fourth leading Army Air Force ace (the leading Navy and Marine Corps aces were David S. McCampbell—34²⁸; Cecil E. Harris—24²⁹; Gregory "Pappy" Boyington—28³⁰; and Joseph J. Foss—26³⁷) in the Pacific Theater of Operations (Bong—40; Thomas B. McGuire—38³²; Charles H. McDonald—27³³; Gerald R. Johnson —22; Neel E. Kearby—22³⁴; and Jay T. Robbins—22³⁵), alone accounted for 68!

Second, Johnson had a couple of little secrets which he pulled out of his bag of fighting tricks from time to time. One little secret that was very dangerous was to practice shooting at the shadow of another P-47 flying about 200 feet over the water. As the bullets hit the water, Johnson could see exactly how close he was coming to the shadow. But the shots had to be taken carefully and very quickly; otherwise, the pilot might get fascinated with the target and end up in the drink.

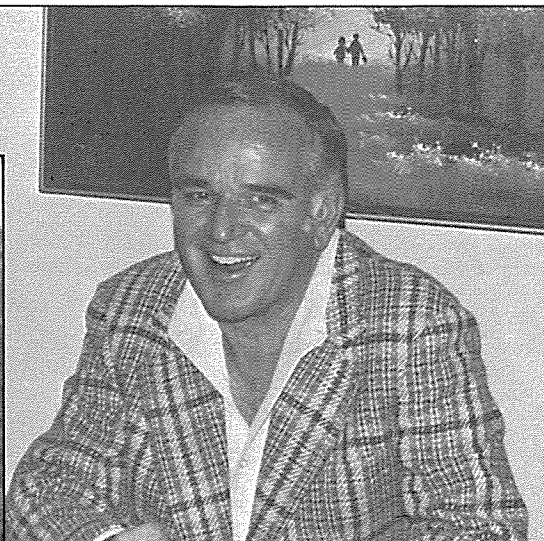
Another of Johnson's secrets might be labeled commonsensical fighter tactics. When the enemy slowed down in com-



Walker Mahurin



Gabreski and Johnson in 1978.



Mahurin in 1978.

bat, 9 times out of 10 the pilot would turn left. It is a lot easier to push the stick to the left than it is to pull it to the right. Thus, when the black smoke puffing from the engine stopped, indicating that the enemy pilot had pulled his throttle back to slow down, Johnson skidded his P-47 up and to the right to get into position for a diving turn to the left. Then, when he slipped back down inside and behind the enemy airplane, he started firing. The enemy would fly right into Johnson's bullets. This little maneuver accounted for several victims and specifically number 28.

With 28 in the bag, a record that eventually would be broken by the temerarious Gabreski, Johnson returned to the United States. Any fighter pilot whoever is confronted with explaining Johnson's feat in the wild blue yonder—28 kills in 13 months of combat against some of the best fighter pilots in World War II—will probably just shake his head. Johnson's achievements with a flying gun are not explainable. Something about this man gave him the edge.

So if you ever see him golfing on Long Island, possibly even with his former fighting partner Gabreski, or walking on the streets of downtown Manhattan, take a close look and see for yourself. You may not be seeing a legendary football hero with a number of kids clamoring for his autograph, but you can rest assured that you are seeing a little man who displayed superlative courage in fulfilling the purpose of preserving freedom in this great country of ours. As beneficiaries of this valor, our hats are off to Robert Samuel Johnson!

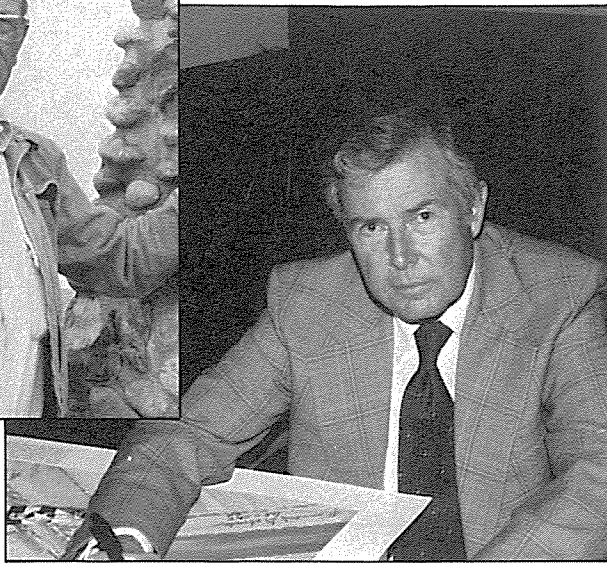
Tales of extraordinary heroism in the air receive very little publicity. To begin with, no newspaper reporters nor photographers can ride shotgun with a fighter pilot. And an engagement with the enemy can take place over such a large aerial expanse—from 50 to 100 miles—that even the other players on the same team may fail to see a winning score. For this reason, despite that Gabreski could go head-on with as much as anybody in the days

when the world was immortalizing hardchargers and that Johnson was one of the most prolific scorers the game of fighting in the air has ever produced, they will never be known as Mr. Inside and Mr. Outside. These pseudonyms have been retired by the American sports fan for Davis and Blanchard, two other young men who were dominating college football while Johnson and Gabreski were scoring on the Luftwaffe on the other side of the Atlantic. But as any worshipper of outstanding achievements knows, the lacuna of publicity does not detract one iota from the efforts of these two fighting machines; they deserve and will receive a fair shake when their magnificent performances for the cause of liberty are reviewed by the Master of their fates.

If the player-coach of the Wolfpack, Hub Zemke, were requested to compose the final two verses of "Red Tails in the Sunset,"³⁶ he most probably would have in mind his two first-stringers with the highest marks. Although he had to give both Gabreski and Johnson unmitigated hell—Gabreski for putting on an unauthorized exhibition game (Zemke, upon returning from a trip to a scheduled night conference for Group Commanders in London which was canceled, found Gabreski and his 61st Squadron "beating up" the airfield—"loops, slow rolls, barrel rolls, the works"³⁷) and Johnson for improvisation³⁸—he says that the conscientious and confident Gabreski "upheld every tradition of a top combat fighter pilot." And Johnson, to quote Zemke, "was one of my types upon whom I would put the chips on the table if need be."³⁹ In fact, Zemke's last verse probably should remind Americans not to let the names of the high-scoring Wolves—Gabreski, Johnson, David C. Schilling, Mahurin, Christensen, and Jerry Johnson—fade into oblivion along with the red-tailed P-47. Their records were set deep in enemy territory under circumstances when the odds of survival were on the low side. The Luftwaffe will never forget these names—so please don't YOU.



Zemke in 1978.



Gerald Johnson in 1978.



Christensen in 1978.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Messrs. Davis and Blanchard gave their permission to use the pseudonyms "Mr. Inside" and "Mr. Outside" in the article.
2. This article is based upon personal interviews, and subsequent correspondence in most cases, with Francis S. Gabreski, Robert S. Johnson, Fred J. Christensen, Jr., Walker M. Mahurin, Gerald W. Johnson, and Hubert Zemke.
3. For more information on Robert S. Johnson, see R. Johnson and M. Caidin, *Thunderbolt*, 1958, Rinehart, New York (contents of this book taken largely from a diary kept by Robert S. Johnson).
4. Richard I. Bong is credited with 40 aerial victories. He was killed on August 6, 1945, crashing on takeoff in a P-80 near Burbank, California. W. Hess, *The American Aces of World War II and Korea*, 1968, Arco, New York, p. 28. All scores are taken from Mr. Hess' book, hereinafter cited Hess.
5. Robert S. Johnson says—and the records manifestly support his statement—that he never lost a wingman in aerial combat. See also *The 56th Fighter Group in World War II*, Washington Infantry Journal Press, p. 118.
6. Richard I. Bong reached a score of 28 in April 1944, while Robert S. Johnson attained numbers 27 and 28 on May 8, 1944. C. Shores, *Fighter Aces*, 1975, Hamlyn, New York, p. 64; and Freeman, *The Mighty Eighth*, 1970, Doubleday, New York, p. 274.
7. Air Force Fact Sheet 737, p. 13, Secretary of the Air Force, Office of Information, Internal Information Division, Washington, D.C., 20330.
8. R. Johnson and M. Caidin, *Thunderbolt*, 1958, Rinehart, New York.
9. Although Robert S. Johnson says that his friend "Bud" had a ball winging his way back to England, Walker M. Mahurin says that he was too scared to gain weight and that sex was the last thing on his mind.
10. Hess, pages 29 and 40.
11. When Francis S. Gabreski recounted his "run" for the author and Robert S. Johnson, it was the first time that he had told of his days in Germany to Mr. Johnson, despite that they are still close friends and live only five miles from each other on Long Island, New York.
12. Freeman, *The Mighty Eighth*, 1970 Doubleday, New York, p. 272 (hereinafter cited Freeman).
13. See, for example, Freeman, p. 276, where Hubert Zemke is given the middle initial "A".
14. C. Shores, *Fighter Aces*, 1975, Hamlyn, New York, p. 46.
15. See also Freeman, p. 273.
16. For more details on this mission, see R. Johnson and M. Caidin, *Thunderbolt*, 1958, Rinehart, New York.
17. George E. Preddy, the top-scoring P-51 pilot, was killed by friendly antiaircraft fire on Christmas Day, 1944. Hess, pages 29 and 40.
18. John C. Meyer died of a heart attack on December 2, 1975. Hess, *The American Fighter Aces Album*, 1978, Taylor, Dallas, p. 159.
19. David C. Schilling was killed on August 14, 1956, when his Allard sports car hit a concrete bridge post at Eriswell, Suffolk. Freeman, p. 274.
20. Don S. Gentile was killed on January 28, 1951, in the crash of a T-33 near Andrews AFB. Hess, *The American Fighter Aces Album*, 1978, Taylor, Dallas, p. 87 (exact date of death secured by telephone from Mr. Hess).
21. Fred J. Christensen, Jr., lives in Arlington, Massachusetts.
22. Ray S. Whetmore was killed February 14, 1951, in a flying accident while flying

- from Otis AFB, Mass. Hess, *The American Fighter Aces Album*, 1978, Taylor, Dallas, p. 239.
23. Walker M. Mahurin lives in Newport Beach, California.
24. John J. Voll, the top-scoring P-51 pilot who is alive today, lives in one of the New England states (exact town not at liberty to disclose).
25. For a photograph of these Polish pilots, see *The 56th Fighter Group in World War II*, Washington Infantry Journal Press, p. 123.
26. Gerald W. Johnson lives in Little Rock, Arkansas.
27. Gerald R. Johnson was aboard a B-17 that was lost in a violent storm on October 7, 1945. Aces Album, p. 114.
28. David S. McCampbell lives in Lake Worth, Florida.
29. Cecil E. Harris lives in Alexandria, Virginia.
30. Gregory Boyington lives in Fresno, California.
31. Joseph J. Foss lives in Scottsdale, Arizona.
32. Thomas B. McGuire was killed in combat on January 7, 1945, over Los Negros in the Philippines. Aces Album, p. 155.
33. Charles H. McDonald has been in Costa Rica aboard his 37-foot yacht for the past two years.
34. Neel E. Kearby was lost on a mission to Wewak on March 5, 1944. Aces Album, p. 120.
35. Jay T. Robbins, the top-scoring P-38 pilot who is alive today, lives in San Antonio, Texas.
36. The Thunderbolts of the 61st Squadron, 56th Fighter Group, Eighth Air Force—"Zemke's Boys"—had red vertical stabilizers.
37. Hubert Zemke's written comments to this article.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.

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