

10 February 2017

To whom it may concern,

The Dance Brothers .44 caliber revolver #332 and the eagle headed bowie knife have been in my family's possession ever since the American Civil War. My father had them from the time he was a young man until his death in 2013.


Our Forster family can trace its lineage back to the period of German immigration to the US in the 1850s through the port of New Orleans. On my grandmother's side, the English name of Beville, goes back even further. Our family history has always been from the deep south of either Florida or Georgia. My father, Joe Forster, was born in 1919 in Gainesville, Florida in the house that his father built, the only son with three sisters. I, Jody Forster, am the last male Forster with no other descendants. In 2007 I escorted my father from Arizona to Gainesville for one last visit to the Forster home where he was born and raised until he went off to war in the Pacific as a fighter pilot.

Joe Forster was a thirty year career Air Force pilot who retired to Phoenix, Arizona in 1972 as a Lt. Colonel. In WWII he flew the Lockheed P-38 Lightning "Florida Cracker" in the Pacific Theater with the 475th Fighter Group, "Satan's Angels". During the war he flew 155 combat missions with other famous aviators such as Dick Bong, Thomas McGuire, Charles H. MacDonald and Charles A. Lindbergh (a civilian adviser). By the war's end he had become a highly decorated Fighter Ace with 9 kills. He was awarded the Silver Star, the Bronze Star, the Distinguished Flying Cross, and the Air Medal. His flying exploits have been documented in a number of WWII aviation books.

Joe was also an avid outdoor sportsman, hunter and shooter with a deep passion for collecting unique guns his entire life, especially firearms from the American wars. My earliest memories of the Dance revolver #332 and the bowie knife date back to the mid-nineteen fifties when I was around 7 or 8 years old and living at Eglin AFB, Florida. When Dad showed me these items, he said that they had been in the family since the Civil War and were quite rare. He explained that the Dance revolver was rare because only about 350 were ever produced before the Union army shelled and burned the Confederate factory in Texas. Even fewer survived the war. "Damn few are in existence," he would say. I have a sense of pride knowing that my father's stories of this Dance must be accurate because the 332 is now regarded as the highest numbered Dance known to be a complete and fully functional revolver.

The bowie knife started out as an early 1800's American officer's eagle headed sword that was broken in half on the battlefield. It was then captured by a Confederate soldier who reshaped it into a bowie knife and used it in subsequent battles. Dad would always introduce it to his collector friends by saying in jest... "This killed half a dozen Yankees!" Although it made for a great story, we'll never know if in fact it was used to befall any Union soldiers.

As a young boy, I would tag along with Dad to other gun collector's homes to see their wares, observe any gun trading that might take place, and listen to entertaining cock and bull sessions by older men. Most of the gatherings took place in southern states like Texas, Florida, Alabama and Virginia. The men would sit around a table drinking beer and share hunting and fishing stories while showing their guns. When asked, "What did you bring Joe?" Dad would present his Dance 332 revolver, explaining that it had been recovered from the factory in Texas after the Union soldiers had burned it down. Of course, being a Floridian with deep southern pride, he would almost never say Union. He would refer to the northern aggressors as Yankees, even a hundred years later.

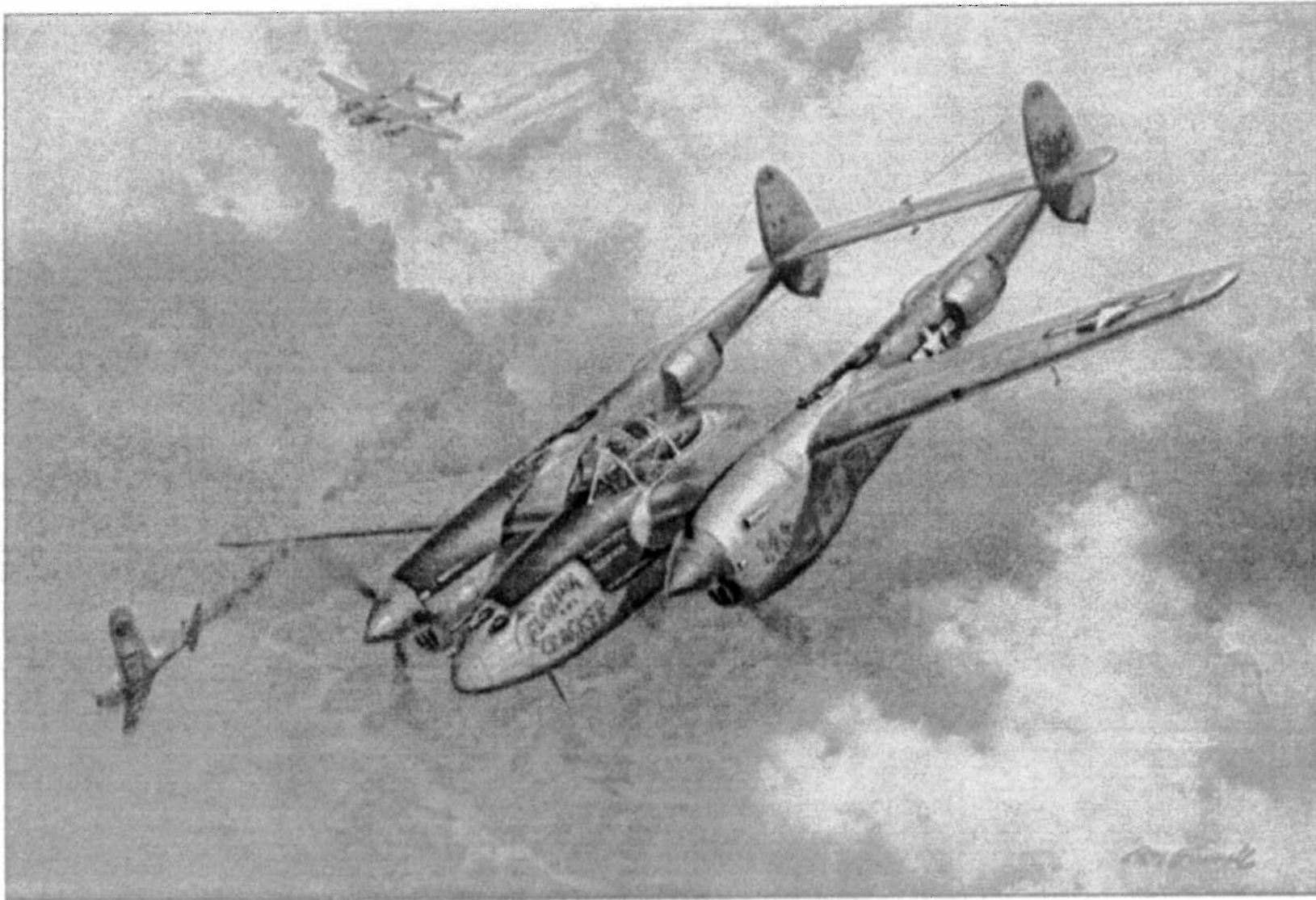


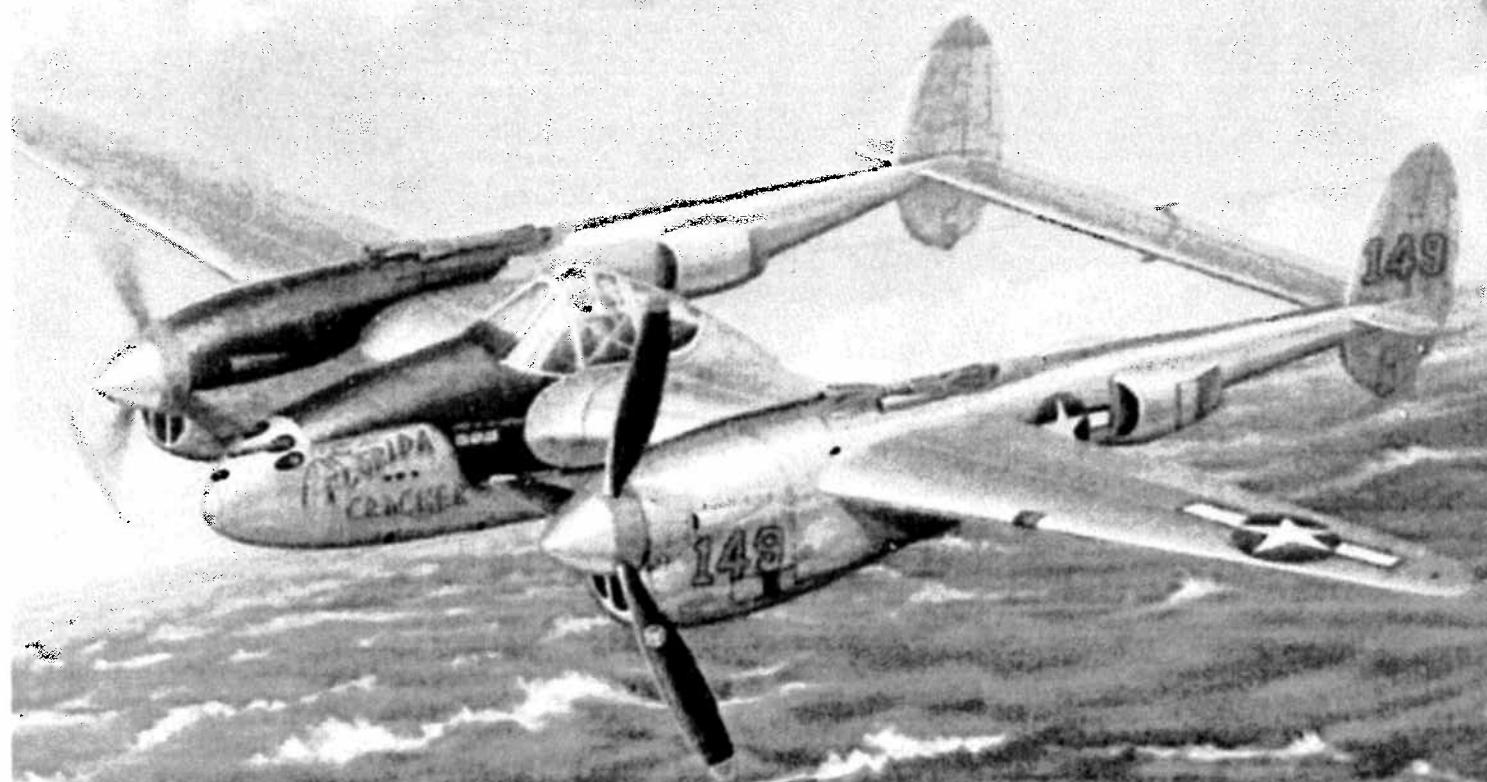
Jody Forster



... and the Oscar goes to "Florida Cracker"

X









The "Florida Cracker" maintenance crew - 1945

photo by Capt. Joe Forster

