

IN REPLY REFER TO:

AGPD-R 201 Cosper, Clyde W.  
(20 Oct 44) 02 044 866

WAR DEPARTMENT  
THE ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.



20 October 1944.

• Mrs. Miriam M. Gray,  
Dodd City, Texas.

My dear Mrs. Gray:

I have the honor to inform you, that by direction of the President, the Silver Star has been posthumously awarded to your son, Second Lieutenant Clyde W. Cosper, Air Corps. The citation is as follows:

SILVER STAR

"For gallantry in action, while serving as Pilot of a B-17 airplane on a bombing mission dispatched 13 November 1943. Due to turbulent cloud conditions, his aircraft went out of control and into a spin. Working coolly and skillfully, Lieutenant Cosper returned his plane to level flight and ordered the crew to bail out. After five crewmen had taken to their parachutes, the airplane again went into a spin, dropping to an altitude of 100 feet before Lieutenant Cosper regained control. Though his plane was almost unmanageable, he managed to keep it stable long enough for the balance of the crew to safely bail out. Probably knowing that his chance of surviving was very small, Lieutenant Cosper gallantly decided to crash-land his bomb-laden aircraft, where it would not endanger the lives of civilians. He found a small clearing, away from the town over which he was flying and brought his plane down. The aircraft immediately burst into flames and exploded a few seconds later, killing Lieutenant Cosper. His gallantry, flying skill and devotion to duty saved the lives of his crew and undoubtedly those of many civilians. The actions of Lieutenant Cosper on this occasion reflect highest credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of the United States."

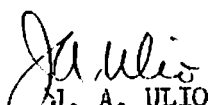
The Silver Star will be forwarded to the Commanding General, Eighth Service Command, Dallas, Texas, who will select an officer to make the presentation. The officer selected will communicate with you concerning

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your wishes in the matter.

May I again express my deepest sympathy to you in your bereavement.

Sincerely yours,

  
J. A. ULIO,  
Major General,  
The Adjutant General.

Bonham Daily Favorite

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Thomas W. Casper

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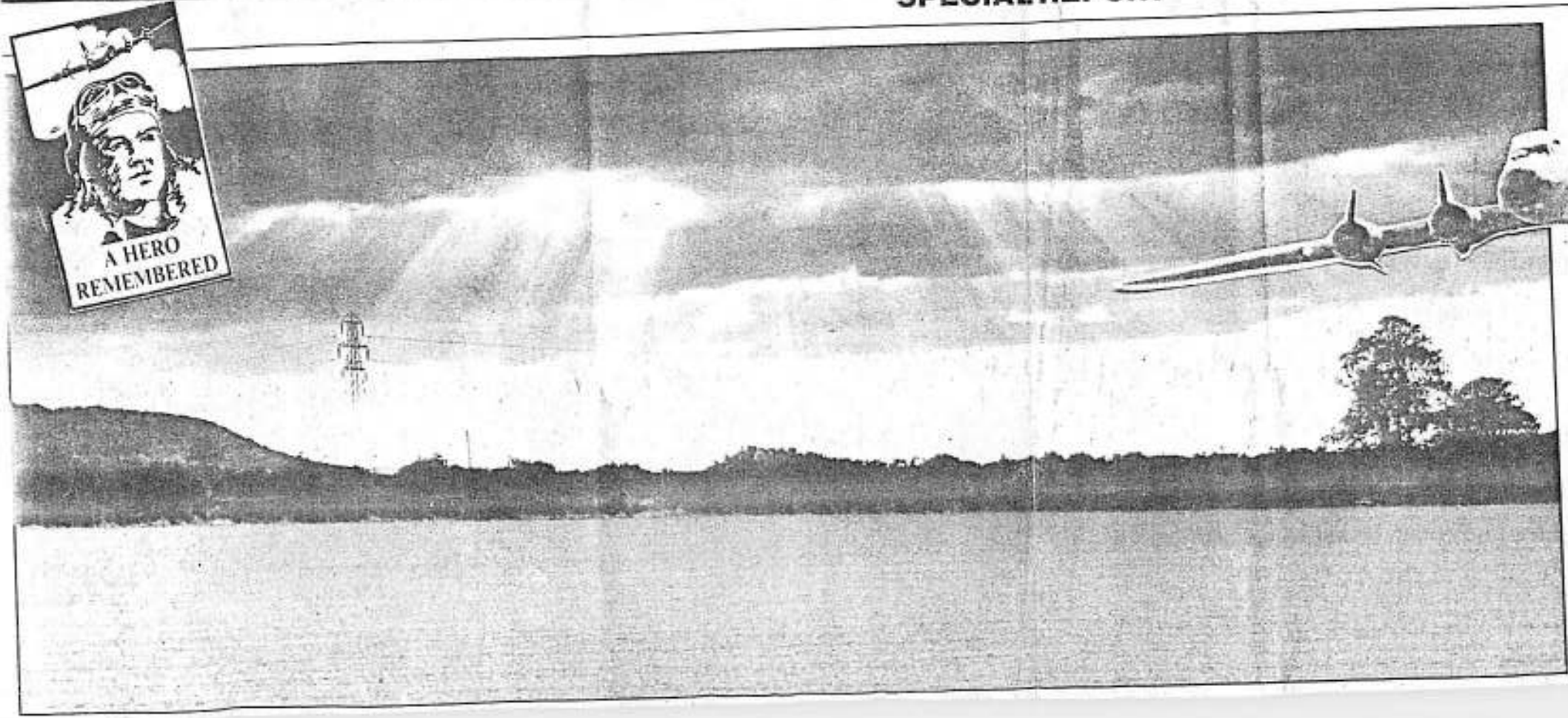
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Dear Connie - You may find this of interest: will keep you informed of developments re the proposed memorial. Regards Mike Young

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### SPECIAL REPORT



The plane, the badge, the field where Lt. Clyde Cosper crash-landed: A story of sacrifice

# At the going down of the sun . . .



Museum pieces: David King with a calibrated gauge and the communications from Lt. Cosper's plane

A SMALL entry in an American military textbook is the only tribute to the skill and sacrifice that saved Princes Risborough from wartime devastation.

Apart from that, the story of Lieutenant Clyde Cosper's heroism has been lost in time and never officially recognised in Britain, until now.

The story starts on the morning of Saturday November 13 1943 at an American airfield in Thurling, Bedfordshire.

On that fateful morning six B-17s of the 367 Squadron of the United States Army Air Force (USAAF), nicknamed The Clay Pigeons, set off to bomb Nazi U-Boat yards at Bremen, laden with incendiary bombs.

Lt. Clyde Cosper (22), from a small town in northern Texas, was at the controls of one of the bombers, just three months after starting his active service in England.

The weather that morning was poor and the aircraft were recalled after they started to ice up. Lt. Cosper's plane hit a huge thundercloud and went into a spin losing several thousand feet in a few seconds.

He wrestled with the controls and levelled the bomber just long enough to order his crew to bale out.

But flying through the cloud with his aircraft breaking up in mid-air, he could see the bomber was on a direct crash course for Princes Risborough.

The 367 Squadron diary for that day takes up the story:

**Hero's sacrifice:** Nearly 50 years after he saved a small town from destruction, the hero of Princes Risborough will be remembered. The Bucks Herald is campaigning to build a memorial to an American wartime pilot who gave his life to prevent his Flying Fortress bomber from crashing on the town. **TIM ROBINSON** tells the story

"In an heroic effort to keep the plane, which still carried a full bomb load from crashing in an English village, Cosper chose a clearing near the town of Princes Risborough and crash-landed his almost uncontrollable plane in an open field.

"The aircraft caught fire and exploded within a few seconds, instantly killing Lt. Cosper.

"Through his valiant efforts he saved the lives of his crew and without doubt, the lives and property of many British civilians."

He managed to lift the bomber over the town and came down in a field just off Summerleys Road, narrowly missing the rooftops of nearby houses.

His crew's parachutes drifted and landed in a garden in Chinnor. They escaped with only minor injuries.

Sadly, all but two died a month later in another raid — but the two survivors, gunners Henry Twing and Chuck Vondrachek still live in America.

The American War Department wrote to Lt. Cosper's mother, Miriam,

after whom Clyde named his plane, when it was posthumously awarded the Silver Star.

"His gallantry, flying skill and devotion to duty saved the lives of his crew and undoubtedly those of many civilians," it says. "The actions of Lt. Cosper on this occasion reflect highly upon himself and the Armed Forces of the United States."

The story of the unsung hero prompted a research project by The Bucks Herald which lasted six months.

We have traced his background through American military records and, working with The Bonham Daily Favorite, a local daily newspaper in Texas, we have found his brother, Moss Cosper, in Dodd City where Clyde is buried in the town cemetery.

Forty-eight years after the death of his brother, Moss told the Daily Favorite: "Clyde thought he could fly that B-17 better than anybody.

"I can just hear his thoughts saying 'it won't take me a second to get out, when I hit the ground I'll be running'."

"But there were those bombs . . ."

The Bucks Herald, with the support of the United States Air Force and local councils is working to commemorate Lt. Cosper's sacrifice next year by seeking help in building and funding a memorial to the hero.

Many people in Princes Risborough remember the crash. Maureen Knopp, of Gatsbury Place, was 11 at the time and heard the plane overhead when she was in bed.

"It was such a heroic thing to do to save the town, I really felt we should remember him," she said.

Maureen's brother, Brian Sell, who now lives in Cornwall, was a High Wycombe Grammar School boy and was waiting on the station platform with his friends for the school train.

"We saw the plane disappear so close to the station and there was an almighty explosion," he said.

His friend, Cliff Frewin, who now lives in Billericay, thought it had hit his house in Summerleys Road and ran home to investigate.

Cliff's brother, Vic, now living in Bletchley, was returning home from

Broom and Wades, High Wycombe, then producing tanks.

As he wheeled his cycle up the path of his home, he looked up in horror to see the bomber pass over just feet above the roof. Then he heard the crash in the field behind.

Since that day in 1943, pieces of Lt. Cosper's aircraft and his belongings which were scattered across the field have lain buried under the dust of time and innumerable ploughings.

But in 1989 experts at the Booker Aircraft Museum, near High Wycombe, applied for a Ministry of Defence licence to comb the Summerleys Road field.

Helped by Fred Frewin, of Chestnut Way, Longwick, they located the exact spot of the crash and searched the area with metal detectors.

Curator David King has carefully preserved their finds, which included Lt. Cosper's dog tag, cap badge and the pilot's intercom switch, rusted into the "on" position from his last command to order his crew to bale out.

Mr. King also has a copy of an American newspaper in which the late Mrs. H. M. Budgen, of the White Cottage, Chinnor, praises the courage of the crew who parachuted out and apologises for not being able to give them breakfast and a warm fire.

On landing in her garden, gunner Chuck Vondrachek dusted himself off and told Mrs. Budgen: "You can't down a Yank."



LIEUTENANT CLYDE COSPER

Newspaper cutting: The picture readers of the Bonham Daily Favorite in Dodd City saw when his death was announced in late November 1943. But the full story of his sacrifice had yet to be told

# War hero pilot's family say 'thank-you'



THE campaign, started by The Bucks Herald, to build a memorial to the wartime hero pilot who saved Princes Risborough from destruction has brought praise from his last surviving relatives.

They described their emotion and gratitude to Princes Risborough for wanting to perpetuate the memory of Lieutenant Clyde Cospier, who crash-landed his B-17 Flying

Fortress bomber in a field near Summerleys Road in November 1943.

The 22-year-old pilot stayed at the controls after ordering his crew to bale out so that he could steer the stricken plane, carrying a full load of incendiary bombs, away from the town.

Lt. Cospier was posthumously awarded the Silver Star for his bravery but there has been no other official recognition.

Maureen Knopp, of Gatensbury Place, had been trying to locate Lt Cospier's relatives for many years and contacted The Bucks Herald earlier this year.

During a six-month investigation, the newspaper tracked down his brother, Moss, to a small town in Northern Texas, and next week reporter Tim Robinson will visit them and one of the survivors of the 1943 crash, gunner Henry Twing.

Hearing of the campaign, which has the support of Princes Risborough library, Moss wrote to Mrs Knopp this week:

"Although this memory rekindles the heartbreak I and my wife, Jimmie, suffered, we are now filled with a new emotion — knowing that the lives he saved, in giving his own, did care and still do and want his memory to live on. For your part we thank you."