

SPIDER'S STORY

by [Dick Smith](#)

I graduated from Aviation Cadet training as a pilot on Feb. 8, 1944. As with most pilots my only desire was to fly as a fighter pilot. They were the ones that we heard all the great stories about. Much to my disappointment, and to all who graduated with me, we were all assigned as heavy bomber co-pilots.

After a short training period I was assigned to a crew and we flew a B-17 across the Atlantic. We arrived in England in late May 1944 and were assigned to the 303rd Heavy Bomber Group stationed at Molesworth in the midlands of England.

We began flying combat in late June with our first combat mission to Leipzig, Germany on June 29. As France was under re-invasion, most of the B-17 missions were deep into the heart of Germany. On 15 August, I flew a mission to Weisbaden which became the subject of Keith Ferris' famous painting in the World War II room of the Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C.



We became a lead crew and I began to fly some missions, training new crews on their first combat missions when my seat on my crew's plane was taken by a "command pilot." I completed my bomber tour with my 35th mission on October 25, 1944. While I was waiting my transfer back to the States I was offered a chance to enter the most exciting time of my life.



An organization had been formed in July 1944 to scout ahead of the bombers to help the group and division leaders with target and weather information. Several missions had been badly torn up by bad weather and German action prior to the formation of the scouting forces. The idea was to assemble a unit with ex-bomber pilots with combat experience who would fly out ahead of the bomber formation to experience firsthand the conditions that the bombers would soon encounter. These scouts were very successful and soon became essential to the accomplishment of successful bombing raids. General Jimmy Doolittle mentions the scouts in his book. "I COULD NEVER BE SO LUCKY AGAIN."

I was assigned to the First Scouting Force under Colonel Bud Peasley in mid November and began my P-51 training immediately. I was given about four hours in a British Harvard (AT-6) and was asked one morning to fly Colonel Peasley to 8th Air Force Headquarters for a meeting with General Doolittle. As the Colonel got out of the airplane, he said I should take the aircraft and fly back to my old bomber base. "Be sure and give them a good buzz job," he said as he left.

After a pleasant visit, I returned to pick him up and flew him back to our base at Honnington. When we arrived and exited the airplane, he said, "You're a pretty good pilot; we will check you out in the P-51 tomorrow morning." I was so elated on my walk back from the flight line, I don't think my feet touched the ground.

The next day I was given a blindfold cockpit check in our trainer P-51B which had a bird cage cockpit. It was a tight fit as I was 6 ft 3 in tall. I diligently folded myself up and strapped on the most exciting plane I would ever fly, WOW!!

After taxiing out to the end of the runway and completing all my checks, I opened the throttle and was pushed back against the seat by the most thrust I had ever experienced. My right leg was trembling as I applied all the right rudder I could to combat the terrific torque. I broke ground with my hands full of the most airplane I had ever felt beneath me. I didn't get the gear up until I had climbed to 4,800 ft. I was so busy just trying to fly the gorgeous aircraft. I flew around

for about 2 hours, trying stalls and all the other maneuvers I would need to land. Then came the tough part-getting it on the ground. Actually it was one of the best landings I ever made. Much should be said in praise of the designers of the P-51. It was an easy airplane to fly and had no bad habits as far as I was concerned.



After about ten hours of training (not even including any gunnery training), the Colonel said I was ready to fly my first combat mission on which I was to fly his wing. I was assigned a P-51D5 which was a rejection from the 364th Fighter Group but was a dream ship to me. I was told that I could pick a name for the airplane, and as the identification letters were 5E-E, and the phonetic alphabet for E was Easy I decided on the name, "Easy Does It." On the left side of the canopy I painted my nickname "Spider" and on the right side I painted, "Betty" which served two purposes; I was going with a nurse named Betty, and writing to my future wife, Betty. They both thought their name was on the airplane and who was I to tell them different. The nickname Spider was given to me by my squadron mates because I was so tall and thin, like a Daddy Long legs.



On the morning of Dec. 6, 1944, I made my first formation takeoff on the wing of Colonel Bud Peasley, my hero. The flight was uneventful until I heard the command, "Break left," over the radio. I thought this meant me, so I broke left leaving my formation heading into Germany. When I came to my senses and realized that this command was from some other group, I was all alone and deep in the heart of Germany. I called the Colonel with my plight and he calmly said, "I wondered where you were going." He gave me a heading and I proceeded to fly back to England, all alone. Lucky for me, there were no German fighters around or I would have been another notch on their guns.

After the first mission was under my belt I proceeded to fly regularly on missions to many targets in Germany. Even some in support of our troops in the Battle of the Bulge. Most of the missions logged around 3-4 hours but a couple were over five hours long; that's a long time to be cramped up in such small quarters.

On my 26th mission on 1 April, 1945, I was picked to lead a mission to Leipzig. At about 14,000 ft, climbing out over the English Channel, my engine quit. I tried everything I knew how to restart but to no avail. On my "MAYDAY" call, I was vectored into Belgium to try and land the aircraft. I jettisoned the drop tanks and set up the most efficient glide I knew how. The radio man who was offering words of encouragement to me, told me that I didn't have far to go when there was a tremendous explosion and the cowl flew off and the airplane began to burn. Time to go, I thought. I told the guy on the radio I was bailing out. He said, "Oh! don't do that, you only have a short way to go."

When I told him I was burning he said, "You better bail out."

I was about 8,000 ft and I attempted to roll over and drop out. In my excitement, I forgot to wind in down trim to hold the nose up when I got inverted. As soon as I let go of the stick and released my seat belt, the airplane split- s'd into me and I was forced part-way back into the cockpit. I then slowed the airplane down and attempted to dive for the trailing edge of the left wing. My lengthy frame prevented me from clearing the cockpit and my foot caught in the canopy roller and I was suspended out the side of the aircraft with flames whipping past me. I was able to get my other foot up to the windshield and I gave a mighty push and I was free. Not knowing how high I was, I immediately began to think about pulling the rip cord. My right hand wouldn't respond. I tried to get the rip cord with my left hand but couldn't do it. I grabbed my right wrist with my left hand and hooked my fingers. The chute opened and I swung outward once and hit the ground on the downswing. The wind dragged me across a field and into a fence which stopped my slide. The next thing I was surrounded by wooden shoes, and being made comfortable by some wonderful Flemish people who couldn't understand my French or English. I was picked up by a Canadian ambulance and when I woke up in a hospital

I found that I had a broken arm and severe contusions of the groin area.

When my jacket was returned, I discovered that the right arm was covered with red paint. The aircraft had a red spinner and red borders around the tail. I knew that I didn't go through the prop, so I must have hit the tail which explains why I couldn't pull the rip cord with my right hand.

Due to my injuries, I was sent home and was on the first ship to arrive in New York Harbor after the Germans surrendered. Strange my first and last mission were both to Leipzig. I arrived back in the States in late May 1945 and had my 21st birthday on June 3.

"Pretty good! 60 combat missions before I was 21."





This model of the Zero had 729 flights on it. We must report on 8/16/97 Dick was making a high speed low inverted pass, pulled up sharply, and watched in horror as the aircraft exploded in the mid wing section. Too many "negative G's" for this old bird. Some of the bystanders said the thought they saw a Corsair pulling up with guns smoking. Maybe, maybe not, we'll never know.

Dick is on the left and Harry Gould, long time Pattern Competitor, assists.



**Dick " Spider" Smith in P51 Easy Does it .
painted by Charley Mackey
a member of the Hemet Model Masters of Hemet California**

From: Dirk Decuyper
To: RICHARD SMITH
Sent: Sunday, February 20, 2005 4:51 AM
Subject: Re: Detection at Ingelmunster in February

Hello Spider,

Yesterday morning, a very cold morning with sleet and hail but also with some dry spells, we searched the crashsite of "Easy Does It". Apart from me there was Dany Saey (who works with the metal detector for our BAHAAAT team), eyewitness Staf Stragier, Frans Vanacker (the owner of the land) and Milo Baert (whose sister married a veteran of 303rd Bomb Group). What we were afraid of was confirmed: the wreck of your P-51 is lying either under the (postwar) plastic greenhouses or under the wooden cabin. This became clear after having detected the land adjacent to these constructions. Because the plastic greenhouses have a frame of metal and because the sides of the wooden cabin are covered with protective metal plates it was impossible to confirm this for 100% or to estimate how deep the wreck (especially the motor) is under the ground. Yet, we are pretty sure.

However, there is also good news:

1. However small they are, the metal detector was able to find 4 pieces of aluminium that

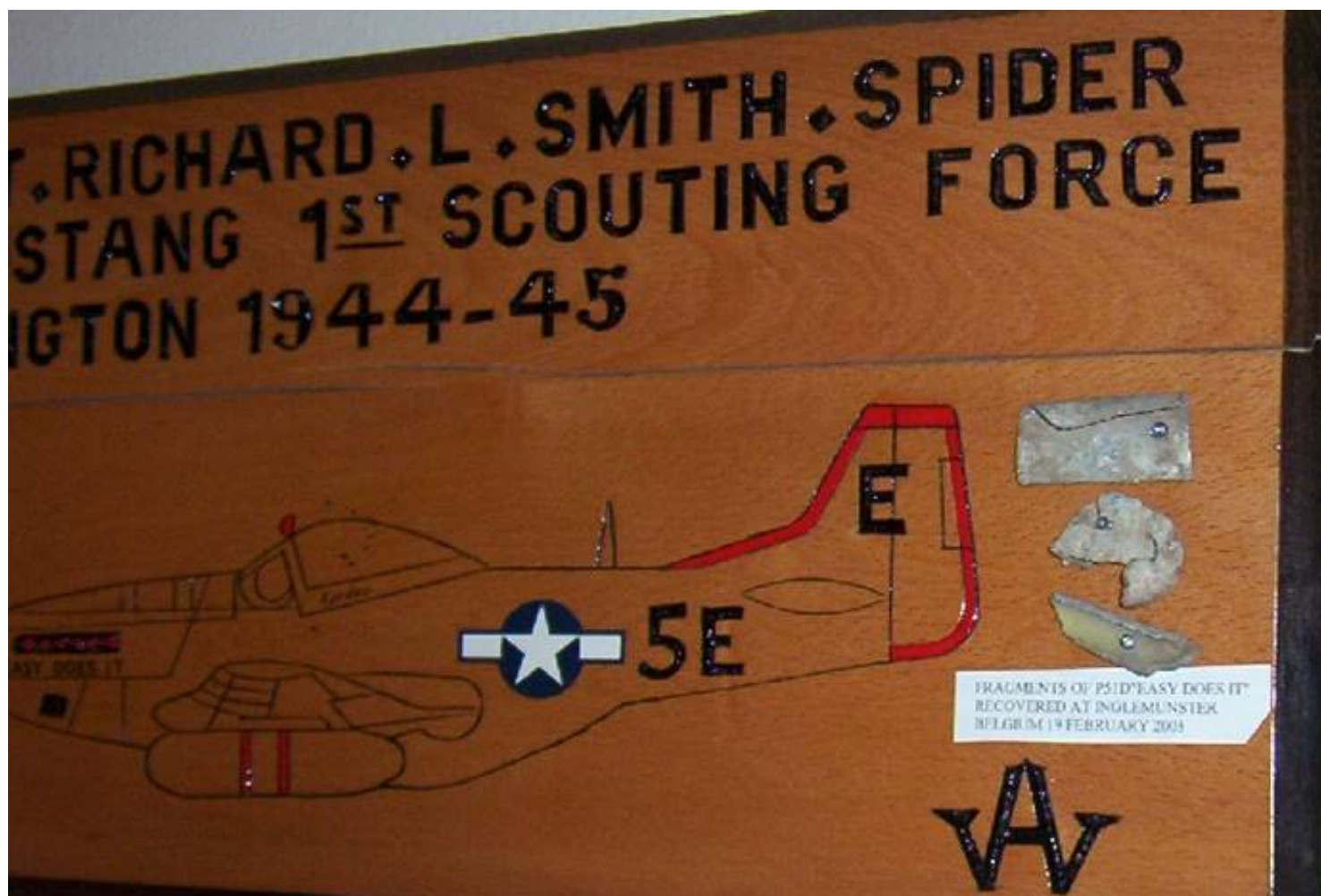
definitely come from your P-51. They came up about 5 to 10 cm under the surface on the land adjacent to the greenhouses.

2. In the future - maybe already next year - Frans Vanacker, the owner of the crashsite, has plans to remove all the greenhouses and the wooden cabin. He intends to build a new hangar farther on the field. He told me he will ring us when these works will start. When this becomes true (so as soon as all these constructions have been removed) we can make a better and definite detection to locate the wreck and dig with a crane. Of course we still need an additional permission for this from our Ministry, but as you know our contacts with them are positive. I have also e-mailed to the Ministry that "Easy Does It" has historical importance as it took part in the Battle of The Bulge.

In the course of the coming week I will send you 3 of the 4 little aluminium pieces on your address. I will keep one tiny piece to show concrete proof of our findings to the Ministry. I will send the pieces to you by registered letter. You never know that they might get lost over the post. I took some photos of the detection and will send them later when the film has been finished and developed.

I hope this e-mail is not too disappointing for you. At least, you will be able to touch some little pieces from you P-51 and we hope that in the further future you can make a rendez-vous with the larger wreck.

Regards, Dirk Decuyper



HEMET-SAN JACINTO

TUESDAY, March 22, 2005

RECONNECTING

RECONNECTING WITH HIS PAST

Dick 'Spider' Smith fills in the residents of the town where he crash landed

BY HERBERT ATIENZA
THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

HEMET—During the waning days of World War II, a young American pilot dropped out of the sky and became part of local folklore in the little village of Ingelmunster, Belgium.

Over the years, the residents have wondered about the pilot whose plane crashed into a field nearby and what happened to him.

Now, six decades later, Dick "Spider" Smith is answering his Belgian rescuers.

The residents are trying to recover the downed P-51, and the 80-year old Hemet resident is helping to fill in gaps in the story.

"It just brings back a lot of memories," said Smith, a native of Rochester, New York, and a self-described "aviation nut" who spends many hours flying model airplanes in a field near Domenigoni Parkway as a member of Hemet Model Masters.

The folks in Belgium recently mailed him matchbox-sized aluminum fragments of his downed plane, which he dubbed "Easy Does It."

Smith has been kept up to date about plans to excavate the crash site, which now sits under a farmer's greenhouse.

A COINCIDENTAL MEETING

Smith had not spoken to anyone in the village since the crash. That changed with a chance meeting a few years ago.

Smith accidentally met a family member of someone who lives in the area and had heard of the plane crash.

"It's just amazing," said the former pilot with U.S. Army Airforce, who got his nickname because of his long, spindly frame, much like a Daddy Long Legs.

"I've always wondered whatever happened to the plane, and they've also been wondering whatever happened to me," said Smith, who went on to marry his sweetheart, Betty.

Smith retired as a manufacturing engineer from Kodak in Rochester in 1982, and shortly thereafter moved to California to work and be closer to their son, Daniel. They have lived in Hemet since 1989.

SUSPENDED IN AIR

Smith vividly remembers his 26th



Folk hero

Dick "Spider" Smith, a young pilot, crashed in Belgium in World War II. Now, the Hemet man is reconnecting with some in the tiny Belgian village.

DEEANN BRADLEY/THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

Dick "Spider" Smith of Hemet dusts a replica of the airplane he flew in World War II. Residents of Ingelmunster, Belgium, where Smith crashed, are trying to recover his downed plane.

flight mission on March 31, 1945.

In his account, Smith who was then based in England and had logged flights in support of troops in the Battle of the Bulge, was picked to lead a mission to Leipzig, Germany.

At about 14,000 feet, while climbing out of the English Channel, his engine quit, Smith said. He radioed for help, he said, but the radioman was helpless to do anything but encourage him to hang on.

Smith tried to glide to safety, until he heard a big explosion and the airplane began to burn. He bailed out,

but not until after the plane split. He said his foot got caught in the canopy roller and he was suspended out the side of the plane.

He finally was able to push himself free, and had to prop up his injured right hand to pull the parachute cord. Smith said he landed face down and the wind dragged him across the field and into a fence.

"The next thing, I was surrounded by wooden shoes and being made comfortable by some wonderful Flemish people who couldn't understand my French or English," Smith said.

TOWNSFOLK

DICK "SPIDER" SMITH

AGE: 80

RESIDENCE: Hemet

NOTABLE FACT: A bomber and fighter pilot during World War II, Smith has renewed contact with his Belgian rescuers who came to his aid when his plane crashed near the village of Ingelmunster.

INTERESTING FACT: Smith dubbed his P-51 plane "Easy Does It," because of the letter "E" painted on its tail and side. The phonetic alphabet for "E" is "easy."

A Canadian ambulance took him to a hospital with a broken arm and severe bruises. He said he was later sent home because of his injuries, on the first ship to arrive in New York Harbor after the Germans surrendered.

'A SPECIAL MOMENT'

Dirk Decuyper, a Belgian aviation historian who has been helping to coordinate recovery of the plane, said the people in the Belgian town were excited to hear from Smith.

"It has always been common knowledge that Richard Smith's P-51 Mustang crashed on this very area," he said in an e-mail.

He said the villagers, including Gustaaf Stragier, one of Smith's first rescuers, have wondered about the pilot who was quickly whisked away by the ambulance.

"It was a very special moment when both sides at long last received an answer to the 'where and who' questions concerning this crash," Decuyper said.

Asked if his near-death experience caused any lasting changes in his outlook in life, Smith replied: "It's just part of the job."

"When your plane is burning like that, your only thought is to get out," he said.

Reach Herbert Atienza at (951) 763-3464 or hatienza@pe.com. If you have an idea for a Townsfolk, contact Assistant Metro Editor Mark Acosta at (951) 763-3453 or at macosta@pe.com.



[Richard L Smith - Bio - AMA Museum](#)

[Hemet Model Masters P.O.Box 754 San Jacinto, CA 92583](#)

Following from: <http://www.littlefriends.co.uk/gallery.php?Group=sf&Style=searchItem&Item=3&searchString=smith>



Lt. Richard L "Spider" Smith (ex 303rd BG). P-51D 44-13557 5E-E "Easy Does It".
Profile by Nick King

Following from: <http://www.littlefriends.co.uk/scouting.php>



SFX



1SF



This is a picture of the Plaque my son Dan made for me.

TO THE AMA EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

NOMINATION OF RICHARD L. SMITH FOR AMA FELLOWSHIP

Dick Smith claims he became addicted to model aviation at the age of six when his father built him a replica of the "Spirit of St. Louis".

Dick has a lifetime of contributing to the sport of model aviation which has been continuous throughout his life with the exception of the time he spent in World War II flying 35 missions in a B-17 and 25 missions in a P-51 over Germany. This nomination is not for Dick Smith's war hero record but rather for his outstanding contribution to model aviation and for his 80 years of love for the hobby and sport.

One of the outstanding contributions that Dick made to model aviation was his incredible record of acquiring six different flying sites, four of which we believe to be in operation today. The first one was on the Kodak facility in Rochester, New York when Dick was an employee of the company. He got permission to bring in outsiders and they started the Rochester RC Club. The club ordered 400 Delta Darts from AMA and put on twelve different programs for the children in a Rochester park. When Kodak needed the flying site for expansion, Dick went to the Parks Commission to request a new flying site. To his surprise, he was greeted with open arms due to his Delta Dart program in all 12 of the parks. He got his new flying site and a few years later he acquired another site through the Parks Department for gliders.

When he moved to Hemet, CA in 1982, he became president of the Hemet Model Masters RC Club and he acquired the present site on Simpson Road. We believe this to be one of the premier sites in Southern California. Dick acquired an RC glider field through the Parks Department that was in use for a couple of years. When that area was no longer available, he acquired the sixth site in Winchester, CA for gliders and electric flying. This site has a wonderful well-maintained grass area and has the gymnasium available for indoor flying.

Dick worked with Hal De Bolt to form the United Pylon Racing Circuit in 1968, He acquired his Contest Director's License and has since been the CD for more than 40 contests. In the late 70's he was Contest Coordinator for District II and served in that position until he moved to California.

Dick built a giant scale "Zero" and flew 729 flights with the Southern California Show Team. His picture, along with his airplane was used in Robart Landing Gear advertisements. In his career he has published a newsletter for three clubs - one in Rochester, N. Y. and two in Southern California for a total of 31 years.

In 1950, the U.S. Air Force Model Airplane Team flew from New York to Dallas, Texas in a C-47. Dick Smith was at the controls of the airplane and he also competed at the Nationals with his free flight designed by Carl Goldberg. Carl helped him trim out the airplane and Dick placed in the top ten.

Dick is now 85 years old, his steps are shorter and he gets up quite a bit slower than he used to. Nothing has been able to deter his enthusiasm for airplanes and the zest for life - not even his bout with cancer. Dick still flies RC twice a week, both inside and outside and he still has his enthusiasm for helping the young fliers. Dick has spent his whole life contributing to model aviation.

Written by Charles Mackey, AMA Fellow and AMA Hall of Fame

Supported by Jerry Neuberger, District 10 Associated Vice President, President of Mira Mesa RC Fliers and Chairman of AMA Hall of Fame Committee

Supported by David Chizlett, President of Valley Wide RC Electric Club

Supported by Jason Turner, President of Hemet Model Masters

February 15, 2010

**These are pictures taken
at the presentation of
my AMA Fellowship Award
Presented by Jerry Newberger
AMA Associate VP
and head of the
AMA Hall of Fame Committee**

Enjoy,

Dick Smith AMA 517









(assembled and photos applied by [Airflow](#), of the [Radio Control Club of Rochester](#))
updated 15 February 2010