

Ada Red

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In 1991, Baron Aviation replaced the old plane with a newer turboprop model. 42-32827 was parked on an abandoned runway along with several other C-47s owned by the company.

Then, in January of 2008, a tornado came through the area and severely damaged the aircraft. The winds caused landing gear on each plane to collapse, and other structural damage made the planes unserviceable. As he recalls the aftermath of the storm, Ed Schmidt shakes his head sadly. "It was a real shame," he says. Ada Red and the other C-47s have sat there ever since.

A Re-Discovered History

Last summer, I received a call from a friend in Springfield, Mo.

"You like World War II aircraft, right? I know where some old C-47s are. Do you want to take a road trip and have a look?"

So in July 2012, we drove up to Vichy to see them.

During our visit, I wrote down tail numbers and took lots of pictures. When I returned home, I did basic research on each of the three planes. Two had relatively unremarkable histories, but I found that the third, C-47D 42-32827, possessed a distinguished combat record. During the war, it had moved from Algeria to Sicily and to England. And then I discovered that the aircraft was a D-Day veteran. For that mission, the pilot listed was a Lt. Richard Philip Sarrett of Ada, Okla.

Further research led me to the Pontotoc County Historical Society,

which provided me with old newspaper articles describing Lt. Sarrett's service and death. Finally, an obituary for another member of Philip's family led me to a Margaret Ray in Sulphur, Okla. I called her number, and after some explaining, told her that I was looking for the family of Richard Sarrett. "Yes," she said, "He was my brother."

Later, in an e-mail exchange with a member of Margaret's family, I was told that if it were at all possible, Margaret wanted to come up to Missouri one day and see

her brother's plane.

A Reunion of Sorts

That day was May 16, 2013.

Margaret Ray's daughter, Marsha Funk, drove her mother from Oklahoma to Missouri. When they arrived that afternoon, Ed Schmidt and I met them at the door to his hangar. Margaret looked frail and moved very slowly, but she was sharp and alert. We walked into Ed's office, where he showed her pictures of the plane when he flew it. We talked for some time about Philip, his service,

and his loss. Finally, Ed said, "Well, shall we go take a look at the plane?"

We drove across the airstrip, which had recently been resurfaced, to a disused runway where the C-47s sat. The asphalt of the old runway was cracked, and weeds and bushes had grown up around the planes. Philip's aircraft sat with its left wing tilted up, as if it were banking into an easy turn to the right. Although the plane had a rather forlorn appearance, it still seemed to have a stoic dignity about it.

We stepped out of the car and walked up to the plane. "This is it?" Margaret asked. "Yes," said Ed.

"No doubt about it. This is the plane that Philip flew on D-Day."

She stood for a moment and looked at the aircraft, taking it all in. It was large but appeared even larger next to her tiny frame.

Guided by her daughter, Margaret walked closer and stood below the cockpit. "It looks a bit sad," she said. Then, she reached up and placed her hand on the side of plane.

It was a poignant moment, one that spoke of loss, but also of faithfulness to the memory of her brother. For a few seconds, we watched quietly.

The moment passed and we started to mill about

the plane again, talking quietly and snapping pictures. Finally, we decided that it was time to go.

As we started toward the car, Ed turned to Margaret and said, "Well, Philip would be proud." She smiled and said, "Yes, I believe he would be." Then she paused and looked back up to the cockpit window where her brother sat so many years ago. "He was a good person."

William Garvin is a special collections librarian and university archivist at F.W. Olin Library on the campus of Drury University at Springfield, Mo.

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