

Richard Lee Bonnell, Jr., T-38
5 February 1920 – 9 June 1997
(aged 77)



Arizonian's Scotch Paper Reveals Memphian a Hero

Capt R. L. (Dickey) Bonnell, 1938 graduate of Tech High, piloted a burning plane to a safe landing en route to England . . . and his mother, Mrs. H. M. Walsh, 2117 Peabody, heard about it via Phoenix AZ.

Here's what happened:

Mrs. Isabelle MacNeil of Phoenix occasionally receives the Peoples Journal and Angus Herald, straight from Scotland. She noticed in the July 31 edition an article telling of the safe arrival of Will Fyffe, famous Scottish entertainer, from a tour of North African camps. At the head of the article Fyffe said he was sending a tartan (Scarf) to the pilot's wife in Monticello AR, in token of his appreciation of Capt Bonnell's efficient bravery.

So, Mrs. MacNeil sent the paper and a letter to Capt Bonnell's wife, and she in turn sent it on to Capt Bonnell's mother.

"It was the first I'd heard from Dickey for some time and he certainly 'came in on a wing and a prayer,' . . . my prayers," his mother said. Fyffe, in the Angus article, described the trip:

"It was a bit of an ordeal, but I couldn't help admiring the way the pilot handled the situation. Twenty minutes after setting off on the first lap of our journey someone noticed smoke coming from under part of the machine. It gradually increased. The floor got hotter and hotter."

The pilot warned that we might have to make a crash landing. An oil pipe had burst and flooded the right wing of the plane with burning oil. It was a marvel the petrol didn't explode. But the pilot decided to take a chance, shut off the burning engine and completed the journey on one engine. Wireless messages went ahead and ambulances were at the field, but we landed safely."

Capt Bonnell, 23, played football and basketball at Tech, played trumpet in the band and violin in the orchestra. He also sang with his mother in the choir of Union Avenue Methodist Church. He attended Arkansas A. & M. College, Monticello.

Information from The Press-Scimitar, Thursday, September 9, 1943.

