

Thunderbolt the Dog

Robert L. Payne was copilot with the Yoder crew who crashed in Germany 19 November 1943. A touching dog saga began when Payne had adopted a stray dog and named him, Thunderbolt. They were constant companions, and Thunderbolt often flew practice missions with him.



Thunderbolt

Thunderbolt was at the hardstand to see them off. Of the 22 aircraft that took off only 10 returned. Missing was "G_r_e_m_l_i_n_ _B_u_g_g_y_". As the Fortresses returned, Thunderbolt patiently waited at the hardstand for Lt. Payne. When all hope expired for "G_r_e_m_l_i_n_ _B_u_g_g_y_'s_" return, Thunderbolt remained for days! He was fed by the ground crew but he would not make-up or take-up with them. After three months, Lt. Robert Lipsett, the Mess Officer, and a friend of Payne's went to the flight line and was able to coerce Thunderbolt into a Jeep. After being bathed and being fed he gradually accepted Lipsett. However, In June 44, Lt. Lipsett was selected to support the D-Day invasion. On 8 June Thunderbolt sat in a Jeep with Lt. Lipsett and another officer on the way to France. But before landing an enemy shell hit the landing craft and Thunderbolt was thrown into the Channel. After landing, Thunderbolt was missing. Lt. Lipsett dragged his feet, not wanting to leave just yet. Soon, sure enough, Thunderbolt came racing up. Lt. Lipsett and Thunderbolt went about establishing Mess facilities together. Next, the pair was caught in the Battle of the Bulge, and once more a shell hit their vehicle. This time, Thunderbolt was badly wounded. Lt. Lipsett took him to an aid station, and talked the docs into treating him. He

recovered and accompanied Lt. Lipsett for the remainder of the war. When Lt. Lipsett was sent home to the US, he left Thunderbolt with another officer who promised to get him back to England. In the meantime, Lt. Payne had been freed from his POW camp by the Russians and had come back to Great Ashfield. He talked to everyone, asking about Thunderbolt. Unable to find out anything, he returned to the U.S. One day in September 1945, Thunderbolt showed up at Great Ashfield, which now was back in British hands. As it happened a Stowmarket reporter was on the base and knew Thunderbolt and he had Lt. Payne's American address! In October 1945 Payne got a letter from the Ministry of Defense in England telling him Thunderbolt was aboard the Queen Mary, meet him! Payne and Thunderbolt were together again! In 1946, Lipsett and Payne also met and had a happy reunion. But what the Germans could not do, a garbage truck did. Thunderbolt was hit and killed by that truck while playing in the street in front of the Payne home.