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Conclusion to WWII bomber crash off Lee County coast

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This is about a story I wrote seven years ago that came back this week to give me goose bumps.

In 2008, I was reporting about a group of local divers who'd discovered the wreck of a B-26 Marauder in 70 feet of water, 30 miles southwest of the Sanibel Lighthouse. The divers found the twin-engine bomber's serial number, through which they obtained the U.S. Army Air Forces' aircraft accident report and pieced together the Marauder's history:

At 6:10 p.m., Nov. 16, 1942, the aircraft took off on a training mission from the Fort Myers Army Air Base, now known as Page Field.

Fifty minutes later, the airbase got a radio call from the plane that the crew was bailing out. Then silence. Two days later, search teams found the bodies of pilot Lt. Donald Vail and co-pilot Lt. Fred Dees (the report states that Dees' watch was stopped at 1905, or 7:05 p.m.). The bodies of the other four crew members were never found.

Through the miracle of the Internet, the divers tracked down Phoenix resident Mark Casey, nephew of crew member Sgt. William Kittiko, of McKeesport, Pa., and called him on June 26, 2008; Mark was very excited that his uncle's aircraft had been found and more so when he heard that the divers (with me tagging along) would dive it two days later.

He called his mother (Abigail Kittiko Casey, Sgt. Kittiko's sister), and the following day, Abigail, her three daughters and Mark flew to Southwest Florida.

Mark went to the wreck site with us; back on shore, I spent an hour with 84-year-old Abigail.

"We got a telegram saying Bill was missing," she told me. "Then we got telegrams saying they were searching. Then we got a death certificate.

"Bill and I were very close. He was especially good to me. He helped me with my schoolwork, and we walked to school together. He never told on me when I did something wrong; one time, I played hooky for a whole week, and he didn't tell anybody."

One of the divers chartered a boat the next day to take the family to the crash site for a private memorial service.

A few weeks later, Abigail sent me a letter, thanking me for writing about her brother and the other airmen; in December 2014, the family informed me that Abigail had died.

And that was the end of the story.

Until Tuesday, when I received a package from one of Abigail's daughters, Christine Casey. A letter to the divers and me said Christine had recently found a stack of unopened Presidential Memorial Certificates and a list of the people to whom Abigail had meant to send them (at some point after her 2008 trip to Southwest Florida, Abigail had asked the National Cemetery Administration for copies of the certificate for herself, her family, the divers and me).

Established in 1962 by President John F. Kennedy, the Presidential Memorial Certificate "honors the memory of a deceased honorably discharged Veteran and expresses the country's grateful recognition of his or her service in the Armed Forces."

The certificate on my desk states:

"The United States of America honors the memory of William G. Kittiko. This certificate is awarded by a grateful nation in recognition of devoted and selfless consecration to the service of our country in the Armed Forces of the United States."

It's signed by President Barack Obama.

Christine ended her letter with: "You certainly made all of us, especially my mom, Abigail, very happy, and, for mom, you gave her the gift of peace and some closure she never dreamed she would attain."

There go those goose bumps again.