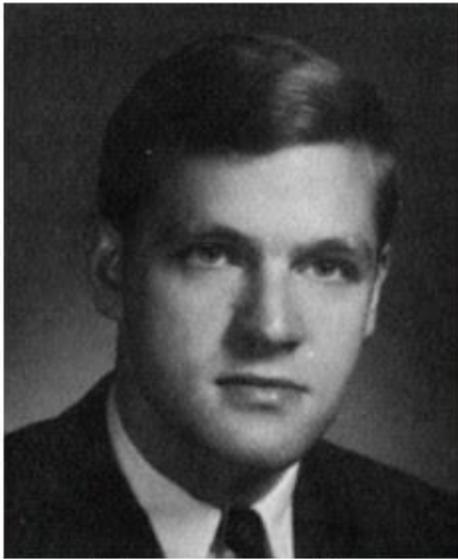


'66 Tiger Talks
My '42 Dad and Me
by Jim Merritt '66

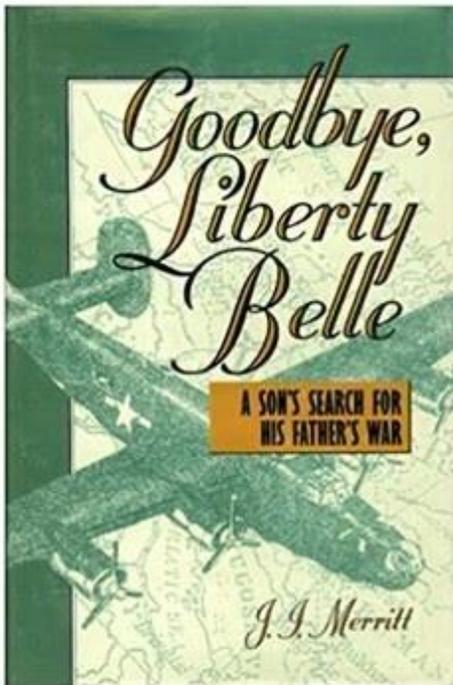
Wednesday, April 13, 4:00 Eastern



Nassau Herald



At graduation with his parents (Jim '42)



Today's topic



Jim and Nancy



With Cosmo Iacavazzi and a painting of Cosmo scoring against Dartmouth, painted by Jim

Do you know Jim Merritt? Is his name familiar? It should be.

Jim has been everywhere on behalf of '66 and Princeton. He worked for 25 years at Princeton communications jobs, including ten years as Editor of the *Princeton Alumni Weekly*. He almost single-handedly compiled and edited the books for our 25th, 40th, 45th, 50th, and 55th Reunions, Herculean tasks comparable to two full time jobs for many months. Plus he is the author of four books and about 200 magazine pieces, mostly about science, fly fishing, natural history, and Princeton. A true man of letters.

For our next Tiger Talk, Jim predominantly is going to talk about one of his books, *Goodbye, Liberty Belle: A Son's Search for His Father's War*. But this is no book review, and this is no ordinary book.

Jim's father was '42. He was the pilot of a B-24 based in Italy, and in October 1944, his plane, the *Liberty Belle*, was shot up on a mission over Vienna, losing three of four engines. He nursed it to Croatia, part of Axis-controlled Yugoslavia, and then ordered the crew to bail out. They were rescued by Partisans but spent 49 days behind enemy lines before making it back to Italy.

That saga is just the starting point of the story and the book. Jim undertook to reconstruct the details of the events, including a trip with his father to Yugoslavia in 1986, where they met with the Partisan rescuers and retraced the escape route. This in turn forced an emotional reckoning between the two Jims, whose sometimes fraught relationship was brought under scrutiny. And so what started out as kind of a history project turned into something very much more. The history is fascinating; the father-son relationship is as complex and personal as you can imagine.

Jim struggled to get the book published. Traditional publishers found it too complex, trying to tell too many stories. But Jim persevered, helped by an enormously positive review in *Smithsonian*, a review which was unsolicited and unexpected (literally arriving from a friend in the mail). Just a short excerpt of the review here:

The book ... involves a network of themes that usually occur in a novel: the nurture of old memories, the grasp of long-forgotten friendships, the dawning light of understanding between father and son. The son watches Dad recall the crew's tough times traveling with the Partisans - constantly moving, almost always wet and hungry, yet treated like heroes by villagers. Finding some of the same villagers in 1986, the Americans get a huge dose of Balkan hospitality, much of which comes in endless toasts with the explosive plum brandy know as rakija. The son delights at the sight of Dad in a bear hug with one of his rescuers: "It was a moment that in my wildest imaginings I never thought to see - my conservative Republican father in the arms of a card-carrying Communist." ... This grandly complex tale is handled expertly by Merritt the younger. Goodbye, Liberty Belle is a war story, sort of. But it has enough facets to gleam brightly whichever way you look at it.

Please join us on Wednesday, April 13, at 4:00 Eastern (1:00 Pacific) to hear and talk with Jim about a story that resonates with many of '66 in so many ways. [The link is here.](#)