

War Era Story Project 2012

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Age: 93

World War II Experiences of Captain Earl P. Miller B-17 Bomber Pilot, 94th Bomb Group, Eighth Air Force Stationed In England During 1943

The main targets were submarine pens, ball bearing plants, German fighter factories, oil refineries and air bases in Germany and occupied countries. The B-17 Flying Fortress had four 1,250 horsepower engines, Norden bombsight and thirteen 50-caliber machine guns and could carry twelve 500-lb. bombs, two 1,000-lb or one 2,000 lb. The 10 man crew consisted of pilot, co-pilot, navigator, bombardier, top turret gunner, radio gunner, ball-turret gunner, right waist gunner, left waist gunner and tail gunner.

We usually flew at an altitude of 25,000 ft. where the outside temperature was 42 below zero in the summertime. There were 18 bombers flying in a group and three groups to a wing. About two miles back, there would be another wing etc. Usually, there were 300 or more bombers participating in each raid. Our losses averaged about 10 percent each raid and up to 20 percent in two of the raids.

One of the toughest raids was on August 17th 1943; it was 12 hours long. One half of the 8th Air Force bombed a ball bearing plant in Schweinfurt, Germany, and our half bombed a Messerschmidt 109 factory in Regensburg, Germany. We had no fighter escort and 50 percent of the German Air Force was based in western Germany and France. Consequently, our losses were heavy. That day, the double-barrel raids lost 60 B-17s and 307 German fighters were claimed to have been shot down by the B-17 gunners. You could see bombers and fighters being shot down all over the sky. In fact, this raid is written up on the walls of the Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio.

We were on many rough raids. I had 10 different planes heavily damaged by fighters and flak. My bombardier and I were the only two men on our crew to survive and to finish our 25 missions, and only three crews out of 46 who went overseas when I did in May of 1943 made it through the 25 missions. (After bombing Regensburg, we flew south over the Alps, Mediterranean Sea and landed in Africa to avoid the German fighters.) On the Regensburg raid, we stayed in Africa for a week, slept under our airplane at night, ate K rations, loaded our planes with gas and bombs by hand and bombed Bordeaux, France on the way back to England. According to Gen. LeMay, the 8th Air force lost 4,500 bombers and 26,000 airmen during the war.

I was awarded the Air Medal, three Oak Leaf Clusters and the Distinguished Flying Cross after finishing my 25th mission on Oct 10, 1943 and was allowed to return to the good ole U.S.A. to marry my bride on Nov. 7, 1943.

I finished the remainder of the war as an Engineering Officer and Flight Test Pilot at an Electronics Experimental Base in Boston, Mass.

My favorite Bible verse is Hebrews 1:14, which says: "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation." (NIV Version)

I thank God every day for His Mercy and His Grace.

Taken on 10.10-1943 after my 13th mission

