

# THE MILK RUN

By  
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June 27, 1944, the 827th squadron flew to Southern France to knock out a railroad bridge and trestle over the Varr River.

It didn't seem much of a target, just a long skinny trestle apparently unprotected, way out in the countryside. We didn't even have a "Mickey Ship" (\*1 Ed Note) for radar for the bomb run, we used our own bomb sight.

I guess we were trying to provide as much support to the Normandy Beach head as possible. (\*2)

We were crew #76 John P Roedel, first pilot. The bombardier, Warren W Watts, released out bombs and we turned away rather sharply in hopes the pilot and front end crew could see the bombs hit. It was an almost perfect impact pattern. Half of the bomb just missed all along the left side of the trestle and the rest just missed along the right side. The trestle and bridge remained intact.

The trip should have been a real "Milk Run" but while we were rubber necking, no doubt the only anti aircraft gun in the area got our range and popped a few rounds at us. They were luckier than we were, as a piece of shrapnel from one of their bursts went through the bomb bay shearing off the four lines to the sight (fuel) gages (\*3). We immediately had a big white plume of raw gasoline coming out of the bomb bay area. We had seen other planes develop these white plumes, and we knew that if you didn't bail out before the plume turned black, (which happens in a very short time), you just didn't bail out.

There was a routine to follow and we knew the routine. The copilot (me) and the rest of the crew were supposed to jump, while the pilot held the plane steady and level, if possible. He would be the last to leave the ship. John Roedel waved me out and I unbuckled, and headed for the bomb bay with no fear or hesitation about getting out in a mighty short time. As I passed through the radio compartment, Sgt Fischer, the engineer, pushed me out of the way and headed for the bomb bay without a parachute on.

I picked myself up and went through the hatch to the open bomb bay. There was Sgt Fischer standing with one foot on the cat walk and the other up on the side of the fuselage, stopping the fuel flow. The drain cocks on the four main lines were safety wired open, as there were also shut off cocks closed at the lower end of the line, (\*4)

As I recall, he smiled at me, proceeded to grab the drain valve

handles, and break the safety wires with his fingers and shut them off one at a time. His fingers were severely cut and bleeding bad. The crew bandaged his hands and we made it back to Torretta, Italy, instead of walking back through Spain. Thanks to Sgt Fischer's quick action we were all saved from a fiery death, injury, or capture.

I offered to work with John Roedel in writing up the combat report, but he said he would rather do it himself. I often wondered what he wrote, because when Sgt Fischer arrived state side at Smyrna, Tennessee, he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross with three oak leaf clusters on September 1, 1944, by order of General Twining. The medal was presented by Col Umstead, Commander of the base.

The End

Editor's Notes:

(\*1) "Mickey Ship" was a popular term used to describe an aircraft equipped with radar or similar devices. In the case of the B-24, radar used for bombing through an overcast, was mounted in the place of the ball turret. They were usually painted a dull grey over all, and carried a black three digit identification number. The use of group insignia painting on the rudder and fin were generally omitted as these aircraft were sometimes used in single ship missions at night.

Mickey, or Mickey Mouse, was a slang term to describe a complicated apparatus that had a dubious reputation for reliability, hence "Mickey Ship".

See photo of a "Mickey Ship" on Page 13 Torretta Flyer#14.

(\*2): The purpose of the air attacks in Southern France was to soften enemy resistance in preparation for the Invasion of Southern France set for August 1944.

(\*3): The fuel quantity gages in the B-24 were glass tubes mounted on the aft bulkhead behind the engineers station. Raw fuel was piped into the cockpit to fill these tubes. They were highly inaccurate and required that the airplane fly straight and level to obtain a decent reading, which was seldom the case as the B-24 flew slightly nose high to obtain maximum lift from the fuselage.

(\*4) The sight gages had pet cocks (drain valves) installed above and below so that the glass tubes could be isolated during combat as they were highly susceptible to flak damage. The pet cocks that were on the lower end of the line within the bomb bay, that the author refers to were used to drain the fuel tank sumps of any water contamination prior to flight.