

# Radar Bombing

By Thomas Carroll

The new crew position of radar operator combined some of the duties of the navigator and of the bombardier with that of the radar operator. For the purposes of this report he will be referred to as the radar navigator.

After completing B-17 phase training at Dyersburg, Tennessee in late December 1943 our provisional group traveled to the 7th processing Unit at Kearny, Nebraska to pick up B-17s for transfer to the United Kingdom. After briefing, but before departure, our crew was one of those broken out of this group for transfer to the 1st AF-I Bomb Commist SAG Group, 4th Squadron at Langley field Virginia. This was a search and attack squadron.

There the navigators received ground and flight training in radar navigation and bombing, using H2X radar. The radar scope and operational equipment were located behind the bomb bay across from the radio operator (B-17).

The ball turret was replaced by the radar dome and could be raised and lowered as necessary. The operational scope was curtailed off for darkness to ease the reading of the scope.

The navigators were trained in blind radar bombing tactics and were schooled in operation and adjustment and light maintenance of the H2X radar equipment. Training flights involved radar navigation to industrial and other selected targets, simulated radar bomb runs and simulated radar bomb drops. Radar was a great navigational tool and a reasonably accurate bombing tool when weather or other conditions rendered use of the Norden visual bombing impossible. On training missions the radar navigators coordinated by intercom with the pilot and bombardier and on combat missions they also coordinated with the lead navigator in arriving at the initial point. With this equipment the Radar Navigator could assist the lead Bombardier in finding the primary target. When the radar navigator was well trained and his equipment was working properly the need to bomb alternate targets was greatly reduced, because the odds were greatly increased.

On completion of radar training eight crews with eight radar B-17s, extra radar parts, some support personnel, departed Langley Field on February 25, 1944 For Morrison Field, Florida, and then on down the Southern route across to Daker and up to Tunis and over the Mediterranean to a B-24 base north of Taranto, the home of the 47th Wing, 376th and 515th Bomb Groups. They arrived March 11, 1944.

The radar navigators remained here with their special radar B-17s. The rest of the B-17 crews continued on to join the B-17 Wing north of Foggia.

Practice missions were flown from this B-24 base making radar bomb runs and drops on exposed hulks of sunken vessels in the Adriatic. These were excellent radar targets because of the water/metal contrast. These bombing runs were excellent, but locals then fishing fairly near the sunken hulks may have acquired a few more grey hairs.

On combat missions the Radar B-17s were originally on detached service to the B-17 groups. Initially a Skeleton B-17 crew would be flown to the B-24 field to fly the Radar B-17 back to

their base the evening before a scheduled combat mission. It would pot luck for the transient radar operator in finding a bed. Then following early briefing, the combat mission, debriefing and the flight back to the B-24 base. Later these radar B-17s and their radar operators were permanently transferred to B-17 groups near Foggia. The make up of a pathfinder lead crew usually varied from mission to mission, so the radar operator had to adjust to new pilots, lead navigators, and lead bombardiers rapidly.

My first combat mission and to the best of my knowledge one of the first combat use of radar equipped B-17s out of Italy was March 30, 1944 to Sofia ,Bulgaria. The target was clear and there were no unusual navigational problems. The lead navigator and bombardier were considerate and friendly. The radar equipment was not of any significant importance on this mission. The veterans told me it was a milk run.

The next visit to the B-17 base last longer. The B-17s hit Budapest on April 3, Bucharest on April 4, and Ploesti on April 5. There was more weather and could coverage on these missions. The lead navigators checked out my radar positions against there calculations in reaching the IP. There was more coordination with the visual lead bombardiers on these three bomb runs, but all drops were eventually made by the Norden bombardier. On the Ploesti bomb run the cloud coverage was very heavy and the lead bombardier called me on and off a couple of times, but finally had enough visibility to use the Norden with very good results. The B-17s were off the target and on the way home when the black oil smoke finally broke through the cloud cover.

On April 9, 1944 the radar B-17s and radar navigators were transferred to the B-17 groups near Foggia. The remainder of my combat missions were the the 414th Bomb Squadron, 97th Bomb Group located north of Foggia There several of us radar navigators shared a tent. If I recall correctly some of them also flew on combat missions with B-24 groups stationed near Cerignola.

My closest friend John F S Adams, now deceased went down on a mission to Ploesti and was a POW until liberated. Other radar navigators also participated in solo plane night missions in foul weather penetrating deep into enemy territory, triggering their radar defenses, alerting their interceptors, and generally wearing them down and exhausting their defensive resources.

Following long distance combat missions on April 12 and 15, our B-17 group went to Wiener-Neustadt on April 23, 1944. Other 15th AF bombers hit Bad Voslau and Schwechat on that date.

On the bomb run two engines were lost to flak and could not be feathered. Our Colonel pilot held the plane on the run and the bombardier made a visual drop. The formation stayed with him and he skillfully maneuvered us back to the vicinity of Zagreb, Yugoslavia, where most of us joined the Caterpillar Club.

The partisans and a British Mission officer assisted us most generously and various relays of Partisans eventually guided us and the remnants of a B-24 crew that went down also to a British Mission in southern Yugoslavia. There was a most interesting and educational walking tour of Yugoslavia with lots of memorable events along the way. The Good Lord was taking care of us. A C-47 crew bringing supplies at night to this British Mission took back to Italy our group and wounded Partisans for hospitalization in Bari on May 16, 1944. At that time this was a ticket back to the States.

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