
Book Review

Eighth Air Force Bomber Stories

by
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Over the years, since the end of WWII, British writers have published scores of excellent books dealing with the activities of the United States Army Air Forces based in southeast England. These authors felt that a proper account of the traumatic events that took place on their soil must be recorded accurately. One of these authors is Ian McLachlan who has compiled 45 stories of eye-witness accounts of the tragedies and triumphs of Eighth Air Force bomber crews. He collaborated with the late Russell J Zorn an American photographer based in Britain during the war who provided the excellent photographs that illustrate much of the book. Bomber crews trained in the States under ideal conditions were quite unprepared for the realities of wartime conditions. Wartime loads often exceeded the design gross weight of the aircraft making the plane difficult to fly. It took considerable ability to maneuver the sluggish four engine bomber under many days of nasty weather into formation without hitting anyone else. Casualties were high. The realities of combat made men out of boys.

Green crews on their first combat mission were often awed by the sightseeing spectacle unfolding before their eyes. The rude awakening of the first exploding cannon shells penetrating their bomber was the initial step in their learning process. It was no longer fun and games, the enemy was shooting with real bullets. There is the sickening spectacle of a broken aircraft spilling men into space without parachutes clutching the air in desperate futility, one moment of misjudgment could bring tragedy to the whole crew. Ian McLachlan grew up in East Anglia where the United States Airforce was based, had a boyhood interest in aviation, and was witness to the air war that was happening all around him. This sparked his interest in gathering of the stories that make up this book.

"The Milk Run"

FOR S/SGT FRANK W. 'Bud' Buschmeier, 19 March 1944, started bleakly with the noisy arrival of unexpected guests. Returning from operations to find their own airfields weatherbound, RAF and RCAF aircrews landed elsewhere, including Frank's base at Thorpe Abbots. As they came in chattering to use the ominously large number of spare cots, their 2:30 a.m. arrival was barely appreciated. However, cheerful assertions that such lousy weather would give him a lie-in placated the sleepy



American. It seemed that Sunday would be a day of peace, but USAAF commanders deemed otherwise, and Frank returned from

church to find that an alert had been called. Two of Frank's four missions had been to Berlin, and vacant barrack beds symbolized losses suffered by the 100th BG. Today's late start precluded long-range targets and briefing officers promised a 'milk run'. Their target, a V-weapon site at Marquise Mimoyecques, meant that only eighteen minutes would be spent over enemy territory.

As Lt John P. Gibbons pre-flighted their B-17 *Miss Irish*, her crew busied themselves checking equipment and ensuring that personal 'lucky' rituals were followed, supporting the shamrock on their bomber's nose. At 3 p.m. *Miss Irish* was airborne with 64 other 3rd Division B-17s, and Bud could be forgiven for wishing that the RAF assurances given twelve hours earlier had been correct. Even a 'milk run' was poor consolation if you got hit. It was six minutes into France when Bud felt the B-17 jurch from the 'whuump' of a shell exploding below the nose. Moments later, another round detonated near the tail. The Fortress flew on unscathed, but Bud was uneasy. Peering anxiously from the left waist window he tensed, every instinct clamoring alarm, as the third shell hurtled towards them at 3,000 ft per second. There was a violent, terrifying roar, and the B-17 was punched more than 100 ft straight up. In those microseconds of bedlam, blast threw Bud backwards as shrapnel and pieces of radio-room equipment peppered his flak suit. Staggering to his feet,

he looked in horror to where the torn-off door of the radio compartment exposed a scene forever imprinted on his mind. Ed Walker, the radioman, had been blown on to his work table, and Bud saw that the young flier's legs were torn to shreds. Death must have been instantaneous - or was it? Even if *Miss Irish* was doomed, Bud had to help his