
The End Of World War Two

By Jud Suddarth, 827 Sq

The Miracle Of Forgiveness

“Come on, Jud. It’s been over fifty years since World War II. Don’t hold such a grudge anymore. It’s time to let go. Let it go,” said my good friend, Hank Schilling. I had just taught the Miracle of forgiveness’ lesson the previous week at a church meeting. I explained about the necessity of forgiving and how difficult it is sometimes to forget a deep and long time hurt, like my hatred for Nazi Germany, its people, its army, and especially the Luftwaffe. I related a story that went something like this:

In the early 1960’s, I worked at Lockheed Aircraft Company as a Senior Research Engineer. One day the manager came to my office and informed me that one of the negotiators for the F-104 Fighter program was not available, and I would have to take his place the next day. Lockheed had been negotiating the fine points of supplying new state-of-the-art fighter planes to the new German Republic. Many of the top brass from the Luftwaffe would be in attendance, and I would get to meet the Chief Air Marshall, and the top aces of all fighter pilots, past and present. It was to be a great honor for me to take part in the meeting, and certainly a boost in my career.

Many of my friends died at the hands of the Luftwaffe, and I personally, stared into the flashing orange muzzle blasts from these very men. My hatred grew at each encounter with the ME-109’s and the dreaded FW-190’s, and the ME 262 fighters as they decimated our B-24 heavy bomber formations over Germany, Rumania, Austria, and France. At the mention of the word Luftwaffe, I was instantly transported back in time, and in the blink of an eye, I relived the awful moments of days past when I was a navigator on a B-24 bomber crew in the summer of 1944, based in Italy. The eight and nine hour flights into enemy territory were just as vivid as the two or three minute bomb runs over places like Bucharest, Ploesti, Pitesti, and Giurgiu in Romania. Like Wiener Nuestadt, and Vienna, in Austria. Like Toulon and Nimes, in France. Again I saw my friends go down in flames, or disintegrate as we flew through their wreckage.

I was incensed at the suggestion that I would sit at the same table and negotiate with this hated enemy. My reply to my boss was a loud “Absolutely Not!”, as I clenched my fists and bounded up in great anger. He, nor anyone else had the least inkling of my feelings, because I had never discussed this with anyone, but business came first, and he asked me again to attend the negotiations the next day. I was adamant that my decision stood. He threatened to fire me and I threatened to have our conversation aired on the evening news if he took such action. I knew that Lockheed did not want that kind of publicity, and that he would not fire me, but with those few words, my career with Lockheed was over, and I soon had to find another job.

After Hank said “Let it go.”, he gave me a book to read. “This book, *The Blond Knight of Germany*, by Toliver and Constable, is about the greatest fighter pilot who ever lived, a German fighter pilot. He shot down two hundred-sixty-three allied planes during World War Two. He has a message for you. Read it. You might like it.”

I read it. I didn’t like it. It infuriated me as I read of the many victories of Eric Hartman, the German ace of aces of all air warfare. At least he didn’t brag about it; I’ll give him that much credit. I read on and learned that he was defending some of the places that I bombed. Some of his missions coincided with mine. He shot down seven American P-51 fighters and several B-24 bombers in a three day period over the oil fields at Ploesti, Rumania. I was on those raids. Maybe he actually shot at me. Maybe he saw our orange flashes too. Maybe he was as terrorized as I was.

His success was attributed to a mode of warfare which was to attack from the rear, fire at the enemy, and run. He avoided one on one combat. If he was forced into a dogfight and found himself outnumbered, he simply rolled over on his back and bailed out. Smart guy. Not a coward by any means; just smart. Why didn’t our guys think of that.

As of a few months ago, Eric Hartman was still alive. After the war ended, he was taken prisoner by the Americans, then turned over to the Russians who demanded he be tried as a war criminal. The real story of Eric Hartman begins with the totally unreasonable accusations and torturous confinement he received at the hands of the Russians, and his outstanding behavior for over six years. He maintained that he was not a war criminal, never having planned nor enforced any acts of atrocities. He was just a twenty year old kid, doing his duty as a soldier. He was one year older than I. He was a soldier, just like me, doing the best job he could at his various assignments. Just like me. He had a sweetheart who was in his thoughts constantly. Just like me. When he finally got home, he married her. Just as I did. He raised a family after the war. Just as I did. In fact he and I led strikingly similar lives, except he was infinitely more successful than I was.

One day in November after finishing the book, I was walking in the local mall and the realization of all these things struck me with a blinding inspiration. I had no reason to hate Eric Hartman. I had no reason to hate the Luftwaffe either. As for Nazi Germany, I had already let it go. I suddenly realized that there is so much to be thankful for, there is no room for hatred. My life was spared in the air war over Europe, and I escaped unharmed from many hazardous encounters since. No more will I have to listen to the guns. The orange flashes will come to me now, only if I will them to come. The fragmented visions of battle, and the smell of cordite will never be by my bedside again. The monkey on my back has released his grip forever, and the grudge of fifty-four years is gone.

Now I am Free. I have even forgiven myself for such incredible stupidity. Those ghosts have put themselves to rest. The miracle of forgiveness has made me free from the past. I am free to sleep in peace at last. World War Two was over for me on November, 1997. Thank you Hank for pointing the way.

The Last B-24

What a glorious day for an air show! A brilliant billowing cumulus on the horizon set a magnificent first day of summer, complete with an indigo sky, for a perfect Seattle day. The sun