

continued to watch the plane ahead for possible survivors, the nose of the Fortress rose into a tight stall and it exploded with a force that rocked the rest of the formation.

Murphy, pilot of "Piccadilly Lily," saw that Lay looked numb from the shock of airplanes plummeting to earth as clusters of parachutes followed them at a more leisurely pace, the German yellow chutes mingling with the American white in an incongruous setting below the bloody battle up above. He let Lay fly the airplane to get his mind off the tragedies unfolding around them.

Lay had lost all hope the attacks would diminish as they got deeper into Germany. He knew that the German Fighter Command had recently been reorganized to counter the growing American bomber threat. He had seen intelligence reports that the Germans had even withdrawn two fighter groups from the Russian front to use in defense of their cities and factories.

LeMay's 1st Bombardment Wing, in the lead, had not received the heavy attacks suffered by the rear wings. The lead 96th Group was flanked by Colonel Edgar Wittans 390th Group in the high position on the right and Colonel William B. Davis's 388th Group in the low position on the left.

LeMay's 95th and 100th groups of the 3rd Bombardment Wing continued to undergo persistent attacks, and German fighters swarmed around them. Stragglers, forced for one reason or another to leave the protection of their formations, faced almost certain annihilation as German fighters pounced upon them.

In "Piccadilly Lily," Lay felt trapped by the pairs of 109s that swarmed around them. He jerked upright as a piece of metal flew past their right wing, narrowly missing one of their props. He quickly realized it was the main exit door of the Fortress ahead of them. As his throat constricted, he watched in horrified fascination as a man, with his knees up to his head, hurtled through the formation, barely missing several propellers before his parachute snapped open.

German fighters lobbed rockets now, which exploded with blinding flashes in their formation, incredibly not appearing to do any damage. A quick glance up showed Lay that other German fighters were flying above, dropping bombs fused to go off at their altitude. The sky seemed filled with debris as Flying Fortresses exploded and pieces of airplanes blew throughout their formation, while bodies continued to tumble out of crippled Fortresses, some dropping sickeningly to the countryside when their parachutes failed to open. Lay knew the target was still a half hour away, and with the 3rd Bombardment Wing so threatened, he seriously doubted any of them would get through.

Below "Piccadilly Lily," Major Gilbert Cleven, commanding officer of the 350th Squadron, noted that his plane was one of only three survivors in his entire squadron. His second element had been completely wiped out as fighters bore in relentlessly, shooting more accurately than he had ever seen.

The Third Air Division fought its way to the initial point after fifteen bombers were shot down, but the 131 survivors maintained their formations and refused to admit defeat. As planes were shot out of formations, others moved in to close ranks and provide a solid front of firepower for those remaining.

LeMay's 1st Combat Wing, leading the Regensburg raid, had suffered least with only two losses. He did not realize what had happened to the following wings because they were under strict radio silence. The full extent of their losses would be known later, and he was appalled when he found that most survivors of the fol-

lowing wings were shot full of holes with wounded aboard. The other wings were smaller than his 1st Wing and had borne the brunt of the attacks.

As they turned on the initial point, LeMay could see for twenty five miles in all directions, and the mile square cluster of buildings of the Messerschmitt plant at Regensburg shone clearly. Lieutenant Dunstan T. Abel, lead bombardier for the 96th Group, synchronized carefully on the target, grateful that the fighters did not attack and that there were only two bursts of antiaircraft fire. "Bombs away!" Abel cried.

The entire wing dropped their bombs as they saw the bombs release from the lead plane at 11:45 AM. Leaning over his bomb-sight, Abel watched anxiously for the bombs to hit. When they covered the plant, he let out a whoop, telling the crew that it appeared that nearly every building had been hit.

LeMay's division turned south after they all had dropped their bombs, losing another three aircraft before they reached the Swiss Alps, bringing their total losses to eighteen. The Germans turned back, and the Americans headed for North Africa.

October 10, 1943 marked the first time that the bombers of the 8th Air Force had ever been given a civilian target. The aiming point was the center of Munster, Germany. The city was a railroad hub and it was thought that by striking at the city, many rail workers would become their targets and the rail system in the Ruhr valley would suffer accordingly.

Sixteen groups of B-17s took off en route to the target with the 13th Combat Wing of the 3rd Air Division consisting of the 95th, 100th, and 390th Bomb Groups leading. P-47s escorted the bombers up to the point that they were 9 minutes from Munster. Due to ground fog on their base, the relieving Thunderbolts were not able to make their rendezvous. This spelled disaster for the lead wing.

As the Fortresses pushed on, they faced the greatest concentration of Luftwaffe fighters they had ever encountered. On their first pass they concentrated on the 100th Group which was flying low group in the wing. On the first pass, eight to ten enemy fighters went directly through the Fortress formation from twelve o'clock level. The first attack took three B-17s out of the 100th Group formation. From then on, the enemy continued to barrel through the lead groups in waves while their twin engine fighters stood off to the side and rear and lobbed their rockets into the bombers.

As they came off the target the 100th Group Fortress, "Sexy Suzy, Mother of Ten," piloted by Lt. William Beddow, collided with a Me-109. The crew members only knew that something had hit the left wing and everything was on fire. Four of the crew members managed to bail out of the inferno. Lieutenant Beddow did not survive. This collision spiraled into a second Fortress, "Sweater Girl," which went down as a result of the crash. Its six survivors bailed out to become prisoners of war.

Of the 100th Group's aircraft that came off the target, a few of the remaining aircraft dove for the deck in a vain attempt to escape the fighter attacks and run for home. None of them made it. The only survivor of the thirteen 100th Group B-17s was "Royal Flush" being flown by Lt. Robert "Rosie" Rosenthal. Although one engine had been knocked out, his aircraft bombed the target and then became the target of numerous fighter attacks. The number three engine was hit and had to be feathered, and the oxygen system was almost completely destroyed. Lieutenant Rosenthal managed to bring the aircraft back home on two engines and put it down