

High Altitude Bombing of Flak Batteries

From Micro Films

I have often wondered over the years, as perhaps many of our members also have, why more flak suppression missions were not flown by the 15th Air Force, as most aircraft losses by the 484th Bomb Group can be attributed to anti aircraft fire. Felix Rameder our good friend from Ebergassing, Austria, who observed allied bombing attacks as a young boy of 13, living in a town heavily defended by anti aircraft weapons, asks the same question in his letter shown below. In response I found a reference in our micro film library on this very subject. I had heard of at least one instance when a three ship element from the 484th BG was ordered to dive down out of the formation and bomb flak installations before rejoining the main bomber stream. I have not been able to verify this one way or another.

On April 1 and 19 April, 1945, B-24s of the 15th Air Force successfully attacked flak batteries Northeast of Venice, Italy from high altitude (24,000 to 26,000 feet) with 200 pound fragmentation bombs equipped with variable time fuses. The first attack was against four 4-gun batteries and the second attack was against two 4-gun batteries. These batteries were selected for bombing as they defended an avenue of approach to important targets in Austria and Germany. It is felt the attacks were successful since the intensity and accuracy of the flak opposition was materially reduced. . None of the 36 aircraft participating in the anti flak operations were lost or damaged. In addition to minimizing the AA opposition, the attacks killed 31 enemy gunners, wounded 9, and caused 3 to be missing, and destroyed one 20 MM gun besides obtaining direct hits on other equipment.

The aim of the assaulting flak positions is to reduce the intensity and accuracy of ground positions. The 260 pound fragmentation (frag) bomb equipped with VT (proximity) fuse was effective in reducing the morale of gun crews and damaging fire control equipment (AA directors) cables, dials, and radar.

Each plane carried

18 M-81 bombs, a T-50E1 proximity nose fuse (bomb burst set to fire at 17 feet above the ground, and a non delay fuse in the tail.

On April 1 1945, near Grisolera, Italy excellent pin-point bombing secured many near misses on three of the four batteries.

The attack was made in two waves of nine aircraft composed of three ship elements. Each element was assigned a separate 4-gun battery. All batteries attacked by the first wave ceased firing when the bombs exploded, even though one battery was missed by several hundred yards. The second wave attacked 15 minutes later and reported that all firing ceased as the bombs exploded. Both waves received scant, inaccurate ground fire on their bomb runs which were made between 24,000 and 26,000 feet. No damage or losses were sustained. Bomb strike photos show many near misses on gun positions, Ground source indicate that 22 soldiers were killed, 18 wounded, and one 20 MM gun destroyed.

On April 19, 1945 near Grisolera and San Stino, Italy, eighteen aircraft attacked two 4-gun batteries which were located near the prescribed route of the main bombing formation. The plan of attack was the same as on April 1, 1945. Scant flak was encountered on the bomb run, but all opposition ceased after the bombs exploded. Bomb strike photos show burst in the air directly over one of the 4-gun batteries. Ground sources indicate that nine soldiers were

Ebergassing, Austria
Bud Markel
C/O Torretta Flyer

From a recent issue of the Torretta Flyer I have learned that more aircraft of the 461st & 484th Bomb Groups, were brought down by anti aircraft fire than by fighter planes, 61 planes by flak, 36 by fighters.

The question that comes to mind is why the Americans did not have a policy of attacking flak batteries direct. It seems that only when the batteries were in the path of the bomber formations when attacks were attempted on a limited basis. In a ten mile area around my home at Ebergassing, there were 10 batteries totaling 104 guns, all lay in open fields. Of these batteries only two were attacked, one from 3 B-17s on December 6, 1944. One gun was damaged and one other to the west of Ebergassing 1 mile away on March 15, 1945 another B-17 Group attacked from 27,000 feet, but the bombs fell 600 yards short without damage to the guns on a clear day. I saw this. Obviously if more anti aircraft attacks were undertaken to increase bombing techniques, aircraft losses could have been reduced considerably.

If in the spring of 1944 each flak battery was attacked by two bomb groups to put them out of action temporarily, all of the following attacks on the main targets could have been made at 15,000 where bombing accuracy is greater. But then I am no Air Force general.

In the German army the duty of flak soldier was a good job. A father was asked about his three sons in military service, he replied "only two are in the army, the other is a flak soldier." I rest my case.

In many books about the B-17 and B-24 I have read that the B-24J and B-24H were not good for combats above 24,000 feet, and a B-17 crewman said, "our best cover was a B-24 Group below us at 24,000 feet while we were at 27,000 feet."

Wishing you all the best

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