

had actually pushed the alarm bell switch, but nothing happened, so he gave up thoughts of bailing out and tried to keep the plane flying.

Later, Maj. Gen. Orval Anderson, in conversation with Schoolfield, said that the withdrawal route had been his idea, both agreed that had the withdrawal been along the line of penetration, the casualties would have been much more than the sixty lost by the Eighth Air Force. This represented 20 percent of the planes taking off in the raid. In the annals of warfare, and particularly to those who met an unwanted fate on October 14, the day will be known forever as Black Thursday. Indeed, it was for the ten 306th crews who gave their all on the mission. Of the one hundred men who did not return to Thurlough that afternoon, thirty five died on the mission or later of wounds. Sixty five went to prison camp.

The 305th Bomb Group led by Maj Charles G Y Normand had its troubles as was observed by Captain Schoolfield. Over Frankfurt, twin engine Me-210 fighters appeared astern and again lobbed rockets. By now, the 364th Bomb Squadron had lost all seven of its airplanes. Still, the enemy attack picked up in intensity. Soon all four 366th Bomb Squadron planes, flying the high squadron, fell to the flak and the fighters.

Major Normand watched in horror as plane after plane was shot down. The sky was filled with burning aircraft and the parachutes of the men that had escaped from them. As the remnants of the group turned on the initial point for the bombing, Normand's bombardier called for a separate bomb run. He didn't know that only three planes were left in the formation and one of them was on fire.

Lt. Raymond Bullock flew the aircraft that was on fire, a Fortress named "Sundown Sal." The B-17 had been hit in the left wing by a 20MM shell, which started the blaze. Bullock held the B-17 in formation until the bombs were dropped. Immediately after the bomb run, he left the formation and told his crew to bail out. All became POWs.

In the final tally for the 305th Bomb Group, the 364th Squadron lost all seven of its aircraft; the 365th Squadron lost two; and the 366th Squadron lost four. Two 365th planes returned. Of the 130 crew members lost, thirty six had been killed. The 87 percent loss for the day left the group devastated.

The assessment of damage at the target was originally stated to be total destruction. Unfortunately, this was not true. While considerable damage had been done, in no way did it put the Germans out of the ball bearing business. However, the damage forced the Germans to speed up the dispersion of the industry to the countryside.

The loss of sixty bombers on the mission further swelled the loss figure for October. In all, the Eighth Air Force lost 176 B-17s during this month. Bomber crew morale hit a new low. Never did they think that they would be asked to fight their way to the target and back under such overwhelming opposition. Of course, it was hurting the Luftwaffe as well, but many of their pilots were recovered and back in the air the following day. The one thing that the American Fortress crews had proven beyond a doubt was that they had the guts to press on to their targets regardless of the odds. They were never turned back by the enemy!

There was little comfort for the bomber crews in the message that Chief of Staff Gen H H Arnold released to the press following the Schweinfurt mission. The message read: "Regardless of our losses, I'm ready to send replacements of planes and

crews and continue building up our strength. The opposition isn't nearly what it was, and we are wearing them down. The loss of 60 American bombers in the Schweinfurt raid was incidental."

If the opposition wasn't nearly what it was, the crews of the Fortresses felt they must have been hallucinating! To further compound the odds that the bomber crews had to face, by November 1943, the Luftwaffe had reinforced its fighter aircraft strength in the west to 800. The good news was that drop tanks for the Thunderbolts were finally beginning to become more available, and two groups of P-38 Lightnings arrived. The P-38 would never become the victor that it was in other theaters because its performance suffered in the extreme cold of northwestern Europe, but it could provide deep escort. The best news was that the P-51 Mustang would arrive in England in December. This aircraft, with its superb performance, could also go all the way with the bombers regardless of the target. The days of Luftwaffe superiority were definitely numbered. 320 Aircraft were dispatched, 91 aborted, and 60 were shot down. 594 crew members were missing in action.

As you can see from the above B-17s took terrible pounding before the long range North American P-51s were employed as escort fighters. I am not sure if our beloved B-24s would have fared any better under the same conditions. Yes! the press did treat the 15th Air Force as some backwater outfit, and all of us harbor some resentment. But we have to recognize that the 8th Air Force with two big B-17 divisions and one B-24 division was bigger and older than the 15th, resulting in huge losses. As the song goes the 8th did get the glory, but the 15th away in sunny Italy fulfilled its assignment successfully and we can hold our heads high, as high as any other fighting force in WWII.

The final bombing mission of the 8th Air Force B-17s was accomplished by the 307th Bomb Group going to Pilsen airfield and, to the Skoda Ammunitions plant nearby with a force of 276 aircraft. B-17s were used after this date in the dropping of food parcels mostly over Holland until May 7, 1945. Leaflets were dropped by B-17s up to May 8, 1945. In comparison, the last mission of the 484th Bomb Group was on April 26, 1945.

Production of the B-17 from Douglas, Lockheed, and Boeing was 12,725. Wing Span 103 feet, 9 inches, Length 74 feet 4 inches, Wright R-1820-97 engines delivering 1200hp, Top Speed 287 MPH, service Ceiling 35,000 feet, range 3400 miles, empty weight 36,135 pounds, gross weight 55,000 pounds. An all cargo B-17 was called a C-108. There were more B-17Gs built than any other, this is the model with the chin turret. The 8th Air Force employed the B-17E, the B-17F, and the B-17G.

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