



RICHARD R. BROOME



The Flying Fortress

They Hated Their Work, But They Loved Their Plane

(Editor's note: America is the greatest experiment in human freedom and dignity ever attempted by man. But it's an experiment not yet completed and a new generation of Americans must make it better. And nobody can do much about America's todays and tomorrows if they don't understand her yesterdays. With this in mind, it seems appropriate that 30 years after the defeat of the mighty German Luftwaffe, we recall a few of the thousands of sacrifices made by the young men who flew the legendary Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress. These men paid a frightful price to assure government, "of the people, by the people and for the people." The average life of a B-17 crew was only 15 missions, and 25 were mandatory. Many of the lucky ones who made it through 25

missions and were eligible to return home, volunteered for additional combat duty.

A total of 12,731 Flying Fortresses were produced in the period 1935-1945. Approximately 4,750 of these aircraft were lost on combat missions carrying 47,500 crew members. Numerous other types of aircraft were also involved in the defeat of Hitler's war machine.

What you are about to read are short stories written by a few Frontier Airlines' employees who were B-17 crew members, including miscellaneous B-17 combat photos. It's possible that a former B-17 pilot may be at the controls of this Frontier aircraft or you may see a former B-17 crew member managing a Frontier station; others may be in various management positions. Crew member stories begin on page 30.)

Frontier Captain Seymour "Ike" Isaacs flew B-17G 43-38385 with the 8th Air Force, 34th bomb group. His airplane, "Sugah", depicted in this portrait was created from Captain Isaacs' photos by Richard R. Broome. Rick can be contacted, regarding his paintings at 3140 Meander Circle, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80917. (303) 596-5622.

George Meshko



Frontier Captain George Meshko after completing 25 missions as a ball-turret gunner on a B-17, age 18, year — 1944.

George is presently a Boeing 737 captain for Frontier. He served with the 96th bomb group, 8th Air Force based outside of Norwich, England during 1943 and 1944 as a ball-turret gunner and flight engineer on a B-17 named "Sky Ball." George was only 18 years old when he completed his 25 missions. Of the original 250 men in the 96th bomb group only George and 18 others survived 25 missions. George didn't become a pilot until he returned to the U.S.A.

"A fairy tale starts with 'Once upon a time long, long ago.' A war story starts, 'You're not going to believe this, but it really happened.'

"During the fall of 1943 prior to the invasion of Europe, German U-Boats were raising havoc with Allied shipping — especially through the North Sea area, which was a pipeline for supplying Russia.

"One miserable day in November, our crew volunteered for a special mission dealing with the U-Boat menace. Our B-17 was stripped of all armor plate, bomb racks and extra weight. Our twelve 50 caliber machine guns were increased to 24 and refitted with special armor-piercing bul-



lets. The bomb bay was reworked to accommodate a 1,000-gallon tank filled with green paint with a large dump valve on the bottom.

"Our curiosity was short-lived as we took off early the next morning headed over the North Sea at low altitude seeking the 'wolf pack.'

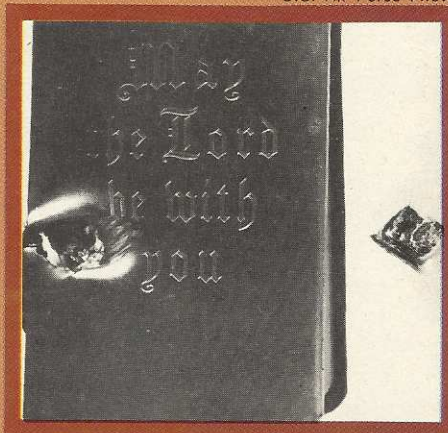
"Sure enough — there they were right where British Intelligence said they would be. Plainly visible, running a few feet below periscope depth. We maneuvered for our run and dropped down just above the waves — bombs away! Whoops — I mean paint away! A fast pull-up and course reversal. As the first U-Boat started to surface, his periscope was completely covered with green paint. The U-Boat skipper not realizing his scope was out of the water, kept rising. When the sub was completely surfaced, all of our guns blazed away and the sub exploded and sank in flames. Our crew was credited with one German sub 'shot down' and a second probably destroyed or severely damaged.

"After I completed my tour of duty, someone up the command decided I should be retained in England as an instructor.

"As things turned out, I cracked up an English bicycle and broke my ankle. There I was in the field hospital ward, my leg up on ropes, with a dozen or so legitimately wounded airmen.

"It just so happened that before they released me, a bunch of visiting dignitaries from Washington — generals, congressmen, etc. — were going from bed to bed pinning Purple Hearts on the wounded and giving them words of encouragement. As the dignitaries came closer to me, I started shaking in my socks. You can understand how this distinguished group responded when I tried to explain how I fell off my bicycle."

U.S. Air Force Photo



An aircraft commander in George's 96th bomb group always carried a Bible in his flight jacket pocket. It saved his life by stopping a piece of flak that would have pierced his heart.

Lou Berets

U.S. Air Force Photo



Lou Berets next to ball-turret on his B-17, "Knockout Drops."

Lou is presently Frontier Station Manager at Grand Junction, Colo. He was in the Army Air Force from 1942 until 1945 with the 34th bomb group, based in Mendlesham Army Air Base in England. Lou flew 28 missions as a ball-turret gunner on a B-17.

"The name of my plane was 'Knockout Drops.' Most of my missions were in the lead plane that carried the bomb sight, and this was the first aircraft the Germans tried to knock out. We bombed Munich, Frankfurt, Berlin and Merseburg. The flak was always heavy, and fighters were waiting for their chance. We never had to bail out or crash land, but we limped home many times full of flak holes with one or two engines shot out."

S.P. "Rusty" Ruster

U.S. Air Force Photo

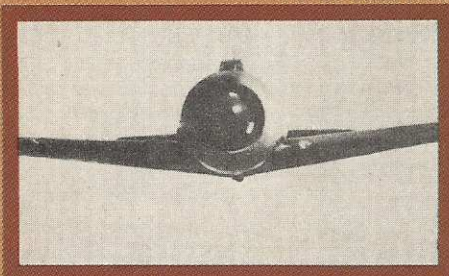


Rusty Ruster (center kneeling) with his crew prior to departure from Lincoln, Nebraska Army Air Field 1944. Four of the crew members standing were killed by the FW-190 that shot them down December 18, 1944. Rusty was 19 years old at the time.

Rusty is presently a pilot for Frontier flying Boeing 737 jets. He was accepted for aviation cadet training in 1941 at the age of 17. He graduated from flying school in 1943, age 19, and was checked out as aircraft commander on the B-17, assigned to the 347 bomb sqd., 99th bomb group in Foggia, Italy. The following is from the diary that Rusty kept after arriving in Italy. This is the record of his third mission:

"On the morning of December 18, 1944, we were told our target would be a synthetic oil works in Eastern Germany. We took off at 8:45 A.M. and target time was noon. Bombs were away at noon, and our formation turned to the left for the flight home. I settled back to relax a bit when I spotted seven or eight German FW-190's coming up after us. I knew we were in for a fight. On the first pass of a FW-190 the enemy crippled our ship by shooting out our control surfaces, leaving us helpless. At the same time, 88's opened up from the

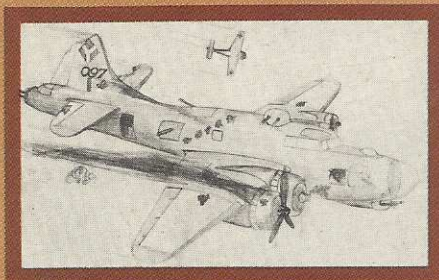
U.S. Air Force Photo



For some of Ruster's crew, and many other bomber crews, this silhouette was the last thing they saw on earth. The German FW-190.

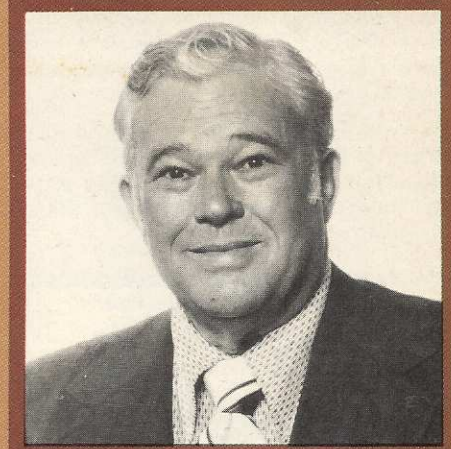
ground scoring a direct hit in the nose. We gradually were falling into a turn to the left. A 20MM shell grazed my head. I called the crew and told them to bail out. After seeing the copilot and engineer go for the escape hatch, I reached for my parachute and started out of my seat, but as I let go of the controls, the ship went into a tight spin to the left. The spin pinned me into my seat and I couldn't budge. I was sure I was a goner. Something happened and I was tossed out of my seat against the roof of the cockpit. I was then thrown down on the catwalk between the seats. Luckily, I held on to my parachute, so I snapped it on and made a lunge for the escape hatch.

"As I floated down into Germany, I could see German soldiers waiting for me. When I tried to get up after hitting the ground, I found my left leg badly shot up and the Germans were all around me. An officer came up and his first words were, 'for you the war is over.'"



This drawing was made by Rusty Ruster showing what he thought his B-17 looked like after the FW-190 got through with it. He drew this masterpiece while he was in prison, north of Berlin.

B.R. "Bud" Naylor



This is a recent photo of "Bud" Naylor. All of his war pictures were lost during a move.

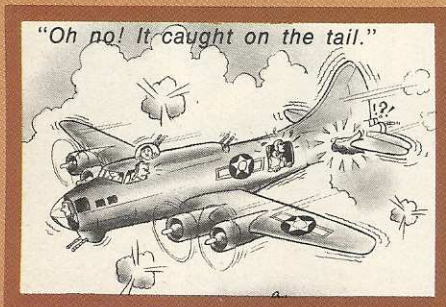
Bud is Vice President of Maintenance for Frontier. He was with the 8th Air Force in England and flew 52 missions as aircraft commander — 33 in Martin B-26 bombers and his last 19 missions in B-17's.

"We were returning from a mission somewhere over Germany and a funny thing happened. Although it wasn't funny at the time. It was a rule in the group that if anyone used the toilet during a mission, he had to clean it out after arrival back at the base. Our waist-gunner, who was from Paris, Texas, didn't like the cleaning job so he came up with a bright idea of using a canvas engine cover as a toilet. He then rolled up the cover and threw it out of his waist-gunner window. Nobody would have known the difference except the cover got caught on the tail. It caused the airplane to shake so bad that I thought we were hit by flak and I advised the crew to prepare to bail out. Just as I was ready to give the 'bail out' signal, the waist-gunner rushed to the cockpit and told me what happened. It took me 45 minutes to shake the cover off the tail. Needless to say, our Texas waist-gunner became an expert at cleaning toilets.

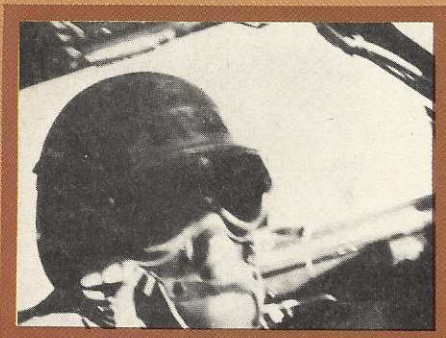
"On June 2, 1943, I volunteered to fly my 52nd mission. As everyone knows who has ever been in the service, you never volunteer for anything. However, this mission was the first to be going all the way to Berlin and after the way Hitler's Luftwaffe had been clobbering us, I was eager to see Berlin get it. Besides, I was known in the group as the 'old man.' I was the oldest at age 24, and the old man wasn't about to quit.

"We made it to the target in fine shape and bombs away. Just as I started to turn to head for home, we took direct hits in the nose and behind the bomb bay. The airplane literally blew up. Fortunately for the copilot and myself, we had not yet closed the bomb bay doors. This allowed both of us to dive out the bomb bay. We never again heard from the other eight crew members.

"I was a prisoner of war for two years close to Berlin. I weighed 175 pounds when I bailed out June 2, 1943, and when I was liberated by the Russians in 1945, I weighed 98 pounds."



S.W. "Ike" Isaacs



"Ike" in cockpit of his Flying Fortress.

Ike is a Boeing 737 captain for Frontier. He was in the 8th Air Force, 34th bomb group (H) 391st bomb sqd. (H) and was based at the town of Mendlesham in Suffolk, England — about 70 miles north of London. Ike flew a total of 35 missions, twice to Berlin, and took part in the Battle of the Bulge. He was an aircraft commander.

"I flew the same airplane during my 35 missions and had nine engine changes and many patch jobs due to flak damage, etc. Two of my crew members were wounded and one was grounded because of battle fatigue. Being of Jewish descent, I knew full well my life wouldn't be worth a plug nickel if I was captured by the Germans. Maybe that's why we somehow always made it home."

Wednesday, December 1, 1944

Stars and Stripes

Daily Newspaper Of The U.S. Armed Forces

The following is copied from the front page of the daily newspaper of the U.S. Armed Forces, Wednesday, Dec. 1, 1944, reporting a raid by the Eighth Air Force against German synthetic-oil plants in the Leipzig area. Ike Isaacs participated in this raid and stated: "B-17's were blowing up all around me throughout the bomb run and I don't mind saying I was scared stiff."

Terrific Flak Costs 56 Heavies

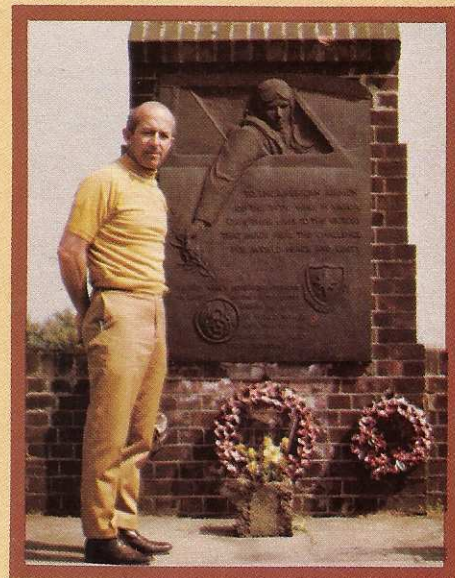
30 Fighters Also Lost In Big Oil Blow

The Germans yesterday met one of the heaviest air blows of the war against their fast-dwindling oil production with a furious barrage of anti-aircraft fire that knocked out of the air 56 of the attacking U.S. heavy bombers and 30 fighters.

More than 1,250 Eighth Air Force heavies and more than 1,000 Eighth and Ninth Air Force fighters made the attack against German synthetic-oil plants at Bohlen, Zeitz, Mersburg and Lutzendorf — all in the Leipzig area.

Germany's oil production is reported already to have been pounded down to less than one-fourth what it was in the spring.

Since the spring, according to Eighth AF reports, the Germans have been steadily reinforcing the 40-square mile area in which most of their synthetic-oil plants are located, moving anti-aircraft installations into the area from all parts of the Reich.



In 1971, Ike visited Mendlesham, England and to his surprise the townspeople had erected a monument on Ike's old air field. The words on this monument state: "To the American airmen of the 34th who in valor, gave their lives to the victory that made real the challenge for world peace and unity."

This photo was taken from the cockpit window by Ike showing a cylinder sticking up through the No. 2 engine cowling and the engine shut down. This engine damage was caused by flak.

Joe Claffy



Joe Claffy in the cockpit of a B-17 along with his copilot, M/Sgt. Clyde Mort.

Joe is a Flight Dispatcher for Frontier and was in the 310th Ferry Command as a B-17 pilot. He ferried B-17's and other types of aircraft to various bases from England to North Africa. Joe was rated as a service pilot and was not combat-qualified.

"Most of our work was delivering aircraft and flying sick and wounded. The enlisted men who flew with us did not have to be pilot-qualified.

I remember a young man who was my co-pilot on a B-17 I was ferrying to an air base in England and it didn't seem to me he had the slightest idea of what he was doing. After we were airborne, I asked him how much time he had in a B-17. He replied that this was the very first time he had been up in an airplane. 'Until yesterday, I was a cook,' he added."

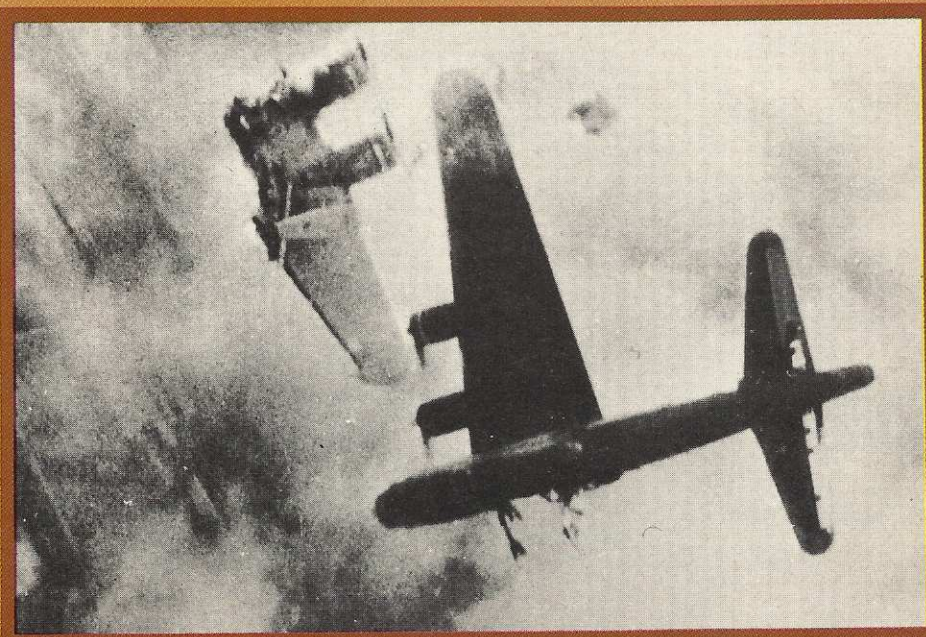
Robert Oswald

Bob is Sales and Service Manager at Manhattan, Kansas for Frontier. He was an armorer-gunner on a B-17 with the 301st bomb group, 419th bomb sqd., 15th Air Force in Fogg, Italy. Bob completed his tour of duty with 35 missions in 1944/45.

"I was hit on two different occasions by flak, once on the knee and on my neck. I was very lucky for the flak was well spent and all I received was bruises. It was enough to convince me that the job could become dangerous."

Other Former B-17 Crew Members Now With Frontier Are:

NAME	JOB WITH FRONTIER	B-17 ASSIGNMENT
Darwin Jimerson	Aircraft Technician	Tail-gunner, based — Diss, England.
Ed Mills	Flight Dispatcher	Pilot instructor, based — Colorado Springs.
Jim Carney	Captain (737)	Commanded B-17 "Bridget O'Flynn" — flew 50 missions in 1943.
Jim Marine	Dir. of Local Service Marketing	Pilot on B-17's & B-29's at Hendricks Field in Sebring, Florida.
Jack Shade	Captain (737)	Flew B-17's on anti-submarine patrols out of Panama and Guatemala City.
Scott Millis	Operations Manager	Commanded B-17's from England — shot down over Germany and was a prisoner of war.
C. K. Logue	Captain (737)	Flew 25 missions over occupied Europe as aircraft commander on B-17's.
Bill Graves	Dir. of Line Maintenance	B-17 top turret-gunner.
Bob Nicholson	Captain (737)	B-17 test pilot and instructor pilot, based — Rapid City, So. Dakota.
Wayne N. Aspinall, Jr.	Captain (737)	B-17 instructor — Ardmore, Oklahoma. B-29 instructor — Alamogordo, N.M.



The long final plunge.