

FLAK-RIDDLED FORT FOUGHT SAFELY HOME

U.S. Bombers Claim Heavy Toll of German Fighters

Their ships were riddled by flak; one was in flames, and five crew members were wounded. But they kept at their guns, drove off a swarm of FW190s, and somehow got the Fortresses home.

This was the story of heroism revealed yesterday when Headquarters, European Theater of Operations, told how seven members of the crew of a single Flying Fortress and four from a sister ship who took part in the American raid on Lille, France, Oct. 9, won decorations. Five crewmen won the Purple Heart, for wounds.

One Fort, piloted by Capt. James J. Griffith, Jr., Highpoint, N.C., encountered unusually heavy and accurate anti-aircraft fire. Two bursts of flak struck the right wing flap, tearing away two square yards of fabric. A third burst smashed a 12-inch hole in the fuselage just forward of the right waist gunner. The blast knocked the waist gunners off their feet, wounding them both. One was Lt. Col. Stuart M. Porter, Muskigee, Okla., the other was Cpl. J. G. Cottros, Charlotte, N.C.

Gunner Hit Three Times

They struggled to their feet in time to fire at a formation of 20 Focke-Wulf 190s that had closed in with guns blazing.

Explosive shells from 20mm. cannons ripped through the Fortress. L. E. Dennis, Farmington, Ill., gunner, was hit in three places. One of his guns was put out of action; he fought back with his remaining gun.

The FWs kept coming. The radio gunner, Cpl. F. E. Hurn, Syracuse, N.Y., was put out of action with a severe stomach wound. In the top turret Sgt. P. R. Taylor, Randolph, Minn., drove off an FW190 that came within 10 yards before it dived away. He was wounded, but in the excitement didn't know it at the time.

Cpl. Got 'A Flamer'

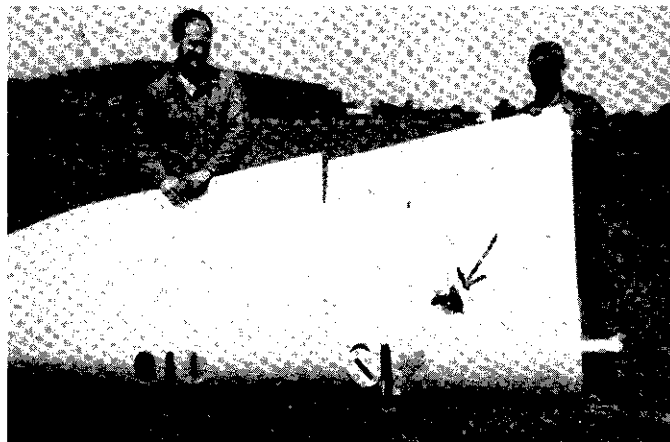
The tail gunner, Cpl. S. E. Blanchard, Milwaukee, Wis., was lucky. A four-inch hole appeared in the fuselage near his shoulder. His oxygen line was broken, but, when an enemy fighter came in he shot it down in flames—an act for which he was awarded the Air Medal.

Meantime, the ship was being shot virtually to pieces. A pair of six-inch holes appeared in the wings; hits were scored on the tail assembly, and shrapnel fragments riddled six of the 10 para-

chutes. One engine was shot out. The tail was so damaged that the pilot and co-pilot had to prop their knees against the wheel to keep the nose up.

But they brought the "Fort" back to a safe landing and, eventually, citations for seven of her gallant crew.

The other Fortress, piloted by Maj. Robert B. Keck, Allentown, Pa., was heavily attacked, riddled with flak, and set on fire.



Damage by German shell. (L to R) Pvt. Roth and Cpl. Veneklassen, 325th Tech. Supply.

Came Home in Flames

Flames swirled around the ball turret and licked through the open panels of the waist gun positions. Sgt. Archie Cothren, Dierks, Ark., felt his oxygen mask shot away as he was wounded in the jaw. He baled out over enemy territory.

Seeing this, the Germans closed in for the kill, but in the next three minutes the gunners of the Fortress shot down three attackers. One was credited to Sgt. O. R. Billings, Hereford, Tex., who was wounded in the leg. The tail gunner, Sgt. Carl A. Drake, Ft. Knox, Ky., knocked down another.

Although the big Fortress was partly disabled, the flames died away, and they managed to get it back over the Channel and down for a safe landing.

From C.I. Newspaper, Stars & Stripes, November 30, 1942
1942.

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