

FROM THE BOOK DESTINY'S CHILD

Written by Jack Paget

This is an interesting account, if only for the fact that Jack was flying tailgunner, in the low squadron of the low group, the 401st of the 91st. This afforded him a pretty good view of things as they happened, especially leading up to the bomb run. Fighter attacks were pretty well incessant on the 91st, all the way in, during, and after the bomb run. Most of the time the Luftwaffe did not attack during the bomb run, for fear of flak hits to themselves, but on this day, they went right in with the bombers.

(GA/ga)

Direct quote starts on last paragraph, page 95, Chapter 16:

"...A half hour later we were over Germany and our course changed that would lead us to our target area. Shortly we approached and turned on our IP and our heading again changed putting us on a direct line toward Leipzig.

On previous missions I had experienced fighter attacks from every conceivable direction, but generally from the front. This mission, however, was different. I remember the navigator informing the crew that we were to pick up P-47 escort in this area. Looking out to my right at about the 7 o'clock position, the left side of our aircraft, I observed a horde of fighter aircraft sweeping into a turn to approach us from the rear. At least 60 or more of them. At first I thought they were the P-47 fighter escort. Then I identified them as FW 190's, with a few ME-109's.

They were stacked so as to be able to fire upon us all at the same time. It was then I informed the crew:

'Enemy fighters are attacking at 6 o'clock level. There are dozens of them. They're coming in fast.' I excitedly said over the intercom system as I began to fire at them in short 6 to 8 round bursts, alternating my guns so that I was able to keep up a constant fire.

'There, one exploded right in front of me. There goes another one, I can't miss. Wow! They're coming right at me,' I yelled into the intercom.

'Right waist to tail,' a voice called to me, 'Where are they?'

'Coming low now at 5 o'clock,' I quickly answered, 'some are level flying between us, get on them. They're FW 190's.' A lot of chatter over the intercom continued and you could hear all the gunners firing and then:

'There I got one,' from an unidentified voice.

'Here comes some more,' another voice called out.

'I hit one, I hit one,' yet another voice, 'he's on fire. There he goes, diving down.'

I thought, well that's four, those and my two. I generally did not put in claims for enemy fighters I thought I had shot down (there had been two more on previous missions), because the Air Force suddenly became aware that the number of claims by gunners far exceeded the number actually shot down and it became a hassle as to whom was in the better position to claim the "kill". But I knew without a doubt that I had gotten those two and by gosh I was going to claim them when I returned to base.

Then from all that noise from the attack, there was momentary silence. The German fighters had passed through and now were regrouping for a second attack. I could see them off in the distance and I

scanned the skies hoping to see some of our friendly escort, but could not see them if they were there.

On the first pass I saw "Destiny' Child" go down. I also saw one or two others go down. I had been quite busy with returning the enemy's fire with my own. Fighters had been exploding or falling apart all around me. After the attack I realized that I had lost contact with the crew and soon discovered that the wires to my intercom, among many others, were severed. I also discovered that my chest type parachute had two large holes through it as big as my fists. I always had it resting by my right foot against the side of the fuselage. I didn't ever wear "flak suits", preferring instead to kneel upon them for protection from beneath. I never wore my "flak Helmet". Both of these protective devices I found to be too bulky and restrictive to my movements. I wasn't aware of any other problems at this time, ever after the 2nd attack. That attack wasn't as intense as the first, but they reverted to attacking from all angles, and I didn't have the opportunity to fire at them as readily as I did during the first attack. Probably because they themselves had suffered heavy losses, they had split their formation, the others attacking the big group to our right, the 381st Bomb Group, the triangle "L" painted on the vertical stabilizer. I know that we continued on to bomb the target.

Just as we dropped our bombs, another wave of enemy fighters hit us. I was firing at two FW-190's as they appeared slightly below and to my left and they were gone in a matter of seconds. I guess I hadn't hit them, at least seriously. Up front, the cockpit lit up like a Christmas tree from the German magnesium tracers. The plane shuddered. We had been hit, and hit hard. All the intercom was gone. Lt. Hultin worked feverishly as the rudders and ailerons responded sluggishly to his efforts to control the aircraft. Captain Martin switched to auto-pilot, and that aided controlling the plane possible. The number 3 and 4 engines were on fire.

'Foam them out,' the Captain yelled.

'We have a windmill on #4,' the pilot told him. Our aircraft had already drifted away from the formation, for what was left of it. Several planes had been shot out of our lower group, as well from the upper two, and I realized that we had sustained critical losses."

(End of quote from the book "Destiny's Child", by John R. Paget. I have deleted a couple of pages of conversation here, as the crew readied to bail out, which they did successfully. GA/ga)

Following are the losses to the 91st BG on that day:

401st Sqd - LL-A ser # 42-102509 The Liberty Run

401st Sqd - LL-H ser # 42-31812 Destiny's Child

401st Sqd - LL-Z ser # 42-97954 Winnie-Frank-Joe

401st Sqd - LL-P ser # 43-37624 Victory Queen

322nd Sqd - LG-A ser # 42-38027 Heavenly Body

322nd Sqd - LG-S ser # 42-311982 Superstitious Aloysius

322nd Sqd - LG-? Ser # 43-37819 (no-name)

324th Sqd - DF-? Ser # 42-97999 (no name)

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