

The Schweinfurt Mission

Although we lost no a/c, Mission 28, 14 October 1943, was the first Schweinfurt raid, a day long to be remembered in the annals of the 8th Air Force. The Target was thought to be a vital ball and roller bearing factory at Schweinfurt, deep in the heart of the Fatherland. This was to be a deep penetration and the first time the entire force would go in and out through the German fighter defenses. Again adverse weather handicapped assembly and almost cancelled the mission, but across the channel the sky was cloudless. The 385th headed the third and last wing of the task force. ME 109s and Focke-Wulfs dashed in and out of the formation as they entered France, they fired explosive 20 millimeter shells. The ferocity of the attacks sometimes approached the fanatical as they pressed home to suicidal range. The attacks were almost continuous throughout the mission, lapsing for one group only when the enemy turned his entire attention momentarily to some other unit. There was also heavy and accurate anti-aircraft fire. On this mission the 8th Air Force suffered the heaviest losses, 60 heavy bombers from a force of 300. But gunners claimed the downing of 250 enemy fighters. The 385th was very fortunate; all of our aircraft returned safely. Pilot Robert Smith in 42-30096, *Liberty Belle*, remembered the serious damage from FLAK and fighters. "We had the super-chargers of two engines knocked out, two gunners seriously wounded, and the oxygen system destroyed. Although we were still under enemy attack by fighters, the navigator, Ungar, shuttled oxygen bottles to the wounded gunners, keeping them alive until we got back to the channel and a lower altitude." Ungar was killed in action on a later mission.