

My Dad's Fiftieth Mission(s)



In July of 1944, my father, Tech Sergeant Leroy Murray, was serving as the flight engineer in the top turret of B-17 (#42-31590 – no nick-name) flying out of Amendola Field near Foggia, Italy with the 20th Bomb Squadron, 2nd Bombardment Group, 5th Bomb Wing, 15th Air Force, USAAF. After completing 48 of his required 50 missions he was scheduled for a dangerous double-credit mission on 25 July 1944, which would complete his combat tour and send him home. This is his first-hand account taken directly from his war diary which was found among my mother's things after her death in 2023.

“. . . July 25th, 1944 –

Well, we flew today (15th Air Force Mission #239 to Linz, Austria) and when we came down everyone congratulated Lt. Drais, Sisco and I for finishing our missions. We were plenty happy too. In fact, before we landed, we buzzed the camp area three times, and I took pictures with the co-pilot's (Lt. Steele) movie camera. When we got up to Group where we always have to go after we come back from a mission to tell them what we saw and etc. –

Well, the first thing when we got back was a Lt. told Lt. Drais he was to go see the Captain. The next thing was that we didn't get credit for our mission because we didn't hit the target (When I say we, I mean the whole Group consisting (of all) four squadrons). This bit of news meant we have to fly the mission over. You can imagine how we felt after thinking we were through and every(one) had congratulated us.

Well, this was half of it. Al (Drais) went to see the Captain who (in) turn sent him to the Colonel. He reported to the Colonel and

was told that he was going to get a general Court Martial for buzzing the Camp and for breaking formation. Boy this really hurt because Al is the best officer or guy I have ever come into contact with since I have been in the Army. We don't know yet if the Colonel will change his mind or not but we hope so because he was pretty mad because of the poor bombing and maybe after he gets over that he will reconsider.

At any rate we caught flak and should have got credit for the mission, but we don't have any say-so. I guess we will have to fly another mission.

No mail.

July 26th, 1944 –

Well, this is the day I have been waiting for. We finally finished our 50 missions.

I was plenty happy when we landed not because we had finished so much but because we got back to the base safely. Today we all had the narrowest escape of our lives.

Our target was Wiener Neusdorf, Austria (*15th Air Force Mission # 240*). It is right between Wiener Neustadt and Vienna, two really tough targets, and boy we caught plenty of flak.

It would not have been so bad if Colonel Ryan had not led us ov-er the target twice. The first time over the target we did not drop our bombs, so he led us back over. We got plenty of flak the first time, but none hit us.

The second time over we got all the flak they had to offer.

When we were about half-way over the target (*on the second run*) No 2 engine was hit by flak and all the oil ran out so we lost all the oil in the engine before we could feather the prop. (It requires 40 lbs. pressure to feather a propellor, and by losing the oil our oil pressure dropped below 40 lbs.) So, with the engine cut off and the

prop wind- milling in the air, it set up a terrific vibration which shook the whole plane and excited everyone.

But in a few minutes Al got it under control so that it did not vibrate so much, so everyone settled down a little.

But not for long, for Cisco reported No 3 gas tank leaking and this is very serious in the air. About the only thing to do in a case like that is to bail out or continue on and pray to God, which I did, that it doesn't catch fire.

By this time the rest of the formation had left us while we were still deep into enemy territory and subject to (*attack from enemy*) fighters.

Well, next No 2 engine started running hot from its run away or windmilling prop. This was pretty serious. With all the oil gone out of the engine, it could very easily catch fire. So, when this happened, Al had us to throw out all the Armor plating, Bomb sight, Upper turret Sperry sight, waist guns, all the ammunitions, flak helmets, or anything that would make the ship lighter and have to carry less load. This was all we could do for the present, so we sweated out the engine.

Shortly after this, four P-51's saw us and gave us cover over the worst part of enemy territory that was subject to enemy fighters. All this time, we had our parachutes on, ready to jump, and also trying to get to an emergency landing field on the coast of Yougoslavia (*sic*) that is held by Americans.

Next, the No 3 engine ran out of gas due to the gas leak, so I had to transfer gas from the dead No 2 engine into No. 3 engine so we could start it again. But, if we transferred more than 40 or 50 gals at a time, it would leak out very fast due to the pressure of lots of gas in the tank. So, in order to keep it running I transferred a little gas into it every few minutes.

By doing this, we still had three engines going. So when we got to the coast of Yougoslavia Al decided we would try to make it back

to the field, as we had plenty of gas, and we didn't have but about 130 miles to go, and we had already gone about 400 miles or more under these conditions. He call(ed) up *(on the plane's intercom)* and ask(ed) the crew if they wanted to try and go on or land in Yougo. We told him whatever he did, we would stick with him. So, we made it alright. Boy, the coast of Italy sure did look good.

When we got over the field, we found that the cable that locks the tail wheel was shot into, but this wasn't too bad, as the wheel was in the lock position, and that is the way you land.

As we made a left bank (turn), gas started to pour from the right wing into the bomb-bay and radio room. This was very serious, for one spark from a small electric motor (and there are lots of motors) might cause the ship to blow up. As we were only 1000 feet from the ground and coming in for a landing, it was too late to jump and there was nothing to do but chance a landing. This we did, and Al made a beautiful landing without a single bounce. He then cut No. 3 engine and taxied with nos. 1 & 4 eng.

When we got to the end of the run way, I had to unlock the tail wheel in order to taxi. I unlocked it by going back to the tail wheel and pulling on the broken cable. We taxied up to the revetment and cut our engines. When I stepped out on the ground, I was the happiest I have ever been in my life and perhaps ever will be. I was happy because I had finished my 50 missions, and mainly, because I was alive after the mission, which was the most exciting mission I participated in. I thank God that I am safely through my missions and I hope I never have to fly combat again.

Again today, no mail. Still have hopes.

I hope mother, dad, Gerry *(girlfriend)*, & all will not worry any more for I am in less danger now than when I was in training in the states. . . .”

Submitted by Ernie Murray emurray475@aol.com

The News and Observer

TWELVE PAGES TODAY

RALEIGH, N. C., SATURDAY MORNING, AUGUST 26, 1944.

TWELVE PAGES TODAY

Decorated



LEROY MURRAY.

FLIER REMEMBERS HIS 50TH MISSION

T-Sgt. Leroy Murray of Rocky Mount Had Close Call; Wins Decorations

With the 15th AAF in Italy, Aug. 25.—T-Sgt. Leroy Murray, son of Mr. and Mrs. M. N. Murray, 1362 S. Franklin St., Rocky Mount, N. C., has flown 50 combat missions as an aerial engineer and gunner in a 15th Air Force Flying Fortress squadron operating from an advanced base in Italy.

"On my 50th mission to the aircraft factory at Wiener-Nieusdorf, on July 26, 1944, I saw more excitement than in the rest of my missions put together," says Sergeant Murray.

"Coming off the target, we were struck four times by flak, each strike hitting in a vulnerable spot. As a result, the No. 2 engine was put out of commission and the No. 3 engine gas line was ruined. Our pilot was forced to gradually change gas from one of the other engines into the No. 3, so that it wouldn't go out altogether. In the meanwhile we were all kept busy throwing all extra material out of the plane to lessen the weight so that we could get over the high mountains between our target and base.

"Until we got back, we hadn't fully realized the danger we had been in because we had all been so busy during the emergency period."

Sergeant Murray, a bookkeeper in civilian life, entered the Army in September, 1942, and attended Aircraft Mechanic School at Sheppard Field, Texas, and Gunnery School at Harlingen, Texas. He has been overseas five months.

Sergeant Murray, a Band letter winner in high school, has been awarded the Good Conduct Medal, the European-African and Middle Eastern Theater of Operations Campaign Ribbon with two battle stars and the Air Medal with four Oak Leaf Clusters.