

The Bloody Hundredth

On October 10, 1943, thirteen B-17s of the 100th Bomb Group took off from their base at Thorpe Abbots, about midway between Norfolk and Ipswich in southeast England, and headed east to bomb Münster, Germany. The 100th was flying as the low group, the last one in its formation that day. As it approached Münster, the 100th was confronted by “the greatest concentration of Nazi fighters ever hurled at an American bomber formation.” Swarms of fighters knifed through the formation, firing machine guns and launching air-to-air rockets. “In seven minutes,” writes historian Donald Miller, “the Hundredth ceased to exist as an organized fighting unit.” The group lost twelve of its B-17s, 121 men killed, wounded or missing, and, for the second day in a row, its mission commander. It also earned a new *nom de guerre*: the Bloody Hundredth.



R. M. LYNCH

With such devastating losses, the 100th Bomb Group had to replace its experienced pilots, bombardiers, navigators, and aircrew with replacements coming over from the Army Air Force training schools in the United States. Roy Merlin Lynch, Jr. of East Orange, New Jersey, was one of the replacement navigators who would eventually arrive at Thorpe Abbots.

Lynch was a mechanical engineering major and a member of Clemson’s Class of 1941. An avid athlete, Lynch competed on the boxing and track teams and played lacrosse. He was a member of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers and was a senior private in the 1st Battalion, 2nd Regiment of the Cadet Brigade.

By the time Lynch reported to the 100th’s 350th Bomb Squadron in mid-1944, the 8th Air Force was targeting

Germany’s synthetic oil industry. With the Russians cutting off German access to oil fields in the east, Hitler’s regime was forced to find alternative sources for the petroleum it needed to



350th Bomb Squadron B-17 in flight.

sustain its war machine. Army Air Force strategists believed that a bombing campaign targeting German oil facilities could reduce gasoline production in the Third Reich by fifty percent. The

resulting fuel crisis would reduce the mobility of German ground forces and reduce the number of German aircraft that could counter the Allies' bomber missions. A raid on May 12 against synthetic oil facilities at Merseburg, Germany, alarmed Reich war production and armaments minister Albert Speer. He reported to Hitler that "the enemy has struck us at one of our weakest points. If they persist at it this time, we will soon no longer have any fuel production worth mentioning."

Persist they did. On September 11, 1944, more than eleven hundred 8th Air Force bombers and 440 escort fighters were dispatched to hit synthetic oil plants and refineries in eastern Germany. Second Lieutenant Lynch and his crew were part of a 22-ship formation assigned to bomb oil facilities at Ruhland. As Lynch's aircraft approached the initial point of its bomb run at 1256 hours, it was attacked by a large formation of Focke-Wulf 190 fighters. The B-17 shuddered from many hits from the fighters' 20 mm guns. The fighter attacks disabled the bomber and started fires in the bomb bay and two of the engines. Six crew members bailed out of the doomed aircraft, but Lynch was wounded and unable to escape. He died when the bomber crashed and its payload exploded.

Photo: 100thBG.com

See also *Masters of the Air: America's Bomber Boys Who Fought The Air War Against Nazi Germany*, by Donald Miller, 2006.