



U.S. Army Air Force Photo

It was a close call for S/Sgt. Elmer Nutter when the Fort called I'll Be Around led the formation of Eighth Air Force bombers over Berlin Saturday. Nutter, a ball turret gunner from Canton, Ohio, shows S/Sgt. James Graddock, of La Grange, Ill., left waist gunner, where a flak fragment tore a hole in his cap.

## Forts Beat Terrific Clouds, Cold to Bomb Berlin 1st Time

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getting the bomb-bay doors open. They were frozen tight. I never saw anyone work so hard as 'Brownie' (1/Lt. Albert H. Brown, of Decatur, Ill.) on the salvo handle to dump those bombs on Berlin. They went down all right.

"How did I feel knowing we were the first Americans to bomb Berlin? Well, I know I felt a helluva lot of satisfaction. But I kept wondering where the hell were the German fighters. We had to drop down, and the majority of the trip back was made entirely on instruments. We couldn't see the ground. Again that boy Durr did a beautiful job of navigation. Fighters? So help me, all I saw was three Mes. They were lined up coming into us when ZOOM! Down came a bunch of P51s and that was the last I saw of the Luftwaffe on the whole trip. Flak, too, was surprisingly weak. The trip was long, it was cold, but it was worth it."

The gunners back from Big B envied T/Sgt. Harold Stearns, 21-year-old top-turret man from Passaic, N.J., who was credited officially with getting the first Nazi fighter over the Reich's capital and biggest city.

"An Me109 came in out of the sun," Stearns said. "He came ramming in at 12 o'clock high. I got him in my sight at 800 yards. As he started to bore in at our nose I sweated him out for about 400 yards. Then I nailed him with about 150 rounds."

One Fortress scored the dubious honor of being the first bomber to come back from Berlin in trouble. S/Sgt. Junior

Bucher, 25, of Cottonwood Falls, Kan., left-waist gunner, told about it:

"The Mustangs helped us along. We only had three engines. We saw some enemy fighters but the 51s kept 'em off. You can quote me on it, those Mustangs look beautiful any time you're in trouble. But over Berlin on three engines, they're wonderful."

Many of the crews were first-mission men. They'd climbed out of warm sacks in the pre-dawn darkness, chowed and gone to their first briefings to find their target for the day was Berlin, Big B. Some of them—and some veterans, too—frankly said they were scared, but even though the weather grew incredibly bad they pressed on.

Most of the men who bombed Berlin came back without seeing any more or as much of the German capital as the RAF airmen who go there by night. Clouds were almost solid, and they towered even above the bombers and their escorts. A few planes, however, stumbled onto gaps in the clouds and saw their bombs smash into buildings surrounded by trees, and saw the white blanket of snow which probably helped to keep down German fighters.

They lost their fighter escort just after that, and for a couple of hours flew westward alone. But most of them saw no signs of the enemy except the clumps of black flak which popped up through the clouds every once in a while, and when they got back to their bases and went to interrogation, the big maps on the walls of the interrogation rooms had grown, in eight or ten hours, a hell of a lot smaller.