

John Pletcher: B-26s were sent to the South Pacific initially and they found that they were not a suitable airplane, the B-25 would be a better airplane there. So they were replaced with the B-25s and quite a few of our people ended up in B-25s to go on to the Pacific and some of them ended up in B-26 crews and went over to the European Theatre: to North Africa or to England. They ran a lot of B-26s out of England, out across the channel. They were the heavily used medium bombardment leading up to the invasion of the continent – a lot of B-26s were used; low level bombing of rail yards, bridges, dams and power plants, anything that the Germans were using that they could destroy. They were going in at altitudes of 15-17,000 feet, where, the B-17s were going in at much higher altitude.

They found out that the low level tactics in Europe were not suitable because they had too much ground fire power, too much stuff on the ground, too many machine guns and anti-aircraft guns, too much ground opposition - so low level, I mean tree-top level stuff, was just, practically suicide. They lost one entire B-26 squadron, initially, over, I guess it was over, Holland or the Dutch. The submarine pens and the ground fire in addition to what fighters they encountered they shot down every airplane in the squadron. And then they sent another squadron over and they had heavy losses. So, then the British told them, well now look, this is a medium altitude airplane. *[sound of train passing by in background]* If you people will go in at a medium altitude – 15 to 17,000 feet, we have found, because we do medium bombing, night bombing – we found out that it takes about 15 seconds for a crew, a ground crew, with an anti-aircraft gun to determine your altitude, set the fuse on the anti-aircraft round and get a bead on you and get a round up there to your altitude. So you've got about 15 seconds so if you keep changing your altitude and course about every 15 seconds it will make it much harder for them to hit you with the anti-aircraft round.

Of course, fighters were another thing- if they happened to be fighters and you didn't have any escort, why, you were in trouble. One of the problems with the B-17s had early on, was that they didn't have any fighters that could fly with the B-17s all the way to the targets. So the last part of the flight to the target and the first part of the return the B-17s and B-24s were without any escort, no fighter cover. It wasn't until later in the war when they got the P-51 and later the P-38s with belly tanks that they could begin to have fighter escorts to engage the German fighters. So the German fighters had a heyday with the B-17s once they were beyond the limited range of the fighters that they did have. That was one of the big problems and the B-17s had very heavy losses early in the war. Their percentage losses were terrible.

I think I remember reading that they had in one big flight, which was, I think, close to 1000 airplanes total that went on the raid, they had lost something like 65 B-17s. Now that's a lot of B-17s.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah, it is.

John Pletcher: That's just unacceptable. The Air Corp lost a lot of people during World War II, a lot of them shot down or killed, a lot of them taken prisoner – those that could bail out, or survived a landing and a lot of them ended up in prison. Even some of our famous fighter pilots eventually got shot down and ended up in prison or war camp.