

Beginning in 1944, I flew 6 combat missions as a B-17 ball turret gunner in the Theater. I was Bomb Squadron, Group (H) at near Ipswich England, as a part Force.



Each mission would oil up our 50 would have to be completely to keep

parts from freezing at high altitude-- 50 degrees below zero We also had to make sure the turret was properly loaded with 500 rounds of .50 caliber ammunition.

An early British assessment of the Sperry ball turret considered it quite untenable, A few of us would have agreed If we had qualms about the angle at which the world was viewed the ball provided an extraordinary vantage-point. The entire ball turret was suspended on a gimbal inside the plane with the central tube of the structure attached to the top of the fuselage. The ball was hinged on the frame on each side of the guns while the yoke of the gimbal pivoted giving the turret movement in azimuth. The guns had to be stowed in a rearward-facing horizontal position for takeoff and landing so the barrels did

not strike the ground To enter the turret had to be moved so the guns were pointing straight down bringing the door inside the fuselage After takeoff and inside the ball. I hooked up my oxygen mask, throat mike, ear phones, heated, suit, slippers, and gloves. A special bag holding my GI shoes and 45-caliber pistol remained on the plane. I then checked the escape door and fastened my shoulder safety strap. I could wear my chest chute in the ball by snapping it to the left side of my harness and let it hang beside me.

After turning on the main power switch, I could swing the turret around and down Two post handles above my head flexed valves in the self-contained electric hydraulic system which moved the turret. On the end of each handle was a firing button for both guns My hands were above my head for the My feet were on rests so I could look through the 13-inch diameter glass panel my face was about 30 inches from the panel. Suspended in between was the optical display of the computing gunsight. A pedal under my left foot adjusted the reticles on the sight. When the target was framed therein, the range was correct. In sighting I was looking directly between my feet After our formation was together in the English Channel, we test fired our

European in the 570th 390th Bomb Parham Field (Suffolk), of the 8th Air

morning we calibers The oil wiped off the guns working

We

guns. In the colder attitude we often had to adjust the solenoids on the gun Over 10,000 feet altitude there was a mandatory oxygen check every ten minutes Our masks might freeze up, shutting off the oxygen causing us to lose consciousness. For the hardto-see ball turret operator, this regular check was very important.

The interphone would get very active when fighters were in the area

Ball turret operators remained in the ball until leaving enemy territory An active turret would discourage attacks on the vulnerable belly of the plane. On our first mission in November, 1944, thirty planes took off that morning. I believe only nine returned that evening. I counted just under 100 flak holes in our 8-17 upon our return. Sixty-five survivors from the 390th were prisoners of war for the duration

I flew as aircraft engineer on the mission May 2. 1945, over the north sea. low altitude and dropped food rather than bombs to the starving Dutch As national president of our 390th Bomb Group(H) Veterans Assoc. I have been active in returning to Europe in late 1900's and 2000. You can't imagine the reception we received when we visited the area where we had dropped food. I even have a video when Dan Rather interviewed us on our base in England where we were having high tea at the local moat house



Eldon Bevens.