



**Francis Noah Utz
Tech Sergeant – B-17's
Top Turret Gunner/Flight Engineer
Army Air Corps
8th Air Force 45th Air Division
96th Bombing Group
337th Bombing Squadron
WWII**

Francis was born on November 18, 1924 in Lineboro, Maryland to parents Millard and Treva Utz. He was the oldest of 7 children (5 brothers and 1 sister). He dropped out of Hampstead High School and went to work with his father at the Baltimore Shipyards building Liberty Ships to help his family. Their shift was 11 pm to 7 am and they rode to Baltimore on a school bus.

On his 18th birthday, he received notice from the President that he had been drafted into the United States Armed Forces. Francis joined several others from the area on a train headed to Fort Meade, Md. where he learned that he was selected to go into the Army Air Corps. He then went by train to Atlantic City for basic training. Basic was tough with the cold and the wind off the Atlantic Ocean where they had to march on the boardwalk with full gear plus heavy overcoats. They learned how to use the Garand rifle, experienced the pain from tear gas and sniffed mustard gas to be able to identify the smell. From there he was chosen to go to New York to attend the Academy of Aeronautics at LaGuardia Field in Jackson Heights, Long Island where he learned the theory of flight plus operations of ailerons, flaps, rudders, controls, hydraulic systems, electric and fuel systems, instruments, etc.

From there he was sent to the Casey Jones School of Aeronautics in Newark, New Jersey where he learned about radial engines, take down, rebuild, propellers and more electrical and hydraulics training. Leaving New Jersey, he returned to New York to Roosevelt Field on Long Island for the third and final phase of his aircraft course. This time they were taught on real aircrafts and tested to see if they would be a crew chief on a bomber or take a physical exam to fly a bomber. Francis wanted to fly; he passed and was on his way to Tyndall Air Base at Panama City, Florida to train to be an aerial gunner on a bomber

The next three months were tough as they learned how to use the oxygen masks as they needed them at high altitudes and how to shoot, take apart and reassemble 30 and 50 caliber machine guns. Shooting moving targets was another challenge as well as more intense physical training. At the end of this course, Francis said that his superiors had made men out of those 18 and 19 year old boys.

Graduation day was December 14, 1943 when they were promoted to sergeants. From there it was off to Drew Field Army Air Base in Tampa, Florida where he was assigned as an engineer gunner on a B-17. He learned how to fly the B-17 and did bombing missions near the base using dummy 100 pound bombs filled with flour. The B-17 carried a 10 man crew.

Francis went to Langley Field, Virginia where they picked up a new B-17 and headed overseas to their base at Snitteton Heath, Eccles Road England where he was assigned to the 337th Bomb Squadron of the 96th Bomb Group, 3rd Air Division of the 8th Air Force. His first mission was on November 10, 1944 to Weisbaden, Germany where they dropped 38 100 pound bombs.

His 3rd mission on January 17, 1945 was a rough one. Flak was heavy and accurate. They were hit, lost two engines on the left wing and were going down. Francis began transferring fuel from the dead wing to the live

side. They were losing altitude and the crew threw out flak suits, machine guns, ammo flak helmets and anything of weight. He shot a flare gun for fighter protection and two P47 Thunder Bolts flew with them. They were skimming the English Channel at 2,000 – 4,000 feet expecting to ditch, but they were able to land on an emergency field in England. They counted 167 flak holes in the plane after they landed.

The radio operator always opens the door to the bomb bays and checks to make sure all bombs had been released. On Mission 11, it was reported that there was a bomb still hanging in the bomb bay. It was Francis' job as engineer to clear the bomb bay. He came out of his top turrets and unplugged his electric heat suit, unplugged his oxygen hose from the main system and clamped on a portable oxygen bottle. The outside temperature was 60 below zero and he started to chill very fast. He quickly opened the door to the bomb bay and stepped onto the narrow cat walk. The bomb release door was open and he was looking straight down at Frankfurt, Germany. The wind blast coming into the bomb bay was terrific. He could see where the bomb was stuck and he wrapped his arms around the center structure of the plane, swung his legs and feet across and came down on the bomb. Down and out it went. He surmised that the release was frozen or had an electrical malfunction. By this time, he was very cold. He quickly went back to his station, plugged in his electric heat suit and turned the rheostat on high, plugged back into the main oxygen system. This was all done without his parachute on because in his position there was no room for a chute with what he had to do.

As happens after every mission they were taken in for interrogation. At the beginning of interrogations, a bottle of whiskey was placed before each crew and a shot glass poured for those who wanted one to help calm their nerves.

Near the end of April, Francis and his crew along with several other crews were sent to a rest home to recover from flying many missions close together. Relaxation, nice beds, good food and games were all welcomed. While there they learned that the Germans had surrendered.

In all, Francis flew 27 missions and he said that no one on those missions got a scratch. He received the Air Medal with 4 Oak Leaf Clusters, Gunners Wings, WWII Victory Medal, European Theatre Ribbon with 4 Battle Stars and the Good Conduct Medal. He was discharged on October 5, 1945.

After the war, he worked at Wheeler Chevrolet in Hampstead for 30 years as a mechanic. Later he worked at Gray and Son, Inc. for 10 years as a large equipment mechanic. He retired in 1990. He enjoyed hunting and fishing, daily crosswords, gardening and raising beautiful roses. He was a proud member of the Hampstead American Legion Post 200 and Life Member of the Mollesville VFW Post 467 in Westminster.

Francis passed away on December 8, 2014 and is survived by his wife, Betty Reed Dovell Utz. Together they had 2 step children, 5 grandchildren and 5 great grandchildren. We thank Francis for his bravery, service and sacrifice for our country.

Most of this information was taken from his own journal.

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