

Interview with Ed Waters – January 2, 2008

Bio:

Edward Waters
Houston, Texas
Born January 17, 1921

Background:

Waters was the son of a Georgia sharecropper. He described himself and other servicemen as “depression kids.” He joined the National Guard in 1940. As an experienced soldier, he was pressed into service to train new soldiers when the Army mobilized for war. He didn’t particularly care for that duty. When they waived the requirement for a college degree, he took the test for the Air Force and passed. “I loved flying. That’s good work.” When compared to what “the boys on the ground went through.” In total, Waters spent five years and four months in the Army.

Military background:

1st Lt., USAAF
8th Air Force, 91st Bombardment Group (Heavy), 322nd Squadron
Bassingbourn, England
Squadron Operations Officer (SOO)
25 missions flown

Aircraft:

A/C #42-102527 - Sleepy Time Gal
Sleepy Time Gal nose art came from Alberto Vargas illustration in Esquire Magazine.

On Kovner:

“He was an able navigator, bright. He lead his class in navigation school.”

In reference to Kovner’s rank (2nd Lt.) and position as Squadron Navigator, “he was very good at self promotion.” His position was somewhat unusual for a man of Kovner’s experience.

Kovner’s position as squadron or “lead” navigator meant that he flew in the lead aircraft that navigated for the entire group. The navigators in the rest of the group would keep track of their position just in case their aircraft had to drop out of formation and find their way home on their own. Lead navigators also would radio their position back to England about every fifteen minutes, enabling the headquarters to track the progress of the mission.

Waters recollection of June 21, 1944 (Kovner’s last mission):

German fighters attacked the formation as it neared its target, Berlin. Sleepy Time Gal was strafed by German Me 410s, twin-engine fighters with 20mm cannons.

After the plane took extensive wing damage and caught fire Waters said, “I gave the ‘bail out’ order.” As he climbed to his escape hatch, Waters checked the nose of the plane to find Kovner alone at the front hatch. Waters didn’t see Kovner bail out. Waters ventured a guess that Kovner may have been fearful of his fate in the hands of German captors.

Kovner and the remaining members of the crew (Miller, Kolano, Humm, Hopkins, Shirley) perished when the aircraft exploded.

POWs

Only four of the crew, Abbott (pilot), Waters (co-pilot), Van Pelt (bombardier) and Hettinger (waist-gunner) bailed out safely. They were taken prisoner and held at Stalag Luft 3 in Sagan, Poland where Waters says they were treated decently due to the Luftwaffe's respect for military protocol and discipline.

As the Russians closed in on the east in January 1945, the POWs were moved southwest to Stalag 7A in Moosberg, Germany. This camp was liberated by Patton's 3rd Army on April 29th, 1945, just days before VE Day.