

Daring of Local Pilot Saves Bomber

Lieut. Fred M. Hageter Gets Flying Cross And Air Medal for Exploit Over France

AN EIGHTH AAF BOMBER STATION, ENGLAND.—Two pilots had to make a difficult decision recently on an Eighth AAF Flying Fortress bombing attack on the Nazi Rocket Gun installations on the French Coast, and happy they are that they were right.

Lieut. Fred M. Hageter Jr., 25^o years of age of 1408 N. Center Street, Bethlehem, Pa. and Lieutenant Russell A. Novotny, 27 years of age, of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, had their ship hit by Flak, just before the IP (initial point), and with better than two engines out, they made it from enemy territory back to England.

In the words of Lieutenant Hageter and Lieutenant Novotny "it



LT. FRED M. HAGETER JR.

was a terrible experience, and we thank God we are alive and able to tell the story. Just before turning in the IP, a heavy concentration of Flak hit our No. 2 and 4 engines and left wing. The No. 2 engine we had to feather immediately, but the No. 4 engine was completely out of control, and the prop just windmilled. A burst of Flak tore a hole in the left wing, and made flying level even more difficult. We were about ten miles from the coast, still in enemy territory, and we decided to turn back, hoping to make it to England before anything more happened."

"Rather than risk the lives of the crew through a ditching experience or a crash landing, we offered them their choice of staying with us, or bailing out. They preferred to hit the silk. Before leaving the ship, the Bombardier salvaged the bombs in an empty field, hoping not to hit any friendly French inhabitants. The engineer was the last to leave, and we are certain that all chutes opened, and the eight boys are safe. Operator was seriously wounded, and died enroute. About this time we crossed over another group of Flak Guns and we suffered another two or three hits, one puncturing the No. 3 engine, and it started to burn. All together we must have had about 200 holes in the Flying Fortress "Stork" and we felt like a flying sieve. The No. 1 engine was our only good one, and we got some power

from the No. 3. Our altitude was the thing that saved us from ditching, and we were able to make the English coast.

CRANKS' BOMB DOORS

"Flying the ship and making ready for a possible ditching was difficult. The bomb bay doors would not close mechanically, and Lieutenant Hageter cranked them shut by hand, using the only available tools, a screwdriver. And threw overboard all loose and extra equipment, making the ship as light as possible. In the meantime we tried to get the most out of the remaining engines, and soon spotted the shoreline. The flames in No. 3 engine were getting worse and were licking back towards the gasoline tank in the wing. We realized we couldn't make it back to our own field, and decided to set the "Stork" down at the first field we could get to. The radio was out and along with the instrument panel board, which was burning slightly. We had no means of contacting the field, just had to come in for a landing. The Flak hit our left tire and burned it to a crisp, making it necessary to come in for a belly crash landing." As soon as the ship came to a stop, both flyers jumped out and took off from the vicinity of the plane, for she had

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Both Lieutenant Hageter and Novotny added a personal touch to the story, when they related how they shook hands a half dozen times during the course of the flight, once when they succeeded in feathering the No. 2 prop, again when all the boys bailed out safely, and again when they sighted the English coast, and finally when the plane came to a stop on the runaway.

GET FLYING CROSS

Two brave men had completed a dangerous but heroic task and were happy.

For their courageous deed, they were awarded "The Distinguished Flying Cross", and the "Air Medal" for extraordinary and meritorious achievement in the air.

Lieutenant Hageter is the son of Mr. and Mrs. F. M. Hageter Sr. of 430 W. North Street, Bethlehem. His wife, the former Miss Beatrice F. Bonser, also of Bethlehem, living at 1408 N. Center St. He graduated from Liberty High School in June 1939 and prior to his enlistment as an Air Cadet in July 1942, was employed by the Bethlehem Steel Company, Traffic Department.

He received his wings and commission in December 1943, and joined this group in April 1944. His father is also an ex-service man of World War 1.

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