

Messinger, Franklin D.

Easton Pilot Wins Air Medal; Is Credited With 40 Missions

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Completion of 40 missions has earned for Flight Officer Franklin D. Messinger, 23, of 1813 Ferry Street, Easton, the Air Medal with seven Oak Leaf clusters. The raids in which he participated, including one on the Salerno marshaling yards, he regards as vague prologues and anti-climaxes to the Salerno show.

Messinger piloted an AAF B-26 Marauder called "Lady Luck" over Sicily, Sardinia, Italy and France, flying with the "Big-tail Birds" oldest B-26 group in the Mediterranean theatre.

In a raid on Salerno, Messinger's ship had its tail guns knocked out just after the formation had dropped its bombs and was crossing the Italian coast to head home.

Flying last in the formation, minus the tail guns, Lady Luck was in poor shape to meet the attack of about 100 German fighters which set upon the bombers 10 minutes off the Italian coast. The fighters damaged one engine and the crew had a bad moment when it cut out but it started putting out partial power again, barely enough to keep the plane in formation.

"Both props," said Messinger, "had holes shot in them and the one on the good engine was bent back. The vibration was terrible. The bomb bay doors were shot up, the radio ruined and the hydraulic system shot out. The tail gunner was wounded in the leg by flak, but the waist and turret gunners got

a fighter a piece.

"I saw two B-26's collide in mid-air. An engine went one way, wings another and other parts filled the air like flak. It just disintegrated. Since then some of our boys who were captured after bailing out and escaped, have said that some of the crew members of the two bombers got out safely after the crash. I'll believe anything now.

"On my other 39 missions I was lucky—just a few flak holes."

Messinger is a graduate of Easton High School and was a machinist for the Messenger Manufacturing Co. before entering the service on Sept. 7, 1941.

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