

Flying Ace



15TH AAF IN ITALY—
Sgt. Robert E. Birkel, son of Mrs. Emil R. Birkel of 465 Montclair Ave., gunner on a B-24 Liberator bomber, has flown over 35 missions, participating in attacks on targets in Germany, Austria, and other German held territories.

Sgt. Birkel has been awarded the Air Medal with three clusters for exemplary services in combat flight. In referring to his outstanding mission, the 25 year old gunner remarked, "Munich, Germany, was the roughest mission I flew on. The Jerry ground gunners had their sights on us all of the time we were on the bomb run and they came too close for comfort with the flak. Although our plane was splattered by bursts several times, nobody was hurt on the crew. Guess we were just lucky because when we reached our base and landed, we counted over 50 flak holes in the fuselage of the aircraft."

This veteran airman flies with a group that has received three War Department Citations for extraordinary combat services. The group is the oldest American unit in the Mediterranean theatre and were the first to drop bombs on Europe from this theatre.

Sgt. Birkel is a graduate of Liberty High School and attended Kutztown State Teachers College. He entered the Armed Forces in November, 1942, and received his wings at Tyndall Gunnery School. He also wears the Good Conduct Medal and the European-African-Middle Eastern theater ribbon with two campaign bars.