

MUSTANG ACE, CRASHING TO DEATH, AVOIDS HITTING BRITISH VILLAGE

A P.51 B. Mustang pilot plunged to his death early this month after desperate manoeuvres to avoid crashing into the shopping district of an English village.

The pilot was 1st/Lt. Charles F. Gumm of Spokane, Washington. At the time of his death, Lieut. Gumm, a member of Lieut-Col. James H. Howard's original 9th Air Force Mustang Group, led all P.51 B. pilots in Britain in the number of German aircraft destroyed.

The 23 years-old airman was on an ordinary practice flight when his Mustang broke out of control and spun down towards Nayland village, in S.E. England, near the Essex-Suffolk county line.

Literally scraping roof-tops, Lieut. Gumm kept the nose of his ship up long enough to clear the main street of the village. The Mustang crashed into a tree, splintering one wing, and burst into flames.

Lieut. Gumm was thrown 20 yards from the blazing plane. His death was instantaneous.

Mr. H.F. Beady, A.R.P. Warden, who saw the Mustang skim over the houses of Nayland, said: "If ever there was a plucky youth, he was it. He did everything possible to keep from hitting the town."

The vicar of the village, the Rev. Mr. L.J. Wright, saw the plane miss one tree by inches and then disappear behind the shops of the main street.

"At the end of lunch," he said, "we heard an aeroplane flying low over the village and making a sound as though it were scraping the roof. We saw it miss a tree by inches. I jumped on my bicycle and got down to the back of the stores where the accident had occurred.

"The doctor was on the spot and told me the crash had been fatal. The aeroplane had zig-zagged making every possible effort to miss the houses. The airman was lying 20 yards from the blazing plane - dead."

The townspeople, moved by the bravery of the American airman, immediately sent a letter of gratitude and condolence to Lieut. Gumm's parents - Mr. and Mrs. Charles F. Gumm, East 3523 Montgomery St., Spokane, Washington.

In less than three months of combat flying, Lieut. Gumm had destroyed seven and a half German aircraft and had flown 23 missions to industrial targets deep in the Continent.

The slim good-looking pilot became the first member of Col. Howard's group to shoot down an enemy plane when he blasted an Me.109 over N.W. Germany on December 16.

He slashed into a formation of eight Me.109s over Frankfurt on Jan. 29 to destroy two and damage several others. Destruction of a Ju.88 and an Me.410 over the same city on Feb. 11 made him an ace scarcely two months after his first combat mission.

Over Brunswick on Feb. 21, Lieut. Gumm shot down another Ju.88 and shared an F.W.190. His final kill was scored on Feb. 25 over Nuremberg, when he went after and destroyed an Me.109 threatening a formation of heavy bombers.

Lieut. Gumm was a law student at Gonzaga University when he enlisted in the Army Air Force on Jan. 29, 1942, as an aviation cadet. He won his wings in Sept. 1942 and entered foreign service in October 1943. His widow, Muriel Ruth Gumm, lives at West Five Clovidence Street, Spokane.

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