



Although this negative is damaged, it depicts Maj. John Egan's *Royal Flush* heading into battle and just minutes before disaster.



Ground crews of the 100th Bomb Group preparing a *Fortress* on 10 October 1943 for the raid to Munster.



The epitome of "USAAF cool," Maj. John Egan poses for a portrait.

MY TRIP TO MUNSTER

BATTERED AND BLOODY, THE 100th BOMB GROUP CREWS MANNED THEIR FLYING FORTRESSES FOR YET ANOTHER DANGEROUS MISSION. HOWEVER, THIS WOULD BE A PARTICULARLY DISASTROUS TRIP TO A WELL-DEFENDED GERMAN CITY - BY FRANK MURPHY

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In the grim seven days that would be referred to later as Black Week (8/14 October 1943), the VIII Bomber Command's strategic air campaign endured its ultimate ordeal, a staccato succession of trials by fire on a scale unprecedented in aerial warfare. In the air over northwestern Europe, push now came to shove in a wave of ferocious and relentless slugfests in which no holds

were barred and no quarter given or asked. For days, the stratosphere became, as the French say, a titanic *moudre des bataillons*, a meat grinder into which both sides mercilessly threw legions of aircrew and machines without respite and without any surety of outcome. This madness was not without reason. Enormous stakes teetered in the balance. Most obviously, for the USAAF, this first half of October

was a mortal struggle to wipe out plump targets thought critical to the *Reich's* war potential. But we now know the days of October were more — much more. For the Allies, it was a matter of air superiority over northwestern Europe. On air superiority rested the fate of strategic bombing as a means of shortening the war. Down the road, winning air superiority meant the possibility of invading the continent.

Although this is not the best of photographs, it captures all the drama on the 10 October 1943 mission when the *Fortresses* continued along after their fighter cover had to turn back. What appears to be a Bf 110 is on the tail of Maj. John Egan's B-17F *Royal Flush*, perhaps preparing to fire the "formation buster" rockets.