

My Favorite Pilot

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By Lee Gnatzig

Philip W. Gnatzig (6/6/1919 - 4/6/1993), arrived at Ridgewell in March 24, 1944, was assigned to the 535th squadron and took his crew out on their first mission on April 18, 1944 to Oranienburg.

He was awarded a Distinguished Fly Cross as a result of his 9th mission, April 29, to Berlin.

The citation reads "About an hour before reaching the target area, the supercharger of the No. 1 engine failed. An attempt was made to feather the useless engine but without success.

Finding it impossible to keep up with the formation, Lt. Gnatzig jettisoned his bombs over enemy territory and the reduction of weight made it possible for him to rejoin the formation. On the return trip the No. 3 engine ran short of oil and failed under the strain. Although two propellers were windmilling, he skillfully joined successive formations, staying as long as he with each in order to take advantage of their protection. When all of the formations had left his ship behind, he coolly and courageously continued on. He made his way safely back to England and executed a perfect landing at a strange base with less than 20 gallons of gas left in his tanks."



Following this mission, he was promoted to 2nd Lieutenant and assumed duties as an assistant operations officer. He did not fly again until June 11 when he rode in the co-pilot's seat, helping a new pilot orient to the details of combat. He spent the rest of his missions in this capacity. He celebrated his 25th birthday on a mission to Rely.

He was promoted to Captain on August 28, flew his final missions during September and was sent to the 12th RCD on September 30, 1944.

He returned home, married his sweetheart and went into the finance industry. He retired from banking at the age of 60 and spent the next 13 years of retirement visiting different parts of the globe. Summers were spent in Wisconsin and winters were spent in Texas. He was diagnosed with lung cancer on Thanksgiving of 1992, went to Texas that final winter and died there, exactly 3 months short of his 74th birthday.