

Benjamin B. Ferns

19 June 1994

Mrs. Thelma Ruff
128 Ferns St
Perry, FL 32347

904/584-7777

Dear Mrs. Ruff:

In response to your telephone call of earlier today, I am enclosing what documentary information I have concerning your late brother, Benjamin B. Ferns:

A copy of the daily orders concerning his arrival with the 306th Bomb Group and assignment to the 368th Squadron;

The Intelligence Narrative concerning the mission of 24 May 44, which details what was observed concerning Robert Ehrler's a/c;

o The Missing Aircrew Report which indicates what happened to each of the crew members 24 May 44.

Concerning the surviving crew members:

Pilot Ehrler is deceased

CoPilot Alden D. Maynes, 1057 Cambridge Rd, Kaysville, UT 84037

Navigator John W. James, 2064 Nashville Rd, Ky 42134

Bombardier Burton C. Gustafson, 29 Island Rd, Windsor, CT 06095

Engineer Paul J. Pratt, Rt 6, Box 389, Nachitoches, LA 71457

Now as to the B-17 aircraft in extremis: The plane was essentially divided into two sections, with the bomb bay linking these two. It was fairly typical to have the men on one end killed while those on the other survived. Those KIA on this plane were all in the back of the plane and it has been reported that they were all killed by a flak burst, very likely the same one which destroyed a part of the tail control surfaces.

My guess is that Pratt is the only survivor who would have known your brother well, as they were the two ranking enlisted men on the crew, and were on the original crew, which was probably put together before they left for combat in crew training in the States, which may have lasted a couple of months. James probably also knew him, but how well only you can find out. The copilot and bom-
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bardier had not been with the origiaal crew, and may not have known the enlisted men very well, or not at all.

There is a narrative history of the 306th Bomb Group available, First Over Germany, and be obtained for \$38 if you will send me a check for that amount, made out to me. This is a 325-page, hardcover book.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Sincerely yours,

FERNS

Friday, June 24, 1994

Dear Mr. Strong

Thank you very much for the prompt response to my telephone call to you last Sunday! I was very pleased to receive the information on Wednesday.

I called the residence of Paul J. Pratt in Natchitoches, La. and learned that he has been deceased since January of this year. I spoke with his wife quite a few minutes on the phone after I identified myself. She remembered her husband speaking fondly of my brother, who he called "Ferns". I'm just so sorry I called much too late to talk with her husband.

I also called what I thought was the residence of the Navigator, John W. Jones in Kentucky - only to learn that he passed away several years ago.

The Lombardie, Benton C. Gustafson

in Windsor, Ct. said he only flew with my mother that one fateful day on May 24, 1944 and didn't know my brother at all.

I found a picture of the original crew that was sent to us from Grand Island, Nebraska on 11-1-43. It listed the names of the crew + their state as well as their positions.

If you have any information on the ones I have listed, please let me know.

Ball Gunner: Gaetano C. Arbatello : N.Y.

Co-Pilot: Dewey D. Jones, Illinois

Bombardier: Gilbert C. Yatman, N.J.

Any information will be appreciated. I am enclosing a check for \$38 for the book "First Over Germany".

Thanks for everything, especially your prompt response.

Yours truly,
Thebona Ferns Ruff
138 Fern St.
Geny. 71. 32347