



Photographs and data relating to Capt. John P. (Ole Baldy) Botten, U. S. Air Corps., from July 1944 to October 1945.

INTRODUCTION

During the time I was with the 86th Fighter Bomber Group our primary function was (1) to disrupt supplies and communications meant for the enemy troops on the front lines, and (2) to provide close support for our front line troops.

We flew fighter planes, not bombers. I started off in A-36 "Invader" (a modified P-51) and then switched to P-47 Thunderbolts for most of my time. Our missions usually consisted of four to twelve planes, although I had missions with only two planes and on occasion some with over twelve planes.

Our eight 50 caliber machine guns would be fully armed and we would normally carry a 500 pound bomb under each wing and, under the "belly", a 100 gallon external fuel tank. On occasion, depending on the target, the bomb load might change to such things as fragmentation clusters, Napalm filled fuel tanks, or whatever was more appropriate. The assigned target might be a vital bridge, railroad tracks, a particular building, an airfield, gun positions, or whatever the "brass" felt we should hit. After hitting our primary target, on our return to our base, we would do an "armed reconnaissance" attacking anything that we deemed beneficial to the enemy troops, usually anything that moved on roads or rails.

On close support missions, we would be assigned our target by flying to the general area of the ground support team, make radio contact, and get our target and instructions from the ground. The leader of the flight would then instruct his flight on how they would attack. Of course, this meant that the Germans knew exactly what we were going to do and were always ready for us.

In Bill Colgan's book *WWII Fighter Bomber Pilot* (see note), he quoted a source saying, "Fighter-bombing is highly dangerous due to the accuracy and concentration of German automatic weapons and small arms fire. Losses are not light. Therefore, the achievement of pilots who must pound in there at low level day after day, certain they will be shot at, is a truly heroic one." Colgan is quick to point out that there was no intent to imply that fighters-bombers fought a rougher air war than anyone else, and I totally agree. I would not have wanted to trade places with some of those bomber crews. We had an advantage, because once Intelligence gave us our target, we planned the mission, and, once airborne, could change things to fit the current circumstances. And our flying certainly wasn't boring. It was often very low level, bordering on rough and violent, pushing the planes to their limits, or, maybe I should say pushing ourselves to the limit. The planes could take a lot more than the pilots. As Colgan points out in his book, "In that overall role and environment, fighter-bomber pilots flew more different kind of missions, performed more varied tasks, and faced a wider range of combat situations than most other pilots in the war"

Jack Botten

Note: For anyone interested in a comprehensive study of the fighter-bomber pilot, I suggest they read Bill Colgan's book *WWII Fighter Bomber Pilot*, printed by Tab Books Inc., #2368. Bill Colgan was the commander of the 525th Squadron, 86th Fighter Group.

