

S/Sgt Archie Eakins

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Born 1916 New Jersey – Died May 6th 1944 , Targoviste, Rumania

Waist Gunner, 725th Bomb Squadron, 451st Bomb Group, 15th Army Air Force



Archie Eakins, class of 1935, Ramsey High School

Archibald Eakins was born in New Jersey in 1916, the son of Arthur and Bessie Eakins, and younger brother of Arthur; a sister, Dorothy Maud, had died in 1923 when only two. He grew up on State Street, in Mahwah, NJ; neighboring families in 1940 were the Bachmans, the Orths, the Petersons, the Goldbergs, the Moffitts, the Koehlers and the Lewis's. He attended Ramsey High School, where he played football, baseball and was a member of the Nugget Staff, the Hi-Y, and Tau Gamma Gamma. Voted "Best Natured" by the Ramsey class of 1935, in Yearbook Class Knocks, his graduating class wished him "Good sense to go with that good nature."

By 1940, Archie was working as a clerk in woolen sales making a salary of \$1092 per year, and was living with his parents on State Street. His brother, Arthur, had married and was living elsewhere in town.

Archie enlisted in the Army in New York City on March 3, 1941, weighing 163 pounds and standing 5 foot 8 inches tall; he listed his residence as Rockland County, NY. He was inducted into the Army at Fort Dix, NJ, and was sent to Fort Jackson, North Carolina where he served as a Staff Sergeant with the 12 Engineers Battalion. In November, 1943, Archie was transferred to the Army Air Training Center in Nashville Tennessee, where he passed his pilot's examination. After completing pre-flight training in Maxwell Field, Alabama, he shipped to Avon Park, Florida to continue pilot training.

Archie did not complete pilot training, but was sent to gunnery school. He was placed as a waist gunner on a B-24 Liberator crew in the 725th Bomb Squadron, 451st Bomber, 15th Army Air Force, based at Castellucia Airfield, Italy, in the Mediterranean Theater. During this time, his parents had moved to May Street, Southern Pines, and he had married; his wife, Helen, a graduate of Overbrook High School in Philadelphia, enlisted in the WAVES in May 1944, and began her own training just after Archie went overseas.



Sgt. Archie Eakins, 1944

Co-Pilot Ken Barmore told of an experience with Archie while still in the States. "Archie had gone to pilot training wanting to be a pilot, but he washed out in Basic. Then he went to gunnery school and would up on our crew. Later, when we were ferrying our plane overseas, we stopped at Memphis Tennessee, at an Air Transport Control base there. I got out of the plane and noticed a BT-13, so I asked the operations officer, "What's the chance of flying that?"

He said "Fine."

I said, "I've got one of our waist gunners out there. I'd like to take him up with me." So Archie went with me and flew that plane for about an hour. He'd washed out in that plane, but he flew it there and was in seventh heaven. We buzzed cattle on the ground near the Mississippi river and had a ball."

Eakins, with his crew, completed only a few missions. The 451st Mission No. 36, on April 30, 1944 to Alessandria, Italy, met with little resistance. Their next mission, No. 37, to Ortebello in northern Italy, was more difficult. While dealing with poor weather, they dropped low and were shot up pretty badly. The crew worked hard to get the crippled plane back to base. Upon their return, the CO advised them that they should have bailed out and let the plane crash, not knowing that the parachute of waist gunner Archie Eakins had been shredded in the attack.



S/Sgt Archie Eakins, above, second from left, holds the piece of flak that shredded his parachute. Sgt Kelly, right, Sgt. Lyle Clark second from right and T/Sgt. Charles Joines, right, look on. From The Pilot, Southern Pines, North Carolina,

In "Forever Remembered: The Fliers of WWII" Co-Pilot Ken Barmore tells the story of the crash that occurred on May 5th, 1944 during 451st No. 38 mission to Ploesti, Rumania. The Ploesti, Romania target was a Marshalling Yard and Oil Refineries. Most of the 15th Air Force took part in this run. The 451st was escorted by thirty P-47 fighters from the 31st Fighter Group and forty-six P-38's from the 82nd and 14th Fighter Groups. They were attacked by 15 to 20 enemy ME-109 (Messerschmitt) fighter planes. The flak was described as intense, accurate and heavy caliber.



451st over Ploesti, Rumania, May 5, 1944

Missions to Ploesti were always dangerous. Called "the taproot of German might" by Winston Churchill, its oil refineries produced roughly 1/3 of Hitler's oil and were therefore heavily fortified. Flying in # 5 position in formation, the B-24 Liberator crew of "Devils Duchess" # 42-52094, was made up of Pilot 2nd Lt Paul E. Krueger, Co-Pilot 2nd Lt. Robert K. Barmore, Navigator Flt O Charles M. Hawkins, Bombardier 2nd Lt. George E. Stauffer, upper turret gunner T/Sgt Charles L. Joines, lower turret gunner Sgt. Lyle J. Clark, right waist Gunner S/Sgt. Archie Eakins, left waist Gunner Sgt. Maurice R. Kelly, tail Gunner Sgt. George P. McDonald, and nose gunner S/Sgt. Leon Stephens. Co-Pilot Ken Barmore described the anti-aircraft flak as being so thick it was like heading into a rain cloud. The crew were able to release their bombs, but upon return, they were attacked by a Messerschmitt. When the enemy fighter's bullets tore through the center of the plane, they lost control of Devil's Duchess. As Pilot Krueger lost oxygen he rang the signal to bail out. The top turret gunner, Charlie Joines, was bleeding badly, cut up by shards from the shattered Plexiglas top turret; with Pilot Krueger, nose gunner Stephens, Bombardier Stauffer, and Navigator Hawkins, he was able to get out through the nose of the plane. Co-Pilot Ken Barmore then went to the back of the plane to find the two waist gunners, Archie Eakins and Maurice Kelly, very badly shot up, both of them with legs shattered from the waist down by a flak hit. The Tail Gunner, George MacDonald, worked on Archie Eakins, helping him with his parachute and out of the plane, following him out the hatch. Barmore attended to Kelly and followed Kelly, the last one out.

Upon landing, Barmore and MacDonald found Kelly and stayed with him, giving him morphine to make him more comfortable. An old Romanian woman placed candles in his hands and stayed with him as he died. Afterward, she wept. Surviving crew members were rounded up and became prisoners of war.

Pilot 2nd Lt Kroeger landed with Archie Eakins. Eakins was taken to a hospital in Targoviste, where one of his legs was amputated. His crew later learned from a fellow POW that that he died in the hospital the next morning, May 6, 1944, from “negligence and loss of blood.”



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After having been declared MIA, the family learned of Archie's death. After their release from Rumanian prisoner of war camps, some members of the crew wrote to the family with an account of his death. Archie Eakins was buried at American War Cemetery Ardennes American Cemetery, Neupre, Belgium, Plot c, Row 6, Grave 2. He was awarded The Air Medal, Purple Heart, The American Campaign Medal and The WWII Victory Medal. Eakins Ct, in the Fardale section of Mahwah, was named in his honor.

-by Diane Mateo