in conversation

bob kopp

1944

# take off

Take off comments – Bob Kopp (referring to the position of our house on Langton Green)

You would have been dangerously close to what we called the East/West runway which was a little short. That's why they switched from B-24's to B-17's at Eye. Also, at that time, that runway had a little dip in it just about the point we reached takeoff speed. So we'd fly across the dip, bounce off the far side and, hopefully, become airborne. Then it became a little iffy if we'd clear the trees with our heavy bomb load. Take offs and landings were always accident prone activities...a dangerous place to live.

It would have been a couple hours before dawn and about 48 B-17's roaring down the runway about 15 seconds apart.  We flew straight west 10 miles trying to gain altitude, made a 180 degree turn and flew back the same track.  It was my job to keep us within a 3 mile by 10 mile band, else we could collide with another Group doing the same thing a few miles away.  Mid-air collisions happened occasionally when visibility was zero in fog and clouds.  Back and forth we flew until we got above the clouds...maybe 10 to 25 thousand feet.  Then we'd seek our Squadron Leader who dragged a colored flare on his trailing wire antenna to help us find him.  When the Squadron finally assembled (12 to 16 bombers took quite awhile), then we had to find and join the other two Squadrons from Eye to form a Group of 36 to 48 bombers.  Our Group then had plus or minus 30 seconds from a scheduled time to join the bomber stream of about a 1000 bombers...then over the Channel to our targets wherever in Europe...quite a feat wearing oxygen masks in from 10 to 20 degrees F. below zero in very thin air.  All this to put ourselves in a position to get shot at. Talk about stupid!!!

