War Era Story Project 2012

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The date was 1 January, 1945 at Y-29, a forward air base located close to Ash, Belgium. It was a cold day and we were preparing our P-47 Thunderbolt fighter planes of the 366 Fighter Group, 390th Fighter Squadron, for the day missions. The crew chief started up the 2,000 horsepower engine and was busy performing preflight procedures, watching the various instruments for proper response. After engine shutdown, I was busy loading a 500-pound bomb under each wing and checking the ammunition trays for maximum ammunition for the eight machineguns. The first flight had just taken off for their mission. Unknown to the Allied High Command, the Luftwaffe leaders had conceived a plan several weeks before to make a mass attack on all allied airfields in Belgium, Holland and northern France, coordinated with a German Panzer thrust through the Ardennes to capture Antwerp. The object was to catch Ninth Air Force and British 2nd TAF aircraft on the ground with surprise simultaneous strikes to eliminate the superior tactical air support of American ground forces. We had air superiority at this stage of the war, so they knew that our pilots and crew members would be in no shape to prepare for missions that day since we would have celebrated the dawning of a new year the night before.

This mass armada of Luftwaffe planes consisting of ME-109's and FW-190's split into different groups for the strikes. The first flight of our planes that had taken off met one group a short distance from our field, and immediately dropped their bombs unarmed and engaged the enemy. The information was radioed back to our base for help. There was a P-51, 487th Fighter Group across the field from us and they immediately were airborne to engage the enemy. I saw one P-51 shoot down an ME-109 before his wheels were fully retracted. We on the ground rapidly took cover wherever it could be found and watched the dogfights taking place overhead. Foxholes were at a premium. We were being strafed by the Luftwaffe and our anti-aircraft were shooting, but they had to stop because our planes were engaging the enemy. One of my good friends dived under a truck for protection and later discovered that he had taken cover under a fuel truck loaded with 100 octane gasoline. One member of our squadron was hit in the leg by a bullet from a strafing plane. Only minimal damage was done to our planes that were on the ground.

We later found out from information that General Adolph Galland, Commander of the Luftwaffe Forces, had violently opposed the operation from the beginning. He told the German High Command that his men were not trained for low altitude ground strikes. His fighters were not equipped to carry the bombs required to insure maximum destruction of selected targets. Over 800+ Luftwaffe lanes participated in these raids. It was said that this was one of the greatest dogfights of WWII and it all took place over and around our field.