

# The Trinity Tripod

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## Bantams Were Among the “Masters of the Air”

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Trinity students who watched the “Masters of the Air” series on Apple TV+ earlier this year got a close look at the operations of the Eighth Air Force. During the Second World War, many Trinity students served in “the Mighty Eighth,” and more flew B-17 Flying Fortresses and

B-24 Liberators in air campaigns in many theatres.

Episode 3 featured the attack on the ball bearing factories at Schweinfurt and the aircraft works in Regensburg on Aug. 17, 1943. The narrative of “Masters of the Air” followed the 100th Bombardment Group (“the Bloody Hundredth”), which flew to Regensburg and on to north Africa. Following a “dual strike” plan, other bomb

groups flew to Schweinfurt, dropped their bombs and returned to England, having twice passed through German anti-aircraft (“flak”) and fighter defenses.

In the 305th Bomb Group that day, one B-17 pilot was Lieutenant David A. Tyler of the Class of 1943. At Trinity, the Hartford Public High School grad was a top intercollegiate swimmer, but he left the College to join the Army

Air Forces less than two weeks after Pearl Harbor. When his B-17 was heavily damaged on the mission to Schweinfurt, half the crew bailed out, but Tyler remained and coaxed the bomber to reach England, gliding the last four miles to an airfield. He flew 25 missions in total. (In 1943, only one of four Eighth Air Force crew members completed that many.) Episode 3 of “Masters of the Air” vividly shows the dangers and costs. One in six of the bombers – each crewed by 10 – were shot down, and more than 600 airmen were killed, missing or captured that single day.

Elsewhere, I related the death of B-17 navigator Judson Ramaker of the Class of 1937 in the Southwest Pacific. (His brother, Robert Ramaker '48 flew B-17s in Italy.) Another story stands out. James D. Cummins of the Class of 1942 was the assistant wing navigator on a bombing mission to Vienna on Feb. 21, 1945. When his B-24 Liberator was hit by

flak, crew members mistakenly discarded all his maps to lighten the aircraft, but Cummins provided the course to Soviet lines in Yugoslavia from memory. He jumped only after helping the wounded members of the crew bail out. Yugoslav partisans might have executed them, but, speaking French, Cummins convinced them they were Americans. Passed to the Soviets, they were back at their base in Italy 10 days later.

Several episodes in the Apple TV+ series followed the airmen into German POW camps. Trinity airmen were there too – Jerry Ennis and Philip Dryden, both of the Class of 1943, among them.

All these alumni of the College had looked forward to ordinary careers and lives, but the aggressions of the Nazi regime interrupted those plans. This coming Memorial Day, remember them.

— Donald M. Bishop  
Class of 1967



B-17 IN THE 305TH BOMB GROUP IN 1943 (COURTESY OF PUBLIC DOMAIN WIKIPEDIA COMMONS)