

**Gus Ebenstein**  
416 Bomb Group



Gus Ebenstein (Pilot, 668th BS) passed away on Monday, May 27 in Boca Raton, FL. Gus and his wife, Marie, attended the last two reunions in CT. No other information is available at this time.

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Gus Ebenstein "Little Sparky" 416th Pilot

Gus Ebenstein was born September 23, 1920 into a quiet Jewish family in Washington Heights, New York. He attended public schools there, finishing at George Washington High School, as he relates..., "Just barely graduating".

In 1938, with diploma in hand, Gus set out to find his way in the world. The Depression was ending, so employment was still not readily available, but he found odd jobs like errand boy, messenger boy and as a refrigerator salesman in Midtown Manhattan. For a year and a half, Gus pounded the streets earning his own pay.

At age 20, a few months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Gustave enlisted in the Army Air Corps and, on October 16, 1940, was sent to Chanute Field in Illinois. He was given Army Issue clothes and the serial number 16028536. He first trained as an airplane mechanic, achieving crew chief status and skipping to the rank of Sergeant. But still he dreamed of being a pilot.

Gus decided to try the test for pilot training school. To his own surprise he passed the very difficult test that was designed for at least a two year college student. He was sent to pilot training school. Upon graduation, he got his wings for the A-20s. promoted to First Officer and assigned to the 416th Bomb Group. F/O Ebenstein praises the plane that the British called "The Boston". "It was a dream to fly, so forgiving, very responsive." Ebenstein fell in love with the Douglas A-20 Havoc light bomber. "It flew much like a pursuit plane," according to the pilot who flew the 416th's first mission on March 3, 1944.

F/O Ebenstein joined 17 other planes for the target at an Airbrome at Poix, France that early March day. Ebenstein's ship was in flight 1, second position. Behind the throttle of 43-9226, he took to the sky from AAF-170, Wethersfield RAF Station with 500 pound bombs fused and ready in her belly. The flying dream had Sgt P. S. Newell and S/Sgt Holley Perkins perched behind 50 MM guns to protect their graceful lady of flight. The flight was going according to plan, but before reaching the target, the planes were recalled by

bomber Command Control for lack of fighter escort. Even so, the plane crews saw plenty. Even though they did not reach the target, they saw Hitler's Atlantic Wall and witnessed the action. "The mission was like a nightmare for the first time combat pilots", says Lt. Ebenstein. They were like flying ducks, birds in the gun barrels' sights.

F/O Ebenstein says, "There were damaged B-17s coming at us without wings." Men in parachutes were falling to the ground, planes were twisting and spiraling out of control and crashing to the ground.

After the raid escape, fused bombs of damaged planes of the 416th were dropped in the English Channel, to avoid explosion upon landing. Accounts were given at debriefings and after all the confusion, many 416 planes were credited with sortie scores.

The bombing mission on March 19, 1944 shook up First Lieutenant Ebenstein to the extent that he would never forget it. Ebenstein, a dynamic, former salesman from New York City, looked as if he had aged ten years when he climbed out of his ship and began inspecting it. He found a piece of flak lodged in a hole about 18 inches from the gas tank in his right wing. Upon further inspection of his ship, he counted a total of 23 holes. Lt. Ebenstein commented, "Boy, am I glad that piece of flak didn't get any closer." One of Ebenstein's gunners, Sgt. Doyle M. Simpson, who had already done a tour of duty in the South Pacific, stated that he did not see any enemy fighter planes, but intimated that the flak was the heaviest he had witnessed to date.

Punishments were handed out to officers and enlisted men alike. One such example, according to the 668 squadron history, follows: May, 13, 1944 - A good example of the little things that plague a pilot is as follows: Capt. "Hiram" Conant, and Lt. "Gus" Ebenstein (a real spark-plug) lose their 48 hour passes due to retracting their wheels too quick. Whew! Such language, gentlemen. The chaplain will listen to you, seems no one else will. No one will even console them. For the afternoon, a "stand-down" was called, giving the ground crews time to patch up their ships from the heavy flak of the morning mission. The rest of the day was spent in peace and quiet except the grumbling in the distance of the dynamic Lt. Ebenstein "little Sparky", over the "Pass" deal.

May 24, 1944 - Again, "Gus" Ebenstein was to suffer for a technicality. He returned with his bomb load, due to an unfortunate mismanagement of his bomb controls. Major "Jug" Price influenced him to spend an hour practicing with the bomb control buttons.

The bomb group practiced when their scheduling would permit it. July 5, 1944 was a mixture of training flying and combat flying. In the morning, a formation flight of six ships was flown. Leading the formation in an A-20J were 1st Lt. Ebenstein and Cpl. Shier. Shier, in the nose, entered into the history of the group the following comments: "I commanded a full view of the flight. Words can never express the thrill of leading a formation flight over the country side. I saw the precision with which these men fly, and the strain of close formation flying. We buzzed a British field, and showed them Yank skill. The flight lasted 1-1/2 hours, and was perfect in all respects."

Lt Ebenstein had several memorable missions with damage. The rudder of the A-20, 43-9907, was almost ripped off the plane on the 61st mission of Oct. 2, 1944. The fuselage of 43-9907 was beaten up by flak on the 62nd mission of October 3, 1944. 43-9907 was out of service for 4 days. A burst near his body sent a piece of flak through 43-9907 and missed Lt. Ebenstein's head by about an inch on his 64th mission, October 8, 1944.

In October, Lt. Ebenstein's reached the magic number of 65 missions, which meant he could return home. His last mission, bombing raid #155 was on October 12. He again flew 43-9907. SSgt Lewis M. Daugherty and Sgt Elpidio A. Damico were the gunners. The last mission went well.

Around half of "Little Sparky's" bomb raids were in 43-9907. Lt. Ebenstein brought her home every time. Sometimes she was beaten and bruised and in need of special care, but none the less, the "Graceful Lady"

got to be credited with carrying many souls back to safty.

On November 27, 1944 veteran Flight Commander Lt. Gustave Ebenstein, having completed sixty-five missions, finally received orders for shipment home.

November 28th - 1st Lt. Gustave Ebenstein was finally on his first leg of the journey home. "Credited with 65 missions and over 200 hours of operational time, "Little Gus" "Ebengoose", etc. will relax in New York. We already miss him, as he was one of the best we had the pleasure of serving with," *668 History*.

Ebengoose returned home to finish his service in the states. It was on the streets of New York, on a lovely spring in May, 1945 that he reunited with Marie, his future wife. Marie was late for work, walking up 190th, Gus in his uniform, was walking up St. Nicholas street. They met on the corner. "Hello Marie", He said. The two young people took the same subway to Marie's workplace together. Marie remembers that it was like they were on an island together, even on the crowded train it was as if no one else was around. He ask her out to lunch, she went on to work and the rest is history.

Mr. and Mrs. Ebenstein were able to attend two 416th Bomb Group Reunions before his passing. One was to the New England Air Museum in Windsor Locks, Connecticut to view the newly restored A-26 Reida Rae, a 416th bomber that flew operations from December 1944 to August 1945.

After a life well lived, the lovely couple retired in Baca Raton, Florida.

They were able to enjoy the sun and sand of the south for many years. On Monday May 27th, 2013 Mr. Ebenstein passed away. He was laid to rest in South Florida National Cemetery, Lake Worth, Palm Beach County.

Thank you "Little Sparky" for your service years. Your determination and spirit to improve, helped make the free world that we enjoy today!