

*Captain Richard Burr "Hawkshaw" Prentiss O-789200***Memories of Richard B Prentiss**  
416th Bomb Group Pilot**Captain Prentiss  
Again Has Narrow  
Escape from Death**

Capt. Richard B. Prentiss (above) recently had a narrow escape at a ninth airforce bomber base in England when the A-20 Havoc he was piloting caught fire as he prepared to take off for a bombing mission over France, according to a press dispatch.

His ship burst into flames in mid-section. A member of the crew, Pfc. Frank J. Robertson, Jr., of the Bronx, N. Y., crawled beneath the burning fusilage and defused the four 500 - pound bombs in the bomb bay.

Captain Prentiss is the son of Dr. and Mrs. O. F. Prentiss of 47 Adams st. He has been awarded the air medal and the oak leaf cluster. He left Syracuse university in his junior year in 1941 to join the air corps. Capt. Prentiss received his commission and wings in April, 1942, and served in the anti-submarine patrol off the east coast of the United States and Cuba. It was at that time that he was awarded the air medal.

Richard was born to Dr. Orlow Frederick and Marjorie Elms Prentiss on February 22, 1916 in Burlington, Chittenden County, Vermont. He was the middle of three children, brother Robert B. and sister Barbara J. completed the family.

After graduating from Burlington High School, Richard attended Greene Mountain Junior college, then Syracuse University. In his junior year in 1941, he received an appointment to West point. Upon graduation from West Point in 1942, Prentiss received his commission and wings and joined the Army Air Corps.

Previous to joining the 416th Bomb Group, he served in the anti-submarine Patrol off the east Coast of the United States and Cuba, the Carribean Theater. His service there earned him the Air medal, but it was not bestowed upon him until he was transferred to the 416th.

In a presentation which took place in his office in April, 1944, Colonel Mace officially decorated Captain Richard B. Prentiss, Assistant Squadron Operations Officer, with the Air Medal and Oak Leaf Cluster awarded by authority contained in General Order 29, Headquarters, Antilles Air Command, dated 13 July 1943. At a formal ceremony which took place the 12th of April, on the occasion when the field was officially transferred

from RAF to AAF jurisdiction, Captain William Battersby, Squadron Operations Officer, was presented with the Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster, awarded by authority of General Order 82, Headquarters, War Department, dated 29 November, 1943.

Capt Prentiss would be decorated with 8 more Oak Leaf Clusters before his life was tragically taken from him.

Shortly thereafter, Captain Hiram F. Conant, also a veteran of the Caribbean Theater, became Squadron Operations Officer and Captain Richard B. Prentiss became a Flight Commander.

*Excerpts from the 668th Bomb Squadron Operational History written by Cpl. Schier with help from Lt. Col. Chester C. Wysocki.*

March 8, 1944 Station 170

As was expected, things cooled down somewhat here today, following our first attack on a French airfield. Pilots and combat crews from this squadron and another squadron were on the alert for a mission today, but by mid-morning the alert had died down and our boys spent the remainder of the day ironing out the sore spots, which other pilots had encountered during yesterday's run on the target.

A total of 15 pilots underwent cockpit checks on the A-20G modified and the A-20B unmodified today, under the guidance of Captain Richard D. Prentiss, He has been quite busy the past two days since Captain Battersby, operations officer, is on pass.

Prentiss flew his first mission on March 18, 1944. The mission was number 5 for the Bomb Group. SSgt Charles L. Hibbs and SSgt Lewis M. Dougherty flew with him as gunners aboard A-20, serial number 43-9225.

March 24, 1944

"Americans are funny people," Captain Richard Prentiss stated today as he did a strip tease with his flying togs. "All those guys out there (indicating the pilots, bombardier-navigators, and gunners) are yelping because today's mission was called off. Here we get ready and now they're disappointed because nobody will be able to shoot at us."

March 24, 1944

Once again the combat crews were about to enter their ships, when red flares from the control tower cancelled the take-off in a hurry. Captain Prentiss stood by the window and said, "They say the weather's good over the target, but it's lousy over here. It would be hard to fly today, trying to get in formation in this stuff. It would be a rat race."

April 8, 1944

It can never be said that our squadron doesn't try. We started off early this morning with some practice gunnery missions scheduled. Then the order came from 31 higher up, to prepare for a briefing. So another combat mission was planned. Everything proceeded well, and the planes took off in the afternoon about one-half hour out, bad weather was encountered and the mission was left uncompleted. All flights were ordered back. Fate again deemed that we are not to throw our punch. Society News, laurels are again won by one of our squadron.

This time Capt. "Rick" Prentiss is the bearer of the prize. This afternoon he was presented with the much-coveted Air Medal. This came as the result of his fine work on flying anti-sub patrol, previous to his coming to our squadron. Our congratulations to one fine pilot and officer. Knowing our pilots ability, we predict that more Air Medals will come to this squadron. Sigh gals, heads a dark, handsome New Englander. So the day was finished, and we look forward to Easter tomorrow.

April 18, 1944

Very near all flying combat crews have the Air Medal now and the palm with it. When ten missions are accomplished, the palm is given. Call him "Hawkshaw" Prentiss now. Capt. Prentiss has left for a week's schooling in camouflage and mine detecting. We can picture him in "field conditions".

Things are rough in the ETO! (Quote a well-used verse here) The day was climaxed by Nite Flying by Lt. Shaefer, and Meagher, with Capt. Conant. Another interesting note today was an experimental flight by Lt. Osborne. He took off on a practice-bombing mission with eight bombs instead of the usual four. The extra four were carried on the wings. The results were a cutting down of air speed and maneuverability. The opinion being that the extra bombs hamper the ship to a goodly extent, which is not advisable in combat. Osborne being a pilot, Operations Officer when needed, now an experimentalist: Going up!

The mission returned in good shape, and very fatigued. Experienced sky-men like Captains Prentiss, Conant, and others, showed and admitted their fatigue. It is "rough" when these men show strain. We are working under the strain of not having enough crew personnel. Many gunners have already 18 missions in the brief space of time we have been here. To fly two missions a day is nothing now, and very frequent. Steel nerves are needed, and these men have them.

May 20, 1944

"Rick" Prentiss was made to sweat also in this fracas.

With him were: 2nd Lt. Lytle (B/N), and Gunners SSgt John Orr and SSgt Francis L. Flacks. Their ship, and A-20J #640, was shot up very heavily, and no one knows how they ever brought it back. It too is in the Sub Depot, undergoing severe repairs. Again fate decreed that they were to go unscathed, after such a beating. Our humble thanks to the unseen powers. Prentiss was back in the air on the 22nd. His nerves of steel kept him motivated. Between missions he enjoyed whittling as a favorite pass time. His pocket knife saw little rest after missions. He whittled away until sleep overtook him.

On the evening of the 6th of June, 1944 the Squadron received its most hazardous assignment. The Marshaling Yard at Serqueux was in use by three Panzer Divisions who were being hastily transported to the front in an effort to stem the rising tide of Allied Invasion. It was vitally necessary that the Yard be destroyed, and A-20's of our Group were given the job. With a 10/10 cloud cover over the target and most of Normandy, low-altitude flying was a necessity. Bombing from three-thousand feet, the formation successfully attacked the target. Severe and accurate German anti-aircraft was encountered during virtually the entire sortie over enemy-held territory. Our aircraft suffered 100% battle damage. Unable to reach Home Station, Second Lieutenant Charles C. Mish crash-landed his battered aircraft on the Southern English coast. Faced with a similar situation, Captain Richard B. Prentiss was forced to land at an RAF field on a runway where Mosquito bombers were taking off on a mission.

December 14, 1944

At last it has happened: word was verified today of an occasion we never thought would occur. American girls lost a feather from their caps, when it was learned that a "limey" gal snared Capt. "Rick" Prentiss. A London girl finally roped that dark, suave, pilot. His present plans are to complete his tour over here, and then return to the States with his bride in a little over three months when he reached his 50 mission mark. With him will go our best wishes for a happy future. And so, one more confirmed bachelor hits the dust.

Despite the snow, an air raid, and a minor aircraft accident, the days only casualty was a wooden, hand-carved stove lifted, fashioned by Captain Richard B. Prentiss (Burlington, Vt.), assistant operations officer, who saw his work of art, completed in two days of arduous and intensive whittling, go up in flames when Sgt. Arnold Markowitz (Brooklyn, N.Y.) inadvertently stuck his masterpiece in the fire.

Mission after mission he brought out his pocket knife. He flew many missions per month when weather permitted and carved in his free time up until Christmas day, serving his country with valor and bravery.

December 25, 1944

Merry Christmas -- in peacetime those words would carry a wonderful feeling. Here, it marked the end of the trail for some of our best boys. Men, who came all the way with us, were lost today, one of the blackest days in the Squadron's history. They gave their lives on the very day that signified "peace on earth".

Their sacrifices must never be forgotten, and never have to occur in the future generations to come. Those who won't answer the roll tonite are; Captain Richard B. Prentiss, Captain Richard V. Miracle, 1st Lt. Robert R. Svenson, 1st Lt. Jack J. Burg, 1st Lt. Francis H. Bursiel, S/Sgt. D.M. Brown, S/Sgt. P.G. Fild, Sgt. A.O. Wylie, S/Sgt. John H. Simmons, and S/Sgt. A.F. Galloway. The status of these men is unknown; they may be dead or alive. In many cases, witnesses doubt their chances of being alive. Time will tell, whom fate smiled on. The twists of fate that cut deep. All will be solerly missed.

The mission was #177. The target was the defended village of Hillsheim, Germany. Again, all of this bombing was done to put a crimp in Von Runstedt's drive. The flight over was quiet, till the target area was reached. Then all hell broke loose, the effects were devastating. "Rick" Prentiss rocked his plane all over the sky in evasive action, but to no avail. The flak was heavy and intense and clawed at the planes in the sky. Bursts of flak surrounded Prentiss's plane, and also caught his wingman and deputy. Both planes were seen going down, with no chutes blossoming. They crashed, and no one escaped to the knowledge of the eyewitnesses. "Rick" Prentiss was to be married in three months. He had over 45 missions to his credit, holder of the Air Medal and Distinguished Flying Cross.

Aircraft A-20-J15 43-21717 was a total loss.

Captain Prentiss was first buried at the American Military Cemetery Foy, Belgium. After the war, his body was moved to the American War Cemetery, Henri-Chapelle.

Because his life so abruptly taken at age 28, there are no wood carvings or descendants to claim his name. He left his family and the English girl to mourn his death. Thank you Captain Prentiss for all you and your crew did for our country.