



Lester Schrenk

Nov 19, 1923 -

BIRTHPLACE: Long Prairie, MN

SOLDIER DETAILS

HIGHEST RANK: Staff Sergeant

DIVISION: Army Air Corps, B-17 Ball Turret Gunner

THEATER OF OPERATION: European

SERVED: Nov 19, 1942 -

HONORED BY: The Eisenhower Foundation

PRISONER OF WAR

BIOGRAPHY

Lester Schrenk joined the U.S. Army Air Forces on his 19th birthday in November 1942. Even though he still sees perfectly today, he was told he could not become a pilot due to poor eyesight. So this Minnesota farm kid was assigned as a ball turret gunner on a B-17 bomber crew, a real-life 'Master of the Air' flying with the 92nd Bomb Group of the Mighty Eighth Air Force. At 5'11", he was much bigger than most men tasked with squeezing into that very tiny space. Roughly a year later, he was deployed to Europe. Schrenk tells us what the missions were like for a ball turret gunner and he describes a harrowing mission in which his damaged bomber barely made it back to England but not all the way back to base. On his 10th mission - Feb. 22, 1942 to Denmark, aboard the B-17 'Pot o' Gold', his bomber was badly damaged by a German JU-88 over Denmark. Bailing out, he was immediately captured and held prisoner at the Stalag Luft IV camp, surviving harsh conditions and interrogations. Near war's end, as the Russian Red Army approached from the east, Lester was forced on a death march west, until reaching the British Army and liberation. For decades, Les wondered why the German fighter who wounded his bomber did not finish them off. In 2012, he finally located the German pilot – Hans-Hermann Muller – who had spared the American bomber knowing that if it went down over water, the entire crew would drown. The former enemies would become friends. Courtesy of AVC (American Veterans Center)