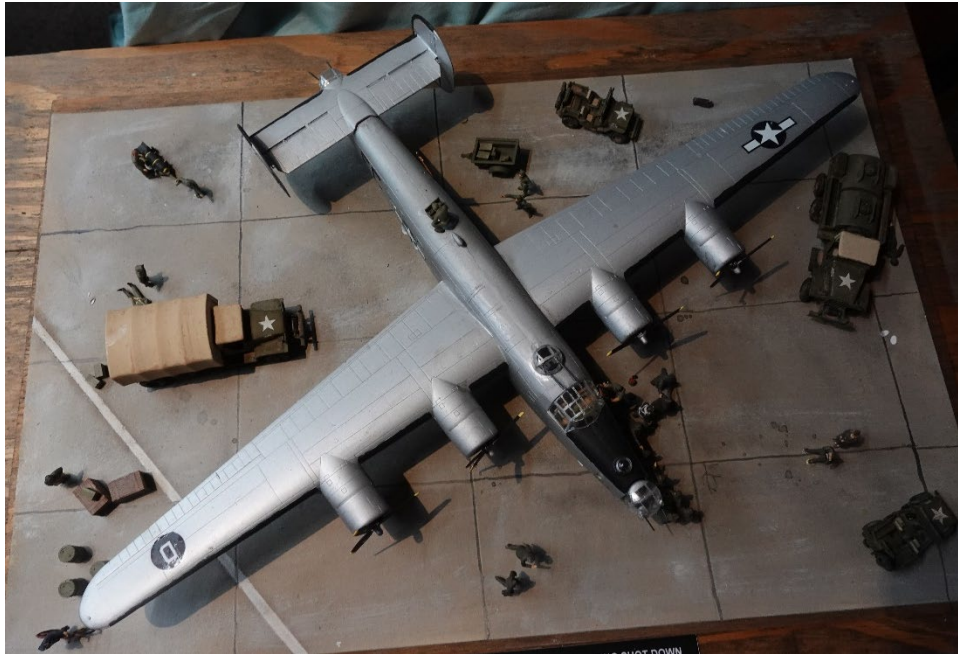


#15 American Beauty



The crew of the B-24 Bomber "American Beauty" pose by the plane as its nose art is painted on. One of the members of this crew was Robert Plude Sr. who enlisted in 1942 and was placed in the 8th Air Force (the Mighty 8th).



He was stationed in Great Britain after training in the U.S. and was assigned to a crew that manned B-24 bombers attacking German-occupied Europe. The crews stayed together as they rotated through planes. He was on this 22nd mission when his plane was shot down over Germany.

On Nov. 4, 1944, he was the tail gunner in the "American Beauty" when it was hit it began to disintegrate. He did not remember anything from the point of the plane being hit to his waking up on the ground where he was turned over to German soldiers by a farmer near Misberg, the target of the mission. Of the 9-member crew (who had been on 20 or more missions together) only 4 survived to become POWs and sent to Stalag Luft-1.

Near the end of the war, in 1945, food became scarce and the treatment by the guards became more brutal. Later, the camp was liberated by Soviet troops who sent the GIs toward the American lines and killed the German guards.