UCF Veterans Legacy Program

Meredith M. Mills (Apr. 21, 1923-Jul. 21, 1944)

https://vlp.cah.ucf.edu/biographies/sanc/BD-0-120-F.html

Meredith MacDonald Mills Jr. was born on April 21, 1923, in Deland, FL. He was the only child of Meredith M. and Russie Mills. His father had served in the US Army during World War I but retired before Meredith and became a licensed pharmacist. His mother worked as a school teacher before she had her son.

In 1935, when Meredith was twelve, his family moved from Deland to St. Augustine, FL, where his father continued his work as a pharmacist.

After high school, Meredith attended the University of Florida (UF) in Gainesville. Although he did not finish his degree, he enjoyed college life. He joined the Phi Kappa Tau fraternity and earned the nickname “Sparky.”

In June 1942, six months after the US entered World War II, Meredith returned home and registered for the draft in St. Augustine. He joined the US Army Air Forces on October 30, 1942. He first trained at Camp Blanding, FL, before he deployed to support the Allied forces' fight against Nazi Germany. He became a Staff Sergeant and served in the 365th Bombardment Squadron, 305th Bombardment Group of the 8th Air Force.

In December 1942, his group moved to Chelveston, England. There, crews of up to ten men flew B-17 Flying Fortresses over Europe. Meredith stood five feet six inches tall and 150 pounds, but still served as a ball turret gunner. This position typically went to smaller airmen because they had to fit into a small glass ball under the plane. The turret could turn all the way around, allowing the gunner to protect the plane from attacks from below.

On July 21, 1944, as part of a nine-member crew, Meredith flew on a B-17 called *Strictly for Hunger* for a bombing mission over Germany. After they dropped their bombs near Munich, Germany, enemy fire hit the plane. The aircraft caught fire and went down. Meredith and the other eight crew members jumped out with parachutes. They landed in southwest Germany near the Swiss border.

At first, the Army listed the entire crew as Missing in Action (MIA). Two days later, they learned that German forces had captured four crew members and sent them to prison camps where they became Prisoners of War (POWs). The other five, including Meredith, were still missing. Neither the Army or their families learned the truth until after the war.

In the Summer of 1945, the French Army’s War Criminals Investigation Branch discovered what had happened. German civilians had captured, killed, the five missing airmen in two separate incidents and then buried them in their town’s nearby forest. The US Army questioned many people and found seven men, including a local mayor,

responsible for these murders. Authorities arrested them and a court found them guilty and sentenced them to different terms in prison.

The US Army moved the airmen's bodies, including Meridith's, to the US military cemetery in St. Avold, France, in what is now the Lorraine American Cemetery. Then, in 1949, Meredith's parents chose to bring his remains home to Florida. He now rests at St. Augustine National Cemetery, near his family. His grave lies in Section D, Site 120, among other American service members.

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