

# Roman Mierzejewski

by  
John Mier

Roman (Ray) Mierzejewski was born on 3 December 1923 in New Bedford, MA. He is the 4<sup>th</sup> of 5 sons born to Jozef and Anna Mierzejewski. Ray was good at working with his hands and entered New Bedford Vocational High School as a Carpentry student in January 1939. Less than a year later, at age 16, he leaves High School to work as a carpenter at Ft. Belvoir, VA. The US is already starting the buildup for WWII. While working at Ft. Belvoir he lives at the Keystone Hotel, located just a few blocks from the White House in DC. In March 1941 Ray returns home and to school in Massachusetts.

Ray turned 18 a few days before Pearl Harbor was attacked. Like many others, he left school and joined the Army Air Force on 19 January 1942. He is sent to Ft. Devens, MA for processing. On 15 February he was assigned to the 104<sup>th</sup> Observation Squadron in Atlantic City, NJ. The 104<sup>th</sup> was part of the Maryland National Guard that was Federalized and was flying anti-submarine patrols.

On 8 April 1942 Ray was promoted to Aviation Cadet at the 1229<sup>th</sup> Reception Center, Ft. Dix, NJ. With his promotion his pay went up to \$75.00 a month, plus \$1.00 per day for rations (food). He was ordered to Kelly Field, TX to start flight training. He became part of Class 42-K. After pre-flight, he was sent to Corsicana, TX for Primary (early June to 6 August), Perrin Field, Sherman, TX for Basic (8 August to 7 October), and later to Foster Field, Victoria, TX for Advance flight training (11 October to 13 December). Aviation Cadet Mierzejewski received his last pay as a Cadet on 12 December 1942. He was



commissioned and received his wings on 13 December 1942, only 10 days after turning 19. This made Ray one of the youngest pilots in the AAF. Before being commissioned, he had flown 80+ hours with an instructor, and 148+ hours solo time. Lt. Mierzejewski reported to the 306<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron, 338<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group, at Dale Mabry Field, Tallahassee, FL on 17 December 42, and then granted 10 days leave. This 'transition training' got pilots into combat planes and got them ready as replacement pilots overseas. Flight training in mostly P-40Ks started on 4 January 1943 and continued until 15 February. During this time, he got 48+ hours of pilot

time, plus 10+ hours of 'other than pilot' time. The exact date he departed the 306<sup>th</sup> is unknown. After 9 weeks of training, Ray got some leave time and went back in New Bedford before shipping out from New York City to Casablanca, Algeria, N. Africa.

After arriving in N. Africa, Ray spent some time in local training with the Fighter Training Center in Berrechid, Morocco, a suburb of Casablanca. He had 2 local flights in a Merlin Powered P-40 on 18 and 27 April, for a total of 2:10 flying time. He was a detached pilot at Chateaudun du Rhoel, Algeria flying night missions, but nothing is indicated in his Flight Logs that were sent home. After 2+ weeks of nothing in his flight log, it picked up on May 15 with more local flights. It showed he was assigned to Fighter Squadron Replacement Center stationed in Casablanca. These flights went through May 26, and was signed by the Operations Officer of the 317<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron. On 20 May 43 Ray was assigned to the 317<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron, 325<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group flying Merlin powered P-40s. After the fall of Pantelleria, the 325<sup>th</sup> flew many missions over Sardinia in preparation for Operation Husky, the invasion of Sicily. Per his flight log, Lt. Mierzejewski's first operation mission was 1 June 1943, the Stagnone Raid. He and the 317<sup>th</sup> Squadron flew top cover while the other 2 squadrons came in low and strafed an Italian Seaplane Base at dawn. This mission was a success, destroying 12 seaplanes while 6 others were left burning, probably lost. After this mission, Group operations had a meeting with all the new pilots. After a few more local (training) flights, his next mission was on 18 June, a Fighter Sweep over Sardinia. Some of the P-40s had frag and incendiary bombs, which were placed on target. Others had larger bombs, which were dumped early when some enemy planes attacked. One enemy plane was shot down, and more planes and equipment on the ground were shot up. On 19 June, the 325<sup>th</sup> moved from Souk el Kemis to a new base near Mateur, closer to the action. Ray flew 2 short flights ferrying planes from the old to new base. On 21 June, he spent 2:30 in local flight time, getting in 4 landings at the new base. This may have been something many pilots did at a new base. Next operational mission was 24 June. This was a 'Counter Air Force Diversionary Sweep' over Southern Sardinia, with the Capottera Landing Field being a specific target. One P-40 returned early. Since Ray was credited with only 30 minutes flight time, looks like he was the one who returned early. This was a rough mission, with a running air battle going over Sardinia and 60 miles out to sea. Five enemy planes were shot down, but a huge cost, 4 P-40s of the 325<sup>th</sup> were lost that day.

The mission on 28 June 43 was to escort B-26 bombers of the 17<sup>th</sup> Bomber Group over Decimomannu Airdrome on Sardinia. Italian and German fighters attacked hard, and an intense air battle raged. The 325<sup>th</sup> did its job and all bombers returned to N. Africa. Sadly, Ray's planes did not. The AAF simply says 'failed to return, cause unknown.' Years later a witness to the air battle was found. He said Ray's plane got into a one-on-one dogfight with an Italian Ace flying the new MC-205. Both pilots got shots off at the other. It looks like Ray realized he was alone and tried to break contact and get back to his Group. The Italian got in one last long-range burst, and Ray's plane starts to burn. He was able to bail out of his burning P-40, but he was too low for his parachute to fully open, and he died when he landed. The next morning an Italian Air Force Chaplain gives Ray a full Catholic funeral when he is buried with Military Honors. However, Ray was listed as 'Missing' for almost a year before his grave was found by Allied troops. After the war, Ray's body is moved to the Sicily-Rome American Cemetery in Nettuno, Italy, which opened to the public in 1956.

To learn more about the 325<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group, please visit [www.checkertails.org](http://www.checkertails.org).

This story is part of the Stories Behind the Stars project (see [www.storiesbehindthestars.org](http://www.storiesbehindthestars.org)). This is a national effort of volunteers to write the stories of all 400,000+ of the US WWII fallen here on Fold3. Related to this, there will be a smart phone app that will allow people to visit any war memorial or cemetery, scan the fallen's name and read his/her story.

Sources:

[www.checkertails.org](http://www.checkertails.org)

Fold3.com

Ancestry.com

Checkertail Clan by Ernest R. McDowell

Herky! Memiors of a Checkertail Ace by Herschel H. Green

Seven Hours a Prisoner by John F. Rauth

National Archives, St. Louis, MO

Story location: Boston, MA  
Story date: 29 January 1942

From ABMC, 28 June 2013



Help us remember Roman Mierzejewski.

Second Lieutenant, U.S. Army Air Forces  
Service # O-668610  
317th Fighter Squadron, 325th Fighter Group  
Entered the Service from: Massachusetts  
Died: June 28, 1943  
Buried: Plot D Row 9 Grave 30  
Sicily-Rome American Cemetery  
Nettuno, Italy  
Awards: Purple Heart

## **Family history of Roman Mierzejewski**

Roman Mierzejewski was born 3 December 1923 to Joseph and Anna (Nelec) Mierzejewski in New Bedford, Massachusetts. He was the 4<sup>th</sup> of 5 sons born the Anna and Joseph. Big brothers Alfred was born 10 December 1915, Zygmunt born 16 January 1918, Lucjan born 28 November 1920, and little brother Ernest born 6 March 1926. Tragedy struck the family when Zygmunt died in 1919 from the Influenza Epidemic. Sadly, no public records exist of his death or burial.

Soon after Roman was born the family was able to buy a house at 435 Prescott Streett in New Bedford. This remained the family home until his parents passed. Tragedy struck again when Alfred died on 19 July 1931 during the summer between Jr. High and High School. A story mentioned a 'Tarzan rope' at a local swimming hole that broke. His mother said he died of a broken heart. Sadly, his parents were not able to place a marker on his grave, with the country in the grips of the Depression. This was rectified years later when a family member had a marker placed on his grave.

Roman was a skilled carpenter. He built an enclosed porch on the back of the family home in his mid-teen years, along with a brick garage. He was a carpentry student at New Bedford Vocational. In October 1940, at age 16, he left school to work as a civilian contractor at Ft. Belvoir, Virginia. During part of this time, he lived at the Keystone Hotel in Washington, DC, just a few blocks away from the White House. In March 1941 Roman returns to New Bedford and school.

Soon after Pearl Harbor was attacked, big brother Lucjan joined the Navy as a Machinist Mate. He served for about a year on the USS Wichita doing convoy escort between the US and England. Later he served on the USS Mallard, a submarine rescue ship in the Panama Canal Zone. Little brother Ernest joined the Army Air Force Reserve in 1944 and became active in 1945 after graduating high school. He became a CFC (top) gunner on B-29s but was never deployed overseas.

The 1930 Census showed the family living on Prescott Street in New Bedford. Both Anna and Joseph are working as weavers in the cotton mills. They own their home, valued at \$5,000, but do not have a radio set.

The 1940 Census showed the family still on Prescott Street, but the house is now valued at \$2500. Joseph was unemployed for 26 weeks and earned only \$300 in 1939. Anna was working at the mills, earning \$900 in 1939. Big brother Lucjan had finished high school and is working as a Machinist, earning \$500 in 1939.

## **Article about family search for Lt. Mierzejewski**

Merrillville man discovers details surrounding death of his uncle, a WWII fighter pilot | Merrillville | nwitimes.com

## **Roman's plane**

The plane Roman was flying the day he was lost was a P-40L-20, serial #42-11102. It came off the line at the Curtiss Wright factory in Buffalo, NY 17 April 1943. It cost \$49,530.00. It was accepted by the Army Air Force and flown to Newark, NJ on 22 April. It was then disassembled, crated, and shipped to Africa by freighter, arriving 11 May 1943.