



# Closing With the Enemy: An Interview With B-17 Tail Gunner Ed Hays

*Aaron Elson*

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Ed Hays of Paramus, N.J., was a 19-year-old tail gunner on a B-17 named Just Elmer's Tune. His pilot was Lt. Elmer Costales, and the plane's name was taken from a popular Glenn Miller song. On its 12 1/2th mission -- did we say anyone was superstitious? -- Just Elmer's Tune was shot down over Denmark. As it was the only American bomber shot down over Denmark that day, Fritz Ulrich, the son of the farmer in whose field Hays landed, was able through rigorous research to locate the German fighter pilot who claimed credit for the kill, and who in turn was shot down by gunners from Hays' plane. Hays and the German pilot, Gunther Sinnecker, met in Berlin in 1998. Hays was active in the American ex-POWs and was a popular speaker in New Jersey schools until his death in 2007. Aaron Elson, who interviewed Hays in 1998, is the son of a tank battalion veteran and has recorded more than 600 hours of oral history interviews with World War II veterans. In addition to a creating popular blog and web site, he has seen his work used as source material in more than two dozen popular books and a dozen documentaries, including some, such as "The Color of War" and "Patton 360," that have been shown on the History Channel.

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