



During the dead of winter, March 21st 1944; Miles City, Montana; local residents woke to their quaint little town being overrun and submerged by the rising frozen waters of the Yellowstone river. Ice jams were building quickly, raising the subzero river water levels over 16 feet. As the blocks of ice, slush and freezing waters flooded into the city, residents were forced to flee their homes for safer grounds.



Miles City Mayor L.S. Keye knew immediate action must be taken, and brought in explosive experts from a nearby town. Two local pilots took a small aircraft over the river and attempted to drop and detonate 50 pound homemade bombs on the Yellowstone ice jam , but unfortunately it had little effect.

The mayor then decided to do the unthinkable, and placed an urgent request to the Governor's office. His request was short, and to the point, "Send in the Bombers!"



At a USAAF base in Rapid City S.D., the crew of an Army Air Force B-17 were quick to accept the unusual mission, and preparations to bomb an American city were fast underway. The crew hastily began fusing and loading 250-pound bombs into the bomb bay of their USAAF Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress. Shortly thereafter, the loaded bomber with her crew of eight, took to the skies in a harsh blizzard and low ceilings.

The plan was to deliver the bombs to Miles City where the load would be transferred to a waiting Dive-Bomber to execute the bomb delivery. As the lone B-17 was nearing Miles City, low clouds forced the plans to be changed. Under a blanket of 1000 foot overcast skies, the B-17 was then ordered to handle the bombing run themselves.



Originally planned to release the load at 10,000 feet, the low overcast forced the bomber crew to take their ship lower. At 1930 hours, in heavy snow, winds and cold, the bomber appeared over the river and executed two dummy bombing runs as crowds of locals watched in amazement.

On the third pass, the B-17 released a test bomb that exploded precisely on target. Unsure of the effect, the crew brought their bomber around again and made two more passes, releasing all six of the 250 lb. bombs. Hundreds of residents watched motionless, and none spoke a word. The entire town, their homes and their families future hung in the balance as they watched the bombs fall. Seconds later a huge plume of ice, mud and water exploded skyward from the frozen Yellowstone river.

The ice jam quickly broke apart, and the frozen waters slowly receded, saving the small town. The next morning, local residents were thrilled to watch as the water levels had dropped a full 10 feet from the day before.

That night the crew of the B-17 were welcomed by the thankful and relieved residents of Miles City Montana. The entire crew were put up at the local hotel, and each received a well-deserved steak dinner.

The next morning, the crew departed, and the B-17 made a final victory pass low over the town at 50 feet over the rooftops, rocking their wings as they flew back home to Rapid City SD... and so the story goes of the only time the continental United States was bombed.