

picked me up, gathered in my chute and looked around. Golly, was I thankful kid. Even old Italy looked very very sweet. I landed in the middle of a revetment - a strip for parking planes - all steel - but so is my head. The men from the adjacent plane came running over, they just couldn't understand the blinking light! They laughed when they saw me. We stopped a passing truck and the driver on seeing me, asked if anyone else had bailed out. I informed him in the affirmative and he said he thought he had heard some calls of help back the road a way. I hurried over to personnel supply and called the squadron and told them about the situation. Then we piled into a truck and looked for the distress call. Soon we found our tail gunner laying in an open field. He said calmly, "I think my leg is broken." We called for the doctor and put crude splints on after giving him a shot of morphine. He was bundled into an ambulance, the meat wagon, and taken to the hospital. I asked to be taken to the Squadron. I was tired, hungry, and emotionally upset. Those three men were still up there and five boys still to be accounted for. But the Doc. (Cpt. Sproul) piled me into a jeep and buzzed me over to the control tower. Many men were there; the Colonel, Group operation officers, and they plied me with questions. The plane was still circling the field and tower was sending them the blinker "Bail out" - "Bail out", but the boys evidently were not able to decipher it. The Group Op. Officer Capt. Roberts said, "Give them the red light!" to the group, "God damn - save their lives, to hell with the plane." The Colonel in a quiet commanding voice said, "Give them the green light." So the tower complied with the higher orders. The plane circled the field and started its approach to land. Millions of thoughts ran through my mind - "Roger's wife soon to have a baby - our first mission. Corp. Burns he's married

too - darn good pilot, never another guy like Rog. Gee, I'm down already, poor Irma."

Then the plane was coming into the runway - down-down on came the landing light like two fingers searching for a soft sport to land on that cold steel mat. Like a bird it swooped lower and lower - now so close - then all the lights went out - complete darkness - not a sound - not a stir, just the whisper of the wind talking to me. "They'll be ok, they are going to be all right." Then a loud screeching, scraping sound filled the air. The sparks flew and a lifetime passed in those brief seconds. Again quiet - waiting - expecting an explosion or flame. Then rudely, I was grabbed and someone pushed me into a jeep and many cars and people roared to that runway to that wounded iron bird. There she lay in a circle of light. Eager automobile lights eating up the sight, when out popped three scared but happy lads. Capt. Roberts (G.O.O.) walked up and grabbed the pilot's hand, shook it, and said, "My boy that was the most beautiful landing I ever saw. Congratulations!" Salutations over, four happy boys hopped into a jeep and regardless of equipment, questions, or inspection, headed for chow.

Next morning we went out and saw a demolished B-two dozen. The service squadron had really wrecked our iron bird in hauling it off the runway. Flak holes were found in all spots, in our mortally wounded airplane. A big hole in the wing had demolished the auxiliary landing gear and one hole thru Cherokee's head had ruptured our hydraulic lines. We learned that the raft in our wing had been released and had torn away the radio antenna. All the boys were OK except Bill. In the town hospital his leg was set and later he had it reset and steel braces put in to brace the severed bones. He got the purple heart and a free ticket back to the States. He told us his para-



#56 Cherokee in the bone yard after the mission.

chute did not open and clawed it into action. Then at a low altitude he thought he was going to land on a plane so he dumped his chute a bit and consequently he hit the ground plenty hard. We all wanted to keep our chutes as souvenirs but a shortage made that impossible. Souvenir for the Bombardier was a rip cord handle and memories.

Conclusions: Our first mission, first plane wreck, first wheels up landing, two months flying pay (\$150) and a world of experience. Veteran!

So the Bombardier does no work on a mission, well, I like that!

EDITORS NOTE: Amos Larsen, Bombardier 766th Sq., received a rude introduction to combat operations but was lucky to survive this, his first mission. For many crews the normal trepidations are heightened because, as in this case a combat-experienced pilot takes over the left seat displacing the first pilot to the co-pilot's side. Most likely the new pilot's flying abilities are unknown to them breaking the trust that a combat crew has in each other. This trust is built up slowly during the long months of training, as each learns from experience to depend on each other. It happened so often that nine lives depended on each other. Jay Garner flew as first pilot while Roger Nixon flew as co-pilot.



Crash of "What's Up Doc" 825th Squadron Ship. Reader comment is requested. (Robert A. Harrison photo 825th Sq.)