

NAZI "ACK ACK" FOUR MILES HIGH

By

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IT'S ONE THING TO FLY A BOMBER MISSION OVER THE MOST HEAVILY DEFENDED TARGET IN EUROPE, AND THEN TO HAVE YOUR PLANE SHOT UP SO BADLY THAT IT WON'T FLY AND TRY TO JUMP FROM A BURNING AIRCRAFT IN A TIGHT SPIN, TO BE THROWN TO THE FLOOR WITH YOUR CLOTHES ON FIRE, BUT THEN TO FINALLY ESCAPE TO FIND YOUR PARACHUTE HARNESS NOT FASTENED, THAT'S ANOTHER !!



On May 29th, 1944 I was flying in the pilot's position of a B-24, leading the 484th Bomb Group of 40 planes on a raid to Wiener Neustadt, Austria, one of the most heaviest defended target in Austria that employed multiple batteries of anti aircraft cannon. The lead ship I was flying was a radar ship. We were flying at 23,000 feet. Col William H Hendricks was with me riding in the co pilot's seat. We arrived at the target about 1000 o'clock. Just before reaching the target, our A-5 (Autopilot), went out. The PDI (Pilot's directional indicator), would not function.

The Bombardier, Richard Pearce, called for a six degree correction to the left which I put in using manual control of the ship. A flak burst in the nose section killed the bombardier, seconds after bombs away while he was trying to close the bomb bay door. He was caught still bent over the bombsight as we passed over the target into a hail of bursting flak. We immediately received a direct hit in just aft of the number three engine position approximately two feet back of where the nacelle enters the wing. The wing and engine were torn up badly. The shell entered from the underneath side, exploded, carrying pieces of the wing and shrapnel through the topside, leaving the wing and engine with a large gapping hole. The propeller immediately run away despite almost simultaneous efforts to feather it. The fuel selector and ignition were turned

off. The throttle was pulled back to idle cut off and the propeller was toggled into low pitch in an effort to slow it down, but the effort was futile.

An enormous stream of gasoline poured out behind #3 engine, then caught fire leaving a flame 200 feet long. I was flying the ship myself by hand and was busily trimming it up, endeavoring to assume three engine operation, when I noticed the fire behind number three engine, and in the bomb bay. I told the acting co pilot William H Hendricks to hold the controls while I pulled the engine fire extinguisher handles which in this ship were mounted on the floor next to the pilot's position. I exhausted both bottles, each time the fire chocked out only to burst into flame again. The number three propeller was now running away at 4300 RPM and the continual friction among the broken parts must have served to ignite the gasoline as it poured over them. I again took over the controls of the ship. Meanwhile, my top turret gunner S/ Sgt John A Battstone, was busily attempting to put out the fire in the bomb bays. This he did twice but the fire flared up again as the hand extinguisher he was using became exhausted.

Another flak burst that came within micro seconds after the first one in number three engine, caught us in the nose, blow