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ing a big hole in the left side of the bombardier's compartment, peppering the back side of the instrument panel and navigator's and bombardier's position, starting fires in the nose compartment. The flame and smoke came up from underneath the instrument panel into my face making it very difficult to read the airspeed, to keep the plane from stalling, and to hold the plane level. I had the plane under control, but of necessity slowing and losing altitude to maintain airspeed. The plane was flying straight and level maintaining a course of 190 degrees, which was our homeward course after leaving the target.

After exhausting the fire extinguishers and finding it impossible to control the fire, which was now filling up the ship. I activated the bail out alarm bell to abandon ship, and looking over to Col Hendricks, I signaled with my right thumb for him to go ahead and bail out too. He left immediately. I then called out over the intercom for the rest of the crew to bail out. I received no response and believing most of them had already jumped or were in the process of doing so, I prepared to leave. With the ship still flying straight and level, there should have been no difficulty for the rest of the crew to bail out. I remained at the controls at least thirty seconds after Col Hendricks bailed out. Some of the crew had already abandoned ship before this time, as I was all alone in the flight deck, the engineer and radio operator having already departed.

When I saw that Col Hendricks had cleared the ship through the bomb bays, I endeavored to bail out myself. The altimeter was now registering 18,000 feet. I found the ship would not

trim up sufficiently to permit me to release the controls without dropping into a spiral spin to the right. After rolling in full trim and throttling back the left engines, I found the ship would not hold steady. The fire was now filling the radio compartment. I left the controls and left for a dash to the bomb bay door opening. The plane immediately went to spiral spin to the right. I was thrown to the floor under the top turret and near the auxiliary power unit and was pinned down unable to rise from the force of the spin. I lay there in an inferno of fire for some thirty or forty seconds, just how long I'm not sure. I was being severely burned. The whole inside of the ship was a roaring mass of flames. Finally I was able to barely raise up enough to tumble out head first through the bomb bay. Right after I left the ship and before I could open my parachute, the ship blew up with a mighty roar.

Tumbling through space, I experienced considerable difficulty in getting my parachute to open. My parachute harness was not fastened, I had been flying with it unhooked, because of a

bad case of sore buttocks from a rough ride in a jeep the day before. When I did get my parachute to open, I just barely managed to catch one strap in the crook of my left elbow and another strap in my right hand, as the whole harness went sliding over my head. I hung this way until I reached the ground. The parachute was badly burned and still burning. Numerous panels and shroud lines gave way as I descended.

I landed on the top of a tall pine tree. My clothes were nearly burned off me and my face and arms

were badly burned. I was picked up almost immediately and led down to a small village about a mile away. My eyes were swollen shut and I was very weak. I was taken to a small police station-like building. Here I was searched and stripped of everything. Col Hendricks, two of my gunners S/Sgt John A Battstone and S/Sgt Ralph L Barnhardt, and the radar operator Lt James Burns were also brought to this same place. Late that evening I was taken to a small first aid station where I stayed for two nights. I was then taken to a large hospital in Vienna for two more weeks. I never saw any of my crew after that.

