

## DOWN IN FLAMES

A POW Story

by

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*We had no trouble finding the target and I released the bombs when the lead Bombardier released his. We circled around to begin the long ride home when someone announced that enemy planes were sighted. I heard gunfire and when I looked out the side window I saw an FW-190 with a big black cross on its side streak by.*

On June 11, 1944, we were up before daybreak and were dodging tent ropes and fox holes on our way to the chow line and breakfast of dried eggs, corned beef hash, rolled oats and condensed milk. At briefing we were told that our target that day would be some oil storage tanks along the Danube River near the town of Giurgiu, Rumania. Just another milk run we were told as there were no flak guns in the vicinity. We picked up maps and pictures of the target area and were soon on our plane ready to take off to join the formation. As Bombardier, I made sure the bombs were armed and that the guns were test fired when we were over the Mediterranean.

We had no trouble finding the target and I released the bombs when the lead Bombardier released his. We circled around to begin the long ride home when someone announced that enemy planes were sighted. I heard gunfire and when I looked out the side window I saw an FW-190 with a big black cross on its side streak by. Instantly we were in a steep dive with the engines screaming loudly till I could hear nothing else. The plane was burning fiercely so I pulled the emergency lever to open the nose wheel doors. The doors didn't open until I jumped on it a couple of times and then I went part way out feet first. The nose gunner was waiting to get out so I pushed myself free and out, scraping my chin on the side of the door as I went.

It was a relief to get away from the plane and after a few flips it seemed like I was suspended in mid-air in a sitting down position. I remembered to delay opening my chute but I kept a good grip on the rip cord. I watched the ground and when it started coming at me real fast I jerked the rip cord.

Next thing I remember was picking myself up from the ground. I could see soldiers on the hill above me searching for

survivors so I walked down the hill to where a farmer and his wife and son had stopped work to watch. I couldn't understand them but the women brought me some soup. When the soldiers got there they indicated that I should get on the farmer's wagon. We headed for town and picked up some of the other members of the crew, including the ball gunner who had jumped without his chute. The upper turret gunner may have gone down with the ship as he wasn't accounted for. Before we got to the town of Rusa, Bulgaria, we were relieved of our jackets, watches and billfolds. We knew by hand motions and a few nudges with their bayonets that they wanted souvenirs. I lost my boots when my chute opened. I had been riding in the wagon with the body of the ball turret gunner, they gave me his boots and I walked the rest of the way into town.

In the small town of Rusa, we were put in a building that had bars all across the front wall and I think most of the town's people came to see the American gangsters. One older gentleman who could speak English and who used to work in Chicago, believed that New York City and Chicago had been bombed and were in ruins. Later that evening, we were moved to a place like a warehouse to sleep. Early in the night, air raid sirens sounded and we were taken to an air raid shelter in the river bank. Most of the people from town were there also. I was glad that we had guards to protect us from them.

The following day we were taken one at a time to be interrogated by a German officer who could speak good English. He wore a dark blue uniform trimmed in red with a lot of medals, braid, and a long sword fastened to his belt. He wanted to know the name of our unit and where it was located, I gave him, name, rank, and serial number and he informed me I could be executed. I reminded him that international law protected prisoners and he told me that not many people knew we were prisoners.

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