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bruck with a load of bombs. I couldn't drop the bombs and I couldn't tell anybody I couldn't drop the bombs. Getting rid of the bombs was the important part of the mission to flyers because, not only did it remove a terrible danger, it meant you had another mission to your credit and were that closer to going home, and it made the plane lighter, faster. When the bombs fell out you could feel the plane jump like a horse, suddenly freed of all that weight. And you would peel off, if you were in a flak area, and take advantage of that speed as you went down and out, away from the black bursts that were threatening your life, the plane screaming from speed, the wings vibrating from the strain.

This day there was no flak. Still the urgency of getting the bombs out was there, and by now it seemed like everyone in the plane was yelling at me to drop the bombs. I was so frustrated I beat my gloved fists against the plexiglass bubbled windows in the nose. I attacked the salvo handle like a savage. I swore, prayed, swore, begged and swore to no one in particular. The racks were frozen and the bombs were stuck, and I couldn't tell anyone.

I stood up with my head in the astro dome, one foot on either ammo can that held the ammo for the nose turret guns, and I looked back through the dome and the pilot's windshield at Steinberg. I suppose a case can be made for man's ability to speak with his eyes, though I suspect the whole facial expression is involved in wordless communication. If eyes alone can talk, they can probably say, "I love you" or "You turn me on, let's shack up" or "You're boring me" or "I hate your guts." But try with eyes alone to say, "The bomb racks are frozen and my throat mike has malfunctioned." Steinberg and I stared helplessly at each other over the tops of our oxygen masks through two layers of glass.

I hooked onto a walk-around oxygen bottle, took my parachute and started back through the narrow passageway to the flight deck. Unattached from the electrical heating system, I immediately felt the terrible cold, around - 70°. When I finally reached the pilots, I tore off my mask and yelled explanations at Steinberg over the engine scream. Steinberg yelled back that the only thing we could do was toggle the bombs out one by one by prying a screwdriver against the release arm of each bomb shackle. We had tried the pilot's emergency bomb release cord and that was frozen too.

I took the screwdriver, had the engineer close the bomb bay doors, and walked out the catwalk to the bomb racks. Then I wedged myself between the racks, rapped a mugger's grip around the left rack with my left arm, and signaled the engineer to open the doors. As the doors rolled open, the blast of air into the bomb bay shocked my eyes. I'd had to leave my parachute behind because the space between the racks was too narrow, and I was standing in that roaring rush of air, one arm tight around the shackle, on about ten inches width of catwalk, five miles above the earth. That sounds brave, I suppose. Oddly, I felt no fear of the height or the situation, and I think for several reasons. One was simply that I was young and had no real sense of what I was doing. Another is that, while I'm quite frightened of heights, I had no sense of height because five miles without reference ceases to be distance and becomes a vague void. Then static distance, looking down the side of a skyscraper (I'm always intimidated when I'm in New York) is far different than being propelled by engines. In a sense, the engines keep you from falling because they are holding you up.

Just as I reached for the first bomb shackle with the screwdriver, the bombs fell out. All this time we had been circling aim-

lessly through clouds, but I suppose more or less in the Innsbruck area. Our navigator, O'Brien, had come back from the nose turret and, with much more strength than anyone else in the plane, had finally pulled the pilot's bomb release cord free.

I watched the bombs going down, converging as they seemed to into one mass. Just then the clouds parted and I watched that hunk of component explosives falling farther and farther away toward a bleak, blue black uninhabited region of the Alps. Before the bombs landed, the clouds snapped shut. We had no idea of exactly where we were. There's a possibility we were over Switzerland, which is less than fifty miles away from Innsbruck, a meager distance when you are at high altitude, flying. I'm sure of one thing. We had contributed nothing to the war effort. Those bombs fell where there were no towns, no farms, no roads.

When we returned to the base, the big blowhard was waiting to interrogate us, as the squadron intelligence officer did after each mission. We told him everything in detail. He listened. Chewed his cigar and when we were through, said in his coarse booming voice, "I'll see to it you boys get the DFC for this." Someone, I wish it had been me said, "For what? The mission was all fucked up." "Never you mind," the loud fat man said.

A month later, Barudi was back but the blowhard had done his work. A line of flyers at least two city blocks long stood in a field and received medals from a general flown in for the occasion. I hate to risk a detail sounding this apocryphal, but the general actually took the medals he pinned to our chests from a cigar box held by a colonel. And so the officers (enlisted men were given few citations) of Lt. Howard (NMI) Steinberg's crew were given the DFC for bombing some remote mountains, maybe in Switzerland.

Yossarian couldn't help but fall in love with the chaplain at first sight because in the chaplain he recognized himself, a sane man caught up in a world controlled by ugly creeps. The chaplain, like Yossarian, is bewildered and ineffectual. A good man can offer the world the gift of his good impulses and in war they are ignored or rejected.

And I hope Heller would have treated that big blowhard with generosity and love too. Wherever I've gone in institutions, I've met a few men like the blowhard. In industry. In universities. In the military. They are easy to make fun of but not so easily dismissed. They seemed to know, to have always known, that most organized human endeavor, waging war or building cities or citing men for bravery, is essentially bullshit. Many of them don't know they know this, but they know it all the same. Sociology isn't my strong point, but I hope many of them learned it watching Marx Brothers movies.

And like the blowhard, their answer to bullshit is more bullshit. And they get things done not because they believe in them but because they don't. Laws. Rules. These are created to occupy people. The healthy cynics cut through it all, booming and laughing and chomping cigars the whole way.

And I don't think I'd like people whose code of ethics is so rigid they'd be critical of the lies in that written report on the Innsbruck nuisance raid, lies that rang like nature's deepest truth—"despite intensive damage to their aircraft by enemy flak and fighters . . ." "... persevered through a series of frustrating malfunctions to lay their bombs squarely on the target." Not when a few months later those medals and citations meant discharge points, meant a lot of us were finally getting out and going home.

The End