

Sequel to the Mission

By Herbert Weinstein

I was the radio interceptor of the 484th Bomb Group attached to the 825th Squadron, because I had been born in Germany and spoke fluent German. Special radio equipment had been installed on three B-24 Liberator bombers, from the 40 or so, planes being flown by the Group.

My job consisted of listening to and intercepting the German (R/T) Radio/Transmissions traffic. The German radar stations in Vienna, Munich, Udine, and Budapest controlled all the fighters in the air and ordered them, where and who to attack. Listening to them I could tell 20 to 30 minutes in advance, if and where, we would be attacked. When I knew, I passed the information on to the flight commander who would contact our fighters to intercept and engage the German fighters.

I was not a member of any one crew and flew with the crew assigned to one of these planes. I became the 11th man and flew almost all my missions with different pilots. In the last Torretta Flyer, Art Ouellette tells of the mission to Trento in Italy, where due to intensive flak, Bomber #24 on which he was flying, was hit, and #2 engine and #3 engine were badly damaged. #24 was one of the ships with my special radio equipment and I, the German guy, as Art called me, when I phoned him after reading his story, was the 11th man aboard.

The crew that day were: Don Zimmerman, pilot Charles Walter, copilot Walter Klus, navigator Dominick Blanda, bombardier Marshall Kahn, engineer Donald Kenny, radio operator James Carney, nose gunner Mike Rainey, top gunner Rix De Lambert, tail gunner and Art Ouellette, ball gunner.

During our flight toward the target, I listened to the radar station in Udine, which would have been the control dispatching fighters to intercept us, but the only R/T traffic was to the shadowing German fighter who was radioing our speed and altitude to the control station. No fighters were being vectored toward our formation.

So I was somewhat relaxed when we turned at the IP toward Trento, at an altitude of 22,000 feet, ready for our bomb run, when we were bracketed by intensive flak. It jolted me, made me scared, all I could think of was the words "Bombs bursting in air" from "The Star Spangled Banner", it was such a noisy affair. Crack and bang, the plane fishtailing and being thrown up and down from the force of the exploding shells. And then there was this extra loud explosion and I saw pieces coming off #3 engine through my little window by the radio station. The pilot did a hell of a job keeping us level and flying. He informed us that #2 and #3 engines had been hit, but we were still flying on and after dropping our bomb load on the target we turned left toward the Ligurian sea.

It was the expertise of the pilot Don Zimmerman and the copilot Charles Walter that kept this plane flying, although we were loosing altitude fast, towards our lines for almost two hours. It was about 3:30 in the afternoon and we were flying at 16,000 feet. Blanda, Rainey, and I were working in the bomb bay throwing everything out, including the kitchen sink, to lighten the plane.

Then there was a loud crack and the propeller sliced into the bomb bay, the plane shuddered as if it were coming apart. We heard the jump bell, someone yelled jump and jump I did. I was the first man to bail out because I was standing in the cat walk, the others were behind me. What happened next, my first and only parachute jump, was 54 years ago, but I remember it, as if it had been yesterday. I knew that the guys in the waist were trying to drop the ball turret to get rid of 1,100 pounds and I was afraid that I might be swept back and hit the turret as I bailed out. I bent my legs, clasped my knees and tucked my head in, to make myself like a ball and so let myself fall.

As soon as I cleared the plane there was a rush of air, the slipstream, like a gigantic hand, grabbed me and tossed me turning head over heels in the air. As I tumbled like a diver, I remember saying to myself straighten your legs as if you were diving. That stopped the tumbling and straightened my fall even though my feet were pointing toward the sky and my head toward the ground. By that time, I thought that I must have fallen thousands of feet, even though only seconds had passed, to me it seemed like forever. I pulled the ripcord of my chest pack. There was a sensation of silk rustling, and cords flashing and then the chute opened with a terrific jerk.

My goggles slipped off my face, my fur lined leather boots were ripped off my feet and the pair of GI boots fastened to one of the rings of my harness, by the laces, also were torn away. I was hanging like a sack of flour in the harness of my parachute, with only my felt shoes from the heated electric suit, on my feet.

Maybe it was cold, it probably was at 15,000 feet, but being scared makes the adrenaline flow and you feel warm. Although I always kept my harness very tight, the shoulder straps were at least 6 inches above my shoulders and I wasn't too comfortable

I remembered some of the advice of the parachute instructor, who had given a lecture on what to do if we ever had to bail out. After the chute opens put your thumbs between the straps and your buttocks and you can then lift yourself up and sit further back in the seat. You can steer the chute and keep it from swinging back and forth by pulling on the cords in the opposite direction to let some air out of the canopy. Definitely cross your legs when landing near trees, the reason is obvious.

