

-what are the girls like?" He laughs, and remarks, "Who knows, no one had ever lasted long enough to get their 25 missions and go!" It didn't take long to find out what the score was. Day by day crews didn't come back - and now we were heading for the same fate, although we didn't know it then.

So, here I am, freezing to death I thought, and wondering how come we're alone when over the intercome comes Joe's voice - "Fighters! Here they come!" Almost immediately his exclamation was followed by the sound and reverberation of his guns. I'm looking out the waist window but can't see any fighters as they were to my rear and high, but it wasn't more than 3 or 4 seconds from the time Joe had yelled when it sounded like rain on a tin roof, and the 20mm shells from the fighters were ripping through the roof of the plane, missing Put-put and myself by inches, and exploding into the forward part of the plane. The oxygen bottles on the deck near the bomb bay doors blew up and caught fire. I was encased in a sheet of flame, my clothes were on fire. The aircraft took a violent lunge upward. I was knocked flat to the bottom of the plane and momentarily stunned. You see, Put-put and myself, being waist gunners, just stood up - we were not sitting in a seat or turret, strapped down with safety belts - so with any violent maneuvers of the aircraft we found ourselves hanging on for dear life or being thrown around like rag dolls. Now I was on my knees looking for my parachute, the interior of the plane was a mass of fire. I found my chute (it was a chest pack and I had to snap it on the harness which I was wearing). It seemed like hours - I couldn't life it - it felt like a ton. Little did I realize then that we were in a flat spin, and I was under negative G forces.

I finally managed to get the chute snapped to the harness and then, just as I dove head first through the waist window, I saw Put-put standing there watching me and assumed that he followed. I hadn't wasted any time once I was able to move. I just knew I had to get away from fire. I didn't even take the time to disconnect my oxygen mask, intercom, or electrical suit. In the ensuing dive through the window I just ripped everything loose as the slack in all the wires was taken up. My oxygen mask was torn from my face. Due to the centrifugal force I didn't clear the side of the aircraft and my left foot was caught on the window sill. I kicked back with my right foot and suddenly I was free - falling through the bright sunshine. Pulling the rip-cord was an involuntary act - I don't remember actually doing it. God, it was quiet - so peaceful - so still. I looked around - nothing - no chutes - no planes - the overcast was way below, no ground in sight, bright sun overhead and clouds below. I couldn't get over how

quiet it was. Then I began to panic - it felt like I was just hanging there. There was no sense of motion - nothing close to relate a downward drift to. I just knew I was stuck. How the hell was I going to get down? All of a sudden, I found I couldn't breathe! I was in pain! I didn't realize it then, but I was suffering from lack of oxygen. It was a horrible feeling, I couldn't stand it. I wanted to end it - now! I tried to unsnap my chute. I couldn't do it because of my weight. I wanted to unbuckle the harness and free myself so I could fall free and quick to relieve my misery, but I couldn't get the harness unbuckled either - because of my weight. It was approximately 12:05 p.m. - at about 26,000 feet - I passed out from lack of oxygen.

The next thing I knew, I was under the clouds and coming down near a village. I could see the various buildings, a church spire quite prominently. There was snow on the ground and I saw that I was about to land in a plowed field on the edge of town. I could see some figures running to where I was about to land. I was coming down backwards. I reached up to shift the risers of the chutes to try and turn around when I hit the ground. I hadn't realized how fast I was descending, and hit the ground unexpectedly, and immediately folded up like an accordion. It was probably a lucky thing, as I did not brace myself but landed like a limp rag, and, therefore did not break any bones. I lay there for a few seconds getting my breath back. I wiggled my toes to make sure my back wasn't broken - it had felt like I had broken every bone in my body. Just as I struggled to my feet I remembered the figures I had noticed running across the field. By now they were close upon me. I could see they were German soldiers. They were shouting and yelling, "pistola, pistola" and making gestures by holding their hands under their right armpit. They wanted my Cold .45 automatic pistol. We had been issued the pistol and a shoulder holster but were advised not to carry it as it was very unlikely we would be in the position to use it. Generally the situation was such that an armed airman was treated badly by the Germans as opposed to better treatment for an unarmed airman. Anyway, the German soldiers were having a foot race to see who could get to me first and get my pistol. I suppose I should say at this point in my story that I could have "John Wayne" it and pulled out my .45 pistol and shot the first 5 or 6 soldier-like in the movie - and then stood there while the rest shot me full of holes, but then I wouldn't be here writing this story - would I? You see, I had landed just across the road from a German army camp, and had literally thousands of soldiers to welcome me to their country.

The first soldier to reach me was disappointed to find no pistol, so he took my helmet instead. The helmet and my parachute was all they took. I was not

molested in any way. I was then escorted to the Commandant's office, where I received a cordial welcome, and had a nice chat with the Commandant - who, by the way, spoke fluent English.

I had bailed out at 12:01 p.m. It was 29 minutes later when I hit the ground - 12:30 p.m. when I had first glanced at my watch. It is now almost 1:00 p.m., and the Commandant has offered me a cigarette and a glass of brandy. I'm sitting there petting his big Irish setter and feeling relaxed and free. It is just beginning to penetrate my senses that the war is over - for me anyway - selfish though it may sound. I tell the Commandant my name, rank and serial number - discuss my home and family, and exchange a few pleasantries. No military or vital security information was discussed whatsoever. After a few moments, I noticed him looking at me rather oddly, as if he were worried about something. He picked up his phone and made a short call. About this time my eyes were beginning to feel rather strange - a tight sensation - no pain, but a feeling as though I couldn't blink my eyes. A moment later the door opened and a doctor entered. He gave me a brief examination and spoke to the Commandant in German. I did not know what he said. The doctor left in a few minutes, and no sooner had he gone when two soldiers, in full uniforms, with Schmeiser machine pistols, appeared and the Commandant said they would escort me to town. He wished me well, we shook hands and I was off. The town center was about 3 miles away, and we walked.

We had walked several hundred yards before my thoughts brought me the recollections of stories we had heard about the Germans. The farmers would stick you to death with their pitchforks - the doctors' had enormous hypodermic needles to fill you with poison - the soldiers would march you to a remote spot in the forest and shoot you - on and on and on - my imagination ran rampant with all the thoughts. I was positive these two soldiers were going to kill me. They spoke no English, I no German. They would motion and point with their machine pistols the direction I was to take. Right into the woods, along a narrow and isolated path - this was it - I just knew it. At first they were along-side, one on each side; presently, they were talking among themselves and were slowly getting behind me. The slower they walked, the slower I walked. I wasn't about to let them get behind so they could shoot me.

Well, it wasn't long before the path widened and we were on a road. A few houses appeared and then the town. I was taken to what looked like a school (at any rate, it was very similar in appearance to the grammar school I attended when a child). They took me into the kitchen - a huge area that had been turned into a makeshift first aid area. I received another brief examination, and then appeared