

While waiting for the go no go signal I was checking out my guns and moving around the airplane with my parachute harness on. After moving about for some time I noticed that the straps that go around the legs had come unfastened. I redid them and worked around the airplane. I found they had come unbuckled again. I went over to operations supply and got fit for a new harness. I did not have time to sew on a snap to hold my shoes and escape kit.

February 7, 1945. Our target for the day was a little north of Vienna, the dreaded oil installations at Moosbierbaum. We were assigned to a B-24H with the nose marked "OL-45". Close to the target we got hit or had mechanical problems. We were losing altitude and the engines were running bad. When the bell rang to abandon aircraft I left the tail gun position and put on my chest chute. Before jumping, I put my escape kit in my shoes and hand carried them out as I left the airplane. When I jumped at 14,500 ft I counted to ten and pulled my rip cord. The chute did not come out. The rip cord had pulled through without unsnapping the snaps. I threw away the rip cord and shoes that I had been carrying in my left hand. I used both hands to tear open the flap. After a long agonizing moment the pilot chute came out dragging the main chute with it. I was close to the ground when the chute popped open with a loud report. I landed in German occupied Hungary and was soon made a prisoner of war.

I was taken to a farm house where I met seven* other men from my crew. We were interrogated by a German officer. Afterward we were put in a local jail to await transportation to a POW camp. The crew was split up and spent the rest of the war in different camps.

The pilot and co-pilot stayed with the plane until the last minute. They got across the Russian lines and one month later made it back to the outfit.

I often think what would have happened to me if the mission of February 6, 1944 had not been scrubbed. I had two strikes against me, a faulty parachute harness and a bad chest pack.**

As always,
Harold D "Bud" Pressel Jr 825 sq.



My crew. Top row from left: Jim Calvert/co-pilot, Alva Merle Schick/pilot, Neal Spiering/navigator, and Ken Limbocker/bombardier. Second row from left: Harold "Bud" Pressel/tail gunner, Claude Torgerson/engineer, and Bob Paul/radio operator. Bottom row from left: William Holmes/ gunner, Ernest Thyberg/ball turret, and Walter Sysko/ nose turret.

[Editors Note] * The normal crew complement was ten, but it was not unusual to have an eleventh man on board such as a photographer.

** Chest packs were stowed in any convenient place in the aircraft and were subject to damage during action either from the results of battle or ordinary wear and tear which could be quite severe at times. As space in turrets, bomb bays and nose tunnels were at a premium, chest packs could not be worn during flight. The only exception was seat packs that were sometimes worn by the pilot and co-pilot when the aircraft was equipped with coffin seats. The coffin seat was fabricated out of curved amour plate so that the pilot literally wore the seat. They were very popular naturally, but could get awfully cold at altitude. The parachute pack served as the seat cushion, as no other padding was provided.

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Brooklyn, NY
Dear Bud

My service in the Army Air Forces began with basic training Miami Beach, combat training Davis-Monthan Field, Arizona, then on to Salt Lake City, Utah, for two week check out and familiarization, then picked up a brand new B-24 and flew it to Bangor, Maine. Ferried aircraft direct to Belfast, Northern Ireland then was transferred to a secret base in England for B-24's. They were stripped of ball turret, nose turret, and painted black, and equipped with flame arresters for night missions. Before we flew any missions they broke up the crews and sent them to various 8th Air Force Bases. I believe about this time they stopped the night mission operations assigned to the 8th Air Force, 34th Bomb Group 4th Bomb Squadron.

First mission was to Hanover, Germany to bomb an enemy air base. About 5 minutes before entering the IP, I reported seeing this huge black cloud. I called it out as a thunderstorm and heard chuckles over the interphone. The pilot said it was antiaircraft fire. I had never seen it before and it was very heavy right at our height. It was scary all right.

Then bombs were away and the aircraft lifted a little and then rocked all over. The pilot called me that we had been hit. I got down from the upper turret, with a portable oxygen bottle in hand to inspect the bomb bay. Most of the cat walk and bomb racks were gone from a direct hit. The bomb bay doors were flapping in the breeze. There were numerous fuel and hydraulic leaks. The self sealing tanks began to hold but there was no hydraulic pressure and no contact with the rear of the ship. I took my "dike" pliers and safety wire, and using the pliers like a fish hook was able to snag the bottom of each bomb bay door after much maneuvering and pull them closed. I then wired them shut. We were very lucky the shell went off where it did, because the fuel booster pumps and fuel lines were spared. Had to hand crank the gear down all 360 turns.

Flew two missions on D-day, short ones of about 3 hours each. Had a few missions when ME-109's went through our unit. Saw a German rocket plane fly through our squadron shooting all the time. It looked like it was on fire. My turret was too slow to track him.