

Just after we did this, we faced one quick, head-on fighter attack. There were only four of them, all of them Focke-Wulfs, but the rate of closure was fast and they made only one pass. They didn't do any damage and they didn't come back to play with us. I've often wondered about the pilots of those four planes. Maybe they didn't realize that they had an easy kill. Maybe they were just student pilots. Or maybe they were headed for the American bombers behind us and were saving their ammunition for them.

Flying south, we began rapidly to lose altitude and approached the area of Friedrichshafen at about 10,000 feet. We carried no maps of Switzerland but each member of the crew had a little escape kit in his flight suit. Bowers opened his up. Besides such things as a knife, some foreign currency, a small compass, and some concentrated chocolate, it contained a handkerchief. On this handkerchief was printed a map of Europe. Since it included all of Europe, Switzerland made up only a small part of it. Still, that was all we had to go by.

Looking down past Friedrichshafen I could see what I presumed was the Lake of Constance and, remembering my grade school geography, I figured Switzerland lay on its south shore. However, as we passed over the Friedrichshafen region, the Germans pumped up some flak. While anti-aircraft fire didn't seem as much of a danger to us as the German fighters did, the number of explosions going on around us started me thinking, "What if some pocket south of that lake is part of Germany?" I called Bowers over the intercom to say, "I think we should make a right turn, south of that lake. I think that the most level part of Switzerland lies over to our right." (I happened to be right, but I was only guessing.) Gordon disagreed. He pointed out that if we made a right turn we might be over Germany again or Occupied France and therefore still in trouble. So, we continued south with the Alps right ahead of us.

We continued to lose altitude and were soon skimming above the peaks of the mountains. By now, Bob Huisinga had rendered our bombsight inoperative and our two Waist Gunners, Walter Kozlowski and Elmo Simpson, seeking to lighten the plane, dropped their 50-caliber machine guns into the wildest parts of the Alps. Because we were now so close to the high peaks, some of the crew became worried about our chances of staying up. Our Radio Operator, Venton Scott, called up to ask if the crew should prepare to bail out. "There's no need to jump," I told everyone, "You could kill yourselves trying to parachute into those steep mountains. And don't worry about this airplane. We've still got two good engines

and we're going to be landing somewhere very soon."

By now we had crossed the Alpine divide. As we continued to let down, we could see airfields on the southerly piedmont ahead of us. There were planes parked on them but they were German planes! There were swastikas everywhere! Clearly we had reached northern Italy, which was not where we wanted to be. I asked Bowers to come up to the cockpit and let me look at that little handkerchief map, too. Luckily it showed a lake we could identify over to our right. The map also showed that the northern tip of it lay in Switzerland. This was Lago Maggiore.

We flew at once over to the Swiss end of the lake, noting a river that flowed into it from the north and looking for what might serve as a landing strip. Suddenly, a single-engined Swiss fighter plane appeared at our side, readily recognized by its white cross on a red field. (Its pilot, we learned later, was Captain Gottfried von

Meiss.) He swung in close to us and, by pointing down, directed our attention to something on the ground below. He seemed to be telling us where to land. Sure enough, we could see a small grass airfield at the edge of Lago Maggiore. (We learned later that it was called Magadino.) While I had never landed a B-17 on grass before and the field didn't look very large, I figured it would work out all right. For one thing, I could come in very low over the water to use every bit of the field. Also, our plane was very light. We'd gotten rid of our bombs and had almost empty gas tanks.

It seems strange in retrospect, but we had been told that, if we ever landed in Switzerland or Sweden, we should try to destroy the airplane. We had with us for that purpose four incendiary bombs. Filled with thermite, they were about the same



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shape as a soft-drink can. When you struck a cap at one end, the contents would burn fiercely after a time delay of seven or eight seconds. They'd been made for the R.A.F. and I had once seen one demonstrated. Accordingly, before we landed, I told Bowers to set one off in the nose of the plane, Scott to set one off just behind the bomb-bay, and Rich to set one off in the cockpit. I intended to set the fourth one off myself. From the pilot's side window, I planned to crawl out on the fuselage as soon as I stopped the plane. From there I would make my way out to the left wing where I would set the bomb just above one of the empty gas tanks. The bombs, as I recall, had spikes at the bottom which you could drive into soft metals. Once that thermite burned through the wing's aluminum skin and got to that empty tank, the plane would surely blow up.

As I swung the plane low across the lake on our base leg to start our final approach, I noted that the Swiss had ringed the entire