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proof glass.

I commenced pulling on the charging handle and trying to reach in to the restricted space at the breach, but the gun was thoroughly out of action. While I was trying to free up the MG, a fighter came at us again, but more obliquely, from my left to right. It was almost as if he knew that my right gun was out and I had to lead him with the left fifty. There appeared to be no response from any other gun turret now.

I distinctly recall streaks of white smoke passing between and around my feet. As the German 20mm shell is armed when it smashes through a fuselage skin, I suspect that the damage was occurring behind me and in the waist area. Suddenly the hydraulic tank and accumulator for my turret burst into flames! I commenced yelling into my throat mike that the plane was on fire! After three or four warnings that I hoped someone was hearing, the flames appeared at my flying boots! Opening the turret doors, I dropped out backwards. This automatically disconnected my oxygen mask and the communication cord, but I had to reach back to unfasten the heated suit plug.

Standing up, I turned around to walk forward, but kept slipping on loose, unfired, 50 caliber rounds littering the floor. Apparently one or both of the waist ammunition boxes/carriers had been hit. No one but myself was in the waist area. Looking toward the front of the bomber I noticed that the ball turret hatch was positioned below the fuselage and that the radioman was standing on the rear section of the bomb bay catwalk. Then I also saw in horror that the flight deck and APU area were completely engulfed in a fire! As Bill Shell had his chest 'chute on, I violently signaled for him to jump out of the burning aircraft!

Suddenly I realized that I did not have my parachute attached. As the radioman departed via the rear of the open bomb bay, I slipped and slid back to the area of my turret to retrieve my "chute. Along the way, I discarded my oxygen mask and the flak suit. When I pulled the tabs and the heavy suit fell away, I remember that the dark fabric was badly torn and the "kopeck" was spilling out. Apparently it had kept some shell splinters from piercing me!

The rear turret now looked like a roaring fireplace, but I was able to unstrap my chest 'chute from the bulkhead forward of the exploded hydraulic tank and clip it onto my harness. I went to the rear hatch and opened it. It had been hit enough so that only one hinge was holding. Sitting on the forward edge of this open hatch, I dropped out of the aircraft. As I left the plane, I commenced somersaulting over and over. The next time I glimpsed blue sky instead of faraway ground, I yanked the "D" ring that pulled the rip cord away. Wham! I was suddenly pulled upright with the nylon canopy spread above from the risers. Glancing upward, I could see the shadow of the pilot 'chute as it now lay on top of the main parachute. The first realization after you know that the thing opened okay is how unearthly quiet it gets. Just a faint swish of air. You're dropping fairly rapidly, but at altitude, there's no sense of it. As I started my descent, an enemy Me 210/410 flew past; close enough that I could make out the pilot staring at me. Then he was gone. Oddly enough, I had no fear or apprehension.

Suddenly, there was a loud cry from beneath me! It came from the nose gunner, who was fearful that I was going to come down on top of his 'chute! As instructed at someplace or other, I yanked down on a riser. I went away from "Knobby" but also lost altitude rapidly! I decided that maneuver was not a brilliant idea! Nearing the ground, you realize that the descent is quite fast and that straddling a fence would not be to your best interests.

Looking downward as I dropped and moved sideways, I saw a woman sitting on the ground and leaning against a large tree. Fearing that I might land in her lap feet first, I yelled a warning. Looking up,

she let out a shrill scream! This distracted me from watching where I was going, so I slammed into the eaves of a two story farmhouse! I dropped straight down into a ditch along the farmhouse wall. This not only "broke my fall", but also broke both the tibia and fibula of my right ankle!

Sitting on my collapsed parachute and a long bench beside the farmhouse, I was eventually joined by the bombardier, Joe MacNamara, and the nose gunner, "Knobby" Walsh. Although it turned out that MacNamara had been wounded in his legs, he seemed mobile enough. He did have badly burned hands, (looked like claws), that happened when he grabbed the red hot red handles to open the nose wheel doors so he and "Knobby" could bail out; (the wheel stays put). As I recall, the nose gunner had been scorched about the face. I had been burned a bit above the rim of my oxygen mask. The woman that I had startled as I approached the ground stuck a goose quill feather into a green bottle of something, and wiped the substance on my upper face. (Farm people know such things.) Of course, we "enemies" attracted a crowd of neighbors and local authorities. There was a plain-clothes Gestapo type, several women and a Roman Catholic priest. The latter was sent for when a cross I carried was discovered during a body search. (It was a big cross, and they thought, at first, that it was a weapon. However, we didn't carry sidearms on missions of this type.)

The women were fascinated by the nylon parachute underneath my butt. The one who treated my face, produced a pair of scissors and was going to secretly snip off a small section. With both of us keeping an eye on the Gestapo type, I pulled a large portion of the 'chute free so she could cut off a considerable amount!

Eventually, a horse drawn cart arrived to transport us to the local town. There was a body underneath some hay or straw in the cart. Brushing some of the covering away, we read the name, "William Shell" stenciled on the "Mae West". Joe MacNamara told us that he had learned that the radioman had bled to death during his descent as a result of a badly shot-up arm.

We spent the night under guard, sleeping on the bare floor of a vacant room of some sort of official building in town. I don't think that we ever knew the name of the town. My untreated, unset, broken leg did not bother me too much that night, but I was in real agony the next morning, especially on the train platform awaiting transportation to Graz, Austria. Joe MacNamara and I ended up in a ward full of American and English prisoners of war on the next to the top floor of the Graz hospital. "Knobby" Walsh apparently was not injured enough to require hospital care and was sent on to Germany. My ankle was set and I had a full length leg cast. A shrapnel hit was also found in the same area.

After sufficient recuperation in Graz, MacNamara and I were separated. At the time, officer and enlisted POW's were sent to different camps, but this changed later when the invading armies squeezed up the remaining enemy areas. I was sent, (through some beautiful Austrian scenery that I will always remember), to a POW hospital in Germany. There, a British POW doctor reset my leg as it had not been set properly in Graz. Convalescence in another POW hospital followed, then I was sent to the infamous Dulag Luft. Internment in Stalag-Luft 4 and then Stalag-Luft 1 were next; (the latter shared with officers). In early May 1945, the Russian army arrived to free us.

After the whole war, I went to aeronautical school, then was employed by an aviation company; retiring after 45 years in 1991. I lost track of "Knobby" Walsh and Joe MacNamara, then learned that Joe had died in the late 1940's. C'est La Guerre.....