

was a move to follow but a cooler head prevailed and reminded us of the bail out bell. We all plugged into the intercom and listened intently as the pilot brought us up to speed. We were told that we would head back via an inland route as the pilot believed we could reach friendly territory and find an allied airfield to land at, if we had to make an emergency landing. Everyone seemed to prefer this to staying over water, and chance having to ditch. We were losing altitude so we should try to lighten the plane by throwing out everything that wasn't needed in an effort to maintain altitude. He also told us to make sure that one of us in the waist stayed on intercom, and then he kind of threw an off the cuff remark at us like, "the manifold pressure is dropping on number 2 engine, but we are watching it closely." I had never heard Pilot Don Zimmerman get excited about much of anything before, and evidently he wasn't showing any of it at this point either.

First, the bomb bay and escape hatch were closed to cut back on the drag. Second, we started throwing out everything that wasn't welded or glued down. Flak jackets, steel helmets, and the ammo cans went first, followed by a steady stream of whatever. For a couple of reasons I especially enjoyed throwing out an ammo can that one of the guys had defecated in on the way up here. I was hoping it would bounce off the head of the German gunner who had put that large flak hole by my turret. Even the extra clothes were going out the windows. All I wanted right now was what I was wearing, my parachute harness, a chute, and my GI boots.



*Nose section of ship 24.*

We had been keeping an eye on the oil trailing onto the wing from engine #2 as it hit the slip stream, and splattered onto the wing on our left side, and wondering how serious that was when the intercom crackled;

"I am going to have to feather number 2, we are going to try to make it to an English emergency landing strip just behind the German lines. Keep getting rid of everything you can and see if you can drop the ball turret out of the plane."

This message caused a new flurry of activity and any fear of the fighters from Udine was thrown to the wind along with all the machine gun parts and ammunition we could work loose. If we couldn't shoot at them at least we could throw things at them. Actually the situation now struck us all as being extremely serious.

I had immediately got hold of a few tools we hadn't thrown out and started the procedure of loosening the ball turret in an attempt to drop it out of the plane.

Try as I might I can not to this day recall ever being shown how to accomplish that task, but with the help of one of the other guys we seemed to have managed to have loosened all the retaining nuts except the last one.

We advised the pilot of the situation, he hastily responded that we should drop it as soon as possible. We had a hard time working the last nut from its bolt as the full weight of the turret was on that point, suddenly the retaining bolt snapped and the turret dropped wedging itself in the turret well.

I came across a gun barrel that hadn't made it out the window yet and started a steady pounding on the edges of the ball retaining ring but to no avail.

The ball was partly out the bottom of the plane but hopelessly wedged in there. We reported this to the pilot but by then we had been losing altitude so fast that all his and the co-pilots efforts were going toward trying to keep the ship aloft. From a previous experience we knew he had

flown the B-24 with only 3 engines but flying with 2 engines gone was a whole different ball game.

We didn't know it yet but we had managed to get beyond the German lines, and were now fast approaching some kind of a city or town and the pilot alerted us to prepare for a crash landing as they tried to line the ship up with the small runway for an attempted landing. The hydraulic system like everything else was in chaos and the gear had to be manually cranked down by crew men up front.

We all rushed to the bulkhead leading to the bomb bay and braced ourselves for what was coming as the rooftops and landscape whipped by the open waist windows.

We were at tree top level and soon we could see the approaching steel matting through the openings around the ball turret. We heard the familiar squeak of a tire as it made contact with the runway. The squeak

of the second shoe hitting the floor never came. It was replaced by a screeching, grinding, wailing sound that terrorized us all as the plane slid on the metal matting.

That was now replaced by the sight of grass as we spun and bounced out of control off the runway onto the turf. Just before the plane made its final movement, the wedged in ball turret that had been bouncing along with the plane freed itself and sprang up in front of us. We were all pressed up tight against the bulkhead.