

So I tried to insert my thumbs as he had directed and due to my dead body weight it was quite difficult. I finally managed it, but trying to lift my body up, just did not work. I had a hard time reclaiming my thumbs. It seems as if you are just suspended in space, you don't seem to be falling at all. At 15,000 feet or 12,000 feet or even 8,000 feet things on the ground look the same size, it is deathly quiet, there is no reference point. As I looked up I saw another chute that had opened; it was a distance above me. I could not see the plane, it was gone. I did not know whether it had crashed or had traveled on.

I looked at the ground; there were patches of snow, the terrain was hilly with scattered small trees. I saw no signs of habitations, no villages or towns. I started to think what I would do once I hit the ground. I knew that I was in enemy territory and the thought of becoming a prisoner of war was very scary. The war was winding down, the Germans were on the run, but there was little I could do about it.

I was still hanging there, how long would it be before I landed, would I ever hit the ground. I bailed out at 16,000 feet and I figured that at a rate of fall of 14 feet per second, after the parachute opened, it would take between 15 to 20 minutes and that did not take into consideration the fact that the wind carries you sideways. I hoped and prayed that the wind would carry me towards our lines and not further into enemy territory.

Anyway, I am still suspended as in a void, thinking hard what to do and considering one hairbrained idea after another, discarding them all. All at once I began to feel that I was falling. The ground was coming closer and the closer it came the faster I was falling. I remember crossing my legs, I was not going to straddle a branch, and at the last minute I pulled on the cords of the chute to avoid hitting a tree and I landed hard, I rolled until the chute stopped me, the canopy had become entangled in the tree. The first thing I did was to check for a broken arm or leg, but except for a sore spot on my behind, I sustained no injuries. I unhooked the harness and untangled the canopy from the small tree, I did not want it to be visible. I started to cut some of the silk of the chute with my

knife to wind the silk around my feet since I was shoeless, when I saw some people approaching.

They were civilians, they wore no uniforms and as luck would have it, one has to be lucky, they said that they were Italian partisans, here to help us to escape the Germans. Mike Rainey had landed about a 100 yards away from me. Mike had not lost his shoes, as I had, he gave me his flying boots after he changed into his GI shoes. The Italians bundled up our parachutes and took us to the bottom of the hill, where an old truck was parked. They drove us over a very rutty country road to a farmhouse. They told us that the Tedeski (Germans) were fast retreating in the area and in a couple of days it would be safe to take us to the Allied lines. It was now about 6 o'clock, it was dark and we were hungry. They gave us some bread and cheese to eat and we shared some of the chocolate bars we carried with us.

The night and the next day passed uneventfully and after dark they loaded us back onto the truck and by ways only known to them, drove us toward the Allied lines and turned us over to soldiers of the 5th British Army. We thanked them profusely for helping us and gave them our parachutes as tokens of our appreciation. The silk of the canopy sold for a 1,000 dollars on the black market.

The Brits arranged transportation to a forward Allied airfield, which was the same field where old #24 had crash-landed, We were happy to find out that all the men had survived the landing without mishap. They had boarded a plane to Rome a few hours earlier. We, on the other hand were believed, by the crew to be prisoners of the Germans. They thought that, since we bailed out some miles back of the German lines, our chances to reach the Allied lines were slim. We figured later on that the wind had been very favorable to us and carried us many miles to the south. That and the timely arrival of the Italian partisans, who hid us, contributed to our lucky return. The next day we flew on to Rome where we were debriefed. Afterwards, we flew to Foggia, and rode to Cerignola and were reunited with the rest of the crew.

The end



*Battle Damage, Members of the 484th Bomb Group gather around an olive drab B-24 that has suffered damage to the tail turret, killing the tail gunner. Notice the right elevator was completely shot away, and the left elevator was hit also.*