

AS THE BOMBS FELL AND THE BOMB BAY DOORS CLOSED, I FELT THE PLANE SURGE AHEAD BUT AT THE SAME TIME I SAW THAT WE WERE PEELING AWAY AS THE GROUP WHEELED AWAY FROM THE TARGET. THE FLAK WAS UNABATED, SHELLS WERE BURSTING ALL AROUND US AS I WATCHED THE DONUT LIKE EXPLOSIONS OF THE BOMBS STEPPING ACROSS THE CITY.

"HERE THEY COME!"

I SAW THEM HIT A GROUP AHEAD OF US. IT WAS AWESOME TO WATCH THE PYROTECHNIC DISPLAY OF HUNDREDS OF .50 CALIBRE MACHINE GUNS CONVERGING THEIR FIRE ON THE ATTACKING PLANES. NOW THEY WERE AFTER US. I LOCKED ON TO ONE, FIRED BUT DIDN'T SEE ANY DAMAGE. I PICKED ANOTHER, HE ROLLED AND DIVE BELOW US, ONE VEERED OFF, OUT OF RANGE. DURING THIS TIME I COULD HEAR THE "SWISH" OF PLANES PASSING THROUGH OUT OF MY FIELD OF VISION AND THE "POPPING" OF SHELLS WAS DISTINCT.

DURING A RESPITE I LOOKED FOR DAMAGE AND WAS RELIEVED TO SEE NOTHING SERIOUS. HOWEVER, MY ANXIETY LEVEL WENT UP A LITTLE AS I HEARD

OTHERS CALLING IN TO REPORT SOME LARGE HOLES AND SOME DAMAGE TO CONTROL SURFACES. THE WORST NEWS WAS THAT THE NUMBER ONE ENGINE WAS SHOWING LOW OIL PRESSURE - AN OMINOUS SIGN!

WE WERE IN A LOOSE FORMATION BUT I WANTED TO BELIEVE THAT THE WORST WAS OVER AND THAT WE'D JUST FOLLOW THAT "RED YARN" BACK TO HOME. I KNEW THAT WE HAD BEEN IN THE "LION'S MOUTH" AND I KNEW, EVEN WITH MY SHORT EXPERIENCE, THAT WE'D BEEN IN A HELL OF A FIGHT. OF COURSE, I DIDN'T KNOW THAT HISTORIANS WOULD DUB THIS APRIL 29TH AIR BATTLE AS THE FIERCEST OF THE WAR. WE DESTROYED EIGHTY-EIGHT GERMAN PLANES AND LOST SEVENTY-SEVEN OF OUR OWN BUT IN THE WORDS OF THEIR COMMANDING GENERAL THIS WAS THE BEGINNING OF THE END FOR THE VAUNTED LUFTWAFFE. TWO PLANES APPEARED OVER THE BEACHES ON JUNE 6TH

THEY WERE GONE. I STARTED TO FEEL BETTER ABOUT OUR SITUATION BUT I DIDN'T SEE ANY OF OUR ESCORT. "WHERE WERE THEY?" PROBABLY MANY OF THEM HAD TO GET RID OF THEIR "DROP TANKS" WHEN WE GOT THE FIRST SIGHTINGS AND THEN COULDN'T MAKE IT TO THE TARGET. AS I SCANNED THE SKY FOR ANY SIGN THAT

THE JERRIES WERE BACK, I THOUGHT OF THE PEOPLE ON THE GROUND THAT HAD OBSERVED THIS GREAT BATTLE. WHAT THEY SAW WAS THE VAST, BLUE, ALMOST VIOLET, SKY "CANVAS" CUT HORIZONTALLY BY 4,000 PURE WHITE CONDENSATION TRAILS FROM THE HALF MILE WIDE, 100 MILE LONG FORMATION OF A THOUSAND FOUR ENGINE BOMBERS FLYING FOUR TO FIVE MILES ABOVE THEM. OFF TO THE SIDES AND ABOVE AND BELOW SINGLE CON TRAILS FROM THE FIGHTERS WERE ETCHED ON THE "CANVAS" IN LONG SPIRALS AND CURVES. AS THE FW-190'S AND ME-109'S APPROACHED ANOTHER SET OF TRAILS APPEARED. THIS "CANVAS" QUICKLY TOOK ON THE APPEARANCE OF A CHILD'S FINGERPAINTING AS THE SWIRLING, LOOPING FIGHTER TRAILS INTERMINGLED WITH THE STRAIGHT LINE BOMBER TRAILS, THE EFFECT OF THE LUFTWAFFE ATTACK AND THE ESCORT'S COUNTER-ATTACK. OVERLAPPING THE SCENE WAS THE FIREWORKS OF MANY MACHINE GUNS FIRING FROM THE BOMBER FORMATION. INTERMITTENTLY, THIS "ARTIST'S" RENDITION WAS DOTTED BY FIRE AND SMOKE FROM BURNING AND EXPLODING AIRCRAFT, FALLING PLANES, DEBRIS FROM EXPLOSIONS, BODIES FALLING AND PARACHUTES. IF THEY WERE WATCHING NEAR THE TARGET THEY SAW THIS JUGGERNAUT FLY STRAIGHT AND LEVEL INTO A MAELSTROM OF FIREBALLS AND

THEIR FINGERPRINTS - DIRTY, BLACK SMOKE BALLS. THEY SAW PLANES DISAPPEAR IN A FLASH, WOUNDED PLANES FALLING AWAY MANY OUT OF CONTROL AND HEADED FOR EARTH.

IT WAS LIKE FLYING INTO A MEAT GRINDER BUT NO ONE FLINCHED, "OURS BUT TO DO OR DIE." THE WORLD WILL NEVER SEE SUCH A SIGHT AGAIN BUT HOW WILL IT BE REMEMBERED? BY THE TIME THE SURVIVORS WERE LANDING IN ENGLAND THE CON TRAILS WERE GONE, DEBRIS AND BODIES OF AIRMEN, BOTH DEAD AND ALIVE HAD FOUND THEIR WAY TO EARTH. THE "CANVAS" RETURNED TO ITS VIRGIN STATE LIKE THE "MAGIC" PRINTERS THAT CHILDREN ENJOY. THE DARK IMAGES MADE SO CLEAR BY MARKING UPON THE PLASTIC COVER WITH A STYLUS ARE GONE IN A TWINKLING OF THE EYE AS THE SHEET IS LIFTED, NO SIGN THAT ANYTHING WAS EVER THERE. AS WITH THE TOY PAD, THE SCENE IN BLANK. THE ONLY EVIDENCE OF THIS HISTORIC BATTLE IS IN THE MEMORIES OF THOSE WHO SURVIVED AND IN TIME THAT ALSO SHALL BE GONE, FOREVER. THERE ARE NO STONE OR BRONZE MONUMENTS IN THE SKY.

WITHOUT ANY WARNING THE WAIST SECTION OF THE PLANE WAS FILLED

WITH BRIGHT GREEN AND ORANGE FIREBALLS. I SAW "HAMP" DOUBLE OVER AND THROUGH HIS WAIST WINDOW I SPOTTED THREE ME-109'S TURNING TO COME BACK AT US. THE PLANE WAS SHAKING VIOLENTLY AND ~~POUR~~ BLACK OIL WAS POURING FROM NUMBER TWO ENGINE. ONCE THE PROP WAS FEATHERED THE VIBRATION STOPPED. NOW MY EARPHONES WERE CRACKLING WITH A JUMBLE OF EXCITED CALLS OF FIGHTERS. I GOT ONE IN MY SIGHTS AND OBSERVED PIECES FLYING FROM IT AS HE FELL AWAY. THERE WERE THREE AND THE OTHER TWO GOT HITS. THE NUMBER ONE ENGINE (HIT OVER THE TARGET) WAS NOW GIVING OFF SMOKE. MY MIND TOLD ME THAT WE'D NEVER MAKE IT WITH TWO ENGINES OUT ON THE SAME SIDE. MORRIS WAS CALLING FOR HELP. HE HAD TWO .40 CALIBRE BULLETS THROUGH HIS RIGHT LEG. "HAMP" HAD A 20MM SHRAPNEL WOUND IN THE GROIN BUT WAS STILL ON HIS FEET.

WE WERE FAR BEHIND OUR FORMATION AND SLOWLY LOSING ALTITUDE. I ANTICIPATED "PAPPY'S" INSTRUCTION AND RETRACTED THE TURRET. HE AND DAT WERE TALKING ABOUT THE SHORTEST ROUTE TO THE NORTH SEA. ONCE OUT OF MY TURRET, I WENT BACK TO CHECK ON MORRIS. HE WAS HURTING BUT NOT BLEEDING MUCH BECAUSE OF THE EXTREME COLD. HE WANTED TO STAY

IN THE TURRET. I WENT BACK TO "HAMP" AND GOT HIM TO SIT DOWN. I TOOK HIS GUN.

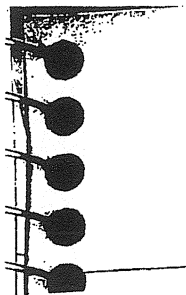
"DAMN!" THE TWO REMAINING 109'S WERE BACK. THEY GOT HITS, MORE BASKET BALL SIZED HOLES IN THE FUSELAGE AND NOW BLACK OIL WAS POURING FROM NUMBER ONE. WHEN THEY MADE THEIR NEXT PASS THEY MADE A MISTAKE, THEY CAME IN FROM 8 O'CLOCK HIGH. WE COULD GET ON THEM FROM THE TAIL TURRET, THE TOP TURRET AND MY WAIST GUN. I TRACKED ONE IN (THIS IS WHERE QUAIL HUNTING AND SKEET PAID OFF) AS CANNON SHELLS BURST AROUND ME, MISSED. NOW I WAS ON HIS COMPANION WHO SKIDDED RIGHT INTO MY TRACERS. I COULD SEE HIS GOGGLED FACE AS THE 109 BEGAN TO DISINTERGRATE AND AT THE SAME TIME I HAD THE SENSATION OF BEING HIT HARD IN SEVERAL PLACES (I HAD 20MM SHRAPNEL WOUNDS IN THE HEAD, ARM, SHOULDER AND BACK). THEY WERE GONE BUT I INSTINCTIVELY KNEW THAT "WE'D HAD IT." WE HAD BEEN CLOBBERED AND WERE ABOUT TO BECOME STATISTICS. I CALLED TO "PAPPY," GOT NO RESPONSE, JERKED MY CONNECTIONS LOOSE, OPENED THE BULKHEAD DOOR AND LOOKED THROUGH THE BOMB RACKS TOWARD THE ~~DECK~~ FLIGHT DECK. I SAW "SWEDE" TRYING TO HELP FONZY - HE WAS DEAD. "SWEDE" SAW ME AND

SIGNALLED FOR US TO BAILOUT. AT THAT INSTANT THE "BAILOUT BELL" SOUNDED. I MOTIONED TO THE OTHERS, GRABBED MY CHUTE AND ATTACHED IT TO MY HARNESS (FORGOT MY SHOES!). BENNETT AND I GOT MORRIS OUT OF THE TAIL TURRET, PUT HIS CHUTE ON FOR HIM AND PULLED HIM UP TO THE HATCH. I WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR CLEARING THE WAIST SO WITH BENNETT'S HELP WE ROLLED MORRIS OUT OF THE HATCH AND THEN HELPED "HAMP" OUT. WE SHOOK HANDS AT THE HATCH, HE ROLLED UP AND TUMBLED OUT HEAD FIRST, I FOLLOWED.

THERE WAS A SUDDEN BLAST OF AIR AS I HIT THE SLIPSTREAM, THEN I WAS ON MY BACK, SUSPENDED IN SPACE WITH NO SENSATION OF FALLING AT ALL. I KNEW THAT WE HAD LOST ALTITUDE SO I WAS TORN BETWEEN MY DESIRE TO DELAY OPENING MY CHUTE AND MY FEAR OF WAITING TOO LONG. THE LONGER I WAITED, THE BETTER MY CHANCES FOR ESCAPING AND AVOIDING BEING SHOT AT FROM THE GROUND. WHILE THIS WAS GOING THROUGH MY MIND, I REMOVED MY HELMET AND GOGGLES AND MY GLOVES. I WAS AMAZED, THEY JUST FLOATED ALONG BESIDE ME! I WAS SURPRISED AND ALARMED BY THE AMOUNT OF BLOOD INSIDE THE HELMET (IT TURNED OUT THAT NONE OF MY WOUNDS WERE DEADLY BUT THERE WAS A LOT OF BLOOD AND

I PICKED BUCKSHOT SIZED SHRAPNEL OUT OF THE WOUNDS FOR THE NEXT COUPLE OF WEEKS.

I DECIDED THAT IT WAS TIME, SO I MOVED MY ARMS AROUND, GOT MYSELF POSITIONED AT ABOUT 60°, HEAD DOWN AND PULLED THE RIPCORD. WITH GREAT RELIEF, I SAW THE SMALL PILOT CHUTE FLYOUT, DRAGGING THE MAIN CANOPY BEHIND. THE CHUTE POPPED WITH ~~A~~ SUCH FORCE THAT I WAS JERKED UPRIGHT WHILE MY FLEECE LINED BOOTS RIPPED AWAY, HEADED FOR THE GROUND. I WAS LEFT WITH THE "BEDROOM SHOE" TYPE HEATED BOOTS. I WOULD RUE THE DAY THAT I FORGOT MY G.I. SHOES. I LOOKED AROUND, SAW A CLEAR FIELD, A TINY VILLAGE AND A PATCH OF WOODS. I WANTED TO GET CLOSE TO THE TREES BUT NOT IN THEM, SO I PULLED ON MY SHROUD LINES TO PARTIALLY COLLAPSE ONE SIDE, THIS ALLOWED ME TO SLIDE IN THE DIRECTION OF THE COLLAPSED SIDE. AS I PULLED ON THE LINES, I LOOKED UP AND MY BREATH STOPPED - THE CANOPY WAS BADLY DAMAGED, LONG RIPS AND CUT CORDS. IT HAD BEEN HIT BY FLAK OR 20MM SHRAPNEL AND I THOUGHT FOR A SPLIT SECOND THAT IT WAS GOING TO COLLAPSE. IT DIDN'T BUT I DECIDED NOT TO TRY TO GUIDE MYSELF ANYMORE. IN ANY CASE, THE GROUND SUDDENLY JUMPED UP TO MEET ME. I ~~W~~ LANDED



WITH A THUD* ✓