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Foster Rodda

OPTION # 2

(O.K. to be checked out but no copies)

From Roland Stewart file
Contacted during 50th class re-union at
Seattle Pacific University

16-15-

#28

From Foster Rodda
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Many of you know that I served in the 8th Air Force during WW II flying B-17's (Flying Fortresses) as a Squadron Navigator. *NO ONE YOU WILL KNOW!*

Without ^{SCRIPT}notes, it would be hard for me ~~to be able to~~ to relate and squeeze a 6½ hour mission over Germany into the allotted 5 minutes. So I'll give a kaleidoscope of a bombing mission in late November 1943.

Our target^s that day ^{WERE} was the sub pens and a large oil refinery at Bremen, Germany. At take-off time it was a typical cold, damp, dark morning in England. It turned out ~~recording~~ the lowest temperatures of the winter.

Over the North Sea near the Frisian Islands we experienced a worrisome oxygen leak....gauges showed less than 100 lbs. remaining in the entire system. Since B-17's were not pressurized, everyone puts on oxygen masks above 12M feet.

We were now at bombing altitude of 25M feet, outside temperature of 60 degrees below zero as we turned South toward Bremen. A fast calculation showed only ½ hour of oxygen left. none-the-less we all agreed to stay in formation to drop our 500 lb. bombs on target.

During our bomb run, anti-aircraft flak took out our #4 engine. Fortunately, we were able to feather the propeller. At BOMBS AWAY as we turned from the target, #3 engine began to lose oil pressure. We now can't keep up with the formation so we break sharply away.

Ice now covers the chins of our oxygen masks. Most plexiglass windows are frosted and the inside of the plane looks like white X-mas. Our inter-com started to break-up and most navigational instruments were frozen.

We began a fast let-down to 7M feet. We are now between two cloud layers. Two German ME 109 fighters spot our contrails and head for easy pickings. As they close in, we duck into a cloud bank and for the moment lose them.

After a couple of 180 degree left turns (Never turn into a dead engine) and still losing altitude, my pilot asks for a heading home.

He then realizes that all compasses are still frozen, some reading erradically. A frozen compass is about as good as a ripped parachute

We are now skimming the water but which way is West? We could well be heading back over the coast of Holland.

At this point I remembered a small compass in my escape kit. I held it in my icy hand. We were heading South. I corrected the pilot as best I could. It worked.

One by one our instruments came back including the inter-com. The ball turret gunner said the bomb-bay doors were still open and some bombs had not been released. Our Bombardier and Radio Operator met in the bomb-bay walkway and freed 5 bombs which exploded harmlessly in the water. The tail fuses on 2 bombs had already spun off making them armed.

Our tail and right waist gunners had passed out from lack of oxygen and extreme frost bite. As we approached our field for landing, we shot red flares to alert the ambulance crews that we had injuries aboard. The tail gunner lost his foot and of course never flew again.

What made the papers back home in the States was bringing the Fort and crew back with a dime store compass.

Surely the Lord was with me for I went on to complete 25 missions...this was a tour of duty. ^{THEN} I took the Il de'France back ~~home to~~ ~~Donna~~ ^{TO THE STATES IN APRIL 1944.}
FOR COMPLETING 25 MISSIONS EACH CREW MEMBER WAS AWARDED THE DFC, THE DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS.