

## Airmen's recollections of being shot down

[Ira Weinstein] In my plane, the battle was going on and raging at such a pace, I didn't even know that we were hit. All of a sudden my navigator gave me a yank and I turned around and he was going out the nose hatch. So I bailed out. My parachute, I had a backpack on that day, my parachute caught on the bomb site. So the plane by that time was in a flat spin with great centrifugal force, but I pulled myself – I chinned myself -- back into the airplane, unhooked my parachute, and finally got out at about 2500 feet, so I had barely enough time to enjoy the parachute trip down when I was on the ground. ”

[Buford Balay] “They hit the ball turret with a 20mm which didn’t explode. It blew my ball turret gunner’s arm off. They had to get him out of the turret and pull his chute and toss him out of the aircraft. I turned around and saw these fighters coming at us and I told Pat, the top turret gunner, that these fighters about 6:30 high and he said “What are they?” and I didn’t have a chance to answer because they had already opened up on him. I emptied my guns and noticed my interfone was pulled out of the socket. So I reached down and plugged it in. Just as I plugged it in, the pilot said ‘Bail out!’”

[Roger Armstrong] One thing, out in the air, there was absolutely no sensation of falling. There was no reference point, no feeling of falling. Once I straightened out... I fell free because I knew we’d been at 27,000 and I had nausea pretty bad. One of the reasons I could do some the things [I did] was that there was absolutely no fear of bailing out.

[Narrator] As survivors reached the ground, captivity began for most. Those who did not survive were frequently buried at the crash site. Here, a member of the 96<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group has been laid to rest. A German newsreel depicts initial captivity.

[German airman] “Is it painful?”

[American airman] “No, it’s not painful.”

[2<sup>nd</sup> American airman] “Gibbons”

[German airman, check with another] “Gibbons. Are you wounded?”

[2<sup>nd</sup> American airman] “Twisted ankle.”

[German airman] “Twisted ankle, but that’s all? You can walk, after all?”

[2<sup>nd</sup> American airman] “Yes.”

[Narrator] Airmen such as these were fortunate enough to have fallen into the hands of the Luftwaffe. Their safe arrival at an air prisoner of war camp was virtually assured. It was far different for others. The airmen prisoners were confined to four principal camps, known as Stalag Lufts. Officer prisoners were taken to Stalag Luft I at Barth on the Baltic Sea and Stalag Luft III at Sagan southeast of Berlin. Noncommissioned officers were imprisoned at Stalag Luft VI at Heydekrug on the border of East Prussia and Lithuania and Stalag Luft IV at Kiehfiede in East Prussia.