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STATEMENT

9 September 1943.

"On 16 July 1943 we were flying formation enroute from our target, San Giovanni, Italy. Suddenly flak hit us, a burst of three (3), I think. Number four (4) engine was knocked out and was quickly feathered. The flak also hit somewhere in the gas line between number three (3) engine and the fuselage or the bomb-bay. Exactly where we were hit I never definitely knew.

At the time I was in the top turret and I could see smoke apparently coming out of the tail. I tried using the interphone but it was out. I got out of the turret and opened the door which leads from the pilot's cockpit to the bomb-bay. Upon opening the door I discovered the bomb-bay full of flames and smoke. I shut the door immediately, after tapping the pilot (Lt. FONNER) on the shoulder and pointing to the fire. I then opened the hatchway door between the pilot and co-pilot which leads to the Navigator and Bombardiers compartment. Flames shot up through this door, too. In the meantime the order to bail out was given three (3) or four (4) times over the interphone by Lt. FONNER. At that same time, I was snapping on my chute, and I noticed the pilot and co-pilot trying to get out their windows. I rushed for the bomb-bay hoping to get out through the radio room. That was impossible to get to, so I tried to find the bomb-bay door release handle but it had either been burnt or shot off. Just then I saw a flash of sky through the flak hole in the top of the bomb-bay. I made a dive for it. I no sooner had my head and shoulders out when an explosion took place and blew me right out. I did a delayed jump and I opened my chute about five hundred (500) feet from the ground.

Our altitude at the time of the explosion was between sixteen thousand (16,000) and eighteen thousand (18,000) feet. I landed safely on the ground in enemy territory. While descending I had to slip my chute to assure adequate clearance between myself and the falling aircraft. I saw two (2) other chutes on the way down.

I was captured by Italian civilians after I landed and was taken to town where I saw S/Sgt. JAMES L. ARNOLD, our tail gunner. He had a bad leg and I was quite badly burned. We were both given first aid and taken away. Enroute to Reggio we were interrogated by some Italian official. He told us they had found three (3) parachutes and six (6) bodies (which accounts for the crew).

After we arrived at the hospital at Reggio we were told by a friendly Sister that the third (3) man, S/Sgt. WILLIAM N. JACKSON, our waist gunner, was taken prisoner by the Germans, and was unhurt.

We were liberated from the hospital when Reggio was invaded. S/Sgt. ARNOLD is now in a hospital in Sicily. I returned to this base on 6 September 1943."

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