

This is the account of my jump story as best that I can recall it after 22 years. I shall never forget the overall story. The first names of fellow crew members I don't know, because at this stage of the War, many men had been lost. Others were at rest camp, so the old crews had been broken up and had been filled in with members of other crews and new men. This was Sgt. Spatafore's first mission.

As for the speed of the aircraft at the time of bail out, a rough guess would be 150 miles per hour. Our plane had lost the use of number one and two engines. I believe that number one engine was on fire, having been hit by flak. Number three engine then began running rough, so Pilot Evans, with one good engine, did his very best to get as far as he could from the target area and to friendly territory. He had to maintain flying speed with dives. It was said later that he managed to fly about 90 miles before we had to leave the ship.

I do not know the manufacturer of my chute. At the time of our first missions, we all were very careful with our chutes. We each had a chute assigned and adjusted to us. The chutes then could be left in the ship at each position, as the same crew would fly the same ship each mission. Later the crews would change with each mission, so the best we could do would be to see that we each had a chute. We would check it for flak holes and to see that there weren't oil stains on its cover. Most often the chutes never were adjusted. The chute that I used was a back pack, but I do not know the manufacturer.

Our mission started early Sunday morning on January 31, 1943. The target was supply shipping for the German army in Bizerte Harbor. We left the base at Ainmalea Tunisia, flew to the coast of Phillipville, out over the Mediterranean to Bizerte, making a right turn on to the bomb run straight into the mouth of the Harbor of Bizerte. It was a perfect day for bombing, but just as perfect for the German anti-aircraft. As we neared the target at 23,000 feet, our P-51 and P-38 escort left us to circle the target and the flak, intending to meet the B-17's on the other side of the target. We were hit by very heavy flak just as we passed over the jetties of the harbor. The ship took many hits before number one engine was hit. The prop was feathered, but we could see black smoke trailing from the navel. This could have been either smoke or oil, but the opinion of the crew after we were safe was that it was smoke. We will never know. The bombs were dropped on the target. From this time on, things got real busy. We were just over the target when the word was passed over the intercom that the Germans were shooting up red flak. This meant to us that the flak would stop so that the German fighters could come in. Then number two engine was running too rough, so it had to be cut and the prop feathered. We heard the pilot and co-pilot over the intercom as they cut and feathered number two engine. We were so busy with the German fighters by then that it didn't dawn on any of us as to the position we were in with only two engines. With the loss of two engines, we dropped back, losing the protection of the formation. We had been told that if we lost the protection of the formation, we were *expendable*.

When we were all alone, the German fighters came from all directions, determined for the kill. The fighting action during this time was the most violent that I had ever seen. It seemed that every gun aboard was firing at the same time. Then it came over the intercom that number 3

engine was running rough. From the talk between pilot and co-pilot, they were trying their best to correct it and to keep power as long as possible. The fighting was still on, but had let up a little. Our explanation was that the German fighters were running low on fuel. Number 3 was still running rough, but we were still flying, though every once in a while the ship would take a steep dive to maintain flying speed. At this time, there were only a few German fighters about, but we were all still at our stations when Lt. Wheeler came down through the ship telling each man to check his chute and that we were going to bail out on signal of the bail-out bell. There seemed to be a long wait as Lt. Evans was trying to get as far from the target area as possible, heading south and west towards friendly territory. The bail-out bell rang. Sgt. Flemming pulled the pins on the side door and kicked it out. There was perfect order. It seemed that each man went out just in the order that he fell into line. We later learned that we had flown about 90 miles from the target. We had gotten to what we thought was friendly territory. We all left the ship at 10,500 feet. The two fellows that bailed out ahead of me made a long free fall, as did I. After the chute opened, I could see the ship a long way off, making a slow climbing turn to the left and then doing a wing over and diving to the ground of the other side of a mountain ridge. Smoke was following it all the way, with a big column of smoke and an explosion as it hit. There were a couple of German fighters in the area, but no member of the crew mentioned having been fired on. Speaking for myself only, I will say that even if the German pilot had fired on me as they came by, I wouldn't have noticed. I was so happy to be alive.

We came down in the mountains. As we got closer to the ground, I could see six or eight Arabs running to the spot that they expected me to land. On landing, they grouped around me. I managed to explain that I was an American and that our bomber had been shot down. I didn't have a weapon, so I took out my cigarettes and passed them out to them. We didn't stand there long before the Arabs motioned to me to follow. After folding the canopy of the chute back in, one took the chute, and we started to climb up the slope of the mountain to a cabin. The cabin seemed to be the home of the leader of a group of Arabs. As I came up to the adobe cabin along with the two Arabs, I was greeted by another crewman, Sgt. Flemming, who had also been guided to this cabin by three other Arabs. Lt. Evans, the pilot; Lt. Wheeler, bombardier; Lt. Carter, navigator; Sgt. Hudson, ball turret gunner; Guyer, waist gunner; Sgt. Flemming, radio operator; and myself, tail gunner; all met here during a period of an hour. I didn't meet the other men until we got back to base. The Arab leader kept all of us in one group. When one of us tried to take a little walk, he was guided back to the group by a couple of Arabs. We found out later that the Allied Forces were paying the Arabs \$10 a head for the flyers that they turned over to them; this being the reason for their close watch over us. I couldn't guess at the time it took for an English ambulance to arrive at this place. It didn't seem long. After another climb up the mountain slope to a road where the ambulance had been parked, we loaded into the ambulance. After a ride of about two hours or so, we arrived at an air field east of Bone, North Africa. The English left us at a farm just a quarter of a mile from the air field. The farm was the headquarters for the American anti-air craft company that was the guard of the air field. On seeing the air field, we all thought all our worries were over. We would just wait around until an air craft came in, hitch a ride, and be back to the base. This we found wasn't the case. The Bone Air Field had wrecked air craft on it, propped up on oil drums. The German fighters would buzz and straf these dummy planes. Then the anti-air craft would

get in their licks. This action was a cover-up for another unmarked field that was used by C47s to land, drop off their cargo, and take off again. We tried to make connections with one of these C47's. The officers tried to get transportation back to our base at Ainmalea, but they also failed. We were guests of this anti-aircraft company for, what I believe to be, four days. During this time, we were all living on the rations, cigarettes, and even pieces of clothing that were accounted for by this company. The commander of this company made more than one trip to town and to other outfits to get shoes, etc. for the fellows that lost their flying boots on bail out. We had a lot of time to think things out. We all felt that we couldn't sponge any longer on this outfit that had treated us so royally. We decided to split up into groups, and then try to hitchhike back to our base. We had the rest of the war to get there. Sgt. Hudson, Sgt. Geyer, Sgt. Spatafore, Hudson, and I were to start out in the first group. We started out just after breakfast of the fifth day. The commander of the anti-aircraft company gave us a start by giving us a ride into the city of Bone. He wished us luck. We first looked up the HQ of an English truck unit. They couldn't give us any help, not having any trucks going back. They said that all their traffic was coming up to the front. We started to just walk. We walked all that day until it started to get dark. We were in flying clothes of electric suit and coveralls, and two with just the light blue electric suit on. We carried two chutes with us in hopes that they would help to prove that we were American Flyers. There had been a number of German paratroops dropped in this area, so we expected to be challenged. It was getting dark as we came to a fork in the road. We stopped here to decide which road to take, when an English dispatch rider came along. We hailed him to a stop to ask which of the two roads was the most traveled. He pointed to the road to the left and then took off. When he kept looking back as he rode away, we could guess what he was thinking. As we rested at the fork of the road, we knew we had better get off the road for the night. As we rested, a French mother and her two daughters came walking along. They wouldn't stop, so we walked along with them, using all the French that we knew to explain to them that we were American. They stopped. We found out that the oldest girl had studied English in high school, so we concentrated on her. Her English came to her so that we could prove to her that we were American. She conferred with her mother for some time. After this we were invited to their farm home that was just a half mile off the road, but hidden behind a hill.

We arrived at the farm home, but had to stand outside while they talked us over with the father of the family. We were invited into the kitchen by the father who wasn't too sure yet who we really were. We were asked to sit at the kitchen table. Here we were asked many funny questions about the US, about American songs, movie stars, and the ways of American life. The answer to these questions seemed to prove to them that we were truly American. After their meeting in another room, they came back to us completely changed. They were really happy. We were then *family*. We had some C rations that the mother made into a soup. After eating, we sang songs and talked till bed time. We were given a room upstairs without any beds, so we slept in our clothes on the floor. Sometime at early morning, the house was surrounded by French soldiers with fixed bayonets. We were awakened and marched out to a waiting truck. We didn't even try to ask our guards what was going on; we knew. We were taken into the city of Bonn and placed in more like a prison than a jail, due to its size. There was an Italian flyer in the next cell to ours. He had been shot down in a bombing raid on Bonn.

He didn't think he was going to get very fair treatment from the French, but said they wouldn't do anything to him until his wounds had healed up. This prison or jail was just a block from the waterfront, so the next morning we had an air raid on the harbor. Shortly after the raid, we were taken by a squad of soldiers to a French headquarters building for questioning. We were asked to explain all our movements since the start of the bombing mission. After all this questioning, we were taken back to the prison. We had a guard that could speak a little English. He allowed us to go out into the high-walled yard of the prison. There was a section of this wall facing the street that was closed in with a tall bar wall. While we were standing by this wall watching the trucks and people go by, a jeep came by. As it slowed down to make a turn, we saw that there were two American officers in it. As it came closer we saw that two of the officers were our pilot Lt. Evans and bombardier Lt. Wheeler. We all hollered out as loud as we could all the time that they made the turn until they drove by. We nearly dropped. Then an English dispatch rider came along. We hollered at him, and he came back. We explained to him that we were Americans and asked him to go after the jeep just ahead of him and ask them to turn around and come back. This he did, and he also came back with them. He really got thanked! Our two officers were escorted by two French soldiers to the French headquarters where our situation was straightened out and we were released. This disturbance started things to move. We were taken to an American outfit where we could clean up. We were fed and given some clothes that we were missing. Then a chaplain drove us to Philipsville where we were put up until the next morning. Another truck then took us the rest of the way to our base. On arriving back at the base, we found that we had been written off as lost. We had no equipment and had to draw blankets to sleep that night. Getting up the next morning we found all of the things that had been taken from us sitting in nice order at the opening of the tent. We were back in business.