

S T A T E M E N T

I am going to try and tell you what happened on our mission of June 20th, 1944 to the best of my knowledge.

We were all feeling fine, and to us it was just one more mission. I think in what part of the plane we were at the time of the accident isn't known by all, so I am going to tell you. Jack, Howard and myself were the only three in the tail section of the plane. Jack was in the tail turret, Howard and I were flying in the waist, the others were all up in front. As you know we can't see them at all from where we are, and they can't see us, but we talk to one another by interphone.

Well, we were flying along fine, and not too far from our target, when a B-24 from our formation cut off our tail. Howard and I saw Jack trying to get out of the turret, but it all happened so fast, he didn't make it, and he went down without his chute. We don't wear our chutes while flying, as we can't move around with them on. We all had chest chutes, except the Pilot, Co-Pilot and Bombardier, they had back chutes, which are worn all the time.

The boys in front of the plane didn't know what happened I don't think until the plane went into a spin. Right after Jack went down, Howard put on his chute, and bailed out the tail as it was all open. I didn't hear anything from the boys in front. I don't know if our interphone was working or not now, but not a word was said. I don't know what they were doing at this time, anyhow I reached for my chute and at that time the plane went into a spin. I couldn't move, I was pinned to the floor, and I thought we would go down with the plane.

We were flying at 20,000 feet at the time of the accident, we must have lost 5,000 feet or more in our spin, then the plane levelled off, and I could get up. So I quick put on my chute and bailed out the tail. How long the plane stayed in level flight, after I got out, I don't know, but for the few seconds it did, I think that some of the boys in front could have bailed out.

When I was coming down with my chute, I could see Howard, but he was pretty far down from me. I kept looking for more chutes, but didn't

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see any. As I was still in the air, I saw one plane hit in the water and explode. We were flying over the Baltic Sea when it happened. But I don't know if it was our plane, or the one that ran into us. The last time I saw Howard he hit in the water and in a few minutes, I also hit. I know Howard was OK up until that time. If Howard drowned, I am sure he would have been found as they found Jack ten days later. So I still have hopes that Howard is somewhere in Denmark.

I was in the water for a half hour, I had plenty trouble with my chute, and I came near going under several times, but with the help of God, and my Mae West, I kept from drowning. I was picked up by Danish fishermen, they said they couldn't help me escape, or hide me out, so I was turned over to the German Navy, and then over to the German Air Force. The accident happened about 9:30 A.M. It was about 11:00 A.M. when two German soldiers marched me for four miles to a place up on a high hill where the Germans had a look-out station over the Baltic Sea.

On my way up here we passed a place that looked like a barn, it had a number of windows in it. At first I thought that is where they were going to take me, but we passed by. In doing so I looked at the barn, and saw a fellow in it who I thought was Howard. I didn't want to look back again, as I was afraid the Germans would see him also, so we kept on going.

Later on the same day, I was told to ride a bicycle which had a spade and shovel tied on it. Two Germans also went along on bicycles. I was in the middle, and we rode several miles, and stopped at a cemetery. We got off our bicycles and walked, and finally came to a grave. Then they told me to start digging. So not knowing what it was all about, I figured I was digging my own grave. After a few hours I found out from what they were talking that they had found nine bodies in the sea and they would bury them at 7:00 A.M. the next day. So when we returned to the look-out station, I asked the German officer if he would let me see the bodies. He said no, that I couldn't identify them as there wasn't much left of them, so I didn't get to see them. We were still carrying our bomb load yet,

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and if the men in front didn't get out, then I can understand why the Germans couldn't identify them. But I still think that I could be able to tell them, just by looking at their hands.

The next day I was taken into Odense, Denmark, without seeing the funeral. The place where they were buried was in Sondberg, Denmark.

Later on I was taken into Germany and then to a prison camp. I won't tell you what all I went through, as it would take too long and it won't help in what happened to the other boys. I wish I knew more, but as I couldn't see them in front, I can't say if they tried to bail out, or if they thought the plane would keep flying. I just can't see why some of the boys didn't get out. I've thought of it hundreds of times in my mind, and tried and tried to figure it out.

Getting back to Howard, when I was picked up by the Danes, another Danish boat pulled up along side of us, and I told them in which direction I thought Howard was. So they went looking for him but never did come back. Maybe they did find him and he is still in Denmark. I sure do hope so, nothing would make me happier than to have all the fellows home.

I did see the pilot and co-pilot of the other plane, the pilot was in Nuernberg, that's where I saw him when I got there in February of 1945, and the co-pilot I saw in France in May 1945, when I was on my way back to the U.S.A. I asked them what was the trouble and why they were flying so close. They said they saw us too late to avoid hitting us. The pilot didn't talk very much, I could see it bothered him to talk about it, you know how he must feel.

My information isn't much, but I do hope I was able to help you some, as I know you are all anxious to know what happened. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask. I will be only too glad to answer them, and maybe I can help you more.

I am very proud to have been able to fly in combat with such grand fellows as my crew members were. My only wish is that they would all be home with the ones they love.

Sincerely

Jacob G. Heilich