

on the way home. I can't remember seeing any enemy fighters. Leaving the target, I knew something was amiss: No "bomb bay closed" and a strong draft thru the waist. I could not leave the turret, still being over enemy territory, but once over France, pilot Fleming gave me OK to investigate the problem.

What I found was awful. The left side bomb bay door was wide open, the right side partially jammed closed by a bomb, hung up by its tail shackle. The one above had been released and was laying on top of the lower one. Both bombs were live, since the arming wires were pulled out.

First, I secured the top bomb with straps, preventing it from sliding into the cockpit upon landing. All this without my parachute on, working over that open bomb bay. I still shiver at the thought.

Lt. Fleming had already feathered the R. S. prop and we were losing altitude. A short time later the left prop stopped and the Klaxon sounded off: "Bail Out" – I snapped my chute pack on and went out that open door and practically hit the ground. That's about it. Lt. Carlson's chute did not open. He didn't pull the handle. My Buddy, Sgt. McNulty, was killed or mortally wounded in the head on the way out. The bombs did not explode.

My greatest respect for Lt. Bill Fleming, while saving the lives of his crew, he lost his own."

The second close call was recorded on 10 February 1945 in the *Group History* – "...we proceeded to the important Communication and Supply center at Horren, our bombs striking the aiming point as

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briefed. The attack was met by strong and accurate flak and one aircraft was shot down. Eleven aircraft received Category "A" damage and a crewman was wounded. The aircraft shot down was piloted by 1st Lt. H. A. Mallory of the 495th Bomb Squadron. Engineer gunner on Lt. Mallory's crew was T/Sgt. John H. Chevalier."

Interrogation of the pilot who bailed out in friendly territory revealed that his crew had bailed out over enemy territory. They (the crew) were reported as missing. But two of the crew were able to make their way safely back to our lines.

*Missing Air Crew Reports* stated: A search for missing crew members is being made, it is a question of whether Allied patrols or enemy patrols will reach them first. Sgt. Chevalier was listed as M.I.A.

The *495th Bomb Squadron History* reported: On 18 April 1945, T/Sgt. Chevalier who had been shot down in February returned to the squadron. He had been injured and spent this time in a hospital where he received fair treatment. He was liberated by Third Army Forces and returned to the squadron to volunteer for more combat!

We congratulate you, John, on your 92nd birthday and on your courage, fortitude and dedication to duty while serving with the 344th Bombardment Group!

– Carl M. Christ