



## Charles Herman Story - Combat

This is a brief history of the experiences of Charles L. Herman, our father, during training, time with the 492nd Bomb Group and time as a prisoner of war. - Judy Strong and David Herman

For this website, this story was broken down into shorter parts in effort to make computer reading a little easier on the eyes. This is Part Three of seven.

## Combat

by Judy Strong and David Herman

Dad's crew was assigned to the 858th Bomber Squadron, of the 492nd Bomber Group based at North Pickenham Airfield, England, that was operated by the 8th Army Air Force.

The day before their third mission out of North Pickenham, Joseph M Debowski, the radio operator and Dad painted a picture on the nose of the plane. It was a Kangaroo with a baby kangaroo in her pouch holding a bomb. The baby kangaroo was saying, "Say When."

On the mission flown on May 19th, 1944, they were hit by machine gun fire from a German fighter, a Folke Wolf FW-190, before they got to their target. Dad couldn't shoot at the incoming fighter because his guns were pointed right through the propellers of the B-24 so the gun wouldn't fire. About six feet of their wing was shot off and holes were shot in the fuel tank. With part of the left wing missing the plane went into a steep bank and Fischer was almost unable to get it flying level again. After he did he found that he could only turn away from the damaged wing. Turning toward the damaged wing caused the wing to drop uncontrollably. The plane was losing altitude with the heavy bomb load. Fischer ordered the bombardier, Angelo Bagnosco, to salvo all the bombs at once. At the time they were over farm country so all the bombs did was make a very large hole in a farmers pasture. With the lighter load they were not losing as much altitude but were still losing fuel. They pumped what fuel they could from the bad tanks to the good ones, but were not able to save enough to get back to England.

When the flack guns would start hitting close to them Fischer would have to turn to avoid it and then would have to keep turning 360 degrees to be headed for home again. One flack burst was so close pieces of shrapnel came up through the plane. Edward J Curtin, one of the gunners, got hit in the foot. It went through his foot and creased his forehead between his eyes narrowly missing his nose. He was the only one who got hit. The gunners in back threw tin foil out the back to draw the flack.

They couldn't ditch it in the channel because with part of the wing missing the plane was flying a bit sideways. The B-24 did not handle ditching at sea very well even when everything was just right. Gas had been leaking inside the plane and they were all afraid it would explode.

They made it to Holland just south of Amsterdam and decided that they had to bail out. Dad and Mallard, the co-pilot, went out about the same time. The other members of the crew had already gone out except the pilot. Dad didn't know until he was liberated if Fischer, the pilot, made it out.

After he left the plane it was suddenly so quiet, just the sound of the wind. Dad was falling with his back to the ground, it was so peaceful. For some reason something caused him to roll over so he could see the ground rushing up at him. He grabbed his ripcord and pulled, his shoot popped out and he swung back and forth four times before he hit the ground. He said, "That was a close one. I could have forgotten to pull my ripcord if I hadn't rolled over and seen the ground rushing up at me."

Dad was on the ground, in a field, alone for about half an hour until some Dutch people came. He had a book containing some phrases. He asked for civilian clothes and place to hide. The Dutch people were taking him to hide when Germans came out of the forest, shooting in the air. The Germans were just kids about fourteen years old but they had machine guns. The Dutch people wouldn't go any further. They would get in trouble if the Germans thought that they were helping him. Dad had given his gun and two small compasses to the Dutchmen. He was surprised to see that some of them were actually wearing wooden shoes.

He was declared missing in action on May 19, 1944.

They were all back together two or three hours after being captured except Fischer, the pilot; Mallard, the co pilot; Dabowski, the radioman who didn't even pull the rip cord; and Teal. They later found out that Teal got to France before being caught by the Germans.

Story Continues in: [Stalag Luft IV](#)

Source:

● Charles Herman family

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