

"This was the June 25, 1943, mission to Hamburg," wrote Albert Westlake.

"I was originally assigned to Lieutenant Thomas Cuddeback's crew but that crew was grounded with aircraft maintenance and I volunteered to go with Way's crew as he was short a tail gunner.

"After taking off from Grafton-Underwood we proceeded to our rendezvous point over the English Channel. We encountered heavy fog and when we came out we were alone, though we could see several formations ahead and off to our left. Lieutenant Way tried without success to join one of those formations. Our efforts took us to the lead formation, off their right wing. By now, we were deep into Germany.

"As we approached the target we were attacked by all types of enemy fighters. Just before the target we were hit by flak and two of our engines caught fire. Moments after I heard 'bombs away' we were hit by fighters again. We were sitting ducks.

"As a Focke-Wulf 190 banked away from my position I noticed a parachute open below (later, in prison camp, I learned it was our navigator). But I couldn't watch him. I was busy again with fighters. At that time I was hit in the head and couldn't see out of my right eye. My guns were empty and we were really burning.

"Lieutenant Way finally gave the order to bail out. After I put on my chute, I released the tail hatch and looked forward, where the right waist gunner was sitting down and motioning with his head for me to come. The left waist gunner, Dodge, was still firing his gun, though he was badly wounded. I saw the right waist gunner's hands were only held onto his arm by tendons. I pulled the release for the waist door. Just as it came free a shell came through the door panel and exploded, wounding me again, jamming the escape hatch, and trapping three of us in the waist. The radio room was ablaze, blocking us from the bomb bay.

"For a few moments we just sat there, looking at each other. I had planned on bailing out with the right waist gunner. The ship went into a spin. I heard an explosion and blacked out. I came to just long enough to pull the D-Ring on my chute and was conscious once more before I hit in what I believe was the Ems River. I never saw the right waist gunner again, but Dodge was in the river about 10 feet away from me. A few moments later he drowned—he couldn't get his chute off.

"After the all-clear was sounded a launch with five old German soldiers on it came out and picked me up. They searched for other survivors, but there were none. I was transferred to a truck and taken to the German Marine Hospital in Emden.

"There I found out I had 48 pieces of shrapnel in me from my waist down, several in my right arm, and a cracked skull. My legs were gangrenous and a surgeon was going to amputate them—he had me on the operating table three times. Fortunately he spoke English and the gangrene was going away so I was able to argue my way out of it.

"In the middle of August I was transported to prison camp. On the 16th I arrived in Frankfurt for interrogation, where I met up with several old friends from the Group who were shot down over Schweinfurt. We were sent to Stalag 7A at Munich and from there to Stalag 17B in Krems, Austria."