

PAUL SHINSKY, SR.

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On June 26, 1943 at approximately 5:00 pm, we took off from Grafton Underwood, England, in B17 #42-30037. I was the co-pilot and there were 9 other people in our crew. We had lost a gunner on our first mission on June 22 over Antwerp, Belgium. The target for this mission was the Luftwaffe's base at Villacoublay Airfield near Paris, France.

As I recall, there were 16 planes from the 384th. Everything went well until we crossed the French Coast. We were hit by flak between the #3 engine and its firewall. We lost the prop almost immediately and caught fire. We were at about 28,000 feet when this occurred. We dove the plane in an effort to put the fire out. At about 8000 or 10,000 feet we leveled the plane out. This maneuver didn't work and #3 engine fell out of the wing. We lost control of #4 engine, probably due to attack by enemy fighters and the fire in #3. The plane was going down for sure, so we rang the bailout bell and six crew members jumped out of the plane. An ME109 pulled up on the right wing tip. He had gear and flaps down in an effort to slow his fighters enough to stay next to our slowing airplane. At this point, our bombardier woke up. He had probably been hit by #3 prop when it spun off and hit the fuselage. Seeing the German fighter, he began to fire at it and caused it to fall away. The German fighters then renewed their attacks on us.

We suffered through several head-on attacks. One of these shot out the windscreen on the left side and our pilot was hit very badly. I thought he was dying. Blood and glass were everywhere in the cockpit. From this point on, I really don't recall what happened, as I was totally concentrating on the airplane and on getting it on the ground in one piece. At this point, the pilot, the bombardier, the navigator and I were the only ones left in the plane.

The first thing I remember clearly was being on the ground next to the left wing. A German soldier was dragging me away from the plane as it was still burning. An officer offered me a Chesterfield cigarette and told me in German: "For you, the war is over!" I was taken to a building where I was treated for a separated shoulder by a German doctor.

The plane was crash-landed near the present-day site of Deauville St. Gatien Airport in France. Nine members of our crew were POW's but survived the war. I was taken to Le Bourget Field in Paris, France and eventually to Stalag Luft 3, which is now in Zagan, Poland. This is where the story for the movie "The Great Escape" originated.

Website editor's note: All members of the crew became POWs. More information on the 384th and this mission can be viewed at 384thBombGroup.com.