

## THE BLIND LEADING THE BLIND

# Pilots of Limping Planes Talk Themselves to Base

U. S. NINTH AIRFORCE BASE IN FRANCE—(AP)—Lt. Richard Kik, Jr., of Kalamazoo, Mich., and Lt. Charles E. Rife, East Cleveland, O., were shooting up German tanks east of Mortain when Kik's Thunderbolt was hit by flak.

Rife radioed, "You're smoking."

"Yes, I got hit pretty bad," Kik replied.

Capt. Henry Mazur, of Lowell, Mass., flight leader and former West Point football star, cut in and told Rife to take Kik back to the base.

\* \* \*

**EN ROUTE**, two direct hits punched holes big as manholes in Rife's wings.

"Now I've had it," Rife called to Kik.

Your engine isn't hit," Kik advised, forgetting his own troubles. "Shove the throttle forward and keep up speed."

\* \* \*

"I DON'T think I can make it," Rife replied. "My flap is gone, the aileron is gone, I can't turn left. I'm going to belly land."

"Listen, Rife, you can't belly land. You've got a bomb hung under your wing. Get some altitude and bail out."

"I can't bail out because I've been hit in the back and I'm afraid it cut a hole through my parachute."

"Keep going then. Keep cool, Rife. We've got to make a landing," Kik pleaded.

\* \* \*

**THEY KEPT** coming until they appeared over his French base. Ground personnel listen-

ing to the radio conversation were chewing their nails.

Finally Rife's landing gear was observed coming down slowly. He was pumping it by hand.

Rife's wheels touched the ground at 160 miles per hour. Kik was right behind him. As Rife climbed out of the cockpit three pieces of shell fragment fell out of his parachute. He was not hurt.

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