

Flyers Defy Death to Help Each Other Land

A Ninth United States Air Force Base in France, Aug. 13 (Delayed) (A. P.).—Lieut. Richard Kik Jr. of Kalamazoo and Lieut. Charles E. Rife of East Cleveland, Ohio, were shooting up German tanks east of Mortain when the former's Thunderbolt was hit by flak.

Rife called him and said, "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 on the radio conversation and told Rife to take Kik back to the base.

They had no more than started when two direct hits punched holes as big as manholes in both wings of Rife's plane.

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

"I can see the holes in your wings but your engine isn't hit," Kik told him, 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."

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

They kept coming till they appeared over this French base, where the ground personnel—listening to the conversation on the

radio—were walking the floor and chewing their nails.

Finally Rife's landing gear was observed coming down slowly. He was pumping it down by hand. Rife nosed his ship down and his wheels touched the ground at 160 miles an hour.

Kik, his engine beginning to blaze and spurting oil, was right behind him.

As Rife climbed out of the cockpit, three pieces of shell fragments fell out of his parachute. He was not hurt.

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