

BY HENRY B. JAMESON

A U.S. NINTH AIRFORCE BASE IN FRANCE, ~~REDACTED~~-(DELAYED)-(AP)-LT. RICHARD KIK, JR., OF KALAMAZOO, MICH., AND LT. CHARLES E. RIFE, ~~REDACTED~~ EAST CLEVELAND, OHIO, WERE SHOOTING UP GERMAN TANKS EAST OF MORTAIN WHEN KIK'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, ~~REDACTED~~ 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 GOTTEN UNDERWAY WHEN TWO DIRECT HITS PUNCHED HOLES AS BIG AS MANHOLES IN BOTH WINGS OF RIFE'S PLANE.

"NOW I'VE HAD IT," RIFE CALLED TO KIK.

"I CAN SEE THE HOLES IN YOUR WINGS BUT 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 BELLYLAND. 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 UNTIL THEY APPEARED OVER THIS FRENCH BASE. GROUND PERSONNEL LISTENING TO THE CONVERSATION ON THE RADIO WERE PACING AND CHEWING THEIR NAILS.

FINALLY'S 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 PER HOUR. KIK, HIS ENGINE BEGINNING TO BLAZE AND SPURTING OIL, WAS RIGHT BEHIND HIM. AS RIFE CLIMED OUT OF THE COCKPIT THREE PIECES OF SHELL FRAGMENT FELL OUT OF HIS PARACHUTE. HE WAS NOT HURT.



~~city~~... P.I.

Alamazoo Officer, Fellow Flier

Reach Base in Crippled Planes

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Local Flier Has

Narrow Escape

#224 RO