

A POW STORY

Written by Charles Sturgeon

Reading Jack Paget's story brought many memories back. I can't remember one funny one, lots of scary ones and a few nice ones. I was on a crew that was shot down August 13, 1944. I arrived at Gross Tychow in September, I can't even remember the trip from the rail station to the camp, nothing like Jack's experience thank goodness.

My story goes back to the day we were shot down. We were hit in the cockpit area, exploding our oxygen system, hydraulic system and fuel transfer system. The resulting inferno burned my flying suit down to seams and pockets. The flames also consumed my parachute that I usually stood on to elevate me for better vision out of the turret. I used one of the spare chutes that I had stored in the waist. I made this jump without the leg straps. I had been carrying three seat parachutes, by the leg straps, to the plane and back to my locker every day that we were scheduled for a mission.

With all the things happening and probably experiencing some shock, I could not adjust the straps to reach around my legs even with the help of two crewmembers. Thinking we were going to crash at any moment, I decided to jump without them. I had never considered this happening to anyone but decided this was my only choice. I jumped, pulled the rip chord, crossed my arms, grabbed my elbows and hung on for dear life.

Several German soldiers were waiting for me when I landed in the fencerow of a building they were using as their advance field hospital. They put my still smoldering chest chute harness with the seat parachute into the back seat of a small car that had brought the soldiers. While they were searching the fencerow for my 45, the parachute started to burn.

They were able to drag it out before catching the car on fire, but were unable to save the chute. I received immediate medical attention. The medic removed what was left of my flight suit and pulled the loose skin off the burns where the blisters had burst. My buttocks and groin areas were the most severe but I had breathed a lot of flame and the area around my mouth, nose neck, and wrists were cooked. The medic also splinted my right leg that had caught in the fencerow and stopped my flight. He told me it was broken but he didn't have the material to apply a cast.

Now to my story. Later in the day, two soldiers took me to a small shed where I would spend the night. My radio operator, Delmer Spears, had arrived earlier. He had been the first one to bail out and I was the last one out but where were the others? Spears had been unconscious and didn't remember landing or being brought to the shed, he had a large knot on the back of his head. We didn't want the Germans to know that we were on the same plane so had to wait until the door was closed to start a conversation. I was wearing a tee shirt and a splint and that's all. The first thing he said was that he was wearing two suits of OD's that day instead of a flying suit. He pulled off the outer suit and gave it to me. We removed the splint, put the OD's on and replaced the splint. The OD's were a perfect fit. This suit of OD's would be the only clothing I would receive during my tour of France and Germany.

Spears was and still is a DEAR FRIEND. This suit of OD's became the subject of another story. I was still wearing this suit of OD's when I arrived at Camp Lucky Strike. As you probably know, I flew out of Barth in a B 17 from the 91st BG. That will have to be another story. Back to the OD's. General Eisenhower came to Camp Lucky Strike one day to visit the POWs. His plane landed and he stepped out onto a platform to talk to the crowd of POWs. My brother was a radio operator in the Air Transport

Command and their main job was transporting high officials. I managed to reach the platform within a few feet of Eisenhower. After he finished his speech, he asks if there were any questions or comments. I ask him if he knew the name of his radio operator. He didn't but wanted to know why I was interested. I told him that I was wondering if it might be my brother. He sent a Captain to check their radio operator's name. The captain returned to tell me that my brother was not on this flight. Eisenhower left the platform and asks me if I had eaten and suggested we go to the mess tent. As we walked to the mess tent, he evidently noticed my clothing (my suit of OD's) and asks if I had received a clothing issue. I told him the story of how I received the suit and told him I had not received a new issue yet. About an hour later there was a notice over the PA for everyone that had not received a clothing issue to report to the supply tent. I received a new clothing issue with an Eisenhower Jacket. My greatest thanks goes to Delmer Spears for his clothing issue.

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