

Experiences of S/Sgt Elmer Logel
Target: Oil Refinery - Balikpapan, Borneo

15th AIR FORCE
372nd Bomb Squadron
307th Bomb Group

I was a ball gunner with 41 missions and was in the 372nd squadron. After reading the experiences of several in the March, 1988 newsletter, I thought I would let you know of one of my experiences.

When we arrived overseas I was a nose gunner on Lt. Paul Kimble's crew. After we had flown our 3rd mission on 9-16-44 to Miti R/W, the ball gunner (John Warne) asked me if I would like to trade turrets. He stated he did not like the ball. After clearing this with the pilot we decided to fly our 4th mission in each other's turret. This was done and I recall liking the ball better but found since I was 6'1" tall and weighing 145 lbs. that I was really cramped. My knees almost touched my chin but I got quite used to this.

From the ball you had quite a view from all over beneath you and sometimes you saw too much as on the Balikpapan raid. I didn't believe the ball was made for tall people.

On October 3, 1944 (our sixth mission) we were flying #620 which was the spare. Originally we were listed to fly #567 but I believe we had engine trouble and then got the spare. We were to fly in A-3 position.

The weather was always a problem and this day was no exception. I lowered the ball and had on my Mae West, harness and my .45 cal pistol in my shoulder holster. Due to the space in the ball I could not wear the flak jacket. When I got in the ball we were in some bad weather and visibility was zero. I knew we were somewhere in the Celebes area and pretty soon we broke out of the storm after a good deal of buffeting up and down like a giant rollercoaster. As we were passing the Celebes group of islands, I noticed the view below was anything but beautiful. We started across Makassar straight and approached the "IP" and I could see the target burning up ahead. Shortly thereafter I saw Japanese fighters coming up. I believe there were between 50-75 fighters that hit us. They seemed to be as thick as flies and the flak was quite heavy and I saw their own flak knock down some of their own. Due to the altitude we were flying (9,000-10,000 ft.) we were within range of most of their guns. The hits on our plane were from flak as well as fighters.

I recall feeling the vibration of our guns being fired and could feel some of the hits on our plane and knew we were hit often. I saw two or three B-24's go down and one was down below me on fire.

This I found must have been hard on my nervous system and I got quite sick and had to use oxygen several times due to vomiting in the turret. It seemed that as fast as I would fire at one fighter someone would call out "fighters at 3 o'clock, etc" and I would turn the turret and try to line up the computing sight that a ball turret was famous for. With so many fighters against us that day I found this was most difficult to do. So I relied on knowing that every fifth round was a tracer and I could do a better job under those conditions.

One particular fighter came up under me and I started giving him short bursts and noticed he was not firing at me. Then I started with longer bursts from my twin fifties. He got so close I could actually make out his

facial expression. He had on goggles and was gritting his teeth. It was then I noticed he was carrying a phosphorus bomb. Smoke began to pour from his engine when he turned away. He released the phosphorus bomb and this exploded off to our side. The last I saw of him he was spiraling toward the sea. I was credited with a probable.

I was running out of ammo and all of this happened after bombs were away. (The ten - 250 lb. bombs all fell in the target area). I did not know how bad we were hit until later. We lost two engines (I believe #2 and #4). Everything seemed to be happening fast as someone called out over the interphone that John Warne (nose gunner) was hit. I then had no ammo left and stowed the guns straight down and proceeded to get out of the ball turret. I did not retract the ball then as this was done later by the co-pilot.

The strangest feeling came over me when I heard John was hit. It was as if I knew it was going to happen. I believe God spoke to me and said go help John. I'll never believe otherwise. Also, since I was the nose gunner only three missions before I felt very peculiar as this would have been me if we hadn't switched turrets.

As I left the turret I felt a tremendous amount of wind and thought the bomb bay doors were open but found it was coming from a large hole in front of the right waist window. I reached for my parachute to attach to my harness and saw it had three holes in it. I threw it out the opening as it was no longer of any use to me. I looked back and saw S/Sgt Rennaker on his knees as he was hit in the hand and someone was helping him.

I then started up to the nose and as I passed under the command deck I noticed this red stuff dripping from above and I thought it was blood and wondered who was hit. Later I found out it was hydraulic fluid as our brakes were shot out.

When I got to the nose Lt. Pfirman (Bombadier) was having a difficult time getting John Warne out of the nose turret because he was hit in the back with a piece of shrapnel. Fortunately, it wasn't serious. I recall taking my pocket knife and getting it out and sprinkling some morphine powder on the opening. When we got John out of the turret I thought he was dead. He was hit in the right chest, and his right arm was dangling. As we were moving him from the turret Lt. Pfirman said, "Elmer, there is one last Jap fighter still with us, and why don't you surprise him and get in the turret when he makes the next pass?" Upon getting in the turret, I accidentally stepped on John's good hand. I did not know this until after the war when he came to visit me, and he told me the pain he had when I did this.

As I tried to turn the turret I saw the fighter turning towards us, and then I found the turret was totally inoperable. It was after this and the fighters were gone, and we were limping back home that Lt. Pfirman and I were doing what we could to help John Warne. We were then approximately 5-6

hours from home and we tied a tourniquet on his arm to cut off the flow of blood. John was unconscious most of the time, but would come to and cry out for water and then pass out again. While this was going on Lt. Kimble called and said he did not know whether we could stay in the air much longer and might have to ditch. I think we were flying at about 1500 feet.

Pfirman and I proceeded to give John some blood. This wasn't easy as neither of us knew how to do this but realized it had to be done, or he would die. Pfirman and I would read the instructions on mixing the plasma with the water. We knew we couldn't have any air in the lines when we inserted the needle in his vein, but we had a difficult time in getting it all done. We would look at each other as we tried unsuccessfully to insert the needle in the vein. John said, "Elmer lets pray as we need help." After we had prayed aloud and cried out for God's help I want to say a miracle did happen. We gave him six pints of blood and kept him alive.

Our B-24 sustained many holes, including the nose turret being hit by a direct hit, a large hole in the waist, many small holes throughout the fuselage, the hydraulic system shot out, two engines shot out, two large holes in the top of the fuselage in front of the pilot and co-pilot, all but one or two instruments shot out, and two large holes in the right wing outside the #4 engine. All of this caused the following injuries: Nose gunner badly hurt, waist gunner wounded in the right hand, bombardier hit in the back, pilot had a piece of shrapnel in the right instep, and the co-pilot had several wounds in each arm.

We were quite concerned whether we had enough gas left to reach Sansapor. I understand only one B-24 made it back to our base at Noemfoor.

As we approached Sansapor we knew our hydraulic system was gone so the main landing gear had to be cranked down. We could not get the nose wheel down. Knowing that we would have to land without brakes and without the nose wheel, we had to take added emergency measures. We threw the waist guns overboard and tied the parachutes to the gun mounts to act as brakes. As many crew members as possible were placed in the rear of the plane to keep the nose up until the parachutes opened and slowed us down enough so that when the nose touched the runway we would not tip over. Lt. Kimble did a beautiful job of bringing us in. I remember what a wonderful feeling it was to kiss the ground again.

Several other B-24's came in behind us with various problems. Included was a B-24 from the (I think) 424th squadron whose crew included "Sabu-the-elephant boy", who was a movie actor before enlisting as a gunner.

There was certainly a lot of things that happened that I can't explain, but I do know not many airplanes could still fly as this B-24 did with all the damages encountered. She sure took a beating but did get us back.

With the total cooperation of all on board and with God's help we lived to see another day. I guess it just wasn't our time to go.

Elmer R. Vogel