

29 November 1944

## STATEMENT OF CAPT. WM. BARTHEL, 60TH BOMB SQDN., NAVIGATOR

We took off, left the ground about 16 after 6 o'clock. We headed north; ~~climbed~~ (before we climbed over the overcast, came back and circled the field; called the tower; the ceiling was 800 feet). Captain Miller asked if the field was open for night transition and they told him the field was on instrument but to carry on with his night transition mission. They gave him some information about which leg to fly (I wouldn't say whether they said don't fly west leg or do fly west leg - I couldn't understand that). I was turning back on VHF just to hear that - I don't stay on it. We climbed on, headed northerly, to 5000 feet, at which time we broke out. One engine, No. 3 was acting up. I heard the pilot and engineer talking about it. The pilot asked him if he wanted to feather it and he told him he thought it should be feathered. Then he told him to feather it, rather sharply. He was getting a little bit excited about it. So they got through their procedures of this off and this on, and so on, and No. 3 engine was feathered. After that, the next conversation I heard the pilot called me to turn the radio compass set on so I had the radio turned on to Salina 344. He called and said we were taking over radio compass, says that will be O.K., then he told the co-pilot he should have had that on at the time he left the ground, and shortly after that there was conversation going back and forth between the pilot and engineer as to carburetor heat and cylinder head temperature. Now, whether they both knew what they were talking about, I don't know. What I heard was carburetor heat; I think they actually should be talking about cylinder. That's out of my field, and I don't know much about it.

Shortly after that, the engineer called and told him 2 and 3, the way I understood it, were acting up. Then he corrected himself and told him No. 2 was on fire. They had some conversation with the gunner and the gunner told them there was smoke and sparks from No. 2. And I do know they said smoke and sparks; I didn't hear the word "flames" at that time. They were going to cut No. 2; they were talking about what the trouble might be, said it was probably caused by 3 backfiring and breaking the line on No. 2.

- Q: The engineer thought the backfire in 3 had broken the gas line in No. 2?
- A: Yes, Sir. Right after that, they were mighty panicky. Somewhere in that sequence he had called to the tower and told them we were on three engines and to advise us what to do. Tower said to return to the field. We were returning to the field and did start going back down through the overcast. I think 2 went out on top. I think when it caught fire we were in the overcast. The command came through to prepare to bail out.
- Q: After you had come down through the overcast? Didn't give the command to stand by or bail out on top?

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Statement of Capt Wm. Barthel - cont'd:

- A: No, Sir, we didn't get an order of that type. At the command "Prepare to bail out" I pulled my earphones off. I have a helmet with earphones in it. I pulled that off, zipped down my zipper so I could put my chute on a pretty narrow compartment. I stood up in the seat and saw the hatch in front had opened the hatch. After that I didn't hear any more conversations between the pilot and engineer.
- Q: When you heard the tower answer you were on VHF. Did you get back on innerphone?
- A: Yes, Sir, I went back then. The only way I can say that I turned it back to innerphone is that I never leave it on VHF except when my hand is on it. That is the procedure I always use. If I didn't use it it would get me off key. When the hatch opened the wheel wasn't down so I did yell out as loud as I could yell - you can speak very well between navigator and engineer as engine noise isn't bad on the 29 - called up to the airplane commander to lower the nose wheel. So then the nose wheel was lowered. I squeezed on through and was up by the hatch and I buckled my leg straps then and put my chute on. I stood there - I know it was over 30 seconds, it seemed like a long time but from what I did I know it must have been that long. The bombardier said "Go ahead" looking right at me. I said "First?" He said, "Yes, Sir, you are right there, get on out." Lt. Bennett says "Good luck, Bill". I stood there a couple of seconds and left the ship.
- Q: About what altitude?
- A: The altitude the last time I looked was 2992. I looked at my altimeter. Pressure was about 3007; last time I looked the altitude was 2400 feet. I was the first one out.
- Q: You were at 2400 feet when you were sitting back there in the navigator's den?
- A: That is right, Sir. That is the last time I looked at my altimeter.
- Q: You figured it would be a little more than 30 seconds?
- A: I would say it would be a minute's time by the time I crawled up through there and left the ship. I was sweating the air speed and altitude. Altitude was dropping from 5000 right on down; air speed would go to 240 and back down to 140; swinging back and forth, diving a little, cutting out another engine, and so on. Stop on 140, go right on back up to 200 and so on.
- Q: Did you see Miller at this time at all?
- A: I did look up and I saw Miller in his seat. When I saw him the co-pilot was in his seat. Miller seemed to have talked to the Tower and didn't look like he was doing anything or touching anything; and the co-pilot looked like he was just there and

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Statement of Capt. Wm. Barthel, Cont'd:

that's about all, seemed to be pretty well frozen. I didn't think he was frozen and I got out of there; I thought he was sweating for further orders but after looking at it now I believe he was pretty well frozen.

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Q: Were you in the clouds when you left the ship?

A: When I left the ship, that is the reason I stood there about three seconds, it went through my mind count ten, hand on the ripcord, pull it, and all that bunk. I counted five, knew I was clear then, so I pulled it. I have a chest pack and the chute opened in my face and it just stayed there. My heart jumped a little then. I reached out and pulled it and she opened up, just a little jolt.

Q: How much time before you hit the ground after your chute opened?

A: After I got the chute opened, about one minute. I looked then and I could see another parachute between the plane and me. I was still in the clouds then; I could see this chute that opened and the fire in the airplane.

Q: Could you see the lights on the ground underneath you?

A: I couldn't see any lights anywhere. Looking back at this, I'm not sure I could tell it was still in the clouds, it was a haze. The only reason I could see it at all was the light from the airplane; there was a pretty big fire. I don't think it was a wing.

Q: You could see the silhouette of the airplane? Do you think the fire went back beyond the tail?

A: Sir, I don't know that. The fire stage seemed to be in a round pattern through the haze. Then I looked down right after that and I could see the ground. I hit the ground in a very short time afterwards; I would say about 30 seconds before I saw the ground, then about 30 seconds when I hit. I'm sure I was in the air about a minute. Just as I had landed on the ground and collapsed my chute, which took about another half minute, the airplane crashed.

Q: Could you see the silhouette of the airplane, how it hit?

A: No, Sir, all I could see was the fire. She seemed to have just flown along, looking apparently level or losing altitude, then just before she went down all of a sudden it seemed to have just dropped.

Q: Going along more or less level and then whipped off?

A: That is right, Sir.

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Statement of Capt. Wm. Barthel, Cont'd:

Q: Would you hazard a guess as to how far it was flying level?

A: No, Sir, I was going down all the time, too, when I was watching the plane in the air.

Q: You didn't see it much after you hit the ground?

A: No, Sir. That plane did seem to be going just straight on through the air. As a matter of fact, it looked to me like it was holding altitude or losing altitude slowly. I had to glance away once when the wind blew into my chute. After I hit the ground, it took me about a half minute to collapse my chute and undo my leg straps. The wind was pretty strong; finally collapsed it all right.

Q: Did you get back to the airplane?

A: I was in a farmer's yard about 400 yards from his house. I went in to his house and called the 60th Squadron Operations. I had to fight a dog a little bit to get in there. After I got into the house and had the call through, Lt. Bennett came in and as he was injured they disconnected me and put that call through. These people didn't know exactly where they lived.

Q: Were you the one picked up near the graveyard?

A: No, that was the other two boys. I was approximately three-quarters of a mile from the graveyard according to the farmer. The bombardier and tail gunner were pretty close together. I was about three-quarters of a mile to a mile from them, according to the farmer, so I don't guess anybody jumped out right away after I left. I imagine there was a gap of 15 seconds or so before anybody jumped. I had a little trouble getting the tail gunner to jump because he had his chute on upside down. I can't say a thing about the engines on the airplane, any trouble along that nature, because I don't know anything about them. The only thing I can say, we were pretty poorly organized on bailing out procedures and what to do. Some men were rather panicky, others were panicky and didn't know they were panicky. I think that is the case of myself. I would have talked to anyone very coolly and calmly, I know, and they would probably say I was very calm. Had I had the correct procedure, just what to do and when to do it and so on, and been through it several times, I know it would have helped.

Q: Was there any interphone communication between the pilot or anybody in the front compartment and the rear end?

A: I didn't hear any communication there. That happened after the command "Prepare to bail out", because the nose wheel wasn't even down at that time. They let the nose wheel down. I understand the engineer called the men in the back and told them to prepare to bail out. The bombardier opened the bomb bay doors and told them to bail out. They called back there and said the bomb bay doors were open.

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*Incl. 10<sup>4</sup>*

Statement of Capt. Wm. Barthel, Cont'd:

Q: Have you ever had bail-out procedure?

A: Not in the 29. I have had it on practically every other ship.

Q: You haven't had it here?

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A: I haven't done it on the airplane. When we were out in Cuba we went through bail-out procedure on the 29 and ditching procedure on the 17.

Q: Have you had any ground instruction?

A: One day we went over to instruction class and some enlisted man spoke about bailing out, but that was just enough to know that I had to go out the front hatch. I think the main thing is to practice it.

Q: What was the temperature outside at the time of the climb?

A: Temperature just as we left was plus two on my little bi-metallic temperature gauge there. After we got in the air I didn't check the temperature at 5000 feet. I should have checked it. I knew plus two was icing conditions. I don't ordinarily look at it until we get on heading or when we get true air speed on engines. Everybody was looking at those engines ever since we took off. After we got on top I looked out to see if there was any ice and I looked at No. 2.

Q: After they said it was on fire you didn't look?

A: I didn't know it was on fire before I jumped. Standing up over the hatch everything was a very pink color in the ship; light pink glow on the men's faces. I remember Bennett's face when he said "Go ahead" so I knew then there was a fire somewhere. Just what the fire was I didn't know. I knew No. 2 was acting up because of the conversation on the interphone, but I never heard that it was on fire.

Q: You didn't hear the left waist gunner call the engineer and tell him it was on fire?

A: Smoke, Sir, and sparks, but I didn't hear him say fire. We had started down. I didn't hear fire on it at all.

Q: Could you locate where some of the men were on the plane? Miller and Phillips were Pilot and Co-Pilot, but could you locate some of the others.

A: McCauley was behind Vanderpool. Vanderpool was his instructor - behind Vanderpool in the front. Why McCauley didn't get out I don't know; he was a pretty big man and had to squeeze through there. Gilbert is the radar man and he was in the back of the ship somewhere. Nandino was in the back.

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Statement of Capt. Wm. Barthel, Cont'd:

Q: Were Gavin, Anderson, Fries and DeMoss in the back?

A: Yes, Sir. Lt. Charles was in the back, also. Seven of us in the front.

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Q: You never received an order to bail out?

A: I didn't receive an order to bail out at all. I asked Bennett if that was the order and he said "Yes, Sir." Bennett said he never did get an order. I never heard a command to bail out.

Q: All you got from the back compartment was that the bomb bay door was open?

A: I got that in conversation, since I have been down. As far as I know, the bomb bay doors on that plane could still be shut except the bombardier told me after we got down that he had opened them.

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*A TRUE COPY*

*Clark G. Tate*

CLARK A. TATE  
Major, Air Corps

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