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29 November 1944.

STATEMENT OF 1st LT. WM. J. BENNETT, 60th BOMB SQUADRON.

We took off about 6:15 and climbed to about 2000 feet, indicated that was. Ceiling 800 feet or something like that. Capt. Miller called in and told the Tower that there was 800-foot ceiling and asked was the field open for transition. Tower told him yes it was open for transition and that he was cleared for 5000 feet - I don't understand the procedure exactly. We went on up through the overcast and I would say the overcast lasted to about 4500 to 5000 feet. Five thousand feet was the highest we ever got. On the way up through the overcast No. 3 engine went out on us and we tried not to feather, but finally on the recommendation of the Pilot and Engineer No. 3 engine was feathered. So immediately we got in contact with the Tower and told them we were coming in, that one engine was out. Immediately after that the No. 2 engine, I think it was, started cutting up also.

Q: While you were still on top? No. 2 started to cut up in what way?

A: Yes, sir, still on top of the overcast. I don't know how to describe it but it seemed to be turbo fire or something like that at first, but it did develop into more than that and we immediately started losing altitude because we weren't getting any power from our 1 and 2 engines. I remember Capt. Miller kept calling about how was the carburetor heat and several pertinent things about the motor. Sgt. Shoppe was working away back there just as calm as he could be, doing a good job at the time. We kept steadily losing altitude, getting pretty close to the ground. Capt. Miller told Shoppe how about he and Shoppe riding it on in and the rest to get out and immediately told us to stand by for bailing out.

Q: Did you get it over the interphone?

A: Yes, sir, on the interphone. So immediately all of us get our chutes ready and made sure everything was snapped, and at that time he motioned me to get out of the nose, to stand right behind him. I was in the nose in the meantime; I was standing in the aisle directly behind him. Then he let the nose wheel down and opened up the hatch so we could get through if necessary and about that time Sgt. Shoppe, I believe it was, called up the crew members in the back and asked if the bomb bay doors were open.

Q: Did you hear that on the interphone?

A: I heard that more or less verbally; I didn't have my headset on at all. I hit the bomb bay door switch on the pilot's panel and (I think this is according to Shoppe - he said they replied the bomb bay doors were open) I didn't hear that personally. I hate to say this now that it's all over, but I think Capt. Miller was a little too excited and did not quite control himself properly for the responsible position he was in. He was more or less panicky and all the time we were gaining or losing altitude.

Q: Was he flying the plane?

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- A: Actually I think the airplane was taking care of itself. The air speed would run up, we would go up and lose air speed, go down and pick up, losing altitude all the time pretty fast.
- Q: What was the co-pilot doing?
- A: In my estimation he was more or less frozen.
- Q: You didn't talk to him?
- A: I asked him if he had his chute on, if he was ready to go and got no answer. In my estimation Lt. Phillips was just more or less blanked out, had no control at all, and I asked Capt. Miller several times "Shall we go?" because I was standing right beside him and I could see we were losing too much altitude for safety. About that time he got all the way out of his pilot seat and was looking for his snap-on parachute. The condition that Phillips was in and action of Millers, there was absolutely nobody at the control, I am sure of that. At that time I told Capt. Barthel, who was waiting (he more or less had to straddle the big hole there in order to let some one else come through or for the Navigator because it is so narrow there with that turret there) I told Barthel to go ahead, let's get out, because in my estimation no one is flying the ship and I figured it was time to get out. So Barthel went out. Then this Corporal Garner - he was more or less hazardedly prepared and he was fixing to go and I noticed he had his chute on upside down, and I don't know whether one of his leg straps was buttoned or not - so I told him to get his chute on, then I stepped over and went down through myself. From then on out I was by myself.
- Q: Were you in the overcast when you bailed out?
- A: I wasn't in the overcast when I bailed out. I was second man out and when my parachute opened I could see the ground, so we must have been about 800 or 900 feet when we bailed out because I could see the ground. Then I landed and busted up my leg.
- Q: Do you know whether the automatic pilot was on or not?
- A: No, sir, it wasn't on.
- Q: You are sure of that?
- A: I could say I was positive of that. I never helped him set it. The bombardier should help him and he never said anything about that.
- Q: You don't recall the altitude of the airplane when you left?
- A: Right at 2000 feet, between 2200 and 2000 feet. I was standing there watching the air speed indicator and altimeter at the same time.
- Q: How was the airplane acting, going in levelcourse?
- A: I wouldn't say it was under control, sir; go up and down and kind of fish tail across there. It wasn't under control.

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Q: Do you think it is possible he might have snapped the auto pilot on without your knowing it?

A: I believe it would be more or less dangerous thing to do. I don't think so, sir. It would be just as dangerous to snap it on, send us into a dive or climb unless it was properly adjusted.

Q: Were you in the overcast when he lowered the wheels?

A: Yes, sir, we were in the overcast.

Q: Did you see the airplane at all after you parachuted out?

A: The only thing I remember I landed in the graveyard and I was busy dodging tombstones. That is how I cracked up my ankle. I pulled my shrouds to dodge tombstones and at that time I saw the airplane burning.

Q: Was it a pretty big fire when you bailed out?

A: When I bailed out it was pink on the interior of the cockpit. I could see this pink reddish glow all around so I figured it was time to be leaving.

Q: That was No. 2 engine?

A: Yes, sir, I believe that is correct, No. 2. I was right up there where most of the control was, right between the engineer and pilot and heard a lot of the conversation and personally I tried to watch everything myself and tried to use common sense on something like that. When altitude and air speed gets so low it's no time to dilly dally around.

CERTIFIED TRUE COPY:

*Eugene S. Sapiro*  
EUGENE S. SAPIRO  
1st Lt. Air Corps  
Ass't. Base Operations Officer

/s/ William J. Bennett  
WILLIAM J. BENNETT  
1st Lt., 60th Bomb Sq.

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