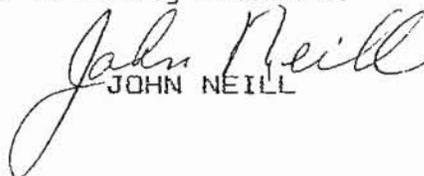


## JOHN'S EXPERIENCE

I was a copilot on a B17 flying out of England. We had been briefed, and were in take-off position, as I was busy checking out the engines, when I found a big RPM drop in the #3 engine, which I reported to the pilot. He was an over-eager person who immediately said, "You just do not want to go on the mission." I told him I did not mind going, but that I was especially interested in coming back, and I did not believe that engine would run that long. I was ignored and away we went, off to bomb the Nazi submarine pens at St. Nazzaire, France.

As we reached altitude, the #3 engine began to smoke and vibrate, soon there was no choice but to feather the engine and hope we could keep up with the main formation. The sky was filled with German fighter planes and flack, with the the flack so thick, we could walk on it. We could not keep up with the formation on three engines, so the Luftwaffe was having a field day taking target practice on our plane. The flight engineer said he shot down one fighter, and the bombardier also got one, but our plane was full of holes and on fire, and there was nothing to do but give the bail out signal. I helped the pilot to the escape hatch and out, but I heard later he never pulled his ripcord. Five other crew members did not bail out either, so they were killed that day. Four of us did survive, and I am the last of them. As I went to the bombay to bail out, the plane was beginning to spiral and spin so hard, I could not get out of the bombay doors. It seemed incredible that centrifugal force could prevent a person from just falling out of the large door. The plane exploded and I found myself hurtling downward with all the debris around me. I tried to open my parachute and found it only went above me and twisted and would not open.

I worked as hard as possible to untangle the shroud lines and finally succeeded, when it opened suddenly and snapped which caused me to suffer a fractured neck. As I looked up in gratitude to thank God, I saw the image of Jesus there in the sky 20,000 feet above earth, and his face seemed to be telling me I would be OK. It was a miracle, and I had no doubt about surviving this experience from the moment I saw the face of Jesus there in the sky. That feeling has become a lifelong comfort.

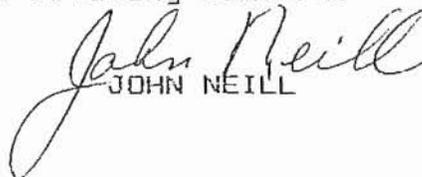
  
JOHN NEILL

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