



One of the black streaks that were enemy fighter planes was trailing thick oily smoke

NELLIE'S NIGHTMARE TAKES A HEAT

By CAPT. PAT PATTERSON

The crew of a Flying Fort can take a run of bad breaks as long as they still have the nerve to go in low—and keep going!

“DUSTY” EDWARDS eased the olive-drab Flying Fortress out of a gradual descent.

“Okay, Ray, wake up that poor guy in the tower and ask him if he has stuck his finger in the breeze lately.” The copilot nodded and adjusted his throat-mike over an Adam’s apple that somehow seemed to be riding at half-mast in mourning.

Anyone acquainted with the lanky skipper of Nellie’s Nightmare wouldn’t have needed a neon sign to tell that his words to the right-hand man were a lot

more cheerful than was his disposition at the moment. Edwards stared out of his side window at Algeria’s brown and green terrain. The dead-still prop on Number One kept him from seeing anything beautiful in this countryside that somewhat resembled his native Dakotas.

“Boxer Five from Notary. Have you in sight. Wind is southwest at fifteen. Cleared to land. Do you have wounded aboard or serious emergency?”

Dusty pressed the mike button on his wheel.

“Nothing wounded but the oil system on Number One and the crew’s record. No emergency equipment necessary.”

Edwards reduced the power on Number Four to balance some of the loss of Number One’s leverage, bent the big ship into a smooth left bank and ninety degrees later rolled out pointed dead to the wide dirt and gravel runway.

“Gear down. Mixtures rich. Props twenty three hundred on the inboards. Let Number Four stay back. Half flaps!” Now the throttles were all the way back—“Full flaps!” He rolled in more elevator trim and began his flareout as the field was coming up under the nose. A little more back pressure, a little more, and the B-17 stirred up dust in a perfect landing.

The stick and canvas tower came on the air as he neared the end of his roll.

“Nice paint job, Captain. How much three-engine time do you have now?”

Captain Dusty Edwards didn’t bother to answer that back-handed compliment. Returning early minus an engine was getting to be an old story—as well as a touchy one. First it was a fuel pump that chewed itself up, next a runaway prop governor and this time it was probably an oil-line clamp that had come loose.

He clamped down on his left brake and gunned Number Four until the ship was in its proper position on the hardstand.

“Shut ‘em off, Ray. I’ll tell Larry the sad news.”

Staff Sgt. Larry Dixon was waiting three feet away as the Fortress pilot dropped through the nose hatch.

“From the looks of the wing, it must have been your oil system this time, Captain.”

“Not much doubt about it, Larry,” Dusty responded. “The pressure fell off all at once and I feathered when it got below minimum. The waist gunners said it was coming out like a Texas gusher.”

“Well, at least there will be plenty of time to give the crate a real check before you go out again. Word came in that the Tunisian Campaign is officially over. Africa is all ours now, and the Old Man says the Group will have three non-operational days.

“Captain, my boys and I are going to work on this airplane until there is not a thing we can find wrong with it. These abortions are just as hard for us to take as they are for you and the gang.”

“Thanks, Larry,” Dusty replied. “I know you have been doing a good job and the breaks have been against you. Still, if we don’t snap out of this rut soon the ‘Powers’ are going to start thinking of putting Nellie’s Nightmare and crew out to pasture somewhere.”

Four days later, at the unholy hour of 0330, Dusty propped himself on an elbow, and struck a match to the stub of a weary little candle. The bombardier, Mike Clinton, was rubbing his close-cropped head with one hand and endeavoring to free himself of the G. I. blankets with the other.

“Bubbles” Jackson, navigator, had one leg over the side of his cot and was evidently trying to convince himself that there was a good reason to swing the other leg over. Ray Nichols seemed intent on being first man to the improvised washstand and was unfastening the tent door-flap tie strings.

“People who think Africa is a torrid continent are nuts!” This serious bit of information came from Dusty as the officer foursome stretched their legs through the still-green wheat which had been beaten down into a direct path towards the mess tent.

BREAKFAST of powdered eggs, frustrated French toast and a peculiar greenish concoction called coffee is not a

joyous thing when eaten from an ice-cold mess kit but the "office department" of the Fortress crew reached the Group briefing tent wide-awake. The subdued greetings and exchanges of rumors and prophecies abruptly ended as Col. Hamp Wentworth stepped to the platform.

"Gentlemen, Bomber Command has cooked up a special treat for you today. As a matter of fact, it even looks good to me. We are going after the 'henhouse' today, and we hope to catch them on the roost!"

The Colonel put one end of the two-foot stick he held on a spot just above the "heel" of the Italian boot.

"There it is—Foggia!" The officers occupying seats shifted their positions and later arrivals left standing straightened and leaned forward.

"It appears that Foggia means something to most of you," Hampton continued, "but I'll try to enlighten the uninformed—Foggia is the central nesting place for the Jerries in this theater. There is a main airport closely surrounded by six satellites and all of them are well stocked with planes.

"You can take your pick of JU-Eighty-eights, ME-One hundred nines, FW-One hundred nineties, and transports. If we do a good job on this raid the Jerry flyboys will be slapped down where and when it hurts the most!

"So it is an all-out, maximum effort proposition! We are putting every combat ship in this air force on the target. The B-Seventeen outfits will fly as separate Groups—each with a different airdrome for target.

"There will be five-minute separations in target time, and the four Groups will use different Initial Points and different headings for bombing runs. We hope that will confuse the flak batteries more than it confuses us!"

Then came the payoff.

"Our four squadrons hit the jackpot! Headquarters gave us the main airdrome and is going to let us be last ones over the target area so we can take our time with it." The Colonel's grin was half-heartedly reflected through the Group.

"Each squadron will carry a full line of inventory from the bomb department. First element of the squadron will have one-thousand and two-thousand pounders—that's to break up the buildings and leave nice big postholes in the landing area.

"The second element will have fragmentation clusters to rip aircraft and chop up some kindling. Then, just to be nasty, the rear element of each squadron will be loaded with incendiaries so we can put a match to the whole mess!

"Bombing formation will be a Vee of Vees for maximum coverage. S-Two will proceed with information on approach, weather and expected opposition. Stick close with me going and coming because there will be no escort! Formation is your only life insurance, so fly it right! Good bombing!"

Dusty Edwards sought out the blackboard showing plane positions. Brother, this was it! Nellie was flying tail-end of the Tail-End Charlies—fighter bait! Theirs was the ship the 109's and 190's would work on first—trying to cut them out of the squadron for a quick kill.

Incendiaries—sixty-nine pounds of concentrated hades hanging from every bomb station. Thirty doses of oil, high-test gasoline and magnesium topped off by a red-hot fuse!

He knew the same thoughts were in all minds of his crew. One touch of flak, one tracer or explosive shell from cannon or machine-guns before those tickets to perdition were loosed from the bomb bay—and Nellie's Nightmare would become a molten mess of metal in the Italian stratosphere!

Dusty and the three officers swung off the truck as it slowed at the hardstand, and the enlisted men came to meet them. Joe Kaufman, career gunner, greeted him.

“Well, Skipper, it looks like we are really the *Hot Rocks* today!” Kaufman, long-ago dubbed “The Tongue,” rattled on, “Think how many ciggs you could light with those little sweethearts they gave us!”

“Cap’n Dusty, this should be the time that the Nightmare gets broken to halter,” Larry Dixon broke in. “We have checked everything at least twice. If this airplane isn’t in shape now I’ll trade my A. M. rating for a permanent detail of privvy policing! The oxygen truck emptied their last cylinder just before they got here but they will be back any minute with another tank. We can service the oxygen system in five minutes and you’ll be all set.”

As Edwards finished his last minute instructions the truck carrying a new supply of oxygen rattled up to the nose hatch of the Flying Fortress.

PRE-DAWN had been gradually building up for half an hour at 0540. At that moment Captain Dusty Edwards released his brakes and smoothly advanced the throttles on four roaring heaps of horsepower.

Nellie’s Nightmare lifted off the dusty runway as if she wanted to be rid and away from all earthly things, eager to be up and about this job of flying. A turn of one-hundred and eighty degrees after take-off and Edwards had fitted the bomber into place with the slowly circling squadron.

The sun was beating down full-blast as the big ships streaked mid-way between Sardinia and Sicily to work on northeastward into the Tyrrhenian Sea. It seemed rather silly, Dusty thought, sitting here sweating and wishing you could fly in shorts when only an hour later heavy

boots, gloves and electrical heat would be necessary to counteract an outside air temperature of twenty or thirty degrees below zero.

Far up ahead Edwards could see the preceding Group beginning to lift from the water and was ready when his own leader increased power for the rise to 22,000 feet. The interphone was quiet now, open to any alarm raised by a man whose squinting eyes had picked up moving specks that meant danger in this territory.

At six thousand feet Dusty checked the crew over the interphone while Ray put in his alternating twenty minute period at the wheel. Everyone was rigged in heavy clothes and each man gave Dusty a quick “Roger” down the line after he reminded them—

“We are well inside enemy territory now. Keep your eyes peeled. They might get eager today and try to jump us from fields in Sardinia or the Italian west coast!”

Ahead and slightly to the right of course was a big build-up of towering clouds.

Cumulo-nimbus—the thunderstorm cloud formation that rises as high as 30,000 feet above the earth and has a wide variety of tricks—hail, ice, vertical drafts, and enough turbulence to set even a B-17 over on its ear without notice. Good luck that the Group could miss that area of frontal development without going out of line from their planned course.

Ten thousand feet—now the bothersome oxygen masks could no longer be ignored. Dusty gave Ray a nod and the copilot squeezed the button on the right side of his wheel.

“Crew from copilot. Crew from copilot. Altitude is ten thousand feet. Ten thousand feet. Oxygen masks on. Acknowledge in order.”

One by one the crew members relayed their receipt of the order. Ray reached into

the little canvas bag at his feet and withdrew his A-10 mask, checking as he did so to be satisfied that both pressure gauges on the system were up. They were right on the money at three hundred and fifty pounds—twice as much as they should have to use.

The copilot finished adjusting his mask and placed his hands on the wheel so Edwards could put on his A-10. Dusty took a long drag on the last cigarette he would have for several hours, then quickly went through the necessary motions—adjusting headstrap, testing for leaks around his face and then plugging the mask tube into the outlet at his left side.

The little plastic bubble in his flow indicator jumped properly as he took consciously deep breaths, but something was wrong—very wrong! Edwards looked at his copilot, who diverted his eyes from the formation long enough to give Dusty an anxious, worried glance.

What was this stuff coming into the oxygen mask? Every breath of it seared Dusty's nostrils and made his pulse pound out of time. He calmed himself and pressed the mike button.

"Crew from pilot. Give oxygen check in order."

Bubbles Jackson came on after a moment of silence; the bombardier was supposed to be first man on the check.

"Dusty, something is wrong down here! Mike has his mask and headset off. He's trying to find out what is getting into our oxygen lines."

At that moment Casey cut in from the tail position.

"Bandits!"

"Where, Casey?"

"They are moving up from five o'clock. Climbing like heck but still a long way back. See four of them now!"

"Right! Sound off if they start to make a pass and don't lose them. Anybody else

having trouble with the oxygen?"

A flood of voices hit the interphone, and Edwards could make out that all the answers were affirmative. They were at 13,000 feet now and from here on up they had to have oxygen—or else.

Harry Hampton's voice—muffled by the wind leaks into his top turret—came in.

"Skipper, I think I know what this poison is. It's welding oxygen. They gave us the wrong cylinder. We can't breathe this gas and live!"

Dusty's head was splitting as he yanked the foul-smelling mask from his face and tried to make his mind work straight. This was bad business. They were way out in the middle of the stream without a paddle. If they stayed with the Group they would all be slap happy in a few thousand feet. If they dropped out the fighters now trailing the formation like a bunch of jackals would pounce on them for a chance to make a comparatively easy kill!

"Where are the bandits now, Casey?"

"They are level now, Skipper, and there's an even dozen. Still staying out of range and just looking us over. I'm taking my mask off—can't breathe this stuff any longer!"

"All right, men. Take your masks off and test your guns. We are pulling out to make a run for it. Call the passes when they make them so we can use all possible guns."

DUSTY pulled the nose up slightly and then warped one hundred and three feet of wingspan in a near vertical turn to the right, shoving the wheel towards the instrument panel. The airspeed needle raced along the gauge until it registered three hundred—crowding the red line painted at three hundred and five—and the rate of descent needle spun crazily and

gave up trying.

"We can be back to that thunderstorm in five minutes," Dusty was telling himself while his safety belt cut at him. "If we can hold our own with the Jerries that long all we'll have to do is beat our way through the storm. There's no other chance!"

"Here they come at four o'clock high!" It was Matthews on the waist gun in the right window, shouting over the interphone. A second later four fifty-caliber machine-guns started hammering as if they had been fired by the same trigger. Their sharp pounding ran through the aluminum skin of the Fortress like a kid beating on a tin drum.

From the corner of his eye Dusty saw four black streaks pass under and to his left. One of the black streaks was trailing thick oily smoke. Then it was Frank Fenton from the ball turret.

"Yowww! One of them just burned!"

"Dusty," the Stomach's voice came over the headset, "how about this load of bombs? If they hit those we won't be worrying about breathing any longer!"

"You can't spill them, Mike. Try to open the bomb bay doors at this speed and you would probably tear the ship apart. We'll have to keep 'em and pray until we slow down."

He saw Ray lean forward and press the mike button.

"They're coming in again—high at two o'clock. Two waves of four abreast!"

As the 109's came into Dusty's range of vision their wing edges turned orange-red in flickering spurts and it seemed to Dusty that he could look right down the rifling of their barrels. Why in the heck didn't Harry let them have it!

"Give it to them, Harry!"

The top turret guns cut loose over his head before his words were finished and the banging seemed to be coordinated with the red flashes now almost on top of them.

Suddenly one of the Jerries just wasn't there any more and bits of scrap metal fell out of a red and black cloud to splatter off Nellie's cockpit.

Now the guns in the radio hatch and left waist window were blasting away and Hampton was swinging his turret around in an effort to get a parting shot at the remaining planes before they did a "split S" out of gun range.

They were still flying. They still had that deathly load behind the cockpit untouched, although Edwards knew the plane had been hit more than once. The clouds ahead seemed close enough to touch but the seconds dragged like hours until they hit them.

There—part of it was over. Now it would take everything that the pilots and the Nightmare had to thrash a way through this granddaddy of thunderstorms. Dusty had chopped the throttles all the way back and leveled out just before they hit the first clouds.

Their first running fight had taken them down to six thousand feet. Had the B-17 hit severe turbulence at two-fifty miles-per-hour there would have been a good chance of losing a wing. Now Edwards eased the power back on. "Give me a crew check," he cracked.

"Okay in the nose, Dusty, except for a little added ventilation and a drift-meter that will never be the same again."

"Radio room okay."

"Waist is okay, and Fenton is out of the ball turret."

"Tail gunner okay."

"Good. Tighten your safety belts and, Casey, get out of that tail before your brains are bashed loose. There's going to be some rough going in the next few minutes!"

Dusty leaned towards Ray and shouted, "Keep your eye on the airspeed and adjust the throttles to keep it between

one-thirty and one-eighty miles per hour. If you see me having trouble holding the ship—come on the controls with me.”

Now they were getting into real turbulence. Lightning was frequent and they switched all cockpit lights on to keep the outside brilliance from blinding them. Holding a heading was impossible—just try to keep the ship topside up and pointed in a southerly direction.

Then the turbulence slacked off quickly and they were in rain so thick and dark that the wingtips were invisible to the pilots. Dusty took advantage of the lull to call his crew.

“This is most likely the center of the storm. Don’t release your belts because we still have the other side to go through.”

When they broke into bright, clear sunlight again the captain’s arms and legs were aching from his work on the controls but they had made it.

Ray took over the controls and Dusty wearily spoke to the navigator.

“Bubbles, see if you can figure out where we are and get us a-heading for home. It looks like this B-One-Seven just isn’t meant to be an egg dropper.”

NOW that the crisis was over he could feel the disappointment and remorse welling up inside him. Already he could visualize the doubt that would be in the squadron commander’s eyes as Dusty told him his story.

Again it was something that couldn’t actually be blamed on the captain or the flight crew but a ship that didn’t do its share of the job in the outfit just had no place. Maybe this time would be the last straw.

Dusty could picture his men being separated and assigned to other crews as replacements, and maybe Capt. D. K. Edwards shipped out to fly transport clunks for a “rest cure.”

Bubbles’ voice roused him.

“There’s land dead ahead and unless I’m crazy it will be the northwest coast of Sicily. Better head due west for a few minutes until we are clear of it!”

Dusty started to nod his agreement to Ray and then sat straight up in the bucket seat.

“Bubbles, there is a Class-one Jerry field at Palermo, isn’t there?”

“Right, boss.”

“Then let’s head on a few more miles until we can take a look at it through the cheaters.”

Most of the crew caught the excitement in the pilot’s voice and several of them figured out what it meant. They still had a load of goods on board that could cause immediate depreciation to set in on anything it hit. It appeared that the skipper wanted a chance to use it.

They were dangerously close to the coastline now and Dusty was intently focusing his binoculars on the airdrome he had just picked up.

“Bubbles, do you and Mike see what I see?”

There was a moment of silence, then—
“If you mean JU-eighty-eight’s spread all over a field that is supposed to base only a couple of fighter squadrons—we see it!”

Sweat was breaking out in little beads over Dusty’s forehead as he pressed his button down again.

“Well, gang, what do you say? We have thirty servings of Hades along with us that we were supposed to drop on the Germans.

“If you are as tired as I am of taking the stuff back home we’ll see what kind of trouble we can give the Palermo airdrome. Nobody would order this job on us and we won’t go in if anyone says it is a bad idea. Speak up now!”

The interphone was completely dead until the voices began hitting it all at once.

“Make ‘em know it, Skipper!”

“I ain’t reading any continued stories.”

“If you can fly it I can ride it!”

“My insurance premiums are paid up.”

Edwards’ mind was now functioning like a well-oiled machine.

“This is it, then! We’ll be there in about four minutes. Take regular combat stations. Gunners, strafe anti-aircraft installations and parked aircraft. Mike, set your intervalometer to lay the eggs at four-tenths of a second interval. Open the bomb-bay just before we cross the coastline and bring the doors shut the instant your last bomb indicator light comes on.”

Dusty had shoved the bomber’s nose down into a steep dive to lose the remaining altitude and the coast line was looming closer by the second. At tree-top level their bombs couldn’t miss and a medium altitude would only make the plane a sitting duck for the ack-ack.

Puffs of smoke and streaming tracers from ground gun positions were giving warning that the Jerries were not caught asleep by the time Mike shouted, “Bomb-bay doors coming open!”

Now Dusty flattened out of his dive, and the bomber was streaking across the edge of Palermo towards the airdrome just beyond.

“Fighters are taking off! Fenton, see if you can nail them to the runway!” The ball turret guns went into action, immediately followed by other fifty calibers throughout the ship.

Somehow the plane was making its way through the curtain of shells thrown at it by guns of every size and through the din came the welcome clicking of bomb shackles in operation. The twelve seconds required to train out the incendiaries would be remembered by the crew as the longest single period in their lives.

Fenton’s turret guns had turned the

fourth fighter into a mass of wreckage, and those following were making wildly skewing take-off runs in an attempt to avoid collision. For what seemed hours Dusty had heard shells hitting his plane with the sound of rocks hurled at a tin roof, often accompanied by violent tremors on the controls.

The last of the parked JU-88’s slid under the nose and Mike was yelling, “Bombs away! Doors coming closed. Get the heck out of here, Dusty!”

Edwards pulled viciously on the wheel and kicked hard right rudder to send the massive plane skimming up and over the rocky hills bordering the now-flaming airport. Halfway into the turn Dusty became aware of fire pouring from the cowl flaps of No. 2 engine. With the speed of trained reflex actions he hit the red feathering button, dropping his hand immediately to the electric fuel switch on the control quadrant.

Nellie’s nose dropped and pulled to the left as the prop wound to a dead standstill. Rocky fingers seemed to be reaching for the plane as it struggled over the ridge with only feet to spare.

Dusty’s shout for, “More superchargers, Ray!” was blocked by the din of top turret guns but the co-pilot had pulled the fire extinguisher control on No. 2 and was in action.

THE interphone was now a mad jumble of shouts as the gunners called out the attacking fighters and the acrid odor of gunsmoke filled the cabin. The pilot had retrimmed his controls and headed for the nearest point on the island’s southern coast.

Suddenly a blinding flash and sharp, tearing explosion filled the cockpit! Dusty shook his head in an effort to clear the fog surrounding his brain and found warm blood flowing down his forehead from a

gash in his scalp.

"Ray will have to take over," he thought hazily and then became aware that his co-pilot had slumped down and forward—held in the seat only by his safety belt.

Edwards forced his numb hands back on the wheel and slowly righted the listing plane.

"Why are we still flying? What are we trying to put it off for? We'll never live the next five minutes. Why not let the wheel go and be done with it?"

But the instinct to postpone death as long as possible kept the pilot flying mechanically until the haze left his mind and the crippled bomber was again over the Mediterranean's water.

Dusty let down until Nellie's ball turret was just skimming the waves, and tried to take stock of the situation. The gasoline-fed flames on No.2 engine had burned out soon after the fuel switch had been thrown.

As he looked out over the left wing Dusty saw little white puffs of smoke blossoming like balls of cotton—twenty millimeter cannon shells from the fighters! A moment later he had the satisfaction of seeing a black ME-109 hit the water in a geyser of churning salt spray. There was one Jerry who didn't know when to pull out of a dive!

Ray was dead. Dusty looked back at the lower portion of Harry Hampton's body visible in the turret. Blood soaked one leg of the engineer's coveralls but the turret platform continued to rotate under steady control and the guns were seldom silent.

A rent in one of the cockpit's yellow aluminum oxygen bottles explained part of the previous explosion. Red hydraulic fluid covered the cabin's floor from a gash in the accumulator cylinder.

"Would those blasted fighters never

leave them? Did they intend to work them over all the way to the mainland?"

A violent vibration from the right wing snapped Dusty into emergency action again. Fighters had hit the propeller on No.4 engine. A few moments would be enough for the unbalanced blades to tear the engine loose from its mounts.

Again the pilot's right hand flashed for one of the red plastic feathering buttons and continued down in the same movement to increase power on the two engines still operating. Propellers on No. 1 and No. 3 whined and roared as r.p.m. jumped to 2600 and manifold pressure rose to a punishing fifty-five inches.

By the time the added power had taken effect the airspeed had dropped to 120 miles per hour and the ball turret was dripping with spray. Dusty pulled slowly on the wheel, and Nellie struggled a few feet above the water. Now the airspeed was down to 105, a hairline margin above stalling speed, but the big plane shuddered and held its own.

As Dusty finished turning the rudder trim he became aware of a strange sensation. It was the silence of the guns! Either all his men were wounded or the fighters had turned from the approaching African coastline.

Hampton had come out of the turret and was leaning toward Dusty.

"They left us, Skipper. Can we go the rest of the way?"

"We can make it if these two engines will run five more minutes without this manifold pressure tearing them apart. Harry, can you move enough to check the crew for me? The interphone is shot out."

"I can do it, Skipper. They just got a flesh wound on me."

The engineer had tied a handkerchief around the pilot's forehead and was wiping the blood from his eyes.

"Get Bubbles and Mike up from the

greenhouse first; then tell the boys in the back to brace themselves for a crash landing. I'm going to set this crate down on the first strip of beach we come to."

Ten miles later Dusty pulled back the power on the tortured engines and used his remaining strength to hold the nose up as long as possible before Nellie's Nightmare settled in the sand of Cape Bon. His body surged forward against the safety belt as the Flying Fortress dug into the beach but Dusty was immune to pain now in the black relief of unconsciousness.

IT WAS late afternoon of the next day before Capt. D. K. Edwards opened his eyes again. He couldn't understand it but he seemed to be on a cot. There was a dark blur on the right side of him, and he gradually brought it into focus until he could recognize the face of Major James Little, Squadron Commander.

"Hello, Dusty. Are you out of it now?"

"Major, how is my crew?"

"Take it easy, Dusty. Things could have been a lot worse. You lost Ray and the radio operator but the other boys will pull through."

Dusty closed his eyes, and decided he would let the haze fog in on him again. The Major was still talking—what the heck was Little telling him? He made an effort, and once more brought the C. O. into focus.

"Dusty, there is no telling how many lives you and your men saved yesterday. Our plans leaked somehow, and the Jerries

were waiting for us with fighters as soon as we were over Italy.

"We managed to do our bombing, and we did a good job on the fields but they had moved most of the JU Eighty-eights. Those were the Eighty-eights you found at Palermo. The Germans were all ready to turn the tables on us. Those Junkers had been serviced and loaded with bombs to use on the Forts as they were landing after the raid.

"A recon plane got pictures of the Palermo field before dark yesterday. Your incendiaries set off those bombs like a string of Chinese firecrackers and there's not one JU Eighty-eight left whole out of the entire bunch!"

The Major saw that the injured man was able to follow his words, and continued his information.

"I saw your plane a few minutes ago, not far from this field hospital. How you brought that sieve back, I'll never understand. Your gunners set a new record by downing nine fighters on one mission.

"The medicos tell me you will be on your feet again in a few weeks. By that time you will probably have so many medals that you will fly left wing low the rest of your life! There will be a new Fortress waiting for you when you are ready again, Dusty—and it will be lead ship."

Major Little was still talking, but Dusty was letting that peaceful fog roll back in. He had heard enough—Nellie's Nightmare had finished in top money.