

**HOW MY LIFE WAS SAVED BY SILK
BY MORRIS W. MAGNUSON**

The most exciting and thrilling sixty seconds of my life took place on March 14th, 1945. Looking back on this experience I tell myself I would not take a million dollars for it, but I would not give two cents to do it again!

We were hitting an airfield east of the Rhine River in Germany. While the rest of the squadron circled, I went down to look over the target area. Everything looked in order and there were many planes on the ground just like sitting ducks! I firewalled my faithful Thunderbolt and made a pass, dropping two five hundred pound bombs and giving two planes a burst with my eight 50-calibers. This was grand-no flak, no planes in the air and lots of targets! I called the squadron and told all but four top cover planes to come on down, then I headed in for another pass. But this time things were not so serene and peaceful for as I crossed the runways at fifty feet, all hell broke lose, and I could hear the shells ripping into my ship. Fear gripped my heart as I pulled up and the cockpit filled with smoke. I threw back the canopy and stuck my head out, but the speed at which I was going was so great it literally ripped the goggles from my face. I flew blindly for perhaps thirty seconds when the engine quit. The time had come for me and my beloved plane to part company!

I was at only about five hundred feet and a few seconds could mean the difference between life and death. Frantically, I unbuckled the safety belt, the shoulder harness, oxygen tube, and radio connection. Now if I could only get out without hitting the tail assembly! I pushed by shoulders out of the cockpit and \whoom- the next thing I knew I was tumbling through space, with the ship well away from me. I breathed a silent prayer and pulled the rip cord. It worked and this called for another and longer prayer!

I sat there swinging to and fro in my parachute, but with a sad heart saw my plane crash and explode in a little clearing in the woods just west of me. My faithful pal was gone; I was on my own. Some Germans in the forest below started shooting at me, but I was not too worried as they'd much rather wait and capture me alive. Another second and I hit the ground with a thud.

Dear old Mother Earth, how good it was to be on solid ground. This was enemy territory, but I was still intact so I hid my chute under some pine cones and headed west as fast as I could run.