

# Crisis in the Cockpit

The copilot, John Morgan, had two alternatives: pull the plug on a wounded friend or fight him for control of the stricken B-17.

BY JOHN L. FRISBEE

**A**T mid-1940, with war raging in Europe and the United States sure to become involved, it looked as though John Morgan was never going to be an Army flyer. The six-foot-two-inch, 210-pound Texan had been classified 4-F by his draft board as a result of an earlier accident in which he had broken his neck. But the Royal Canadian Air Force, more interested in willing warriors than in medical history, welcomed Morgan into its pilot-training program. A year later, he was in England, wearing the RCAF uniform but flying bombers for the Royal Air Force.

In May 1943, John Morgan transferred to the US Army Air Forces as a flight officer and was assigned to the 92d Bomb Group's 326th Squadron, based at Alconbury. Sixty days later, on July 18, Morgan sat in the right seat of a B-17 as copilot for 1st Lt. Robert Campbell, a huge, muscular Mississippian, as they climbed out over the North Sea, and headed for Hanover and one of the most remarkable bomber sorties of the war.

Before the bomber stream reached the Dutch coast, it came under heavy attack by Luftwaffe fighters. The intercom of Morgan's plane was shot out, the tail, waist, and ball-turret guns ceased firing, a cannon shell shattered the windshield on the copilot's side, and a machine-gun bullet struck pilot Campbell in the head, splitting open his skull. Campbell, semiconscious and in a crazed condition, fell forward, locking his arms around the control column.

Morgan knew that if the B-17

dropped out of formation it would be easy prey to German fighters. Flying with his right hand, he dragged Campbell off the controls, holding him back in the pilot's seat with his left arm. The wounded pilot continued to fight instinctively for the controls as Morgan maneuvered back into formation. He now had two alternatives: pull Campbell's oxygen mask off, which, at 26,000 feet, would have been fatal to the wounded man, or fight the crazed pilot for control of the B-17 as long as his strength lasted, hoping that another crew member might come up to the cockpit and help. He chose the latter alternative.

Once again enemy fighters came in. As they pulled up over the riddled B-17, the top turret gunner fell to the floor, one arm shot off at the shoulder. Morgan's navigator, Keith Koske, unable to apply a tourniquet, got the gunner into a chute and pushed him out the lower hatch, believing correctly that the  $-50^{\circ}$  F. cold would stop the bleeding. The gunner survived, was cared for by German surgeons, and was repatriated in late 1944.



Lucky to be alive to tell about it, Lt. John C. Morgan recounts the events of July 18, 1943.

The navigator, bombardier, and engineer were aware from the B-17's erratic flight that something was wrong in the cockpit, but all were too busy fighting off attackers to leave their stations. For two hours, John Morgan held formation, all the time fighting to keep the irrational Campbell off the controls. Finally, after bombs-away, navigator Koske came up to the cockpit and, shocked by the grisly scene, helped Morgan get Campbell out of the pilot's seat.

As the formation let down over the North Sea, the gunners Morgan had believed to be dead appeared on the flight deck. Their oxygen system had been knocked out in the first fighter attack and they had been unconscious until the bombers descended to lower altitude. Bob Campbell died minutes after Morgan landed the battered bomber at an RAF base near the English coast.

On December 17, 1943, Lt. Gen. Ira Eaker, Commander of the Eighth Air Force, presented 1st Lt. John C. Morgan the Medal of Honor in recognition of his heroic acts over Germany that July day. General Eaker directed Morgan to fly no more combat. But Morgan decided that if the war was not over for the Allies, it wasn't over for him. He volunteered for several more missions, including the first Berlin raid of March 6, 1944. On that day, John Morgan's war against Nazi Germany came to an end. His B-17 was shot down and he remained an unwilling guest of the Luftwaffe until V-E Day.

John Morgan must surely be the only draft-classified 4-F to serve with the air forces of three nations, fly twenty-six combat missions (he says it really was only twenty-five and a half) with the RAF and the AAF, earn this country's highest decoration for valor, and spend fourteen months as a POW. No American who survived World War II paid his dues more fully than that tough, tenacious Texan. ■