

THOMAS BONNER, JR

The Navigator

—for Joseph Gilinsky, 8th Air Force, 94th Heavy Bomber Group
332nd-333rd Squadron, Bury St. Edmund, England

In a steel tube mounted amid once silver
Wings, from which propellers chopped air,
Ten men, barely shaving, crowded among
Racks of bombs, the horizontal fins like
Cold and still bodies on pallets waiting
To be released into cloud free skies.
Our navigator looked up through a clear
Blister searching when two black gnats
Darted geometrically blocking his sight,
Delaying his calculation as the aircraft
Shook and the crashing noises began,
As they always had, followed by shouts
And cries and clatter of metal on metal.
It was long ago but he rode his chair
Into the abyss of memory, his seat
Now softer with gentle pitch, no yaw
And barely a roll as he closed his eyes,
Seeking to intercept the azimuth.

THOMAS BONNER, JR. is professor Emeritus at Xavier University of Louisiana and former Distinguished Visiting Professor at the United States Air Force Academy, has published fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. Recent publications include fiction in *New Orleans by New Orleans* and an article with Robert Skinner on Kate Chopin's editions in *First*.