

PATRICK HICKS

The Lazarus Bomb

I still don't have an explanation for what I saw in 1943 but no one really knows what happened to Second Lieutenant Miller over the skies of Germany that summer. Even the scientists that were flown into our airbase couldn't figure it out. They tried to act like they were in control but if you looked into their eyes or watched how their hands shook when they took notes, well, you'd know. They were just as confused and frightened as we were, but no matter what anyone says to the contrary, I know what I saw, and everything I am about to say is true. Everything.

We were attached to the 71st Heavy Bomb Group in England and for many of us it was our first time outside the United States. Second Lieutenant Miller was the bombardier on my B-17 Flying Fortress, and I was the pilot. I was in charge of a ten-man crew and it was my job to get us safely over the drop zone. That's when Miller took over. He peered down into his crosshairs, he calculated for speed and distance and height, and then he released his ordnance. On a good day he might obliterate four or five city blocks. Not much remained except for little puffs of fire or maybe the faint outline of what used to be a street. Miller once told me he felt like a magician because with a single wave of his hand he could—*poof*—make whole cities disappear.

He was an odd guy though. When we weren't working he didn't go to the bars with us. Instead, he sat in a hangar full of bombs and read books like *Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde*, *Dracula*, and *Don Quixote*. I guess that's where he got this crazy idea to name our bomber Rocinante. We were eating breakfast one morning when he leaned into me, his mouth full of scrambled egg and bacon. "That's the name of

Don Quixote's horse," he swallowed. He shoveled in another forkful. "It's a quality name. You maybe want me to paint something on the side of our 17?"

So he got himself a few cans of paint and a stepladder, and he hummed and whistled as he created this Pegasus on the side of our plane throwing bombs at a windmill. The white horse had a chest plate of armor and its feathered wings were all highly detailed—"she'll keep us safe," he sang from the top rung—and then he painted all these bombs into a saddle. Down in the corner there was a windmill, but instead of four wooden arms paddling the air it had a rotating swastika. Above the entire painting was the single word: Rocinante. It was so well done that a photojournalist from *Life Magazine* had us line up beneath the painting and smile. We wore our dress uniforms and wondered what we'd look like to everyone back in America. We saluted the camera. We gave the thumbs-up sign. We waved to our mothers.

"She'll bring us good luck," Miller said patting my shoulder. "You wait and see, Captain. Rocinante will keep us safe."

And maybe she did keep us safe. We were all superstitious back then so who knows what's what about the truth. With so much death orbiting around us and so many incomprehensible images of bombers breaking apart and being sucked from the skies...well, I guess a spirit world just felt closer to us. Thousands of ghosts were created every time we lifted into the sky. Buildings melted, factories boiled in fire, people disappeared. Voodoo magic happened every day and the devil rose out of the ground.

We never talked about dying because that was tempting fate but all of us had good luck charms and private rituals that kept evil from reaching into our B-17. Whenever I climbed into the cockpit I always wore a rosary that had been blessed by an archbishop back in Minneapolis, but other guys had things like rabbits' feet, or four-leaf clovers, or horseshoes, or locks of hair. Our navigator had a lucky pencil. My co-pilot scratched his name into a bullet and convinced himself he'd come out of the show alive. And you know what? He did. When Edmund Deering finally died of a pulmonary fibrosis in 1998 he still had that bullet with his name scratched on it. They put it in a tiny box and buried it with him.

Second Lieutenant Miller also had his private charms and rituals. The scientists, those egghead types from Oxford and Cambridge and Harvard, wanted to know if these things somehow influenced "The Event", as they called it in their official reports. They tried to connect Miller's goofy rituals with what happened on June 27, 1943. Maybe it affected his bombs somehow, I don't know, but I do know that he always took his bubblegum out of his mouth before every run. He pressed it

against the same spot on one of the crossbeams, he hunched over his scope and then—after he dropped what he came to drop, after all those seeds of death had tumbled to the ground—he popped his gum back into his mouth. He never said “bombs away” like he was supposed to, he yelled “boom!” as loud as he could over the flight intercom. It was a yip of joy.

“Boom! No more *not-sees*, boys!”

That’s another thing. He never called them civilians or Krauts. He called the people on the streets and hiding in the bomb shelters *not-sees* because he liked the play on words.

“I’m a goddamn magician, boys! Now you see them, now you don’t!”

Miller was good at what he did. There was only one spot in the whole big sky where he could release his bombs accurately and I never saw him miss that little trapdoor of air. Not once. I mean, the man knew his explosives like they were his own children and he sometimes gave names to his bombs. Sometimes, back at base, while the rest of us were relaxing in our Nissan huts and listening to the BBC or playing blackjack or whatever, he was out in a hangar studying bombs. He looked at firing pins and detonation fuses and oiled gears. He knew all about racks and linkages and switches, and he especially knew about the electricity that pulsed from his thumb to the releasing pins. He considered survivability in relationship to blast radius and he made up all these elaborate charts where he calculated what would happen to the human body at 25 feet or 50 feet or 100 feet. Shock waves, shrapnel, and fire could blast a person into fleshy confetti at 15 feet or, if they were standing further away (maybe around a corner or something) it might only shatter the delicate bones that kept their ear working. Miller said he wanted to understand what was happening on the ground and he started to lose sleep. His firing thumb began to twitch on its own, like it was doing its own thinking and didn’t belong to him anymore.

I asked Miller if he was okay one night, if he needed anything. He looked at the stars and shook his head very slowly. He lit a cigarette and asked what it would be like to fall 30,000 feet.

“That’s how far my babies drop.” He looked at the stars and acted like I wasn’t there. “It takes seven minutes to fall from that high up, and you’re going 120 miles per hour when you hit the ground. Think you’d scream all the way down?”

Then he walked into the dark. The little red ball of his cigarette fell away from me, it winked out into the night. Swallowed whole.

“The Event” happened on our thirteenth mission. We knew it would be a bad hop over Krautland because our planes were given a full load of explosives and fuel. When we woke up, the stink of gasoline saturated the air, it crawled into our noses, it made us think twice about lighting cigarettes. Plus there was that spooky number: thirteen. It filled my heart with spiders.

The morning of June 27 was like any other day of the war. All the pilots, co-pilots, and bombardiers crowded into a Nissan hut where, on a large map, we were given the target. We would be running over a city called Kiel because that’s where the Nazis built their U-Boats. The concrete bunkers were easy enough to locate and we were told to expect moderate to heavy flak. Major Gillespie gave this information like it was a weather report, like we might encounter hail or some other minor inconvenience on our way to work.

There were trays of hard-boiled eggs for us to grab on our way out. Deering and I filled out pockets for the long haul ahead and talked about these impossible rumors of slave labor we’d heard. Was it true the Nazis were forcing Jews to build U-Boats? We walked towards Rocinante and shrugged our shoulders. What could be done about it even if it were true? We were at war...*c’est la vie*...we had to suck it up and fly on.

Second Lieutenant Miller inspected his bombs. The 500-pounders and 1000-pounders that morning looked normal and there was nothing really odd about them. The scientists would later find this hard to believe but I know it’s true because I was there with Miller. I checked the bombs myself.

“Looks fine to me,” he said. He gave me a limp salute and crawled into Rocinante with a pack of gum. The other men got out their good luck charms and some of them patted the Pegasus on the side of our plane. And as each man entered the fuselage, Miller asked if anyone wanted a stick of gum. This was all pure ritual and it made us feel that it was just another day at the office, just a training flight or an easy run up the coast. I got into my seat and moved the yoke in a circle to check the flaps. The cockpit smelled of grease and cold metal and, when the engines coughed to spewing smoky life, I looked at my reflection in the window. The whole plane shook like it was afraid.

Soon, the whole bomb group lifted into the air and we were over the English Channel. It was a vibrating and deafening environment up there. Cold too. I’m from Minnesota so I know a few things about subzero temperature but at 32,000 feet it’s -40°. Spit froze in my oxygen mask. My blood turned to slush. Frostbite nibbled my fingers. And then, just when I was beginning to lose feeling in my whole body and wishing for something to break the monotony of the droning engines,

the sky filled up with swastikas. Little fighter planes swarmed around our bomb group and they opened up their machine guns—hot streaks of orange snapped through the air, invisible metal punched into engines and glass and bodies—that’s when bad things began to happen, fast. *The Irish Rose* lost both wings and folded in on herself. A burst of yellow flame licked out from the cockpit and I saw men jump out, they fell like fleas and their parachutes bubbled with fire. When the *King Bee* was hit there was a puff of debris but no fire at all, there was just an eruption of metal and then a slow curling into the ground, like the whole plane had decided to take a nap. Meanwhile our waist gunners were shouting out enemy positions. Three o’clock! Nine o’clock! Watch out for seven!

I saw a man fall out of the *Careful Virgin*. His chute dribbled behind him like a weak exclamation point and I swear to Christ he was reading a book. Maybe it was the Bible? All I know is that he was traveling at 120 miles per hour and he’d hit the ground in seven minutes. I watched him for awhile and his chute never opened, he just became smaller and smaller.

“Target ahead,” Miller said through static. His voice was calm and focused like all of this was perfectly normal. The 17s ahead flew into clouds of black flak and it made the air bumpy, like we were riding over rocks and potholes. Chunks of metal began to chink into Rocinante as if somebody were throwing sacks of holes at our plane. Up ahead, bombs began to fall and I watched concussion rings blast out over Kiel’s harbor. A thunderstorm of fire popped up from the ground, it looked like a jagged line of fiery flowers, and I could tell the boys ahead put their ordnance right in the pickle barrel. There wouldn’t be much left for us to hit.

I switched control of the plane over to Miller. “She’s yours.”

He pressed his bubblegum against the crossbeam and hunched over his bomb site. I felt us pitch and yaw as he adjusted our course heading. Up. Down. Steady. Up. Up. Steady. When the bombs were finally dropped, Rocinante lurched into the air suddenly lighter and Miller yelled that one word we all wanted to hear because it meant that we could fly home.

“Boom!” he shouted. “Boom! Boom!”

What happened next became the subject of many debriefings and classified reports but in spite of all that paperwork I still don’t know how to properly explain it. There wasn’t much left of Kiel when we unloaded our bombs, that’s for sure. The harbor was on fire with black oily clouds and I could see the skeletons of buildings collapsing into themselves, but when our bombs hit the ground the colors weren’t right. Each of our bombs was a brilliant globe of light that swelled for a few seconds and then winked out. It was like we dropped pearls of heat onto the ground.

“What’s that?” Miller shouted. He touched the nosecone with both hands and stopped chewing his gum. “What the hell’s that?”

Far below, amid the inferno the 71st Bomb Group had just created, there were puddles of fireless calm, like a stillness had decided to pock the burning ground. The buildings looked undamaged, destruction raged and cracked around them but inside the little circles of our bomb blasts there was nothing but peace. There’s no other way to describe it: It looked like our B-17 had blasted the harbor with life, not with death.

As we turned back towards England we said nothing to each other. Miller stared out the nosecone and didn’t move. When we landed, he just sat there, thinking.

He came to the conclusion that it was some kind of super weapon. After all, new technology came out of warfare all the time, and didn’t the last World War create submarines and tanks and flame-throwers and mustard gas? Maybe these bombs were some kind of new military hocus-pocus?

Major Gillespie ordered us into his office and closed the door. He talked in hushed tones. Reports were written, Rocinante was studied and Second Lieutenant Miller was interviewed by scads of brass. And then my co-pilot and I were taken for a long drive with Major Gillespie. He motored through villages called Plumpton, Broomer’s Corner, and Wisborough Green. Thatch roofs and leafy trees flicked by the windows. The sun was a dull white circle and the air was hazy, full of pollen. We talked about home and then, after zigzagging down gritty roads that pinged rocks off the undercarriage of the car, Major Gillespie pulled into a field, he turned off the engine and took out a pipe. He wanted to hear the whole story again, off the record, so Deering and I told him once again what we knew.

Gillespie nodded and tweaked his nose. He mentioned that spies in Kiel had managed to visit the bombsite. Their reports were full of these unbelievable accounts of buildings that had been reassembled from rubble, trees were made whole again from splinters, anything scorched by fire was unburned.

“It’s an impossible story of course,” Gillespie said relighting his pipe. “They’re saying that everything inside the blast radius of your bombs has been brought back to life. Some kind of Kraut propaganda, no doubt.”

“I don’t follow, sir,” Deering said.

Gillespie stared out the window and cleared his throat. He went on to say that—according to the report, which he hardly believed—people had been brought back to life. Anyone that was dead was now alive. It made Gillespie chuckle. “These are being called ‘Lazarus Bombs’ by the Germans. But look, I need both of you

to ignore these fantastic reports and stay on target. We're at war so don't believe everything you hear...just get your job done, okay?"

Over Hamburg and Cologne our bombs did exactly the same thing. Instead of fire there was a flash of white. Everything looked peaceful, untouched, fresh, like the Garden of Eden had bloomed to life again, and it didn't matter what bombs we used or what the weather was like or what city we were attacking. Rubble jumped up and reshaped itself into buildings, bridges knitted themselves together, fires crouched down into little sparks and puffed into nothingness. When we were flying back from Cologne, Miller asked about people being brought back to life. "You think that's true?" he asked chewing his gum. "Think my bombs are doing that?"

"Don't be stupid," I said over the intercom. "Can't be true."

But privately I wasn't so sure.

Miller moved his bunk into the bomb hangar and started doing really crazy things like blessing 1000-pounders. He sprinkled water on their tailfins and made the sign of the cross over huge stacks of explosives. He slept with firing mechanisms like they were teddy bears and I had to remind the guy to brush his teeth, and finish the mutton on his plate, and shave. I began to feel like his mother.

A team of scientists was brought in from a place called Bletchley Park and they studied Miller for a week, they gave him all these psychological tests, then we were told to bomb some insignificant podunk village on the coast of Germany. We didn't know it at the time but this place had been flamed off the map two days earlier because they wanted to see what would happen when we arrived with our payload. Rocinante was the only B-17 that went on the mission and we were under heavy fighter escort. Two scientists (we weren't told their names) joined the crew and filmed Miller at work. They watched him chew his gum, line up the scope, and drop a single bomb onto the charred houses. They heard him say "Boom", although with less enthusiasm than he usually did. When they saw the little globe of white their mouths opened in shock. It's true after all, one of the shouted.

We were immediately grounded.

What use were we to the war if our bombs healed Germany? We were quarantined in a corner of the base and forbidden to go anywhere, not to the Postal Exchange, not to the Doughnut Dugout, and especially not into the village of Falmer for a pint of beer. Our hut began to smell like leather and stale farts, MPs were stationed outside our door and, as the days leaked by, Miller got quieter and quieter. They

gave us a radio and plenty of good chow but I hated watching the rest of the 71st lift into the morning haze without us, especially when so many of these guys never came home. On a single run over Frankfurt, eight B-17s fell into the earth. It was late in the afternoon when they began to return and we counted everyone back except for eight planes. *Red Box* and *Glenda's Men* and *Pirate Ship* were gone. So were *Your Mississippi Pop* and *Eight Ball* and *Thumper*. *Omaha Joe* and *Yankee Clipper*.

And where were we? Stuck in a goddamn hut. In one day, eighty men disappeared—abracadabra, gone—that's eighty men that will never come home and have kids or go to the ballpark or brush their teeth or open birthday presents or grow old. Their lives were snipped, cut short, and I couldn't help but wonder how things might be different if we were up there with them. Maybe we couldn't save them but the flak would have burst differently and the fighter planes would have banked around Rocinante if she were up there in that mess. As I thought about all of this in the cruel calm of our hut, I stopped babying Second Lieutenant Miller. I began to hate the guy. I prickled with resentment. We should be up there.

After two weeks of music and darning socks there was a knock on the door. A man in an expensive suit came in with a case of beer and a stack of chocolate. He introduced himself as Dr Pearse and he made polite noise about the damp weather. He knew our names and asked specific questions about our families, he listed off our hometowns like he knew them personally, then he took a deep breath and smiled.

"Gentlemen, we'd like you to bomb London."

Everyone in the room snorted with laughter, we rocked back and forth on our cots and held our stomachs, we took out our handkerchiefs and wiped our eyes.

"Bomb London?" I said. "You can't be serious."

"Gentlemen! Almost 40,000 people have died in air raids since this war began," the man barked. He closed his eyes and composed himself. "Whole areas of the city, especially those around the East End, have been totally destroyed. Lives have been lost...good people are dead."

He went on to mention how awful the Blitz was. While fires raged, water boiled inside fire hydrants, lead from old windowpanes trickled down from buildings, bricks glowed yellow and burst. The sky was so full of flame and smoke that people didn't notice when morning came. There was no sunrise at all, like it never happened, and this went on night after night after night.

"We'd like you to bomb London. Do you think it will work?"

Everyone looked at Miller, who stared at his unlaced boots. He took in a sharp breath like he was going to speak but he said nothing. Outside, a truck drove past and we listened to it gear away. It seemed like the war itself was leaving us behind.

After a long moment, Miller shrugged a shoulder.

“Good,” Dr Pearse smiled. “We’ll let you know more about our plans tonight.”

We were told the big man himself, Winston Churchill, would be watching us. He, his cigar, and a platoon of military others would be stationed on a rooftop across the river at Greenwich. Anti-aircraft guns and spotlights were told to stand down and we were ordered to make our run at 0300. Not even the pigeons would be awake at that time in the morning. So we flew over Big Ben and lined up our sites on the coal-stained dome of Saint Paul’s Cathedral. It was damp and we had a full moon to guide us over the blind streets. Flares had been rigged up over the shattered docks of West India Quay, which was our primary target, and the Prime Minister was somewhere down there with thousands of others who could hear our heavy plane push through the night.

When Miller flicked his thumb and let go of our bomb, we banked up high into the moon. At first there was total silence but then there was this low crack like thunder beneath ice. An explosion of color bulged into the night, it turned into a globe of burning daylight that shimmered with heat and, after several seconds, it flared into brilliant white like phosphorous. It was so bright it illuminated our cockpit and cast weird shadows across the instrument panel. It flickered, then vanished.

It lasted almost twelve seconds. I know because I counted. One-mississippi, two-mississippi, three-mississippi four-mississippi, five-mississippi, six-mississippi, seven-mississippi, eight-mississippi, nine-mississippi, ten-mississippi, eleven-mississippi, twelve—

It was a glorious sight, far more beautiful than during the day because it was a giant pearl of wispy light that didn’t hurt the eyes. It swelled up, did its thing, and went away. Even now when I close my eyes I can see that ball of glistening energy over London. It was like a scoop of light had been dropped onto the streets.

Rocinante filled with cheers when it disappeared. We hooted and thumped the side of our plane. Deering shook my hand and we flew back to base. Champagne waited for us and Dr Pearse patted everyone on the back by saying “good job, good job”. Our tail-gunner yipped like a coyote but amid it all Miller just stood outside in his flight suit and smoked a cigarette. He stared into the distance and didn’t talk, he didn’t move, he didn’t do a goddamn thing.

I put my arm around him and gave him a shake.

“I don’t get it,” he said. “For twelve missions I drop straight-up explosives on people then this happens to me?”

I shrugged and turned him towards the party. “Stop thinking about it. Let’s have a beer.”

The next day Gillespie and Pearse gathered us in a large office. We sat on desks and drank fresh coffee, we spooned in sugar and dribbled real cream into our mugs. Thick slabs of wheaten bread and pots of jam were on a sideboard. Rationing may have been taking place elsewhere in Great Britain but it wasn’t happening in that office. We even had oranges and bananas.

Men in trenchcoats had gone into West India Quay shortly after we dropped our bomb. They walked around with flashlights and found 219 people walking dazed through the streets, their bodies whole and undamaged. When they asked these people what day of the week it was, one elderly lady crossed her arms and refused to believe it was 1943. “Impossible,” she said. “Any fool knows it’s November 9, 1941.”

Hearing all this gave me the creeps. I touched my rosary and wondered where all these souls had been and what it meant that we brought them back from wherever that was. The trenchcoats also reported that bricks had reassembled themselves into buildings and that smashed streets looked as if they had been newly cobbled. Birds nested in regrown trees, clothes were as good as new, and antiques that were hundreds of years old looked as if they were bought yesterday. Books written in the 1800s were crisp, their leather covers fresh and perfect. Most amazing of all, no one was sick. Confused families and dock workers and firefighters and maids and journalists and bus drivers and children, they were all perfectly healthy. Even familiar problems like arthritis and polio and childhood scars were erased. One middle-aged man who was badly wounded in the Great War of 1914-1918, ran down the street and wept. For the first time in three decades he was able to walk without pain. He danced and went looking for his children.

“West India Quay has been quarantined,” Dr Pearse said with crossed arms. “All of this gives us great hope for this so-called Lazarus Bomb.”

“Hope for what?” Miller asked. There was a sharp tone in his eyes.

Gillespie and Pearse looked at each other and walked over to a map of North Africa. Pearse pointed at the coast and talked about battles that were being waged, then he talked about Rocinante bombing American troops and then, with a straight face, he said he wanted us to fly over battlefields and drop 2000-pounders on the freshly dead.

“Our boys will be healed and we can put guns back into the hands.” Pearse cocked his head to one side and squinted at the map. “Of course, any Krauts that are brought back would need to be eliminated. We could place machine guns here, here, and here.”

Miller stood up so quickly he knocked his coffee to the ground. The cup shattered. “This can’t be used as a weapon.”

Pearse took a deep breath. “Son, you love your country, don’t you? You want this war over, right?”

Miller gazed out the window and I watched blood drain from his cheeks. He looked pale and clammy, like a jellyfish.

“You’d be saving thousands of American lives. Think of those boys going home to their mothers and wives and girlfriends. Would they have a problem with what I’m suggesting? I don’t think so.” Then Pearse pointed at the door and his voice softened. “Let me show you something.”

We walked across the base to a hangar and Pearse opened his arms like he was about to conduct an orchestra. Hundreds of explosives glinted behind him. It looked like a galaxy of brass. “Everything in here can be used to bring back the dead...all of it. Tell me how that’s wrong. Tell me why we shouldn’t raise the dead.”

Miller didn’t say anything but after a few minutes he went to a stack of 500-pounders. He put both hands on the bombs and closed his eyes like he was deep in thought. If the war hadn’t interrupted his life he might have been a philosopher or artist but certain paths were chosen and certain possibilities had been eliminated. All of us were denied access to selves that we might have become. A future me was killed in those war years and sometimes I feel like I’m still searching for the corpse of that young man I might have become, that young man who had no clue what hot steel did to human bodies. No bomb in the world can bring him back to life. My young self died in 1943 and he’s never coming home. Never.

Maybe Miller was thinking about this or maybe he was thinking about giving rifles to the dead over and over again and what that would mean. Maybe he was thinking about that beautiful bomb—the one that transformed chunks of wet tissue back into breathing loving human beings—maybe he was thinking about that bomb becoming no different than any other weapon used in war. I don’t know what he was thinking, but I know he stood there for a long time. A really long time.

When he finally spoke it was in a whisper. “This can’t be used as a weapon. It wouldn’t be right.”

Pearse looked at the floor and then clapped his hands together with a false smile. “Boys...how about we grill us some salmon tonight, eh? Sound like a plan? Have some beer too?”

We went back to our hut and played blackjack but Miller stared out the window and smoked cigarette after cigarette. As the sun went down, he squinted at the horizon. He was smiling about something.

He was missing the next morning. His pistol was on his cot, it was dismantled, and all the bullets were gone. The man just—*poof*—he vanished. Now you see him, now you don’t. Abracadabra. We heard rumors that he was hidden by the government, or that he sneaked off in civvies, someone said he went to neutral Ireland. Another person swore that Miller was living in the same area of London we bombed back to life.

I can’t vouch for these stories. I only know what happened next.

A few days after he disappeared I stood on the edge of a wheat field near our airbase. This grainy ocean rolled in wind and I noticed footprints running through the thin stalks. I couldn’t say why, but I just knew it was Miller. I thought about all that grain throbbing with life while men and women died in their thousands all around me. Starlings began to dip and rise overhead, they were a waltzing cloud of flight, and the whole sky was on fire. The sun looked like a bullet wound and there I stood, a single man caught in so much destruction. I closed my eyes and felt air move in and out of my lungs and I was just so happy to be alive. What, I wondered, would the world be like if life could be brought back so easily?

Around me the wheat flowed on the wind. Birds danced. The clouds darkened. It was all so...so beautiful, so delicate.

The bombs that Miller touched were placed under lockdown. A week went by, then two weeks, and then this seventeen-year-old kid shows up in our hut. He knew zip about war but he was from Nebraska like Miller and he was fresh out of Bombardier School. They gave him a copy of Don Quixote and told him to chew bubblegum. Miller’s bombs were hoisted into the belly of Rocinante and we were sent back to Kiel where it all started. No one told the kid a thing. I wore my rosary. The other guys had their rabbits’ feet and horseshoes and locks of hair. Deering had his lucky bullet. The kid chewed bubblegum and put it on the crossbeam just like he was ordered to. He looked through his bombsite and used his thumb to release thousands of pounds of explosives.

“Boom!” he yelled. “Boom!”

Flak burst around us, steel and brass stabbed the air, and I looked at the angry ground below. I hoped to see a blast of color and that familiar glowing pearl but our explosions were only full of fire and destruction and death. The kid began to cheer. He began to pound the side of our plane and yell for joy because all of his bombs landed right on target. He couldn't figure out why the rest of us were so disappointed, so empty, so silent.

PATRICK HICKS is the author of five poetry collections, most recently *Finding the Gossamer* 2008 and *This London* (2010), both from Ireland's acclaimed press, Salmon Poetry. Aside from being the Writer-in-Residence at Augustana College and an advisory editor for *New Hibernia Review* his work has appeared in scores of international journals including, *Ploughshares*, *Utne Reader*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Glimmer Train*, *Natural Bridge*, and *Nimrod*. He has been a Visiting Fellow at Oxford and he has won a variety of grants to support his work. He lives in South Dakota.