



A TORRETTA BASED B-24 DROPS OUT OF FORMATION, FUEL VAPORS POURING OUT OF A RUPTURED FUEL TANK AFTER BEING HIT WITH ANTI-AIRCRAFT FIRE.

PHOTO BY JAMES C. DOOLEY 461ST B.G.

ner calls out: fighters attacking from behind you.

FW-190's and ME-109's sneak in at the formation behind, veer off and make passes with the bombers shooting back. A ME-109 goes down. As if someone had taken a pencil and drawn a thin vertical line in the sky. Two Liberators roll sideways and fall away bellowing orange flame, then blowing up. And a FW-190 breaks away and comes at you.

The tail gunner sees him and is excited. "Fighter!" he screams, "low at six o'clock!" He leaves his mike button down in the excitement, and the dull staccato of the guns grips your stomach. You pray and wait. Then, "I got him! I got Him!"

Your escort is busy now and the fight seems to drift off. Maybe you're safe for awhile and lucky today, and you begin to have visions of mail and the squadron club tonight.

But you're slowly falling behind the formation as a worried engineer fuses over the fuel lines and hydraulic systems. And someone else takes over your place. Over Hungary you realize that you're suddenly alone, with both your escort and formation far ahead. You've got to make it back by yourself. And sitting there - over a land sworn against you and your country, you realize what a privilege it is to represent all of those people - your countrymen, Americans - back in the wonderful United States, thousands of miles away.

Your luck is good and you make it back over Yugoslavia and now out over the Adriatic. Ahead lies Italy...resplendent in the white clouds and four o'clock sunshine. Off come the hel-

metts and oxygen masks, and you relax and light a cigarette. You turn on the radio compass for some American sawing *. Life is good and you're going to enjoy more of it - at least another days worth.

Dropping through the opening in the clouds is fun and then you fly along the deck, above cities and farms. Its peaceful. Another world.

At your base they've been waiting and watching, first for the main group as it came rumbling overhead and peeling off into the traffic pattern. And now some of them still wait and watch for stragglers. Like yourselves.

You're over the field at last, with fuel now your real concern. And you can't waste time on the pattern so you turn for the runway, firing flares. The hydraulic system is also out and you lower your gear by hand.

You're almost down now, nearing the end of the runway. Your engines increase their bite for a moment just as number two begins to cough. Then you're on the ground with wheels catching on the mats and smoking, and you're coasting across the field.

The gang's waiting at the revetment as the last engine is cut and moves on the ship. You all just sit still for a minute, suddenly very tired. Then you drop from the catwalk to the ground.

Doughnuts and smiles from Ellie Mae the Red Cross girls, and straight rye whiskey from the medics cheer you up, and you're eager for some chow and relaxation. But for a few moments the mission must be relived in interrogation, then it's off to the club and multi Vino and Congac, cut with grapefruit juice. And lots of talk.

The starlight is glinting on their

wings again as the bombers sit on the field, being readied for tomorrow. The wind tonight is cold again and as the sentries pace back and forth they pull up their collars a little tighter to keep warm, 'til in a few hours, in the early dawn, the bombers should once again come to life.

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*Editors Note: The Author is referring to the Armed Forces radio broadcasts of American music.



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