

We were close to buying the farm.

As we approached the target at around 26,000 feet we found the smoke screen in place. We hit the IP and turned toward the target. From the right waist I saw two flak bursts bracket the right wing, and someone in the nose called three bursts directly in front of our ship and at our altitude. Almost immediately a flak shell burst in the vicinity of No 4 engine setting it on fire, leaving a big hole on the top of the right wing where the right Tokyo tank was located. It was burning too. No 3 engine quit also.

The airplane started down out of control in the middle of the flak field. The bail out bell was ringing and Col Glanzberg ordered bail out. Suddenly the side slip pulled the fire out of the engine and fuel tank. I started yelling on the inter-phone that the fire was out. We had been trying to ride out the aircraft until we were out of the flak field before jumping. Col. Glanzberg got the plane under control at around 4,000 feet on the Number 1 and 2 engines, and asked for a crew count. We were all still hanging on. He headed for Turkey. After observing No 3 engine and finding it still there and apparently undamaged it was restarted and purred like a kitten for the rest of our journey. We discussed the fuel situation, because if we were to try to return to Italy we would need the fuel from the No 4 tank and any left in the right Tokyo tank that had been on fire.

Because of the fuel system design on this B-24J, I had to remove a fuel line and plug another over the bomb bay with a 50 caliber round in order to use the fuel from the No 4 and Tokyo tank.

On we went at tree top level leaving Turkey and turning back to Italy with out seeing another aircraft either German or American. Everything was thrown out, including our beloved "Jewel" pots to lighten the load. Two and a half hours later and after the rest of the group landed we limped in for a good landing at our base at Torretta. As we rolled to a stop fuel was leaking all over the aircraft. We didn't need a bail out bell to tell us to get the hell out once the aircraft stopped. The aircraft was junk, after just one mission, and my 50th.

When I got back to my tent, my crew were preparing for R & R in Rome which had just come under allied control. Col. Glanzberg had me passing information and instructions to new crews on the procedure we used to get our plane home. I never did get to Rome for R&R.

For this mission I received the Distinguished Flying Cross. I didn't find out about this until 39 year later when I attended the 461st & 484th Bomb Groups Re-

union in Williamsburg, Virginia and saw the orders, awarding the decoration.

Crew 36 departed Morrison Field, Florida February 1, 1944, flying our aircraft to South America, Dakar, and North Africa to Italy. We flew our first mission April 2, 1944, and during May, June, and July of that year the 765th Squadron lost 22 aircraft and crews. Crew 36 returned State Side on the troop ship General Bliss and arrived in New York on September 1, 1944.

Part 2

At the Dayton, Ohio reunion in 1982 I was telling Leonard Cole, (he worked at group headquarters) about our mission to Palesti. Mayfield was listening and I was informed that he was the flight engineer that had plugged the gasoline line with a fifty caliber machine gun shell that enabled us to return to Torretta.

I remember this mission as it was the hardest a plane had been hit while I was flying as the Group Navigator of the 461st Bomb Group. This particular day was what I would call a routine start of a mission except it was a new airplane with the navigator seated behind the pilot. The radar operator Lt Gizelba was seated across at the radio operators position with his back to the co-pilot. We were leading the 461st Group of the 49th Wing as well as the 15th Air Force against the Romana American Oil Refinery at Palesti, Rumania.

We arrived at our initial point a few miles southeast of Bucharest, Rumania, and the bombardier took over. A normal bomb run was two to three minutes long before bombs away. We dropped the bombs and took a standard rally of a 45 degree to the right loosing 1000 feet in altitude as quickly as possible to confuse the anti-aircraft gunners. The planned route for the day was to go north of Palesti and turn west and return to base. I can not remember our altitude exactly on this mission, but it was 19,000 to 21,000 feet. As we started the bomb run I was seated at a table that I used in the navigation of the plane. I turned around to look forward between the pilot and co-pilot and could see the flak was very heavy over the target.

As we approached the point where we were due to release our bombs, I saw four bursts of 88MM flak exactly in line at our altitude.

As we approached the point where we were due to release our bombs, I saw four bursts of 88MM flak exactly in line at our altitude. I thought we were safe from that battery of anti-aircraft artillery, but where the 5th burst came from I do not know. This burst hit our No 4 engine and set it on fire. It appeared that to feath-