

Hallenbeck returned to our jeep only to learn from his sister's girlfriend that she had been transferred to the General Hospital in Naples a few days before. Congested traffic and poor exit did not allow us time to stop at Naples. We headed back for the 824th Squadron in this rough riding jeep. The road was seemingly endless as we drove into our squadron area about 2:30 AM only to find the CQ with his flashlight checking tents, awakening crew members. Hallenbeck was already awake from two nights of "sit up snoozes" in our jeep. No wonder he was weak, after falling four miles on fire from the sky and his burning B-24 on May 29, 1944 over Weiner Neustadt, Austria.

My tent mate, S-2 officer Goren made me "numb" when he said "Hallenbeck's B-24 was shot down with only some parachutes visible." Supply Officer, Stan Bennett gave me the job to sort personal belongings from military properties in Hallenbeck's tent on the edge of the Italian wheat field. Hallenbeck's footlocker had letters and pictures from his wife, parents, and kid sister, a senior high student at Monett, MO. I also had the honor and privilege of being with the Hallenbecks at Lt Zeff's Officers Club at Harvard, Neb. just before we shipped overseas. After spending one year as a POW, Hallenbeck came home to his wife and son. They had three more sons. The three oldest became West Point fighter pilots and served in the Vietnam War. The youngest son was killed in action as a fighter pilot in Vietnam on his second tour of duty.



This B-24 had crashed some three hours before we spotted it on our way to Anzio. if you look closely you can see German dug outs in the side of the hill. May 28, 1944



The Illegal Mission of May 29, 1944. A small village south of the Anzio Beachhead where we stopped briefly on our way looking for Ralph Hallenbeck's sister, who was transferred to the Naples hospital the day before. Ralph Hallenbeck's crew was shot down the next day, May 30, 1944 (see pages 14 and 15 Torretta Flyer No 15). From Left : Ed Neshiem, William Dodd from Connecticut, Lt J Harlan, from Kentucky, and Ralph Hallenbeck.

Santa Maria, California

Dear Bud;

I hesitated to write about this incident because nobody believes me. But the story is true and it's worth a chuckle.

After the members of John Roedel's crew (76) finished flying the required fifty combat missions, we were restricted to base pending rotation to ZI which meant stateside- home.

We figured on a two week wait for transportation home, so rather than sit around camp and because we couldn't get official leave, our navigator Jud Suddarth told the executive officer not to look for us for a few days, and took off down the road, AWOL, to see how far we could get. We didn't have much trouble catching rides in the GI trucks so we made pretty good (if somewhat bumpy) time up the Appian Way.

We reached Naples about sundown. We were away from our base without official leave orders so we couldn't get beds in the military hotels or eat in the officers' mess. That meant we were on the local economy. We managed to get some food in a red cross snack bar, so we didn't have to go to any black market restaurant, but where were we going to sleep? We set out in search of some native hotels, but either there weren't any or we couldn't read the signs. All of the USO lounges were locked up for the night so we couldn't sack out in the lobbies.

Jud and I were just wandering the streets trying to find some way to get off them. We were sure if we were found by the MPs after curfew at sundown, we'd spend the night in jail and probably get court martial and lose our place in the rotation roster. If the MPs missed us we would probably wind up in an alley with our throats cut. We had heard that is not an uncommon thing in Naples in those days.

Anyway, there we were meandering up the side streets and watching the merchants boarding up their shops at curfew time. All through the town we had been pestered by little boys who were hustling one thing or another, like cigarette lighters or girls or were begging for money, candy, or chewing gum.

"Hey Joe ! Chewing gum?"

"Hey Joe ! girls? You want girls?"

The penny finally dropped. We could go with one of these kids to a brothel, buy a room for the night, kick the girls out and get a night's sleep.

This was a wild idea for guys like us. Firstly, Jud and I were both engaged to girls back home. And then Uncle Sam had been feeding us propaganda movies about venereal disease until we were so brainwashed that like the Sad Sack, we were afraid to brush up against a woman on a crowded bus. Both of us were just 21 years old and pure as the driven snow-almost.

By this time the little kids had all disappeared because of the curfew I guess and there was nobody yelling "Hey Joe!" for any reason. Finally we spotted a kid way down the street and chased after him calling for him to stop. When we caught up with him he looked like he would rather have run away than wait. Furthermore, he was all dressed up in his Sunday best, he was not one of