

running rough. The lead ship took us the wrong way for we used up much precious fuel. Our engineer Charles Shanklin was busy transferring fuel while we headed for the emergency landing strip at Vis. We dropped down to 12,000 feet now with two engines out. Lt Kaiser told us to prepare for a crash landing. Four of us got in the waist and braced ourselves against the rear bulkhead. The pilot gave the order to bail out about 5,000 feet. I was the first out of the bottom hatch, and pulled the rip cord and I was jolted severely. I tried to turn around and count the chutes coming out of the plane but couldn't maneuver the chute. In about a minute with the ground coming up fast, I hit the ground hard on my back. I cut my head in two places, cut my lip and got a bloody nose. It finally stopped. We landed about 30 miles from the Yugoslavian coast.

After I landed, a group of Yugoslav Partisans (commanded by Marshall Tito) picked me up and helped me with my shoes and out of my harness. They shook my hand when they found out I was an American. They wore what looked like British battle dress, and Nazi boots and guns they got from the Germans they had killed. They pointed out where another one of the crew had landed about 200 yards away, and took me to him. It was Lt McKone, our navigator. They pointed up on a hill nearby. We all went up and Eddie Yurochko, our ball gunner was lying there. His neck was broken and he was dead.

The Partisans carried our chutes and harnesses and took us to a farmhouse about 2 miles away. They gave us some Yugoslav wine and liquor, and brown bread. We waited while they brought in more of the crew. The first was Charles Shanklin, the engineer. He had hurt his right hip. Next was Charles Elsesser, nose gunner. He sprained his ankle. Next came Lt Laster, the bombardier. He had hurt his back and two Partisans were helping him in. Then Albino Frigo, tail gunner walked in. One of the Partisans spoke English and told us to wait while they got Yurochko's body and a truck to take into town to Partisan Headquarters. The town was called Benkovac. When we got there, we found Lt Kaiser, first pilot, Lt Chester Jones, copilot and Calvin Teel, the radio operator. They had crash landed the plane 5 miles outside of town. All three were OK. The Partisans fed us and gave us the choice of wine, cognac, vodka or vermouth. They

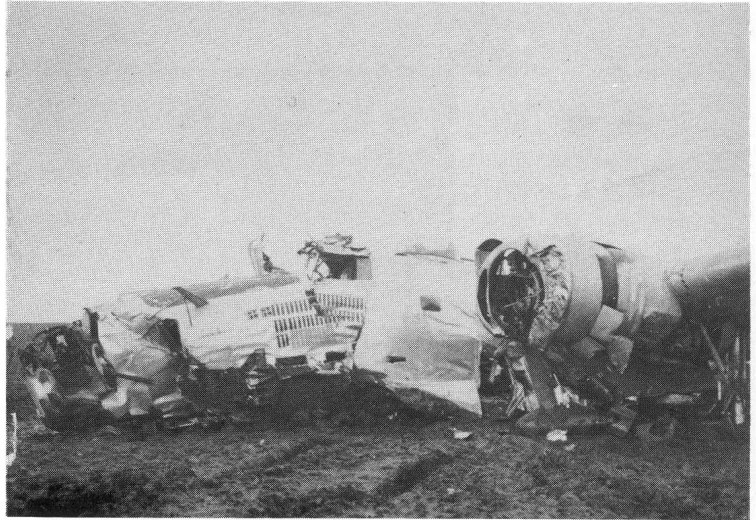
told us the Germans had cleared out just three weeks before. They put us up for the night in the mayor's house.

The name of the interpreter we had was Rudy Moscovick. He had lived in the United States and had been fighting the Nazis since 1941. Tuesday December 12, 1944. Got up at 6:30 AM, ate breakfast of soft boiled eggs, brown bread, strong coffee in addition to our choice of wine, cognac, vodka, or vermouth. We went out to the plane in a bus. Half of the belly was buried in the ground, everything was piled up against the bulkhead in the waist. The propellers were scattered all over the field. We took out all of the 50 caliber guns and ammo and gave them to the Partisans.

We rode back to town and attended Yurochko's funeral. The Partisans had arranged everything. They had six Partisan pallbearers, and a guard of honor of 25. The funeral services were in St Gospa's Catholic Church with a twenty voice choir singing the service. He was buried in St Gospa's Cathedral Cemetery with full military honors. The honor guard fired a volley of shots over his grave. Yurochko's dog tags were placed on the grave.

We went back to Partisan headquarters and waited until they got a bus and took us to Zara, Yugoslavia on the coast. On the way we saw a few skeletons of Nazi and Italian planes which had been shot down or had crashed. We arrived in Zara and got aboard a British Ack Ack cruiser, (HMS Colombo). We slept in the seaman's mess. This ship carried Royal marines.

Wednesday December 13, 1944. Ate breakfast, sausages, toast, tea. Got our bags together and transferred to a British Destroyer (L-34 HMS Bicestra) to take us to Bari, Italy. We met two other air crews who had been shot down in Austria and had taken 38 days to walk back. We also met a group of British soldiers who had been prisoners of the Germans for three



Kenneth Prien photo 765 Sq

and a half years. The British destroyer crew drank tea (no sugar) six times a day. We slept on the ship.

Thursday December 14, 1944. Aboard Destroyer L-34, speed up to 24 knots, arrived at Bari at 1:30 PM. A truck came and took us to a hospital. The doctor there checked us over, dressed our cuts and bruises. They deloused us and our clothes with DDT. We received a new issue of clothes, field jacket, olive drab shirt, tie, and olive drab pants. Also issued cap, socks, underwear, belt, shoes, and a sweater.

Friday December 15, 1944. We were taken to 15th Air Force Headquarters in Bari, and were interrogated by an English Captain. We reported Eddie Yurochko's death. They called for transportation back to our squadron. I helped Lt Kaiser write a letter to Yurochko's parents. He was only 19 years of age.

We went to the airfield near Bari. A B-24 from our squadron came and we were taken back to Torretta, landing about 3:30 PM.

The Crew of Reuben J Kaiser was shot down on another occasion. The following report was printed in the Baltimore Sun March 21, 1945.

15th AAF in Italy. S/Sgt Ralph W Christensen of Baltimore, Maryland, an armorer gunner on a B-24 Liberator of the 15th Air Force in Italy, recently returned