

impoverished villagers, the German military, and later, the Russian army. "Two of my friends ran to the craft. They found a rubber boat with cigarettes and candy bars inside," wrote Dechant to Hartunian.

"My aunt did laundry for one Rudi Hammerschmid, who brought over a white silk cloth, which when held against the light, you can see the points of the (bomber's) target. It belonged to one member of the crew." Dechant said that the bomber was later cut into pieces by the Germans and moved to a railroad station in Kirchberg, presumably to be scrapped for metal. But the Russians moved into the region before the plane could be shipped off and later used it for target practice.

All of the bomber crew survived the bailout except the tail gunner, who Hartunian believes may have landed in the Danube river and drowned. The nine survivors were separated by rank, and Hartunian and two other officers eventually were transported by rail car to a POW camp in Luckenwalda, about 25 miles outside of Berlin.

Upon arrival, Hartunian experienced what was perhaps the most terrifying moment of his captivity. "That first night at the POW camp, they took us into a big room to be deloused," he said. "I remember looking up at the shower heads and noticing that they weren't wet. I'm not sure why, but I was thinking that we might be gassed then the water came out and I started breathing again."

According to Hartunian, he was well treated by his German captors. His real POW ordeal didn't begin, he said, until the Russians took over the camp during their drive for Berlin. Although the war ended on May 7, 1945, Hartunian was not released to the Allies until nearly a month later.

The only food we had was what the Germans had left us," he said. "I know now that the Russians were holding us hostage to force the Allies to return the Russian prisoners who didn't want to go back."

In the years following the war, Hartunian would prosper as a furniture manufacturer before retiring last year. But he always wondered about the little village in which he landed and the people he encountered there.

"I couldn't get the village location from either the navigator or the pilot as to where we came down," Hartunian said. Twice, my wife Viola and I drove through Austria trying to find that village, but with no success. I found out later that we were about a hundred miles off."

His luck finally changed when he read in a bomber group publication an account of a bomber being shot down over the city of Kirchberg on Jan. 15, 1945. Back to Austria Hartunian and his wife went, hiring a Belgian driver who had a brand new Mercedes bus to drive them to Kirchberg.

Arriving at the village city hall, the couple explained their mission to an Austrian woman named Rosi Hofbauer, who kindly offered to make some phone inquiries on their behalf. While this was going on an elderly villager was outside the building, admiring the beauty of the Mercedes bus and wondering about the presence of the two Americans.

That man was Franz Dechant. When he received a call from Hofbauer later, he suddenly realized that the American was the prisoner who's service pistol he had once held in his hands.

Frau Hofbauer couldn't find anyone who recalled the incident, so we thanked her for her time and started to leave, "Hartunian recalled. "She said that she'd still keep trying, but I figured that she was just being polite and we left. Evidently, she kept trying." Hartunian will never forget his astonishment and pleasure at receiving Dechant's initial letter of introduction. Since then, he and Dechant have maintained a warm correspondence, full of personal recollections, maps and copies of war memorabilia.

"My wife and I plan on going back there in May or June," Hartunian said. "I've already talked to a friend who's grandson lives

in Vienna, so he could be my interpreter.

I don't think I will find out any more about what happened," he added. But he (Dechant) has sent me pictures of that vineyard in which I came down, and I really want to see it. I can still remember looking up from there and seeing those mountains, and feeling bitter cold."

Regards,

Vi (Mrs Mike) Hartunian (*Editor's Note: The bomb group publication referred to was the Torretta Flyer*)

Riverdale, IL

Dear Bud:

Marion and I plane to attend the reunion, and spend some time in Brown County State Park in Indiana.

That's in the rural and once rustic part of Indiana that was immortalized by the old journalist Ken Hubbard, via his widely syndicate cartoon featuring "Abe Martin" the country bumpkin philosopher. I've enclosed a few of his sayings.

I am almost off the cane after hip replacement last March. Marion had to do most of the stoop labor in the garden this year.

Slowly and not very surely I've been making some headway on my article on the Tuskegee airmen. Their clubhouse is only a few miles from them. I attended one of their meetings and got some good responses later to a questionnaire I left with them. Hopefully the article will be finished soon.

Some of Abe Martin's sayings: (a) "No matter how a dun is addressed, it always reaches you. (b) The man who owns a home is always just coming out of a hardware store, (c) A slice of eggplant makes a dandy sink stopper, (d) It seems you can't buy anything anymore that lasts as long as the old one did, (e) Very often the quiet fellow has said all he knows, (f) A cold pancake is a total loss, (g) Sunday used to be a day of rest, but it's getting to be a day to rest from. (h) The best way out of it, is not be in it."

We'll see you in Dayton.

Bob Kelliher, 765 Sq.

Torrance, CA

Dear Bud:



Here is a picture of my crew, they are from left top Row: F/O William G Meeder-N, B, 2/Lt William L Pietzch (D)-C/P, and 2/Lt Earl C Downey-P Bottom row: Cpl Homer E Lecklitner (D)-R/O, Cpl Gabriel Fede-E, Cpl Albert F Kline-T/G, Cpl Franklin S Wiig-B/G, Cpl Orton S Linderman-U/G, and Cpl Howard R Cisna-N/G.