

crew that crashed in the Adriatic Sea last June 13. were picked up by a German hospital ship, given medical treatment and supplies and set free in their life rafts. The German ship then radioed the fliers position to Allied Forces and in a few hours the nine Americans were rescued.

This is the story from the beginning. Their B-24 left their base in Italy for a mission to Munich. Lt. Johnson's ship crossed the Alps and approached Munich when it was attacked by endless waves of enemy fighters, ten fighters in each wave.

Their ship was flying tail end in the formation and got plenty of fire. The wings were perforated with bullets. There were holes in the gas tanks and they were losing gas.

The crew voted to try to get back to the base even if the ship was in bad condition rather than bale out over enemy territory. Lt. Johnson dropped the bombs on the railroad center of a small town and the men started to lighten the plane by throwing out ammunition. One engine was lost over the Alps and another over the coast. After they lost the third engine they were afraid the last engine would catch on fire because gas was leaking. It was decided to ditch the plane. When they were 900 feet up the last engine gave out and the ship crashed into the Adriatic. The plane broke into three pieces and the nose was completely immersed. "I found myself in the fore part the plane and under water," says Lt. Johnson.

"The upper turret was on top of me. I couldn't possibly move it. The navigator was sitting on my lap. I figured my seconds to live were numbered when suddenly the turret rolled off. I'll never know how it happened because it was much too heavy for me to move or crawl out from under. I swam to the top. "I saw the ball gunner on one of the wings and swam over to get him off because he was seriously injured. Then, the two pilots pulled the rafts out of the plane. But they were upside down and had to be turned over. When we took stock of ourselves we saw that the upper turret gunner and the radio operator had been killed. We got into our rafts and looked the situation over. There were six left besides myself: Lt. Robert E. Bedwell, pilot; Lt. Dennis W. Posten, copilot; Lt. Frank J. Flood, navigator; S/Sgt Verlin Upton. ball gunner; S/Sgt. John F. Hahn, tail gunner and T/Sgt. Harry F Solis, engineer.

"Upton was in very great pain and seriously hurt. The navigator and engineer were injured also and I had an injured head, wrist, and hand, but the two pilots were in fairly good condition

"It was about noon and it didn't take us long to find out that none of us had water or food. We had one compress bandage and one morphine tablet. We tried to ease the pain of Upton and gave him the morphine tablet. I bandaged his foot as best I could but one of them was practically cut in two, and his face was a mass of cuts and bruises.

"We had radioed our position before we went down and the fact that we were going to abandon ship. As near as we could figure we were between Pola, Yugoslavia, and Venice, Italy in German held waters.

"We started paddling. We paddled the rest of the day and into the night. I'll never forget that night, it was a nightmare, we were sleepy, cold, damp and, hungry. Upton was in such pain he was almost out of his head. Although I had hemorrhages from my nose and mouth, I was still able to keep paddling.

"We could see the lights of the towns and were close enough to hear shells firing. We all knew we must get Upton to a hospital, yet we didn't want to get into the hands of the enemy, But it was the only way to get help for him. We shot off our flares but no one saw them. Everyone was so tired and weak that we finally decided

to try to sleep for awhile.

"The next morning we took off our damp clothes and laid them on the edge of the raft. About 11 o'clock we saw a B-26 and tried to attract its attention but to no avail. Then we saw a ship at noon, but it too failed to see us.

"But soon afterward we saw another ship. We waved, shouted and blew a whistle". The ship stopped. Everything was deathly quiet. They had seen us and turned around and came towards us. We could see the three Red Crosses on it and knew it was a hospital ship but we couldn't see the flag. The boat was crowded, Men were practically hanging over the rails They lowered a boat to meet us. Then we saw the Nazi flag.

"Our hearts stopped. We were all quiet waiting because we didn't know what would happen to us. The Nazi officer, who came to meet us, spoke English. We were told we could come aboard as prisoners or stay adrift. "We certainly didn't want to be prisoners, although it would be an easy way out, but we did want to get medical supplies. We asked if we could receive medical supplies and they said yes. They helped us onto the ship. It took a Nazi soldier to hold us up because we were so weak. It had been 38 hours since we had food and water.

"They gave us water and coffee. We were asked if we wanted beer, but we were afraid it would make us sick on our empty stomachs. Then they asked us if we wanted some soda pop and we did drink some cold orange crush

"They wanted to take us as prisoners but said we could get off. They took our names and serial numbers. The hospital ship had heard our radio for help and knew we had been to Germany on a mission the day before.

"We talked with them and persuaded them to give medical attention to our wounded. They gave us ten cans of meat, seven loaves of bread and mineral water, We decided to try to make it back to Allied territory. They had cared for the ball gunner, navigator and engineer, and washed my face. They finally decided to let us go and we left the Nazi hospital ship for our small rafts. Since we had figured we had made 30 miles since the ship had crashed and that we were about 20 miles from Allied territory, we thought with good luck that we could make it there in a week or two.

"Before we left the Germans, we had asked them to radio our position to our locator and they had agreed. But we were all 'leary' that they would do this because it was a supreme favor.

"Not long after the hospital ship was out of sight, towards the middle of the afternoon, we saw six P-38s and a PB-Y fly by. But they kept on going, We were in mental agony and our hearts sank another thousand feet. The planes were flying out of sight. We could hear the engines at times but we couldn't see them.

"Then the PB-Y came back and flew towards us. He still didn't see us. We had dropped color markers in the water. In fact, I was covered with yellow marker from head to foot. Now the PB-Y was only fifty feet or so above us. But those small rafts are hard to see. We let our last flare go.

"The pilot dipped his wings. He had seen us. Then the P-38s all came overhead and buzzed us. Boy that humming and drumming of those planes was the most wonderful music I have ever heard."

"Yes." Lt. Johnson replied to a question, "the German hospital ship had radioed our location to our locator."

