

and his wife, Pete, and my wife, Virginia, and I spent several days together. Ruben believed that Eddie Yurochko's body had been returned to the States, but he didn't know where. I wrote to the American Battle Monuments Commission with this question. They sent my letter to the U.S. Army Military Personnel Center and the answer that came back said that they couldn't find his remains at Benkovac cemetery

Five days after returning to 825th squadron tent city, we were sent to the Isle of Capri by 484th bomb group headquarters for a week of R & R. (Rest & Refreshment) Capri is a small island about 25 miles south southwest of Naples. The crew was there during the Christmas season. We did visit the Blue Grotto via a dingy by guides at low tide. On another day, we toured the only road around the island by Jeep. On the top of one high point were early Roman ruins and gardens. This was a week that was good for the soul and the mind.

On the 4th of January, 1945, we flew our 7th mission in plane #36 to bomb the Marshaling Yards at Trento in northern Italy where the rails went through the Brenner Pass. This was a 7 hour 15 minute flight which we flew up the middle of the Adriatic Sea and turned left to cross over Italy at the top of the boot. We returned to base over water down the west side of Italy. The 484 Statistical Summaries printed in volume #23 of the Torretta Flyer, 1992/93, had 28 aircraft in the air, one plane returned early, 52.5 tons were dropped, 2 planes lost and 10 men lost. This is probably more accurate than my memory, but in a note on the back of a picture, I wrote that we lost 7 planes. Three or four came from the 825th. What happened and why we got hit so badly was easily seen after it was too late. The formation that was in front of us was not damaged but the flak gunners fired at us at the altitude of the first formation and we were right there for them when we dropped out of the clouds over the target. Our plane lost the end of the left wing that held the Tokyo gas tank and when we landed on returning, counted up to 70 holes. The formation that followed us over the target reported no flak. The cannons had to be cooled down after the work done on us.

The 8th mission was on 19 January 1945 to Brod, Yugoslavia, to hit a railroad bridge. The mission lasted 6 hours and 30 minutes. Something was wrong with the plane we had been assigned to fly in, but rather than abort, the crew voted to follow the formation, even if we couldn't keep up. We were losing power for some reason, so we unloaded three 500 pound bombs into the Adriatic. We were almost able to catch up with the formation as they were going over the target. We were still far enough away to see that flak was thick and heavy and very dangerous for a lone plane, so instead of going over the Brod target and getting killed, we made a bigger circle around and from the back side it looked like we really walked through a wall of flak. When we crossed the Adriatic and no longer in sight of the other planes, we dropped the rest of our bomb load. The reason we agreed with the pilot to fly on this day when we shouldn't have, was that over the past two weeks we had returned to base after several times in the air. When you have to abort, none are counted as missions. When you abort, you must return your bomb load. By circling Brod, it looked to the other planes in the formation that we really caught hell, when we were actually very safe. Since they thought this and were very sympathetic, who would be dumb enough to be truthful. Ralph wrote that we had to return to base to find a 40 mile an hour cross wind to make our landing more dangerous than flying.

The 9th mission was entered into my Individual Flight Record and I thought that it was in error until Ralph's photo copy of his

diary for five pages on the mission of 5 February, 1945 came in. The first page covered "Wednesday January 31, 1945, briefed 6:45 took off 8:30 to bomb Moosebeirbaum oil refinery, #3 eng started to smoke, had to abort 2 hours from target, got back 1:15, cleaned guns, got paid, and wrote letters." The crew was credited with this mission.

The 484th Bomb Group summary for the year reported; 31 January 1945, mission was to Moosebeirbaum Oil Refinery, Austria. 39 A/C total left base, 9 A/C returned to base for emergencies, total tonnage dropped 37.5 tons, bombing by Mickey Ship, 1 plane lost, no casualties. Thus 9th combat mission. About this time I was on a high altitude flight with just a skeleton crew to test run a new engine of Old #45 and, after we landed I had two pictures taken of the five of us standing beside the ship. When the film was developed I put the date, 7 Feb 1945, when Old 45 was shot down on the back of the picture knowing that we had just checked it out OK. I still don't have the date of the test flight.

On 5 February 1945, my crew's 10th mission was the Regensburg Winter Harbor Oil Storage in Germany. The 484th BG Operational History listed this as Mission #148 and made this report: "Large amounts of oil shipped to this target from Romanian Oil fields before their capture by the Russians, making this target important. 36 B-24s reached the target, but found it cloud covered. Forty two tons of bombs were dropped by instrument and results were unobserved. Photos later showed results to have been very good. Two planes failed to return." (Bombing by instrument meant using a Mickey Ship that carried a radar scanner in the place of the ball turret.)

Ralph Christensen wrote the following in his diary: "Mon. Feb 5, 1945 briefed 5: 45 AM, supposed to bomb Regensburg, Germany. Ship #34 brand new model B-24L, flown in from the states was our ship for this mission. Took off 8:30 made all kinds of turns near the target don't know whether we went over target or not, but dropped bombs and not too much flak. We had dropped behind formation before we came to target, and just caught up before target, then headed back, started to run out of gas, so headed for Ancona, Italy to an emergency landing field. No gas in #1,#3, #4 tanks 250 gals in #2, but couldn't transfer it to other tanks as the booster pump was out. First one engine would run away and pull us to one side and then the other. We were still 30 miles out in the Adriatic. The ship hit the water a little nose low with 3 engines out. Water poured in the nose and completely filled the pilot's and radio compartment, the engineer, navigator, bombardier, and I were on the flight deck. The pilot and co-pilot went out their side windows. When the water poured in, the top turret fell on me and cut my head, hand, and knee. The water filled my lungs and stomach and I thought I was drowning. I was ready to give up and die but I managed to struggle out from under the turret. It was black as pitch under that water. I got to the surface of the water which was 6" from the top of the fuselage and I got a little air and went under again, then I saw a patch of light at the surface and I headed for it. It was the top escape hatch. I got out to the surface and got some air, managed to get out and slid off the wing into the water."

Ralph Christensen was very close to drowning and so were five others who were trying to get into the rafts and away from the sinking plane. Albino Frigo and Charles Elsesser had gotten in one raft and James Pope and I were in the other raft.

"Later the rest of the crew told me that my eyes were popping out of my head and I looked like I was almost dead, drowned that is and was so weak I couldn't pull the cord to inflate the Mae West.