

the formation over the IP and then the target, we had to slow down. The pilot turned left into a 360 degree circle and this let us fly faster and also gave us a chance to be with the group over the target. The route to the target may have been in a valley with mobile flak guns, because they shot at us steadily. Heavy flak patterns met us and followed us across the target area. You could sense the holes due to the sounds but you couldn't see any. With bombs away, the group swung right and tried to get out of the flak guns range. Over the Alps, the engineer discovered that the booster pumps to three wing tanks were equalizing into one wing tank. He explained to the pilot that we would have to depend on gravity flow, by shutting off the boosters and going to a lower altitude, or we wouldn't get home.

The pilot dropped out of formation after we had crossed the Alps and the rest of us started sweating it out. Flak may have damaged the fuel pump on the #2 engine wing tank. The trip was the safest flying down the center of the Adriatic. It looked as though there was enough gas in one tank, if it would flow to the others by gravity, for us to get to land fall. When the engines began coughing from lack of fuel, the pilot told us in the waist to open the waist windows and throw out every thing that could reduce weight. I asked the pilot, over the intercom, if I had time to come to the front and make radio contact with the base, and he said to stay put and help with the preparations for ditching very quickly. The pilot and co-pilot were in the drivers seat and what may have been their major concern other than how to ditch and survive, were four crew members behind him who didn't know they were to ditch until it was too late. The Navigator, the Bombardier, the flight engineer, and the upper turret gunner were very soon going to get in each others way from the bottom of the flight area and a lot of cold water.

There were four of us in the back throwing every heavy object out that was loose. In the storage area over the bomb bays, the four of us braced our backs against the main bulkhead and directly overhead was the upper escape hatch. The Adriatic was salty to the taste.

There was a split second, when the engines were shut down, that there was no sound. It was very quiet. We smashed or splashed down into the Sea and the forward motion abruptly halted. Even though we had braced ourselves against the metal wall of the bulkhead, at the moment of impact we really got slammed onto it. The Adriatic was over our head until we stood up and removed the upper hatch and made our way to the right wing. On impact the rafts were triggered and both were inflating. One had to be turned over as it was upside down, and in doing this we lost the oars and kit of supplies. By the time we had this raft turned over and with Frigo and Elssesser on board, there were six crew members to pull out of the cold chilly water. Working from each raft, we got every one into the rafts, without knowing if any one was missing. Water soaked flying clothes made moving from the water over into the rafts very difficult. The Mae West life vests helped to keep heads above water, unless one side or the other failed to inflate or had a tear. We were lucky to pull, tug, push, and roll on board six men who were too weak to do it by themselves. Three were added to each raft and the four doing the tugging, pulling and rolling must have had a source of help from beyond themselves. They were totally exhausted and as weak as the others. Before I could count bodies, the plane was gone. It had disappeared and so had my new four buckle over-shoes.

We tied the rafts together and took turns with the one set of oars, hoping to row toward the shore where the setting sun outlined

a range of mountains. Everyone had on wet and cold clothes and rowing was thought as a way to keep from freezing, at least briefly.

We saw a P-38 fighter plane pass over head and figured that he was calling in our location, but later when we did reach shore, we learned that the pilot of the P-38 was also ditching. In a short time fog settled in over us and we couldn't be sure that we were going in the same direction to reach shore. We listened to the motor of a boat off in the distance and it passed us on one side and later we heard it again pass us on the other side. We figured it might be air sea rescue and hoped that they hadn't given up looking for us. The motor launch was patrolling in rectangles or squares, and making each smaller, and when they came within yelling distance, we could see their bulk in the fog. It was a British launch and they took us on board. The German air sea rescue worked the same area and we were leery for a while.

On the deck of the British high speed launch, we stripped off our wet clothes on the deck area above the motor and though we stood there naked and bare footed we felt warmer than we had been for many hours. We were given blankets and taken below deck where it got much warmer. The British sailors believed in making sure we got a shot of rum as a cure for shock and exposure. Each time one of those on deck came down to check on us, he made sure we drank a round of rum. They brought out pants, shirts, jackets and shoes for us to fit our selves into. After getting dressed in their clothing and donating our wet ones, they fed us. The only things that I kept from the clothes on the deck was my grey silk scarf and my 45 with a shoulder holster that would need cleaning and oiling. The pistol I gave to a seaman who had been pouring rum and told him to strip and clean it soon and he could keep it.

The present to the seaman was my way of saying thanks from what I considered a surety of death had we not been found. He seemed very pleased and placed the pistol in his locker. When he returned, he was carrying his present to me. It may be a British code that to accept a gift one must be returned. He presented a silver Italian sword that was so fine that I had to shake my head. I couldn't accept such a prize. The senior officer took the sword from the seaman and then handed it to Lt. Kaiser my senior officer. Neither of us said anything and I never saw the sword again, but the event of that moment I could not forget. I hope that the seaman got to keep the gun.

We spent our first night on shore at Ancona where the air sea rescue base was located. We heard that they had been searching for two other B-24 bomber crews and a fighter pilot who had ditched when they found us. My wrist watch was ruined by the salt water and quit at 3:30 PM. It was later at the 484th HQ that I put in my request for a replacement GI watch and a 45 caliber pistol that were lost in the ditching. We lived in our British clothes until GI replacements could be made.

This was my crew's third plane to crash and I had forgotten all about the first one that happened during a night landing in training at Mt. Home Air Base, Idaho, in the summer of 1944. Now my thoughts were considering that flying was very unsafe. I didn't go on another combat mission until 26 April 1945 over Spital, Austria. This was to be the last day of strategic bombing for the 15th AAF. There were no more big targets to go after. The war for us was almost over.

There had been many ditchings in the Adriatic Sea, and the one ditching of a B-24 on 5 February 1945, was the only one that all ten men survived..