

were together again in Miami Beach, Florida at a redistribution center right after we got back to the states.

"My wife and I got married there and your dad stopped by and brought us a bottle of wine." Walt Chapman came down in a field where some farmers took his uniform and gave him some civilian clothes, as well as a

bottle of wine and a couple of raw eggs. They took him to a cave-like hollow under a tree near a river where he studied his escape map. "While I was there, another B-24 was shot down right over my head later that day. He was at the tail end of a group that was headed south, returning to base. I saw some chutes but it didn't look like all of the men got out. The next day a man took me across the river in a boat and there was a man on the other side who spoke to me in English. He said 'You're one of those American flyers that was shot down yesterday, aren't you?'" Walt told him that he was and the man said he knew where two of the other crew members were. The man took him to a farmhouse where Howland and Hassan were waiting.

John Hassan landed in a street in a small town called Gorgo. "When I was coming down in my parachute, one of the fighters circled very close to me and I could see the pilot looking coldly at me, with his canopy slid back. I put my hands over my head to show him that it was the end of the war for me but he did not acknowledge me. I was afraid he would try to collapse my chute by flying near me and gunning his engine but he didn't. I saw our plane crash into the Adriatic and there was burning debris on the water where it went in.

"When I landed, I climbed a Mulberry tree and stayed in it until it got dark. When I climbed down, I hid in a ditch and after a while I heard a noise behind me. There was a man standing behind me with a pitchfork and he spoke to me in Italian, which I could not understand very well. He took me to a farmhouse and the next day, Chapman and Howland were brought there too." It took the three men 48 days to get back to their unit and their escape is an exciting story in itself.

Haupt came down in a swampy area near the coast and crawled into the brush along a river levy. "I just existed there until my legs healed enough to start walking. When I needed a drink I would beat a depression into the ground and it would fill up with water. When I finally started walking out a soldier came up to me with a rifle and I guess he was asking me for papers. I pulled out my wallet and showed him a picture that I carried of my girlfriend. He leaned forward to look at the photo and he did not see that I had my 45 in the other hand. I swung it up and hit him right under the jaw. It knocked him out and I grabbed his knife and took off as fast as I could. I still have the knife in a trunk in the garage." Al showed me the striking picture of his wife that he held out to the soldier, and



From Left: Walt Chapman, m Dick Olsen (son of Richard Olson, and Bill Snyder

he showed me his scrapbook, too. He eventually made his way back to friendly territory with the help of sympathetic Italians and Yugoslav Partisans. It took him almost a month longer to escape than the other three men did. Edwin Rogers and Irwin Hansen were both killed on the plane. Their bodies were recovered from the Adriatic and buried in local cemeteries.

Hansen is now buried in the American cemetery in Florence, Italy and Rog-

ers is buried in Houston Texas. John Hassan told me, "Irwin Hansen was the youngest one on our crew and he was a fine young man-very quiet and good at his job." Hansen had a baby daughter when he went to Italy and a son was born while he was there. When I recently asked his widow if they ever knew much about what had happened to their dad she said "I never knew many details. All I could tell them as they grew up was how wonderful he was." I have not been able to find any living relatives for Edwin Rogers but Walt Chapman kept in touch with his mother for many years, just as he did with my grandmother.

He sent me a letter my grandmother wrote to him saying that she would not forget the day he called her to tell her that he thought dad was okay when they bailed out. I also have a copy of a letter that John Hassan wrote to my grandmother. In it he said that my father and him were both okay when they bailed out and that he was sure dad would be okay. When John Kelly got back to the states, he went to see John Hassan's mother since they were both from Pittsburgh. "His mom was pretty broken up about it but I told her that he would be okay and that he would get back"

John said. "He gave my mother my wallet and in there was about \$320 and a note telling where it had all come from" John Hassan told me. "I said to John Kelly recently that I told my mother I did finally get to thank the boy who brought her the wallet".

All members of the crew were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for the mission to Innsbruck. Unfortunately, through a clerical mistake, Walt Chapman did not get his medal in 1944 like the rest of the crew. The Air Force corrected the oversight on June 23, 2000 at the Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio when Brig. Gen. Jay Jabour presented Walt with his medal in front of the Museum's B-24. I attended two reunions of the 484th Bomb Group Association with Walt and had the honor of pinning my father's DFC on him at a dinner during one of them, before we knew if he would ever get his own.

I have also met John Kelly, Al Haupt, and Bill Snyder in person. It was a sad day when I found out that Al died in the fall of 1999 as did John Hassan, a great friend of mine. John was buried with full military honors in Arlington Cemetery and it was a great sight to see him receive that honor. These are all great men in my book and they have all been very generous to my family and me. Finding them all and getting to know them is something I'm very proud of and grateful for. I'm teaching my sons about these men and I hope that someday they will be telling the story about their grandfather and his crew to their children.