

froze in place. Now we could see the ruptured propeller dome which had caused the the engine to pump away all of its lubricating oil. Motionless and in flat pitch, the drag from the three blades was much more than from from a feathered propeller. The blades' air-foil shape deflected a great mass of air and acted as a very large air brake. I put down 19 degrees flap, applied maximum climb power on the three remaining engines and was able to maintain altitude at 135 MPH indicated. This was 15 miles per hour slower than our minimum cruise speed.

By then we had lost 7,000 feet and the ships of our group were much higher and several miles away. So while one crew member applied first aid to Ray, the rest busied themselves in throwing everything overboard, that they could get their hands on. That even included ammunition, and guns to lighten the load as much as possible. There we were, all alone, over German territory listening to the radio and hearing a steady stream of reports of enemy fighters. Our route home lay to the south and unfortunately so did many of the lesser peaks of the Alps. As we were flying at the same height as some of the mountains and we had no idea of how badly the plane was damaged, we turned to the southwest toward Lake Balaton, Hungary and the Russian lines. Our course led us over a number of defended targets. The ground below was partially obscured by clouds, so we kept blundering into areas where the enemy would shoot at us. The flak was not intense, but accurate, for we were low and they could draw a good bead on us before firing. At one time I heard a crash behind me and on turning could see a hole in the canopy just behind my head. This was most disconcerting as all of our protective gear had been thrown out. Nearing Lake Balaton, the overcast beneath us became solid. Thus as all systems seemed to be operating properly and when dead reckoning indicated that we had reached the lake, we turned south for home. We saw nothing of the mountains of Yugoslavia passing below us. But now the land that we were flying over was in friendly hands, or least not occupied by the Germans. The skies cleared as we reached the Adriatic Sea and there far ahead we could make out the small island of Vis. Here Tito had located his headquarters and the British maintained a small emergency field.

The fuel system left a lot to be desired, therefore Bill Kassay, our engineer, could not accurately determine the amount of gasoline remaining. Even though we had been using only three engines for the last three hours, we had been under full power the whole flight. This, plus the fact that it now was time for our squadron to be landing back at our home base, indicated to us that we couldn't have much fuel left. So we radioed Vis and told them we would be landing with wounded aboard. The island is very mountainous and the field

was located in a closed in valley. All landing approaches were made straight in over the sea and take offs were in the opposite direction. There would be no missed approach and no go around. Because of the frozen propeller, I came in ,under power low and relatively hot. Thank God the brakes were working, for I had to stand the plane on its nose so as not to run off the end of the short runway. We all gathered around Ray to wish him well as he was being placed in an ambulance to be transported to the hospital. He would spend the rest of the war in the States recovering from a broken shoulder bone. Then our crew returned to its favorite pastime of counting the number of flak holes punched in the skin of the airplane. We had picked up between 60 and 70, depending on who had made the count.

Our crew ate dinner with the British in an open air kitchen shoulder to shoulder with Tito's communist troops. For the first time we saw pretty young girls in uniform with combat rifles slung over their shoulders. We were put in a high wheeled British Lorry for a trip to town. The canvas sides were deliberately tied shut so that we wouldn't be able to observe the defenses of the island. Thus we were not able to view this beautiful place which the Prince of Wales had used as a playground before he gave up his throne for an American divorcee. We spent the night at British headquarters. As there was no beds, we were given a blanket and told to find a spot on the wooden floor. I was to sleep the night like a baby, relieved that we were all safe and were not in an enemy prison. Even the aircraft after receiving a new engine, would be flown back to the squadron and like the crew, would be flying combat missions. Just before falling to sleep, I heard Herb Frank say to no one in particular, but loud enough for everyone to hear, "Whew! I sure am glad that's over. It was my thirteenth mission.

My last mission was a humdinger. I went to bed the night before hoping my final trip would be a milk run. I was awakened a half an hour early at 3:30 AM and was told that I was to go to the special briefing. Thus, I knew that something was in the wind as usually only the lead and deputy lead crews go to this one. Before leaving the the tent, I grabbed the can of beer which I had been hoarding for this last trip. At the briefing, we found our target was to be the marshalling yard at Roveretto, Italy in the Brenner Pass. Then the group leader got up and said, " Today just before we start on the run, three ships will break away from the formation and bomb the gun emplacements; Lightbody, Carlisle, and Alexander." My heart sank. There were only twelve anti-aircraft guns, but there would be only three aircraft in our formation. I had heard enough stories about crews being shot down on their last mission and I was not pleased that the odds had just increased and that Don and I would be added to these numbers. Next