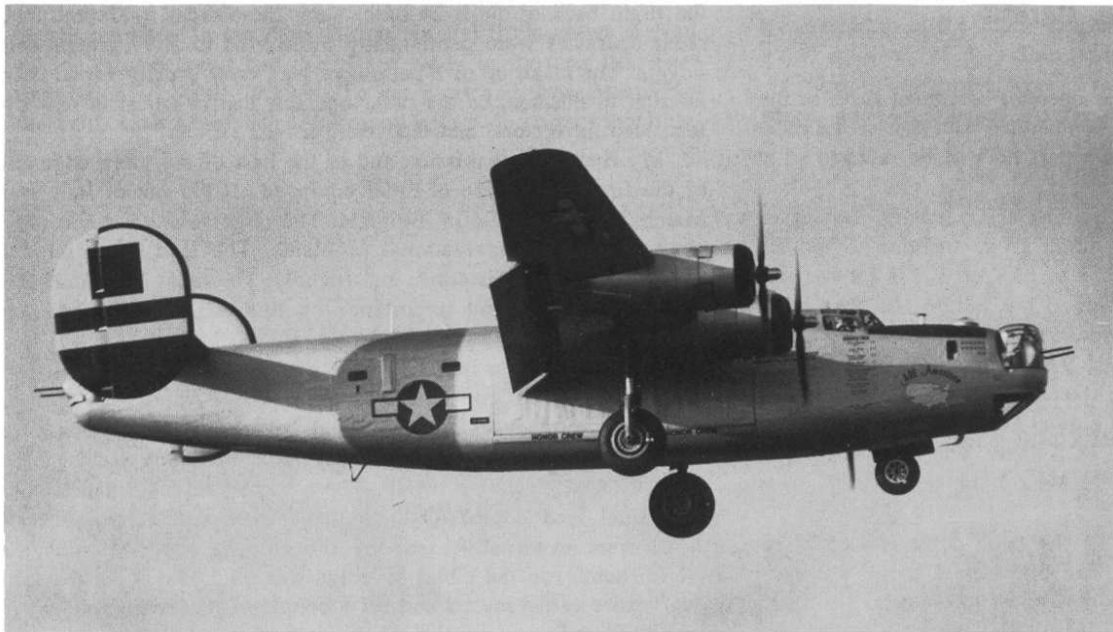


MAIL CALL



The completely rebuilt B-24-J "All America." John Aunapu photo

Dear Bud:

I am enclosing a copy of a report that was submitted for a B-24 publication.

It was a cold morning as we climbed aboard our B-24 on December 18, 1944, for our mission to Blechhammer, Germany. This was our eighth bombing mission with the 825th squadron, 484th Bomb Group (H) Cerignola, (Torretta), Italy. As we left the IP on the bomb run, flak was moderate, our ship sustaining four holes in the bomb bay and flight deck. The #1 engine was hit and was feathered quickly. We continued the bomb run to the target. As we left the target area, we were unable to maintain air speed to keep up with the rest of the group. We proceeded to fly to Yugoslavia, on our way home. We contacted "Big Fence," for a fix of our location and identified to them our problem. They directed us to the Island of Vis, off the Yugoslavian coast. Vis had a runway of 5000 feet and we were told that if you don't touch down in the first 500 feet, the aircraft would probably not be able to slow down, and fall off the end of the runway to fall into the sea 500 feet below.

We were now flying at 15,000 feet when the choices were given to us: land at Vis, ditch in the Adriatic Sea, or crash land somewhere in Italy. All of the choices were not the best. After consulting with each of the crew members, we decided to "hang a sky hook," and just float across the sea to Italy. It felt as though we were actually hanging in the sky, as we throttled back our three engines. We commenced some fuel transfer from the #1 engine tanks. We all prayed. As a result, we all became more confi-

dent that we would make it across. Inter-com conversations from each of the crew stations, and talking to each other, kept up our spirits.

It was a cloudless sky that afternoon and as we headed home toward Italy, we could see the coast line of Italy about half way across. We contacted "Big Fence," again giving them our decision to try and make it to Italy. They directed us to the closest airfield near Manfredonia, a place on the spur of the Italian boot.

We contacted "darn thing tower" the B-17 base. We told them our problem, flying on three engines and getting low on fuel, and requested clearance to land. The tower operator requested our ETA for landing.

We stated approximately 30 minutes. The tower answered back, "You had better hurry since the B-17 group was due to be landing at this air-base about the same time. We replied "Roger."

The navigator and bombardier were busy on their charts trying to locate the field. Co-pilot Bob Sheldon was given controls of the ship since I was busy with the engineer Sgt Ken Querry as to the management of the fuel and transferring of fuel to each of the remaining engines, while receiving instructions from the navigator, Tracy Denninger and bombardier, Hatfield, as the heading for final approach to this strange field. The trim tabs had been set for over control required for three engine flying.

The aircraft was re-trimmed for final approach to the field. The tower gave us wind direction from the east. I replied that we would be making a "down wind," landing to the west, since we did not have sufficient fuel to make a normal traffic pattern. The tower responded "Roger," clear to land.

As co-pilot, Sheldon lowered the landing gear and flaps, the outboard engine on the port side failed! I hit the feather button immediately. We were now on two engines on final approach. I was helping the co-pilot with the rudder pedals to keep the aircraft lined up with the runway. As he pulled back on the wheel, just before touch down, the inboard engine quit because of lack of fuel. I hit the feather button for #3 engine. Sheldon landed the aircraft within the first 500 feet of the runway. It was a gentle smooth landing. I yelled "let the aircraft roll, no brakes!" knowing that with only one engine operating, we could not taxi or make it to the end of the runway. Finally at about 3/4 down the end of the runway, with the aircraft slowing down, and because of the angle of the wings, the fuel supplying the remaining engine ran out, starving the engine. There must have been some conversation from