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As my chute jerked me around when it opened and I could see a shape that looked like an ME 109. I also heard gunfire and cursed myself for opening my chute too soon. At first, I believed I was under attack. However, this was not so. I concluded the plane was a P-51 whose pilot had observed us bailing out, counted the chutes and then began firing at our B-24 to assure the bombsight would not fall into enemy hands. The wind twisted me around again and I lost sight of both planes.

It seemed I was floating down forever but when I did hit it was hard and on a rocky slope with my right foot making contact first. I felt my right ankle bend sharply when I hit the rocks and a sharp pain shot up my leg. While still attempting to rid myself of the parachute harness, I looked up and saw a man and young boy standing over me. The man had a pitchfork pointed at my chest and jabbed it in my direction but not touching me with it.

This fellow was wearing an army hat with a red star insignia. I immediately began saying over and over, "I am American." They could not understand English but both of them responded favorably to the word "American." After shedding the chute harness I tried to rise but found I could not walk without assistance. They helped me move to a small hut where they gave me a full glass of water-or so I thought. This was my introduction to "Slivovitz." (Sljivovica).

Slivovitz is a potent Yugoslavia plum brandy. It looks like water but it packs a whale of a punch. My greeter insisted I drink more than that first choking swallow. I suppose it was good I did sip some more because I still was not sure of what he might do with his pitchfork. Besides, my ankle and leg were really beginning to throb. That stuff helped me significantly as my journey continued.

Two other young people joined us and all of them helped me to a farmhouse. After dark the first boy brought a small cart with two large wooden wheels pulled by an ox. He indicated I should get into the cart and we began to move away with the large wooden wheels of the cart bouncing over the rocks. We were not moving very fast, but every time we hit a rock and the cart jerked to one side or the other, my ankle felt like it was coming apart.

My memory of exactly where I spent that first night in Yugoslavia is dimmed after all these years. I had no idea then where I had come down nor how far I traveled in the cart or in what direction. It seemed like we traveled for hours in the dark.

However, I remember well my introduction to a much larger group of Yugoslavians-about 20 very rugged looking individuals at a cabin in the hills. They were well armed. Oil or kerosene lamps were being used for illumination at the cabin. There was an immediate controversy in this group with some of them acting very hostile while others were friendly.

The leader of the group began questioning me in broken English and told me that some of them thought I was a German spy and wanted to execute me immediately. He began to ask me questions about Pennsylvania which I apparently answered to his satisfaction because he ruled in my favor explaining he had worked there some years earlier in a coal mine. Then he informed me I would be staying with them the rest of the night and part of the next day. In the morning he also told me that other Americans had been picked up in the surrounding area, but he did not know how many.

Meantime, Frank Oliver had landed near a river, was dazed from hitting a tree, tore a ligament in his knee and could not move very far. Frank did see several people searching the hillside and when he spotted one wearing a "Red Star" he hailed him.

Frank was taken to partisan troops nearby where he joined

radio operator, Vincent Fornieri. Frank was given a horse to ride. They traveled to the area of Buzim where the rest of the crew, except Reimer and me had been collected by partisans. Copilot Henry Walrond was picked up immediately upon landing. It was his 21st birthday and his 1st mission.

Two to three hours later Henry was reunited with navigator Carl Voss, turret gunners Robert Parsons, Arthur Dunmire and Cornelius (Chief) Wakolee, and engineer Fred Dodge. In the evening Frank Oliver and Vincent Fornieri joined them and the group was moved about 12 miles where they joined photographer Herald Sykes. Harold had been a target of hostile gun fire from the other side of the river on the way down but not injured. Like me, Carl Voss was greeted by a peasant bearing Slivovitz. By this time, nine of the 11 member crew had been gathered together by the partisans. It was late October 14, 1944.

The first day ended with these crew members sleeping in partisan homes. On October 15, I was reunited with the other nine crewmembers and we traveled to Kladusa where nose-gunner Tom Reimer joined us on October 16. The entire crew was taken to a farmhouse near Glina, arriving on October 18. All of the crew except Frank Oliver and me walked during these movements. We traveled in a wooden two-wheel ox cart. Except for apples from orchards on the way I do not recollect what we ate during the first few days in Yugoslavia.

The partisans had very little themselves, but they did share. Conversation with them was difficult. We just did what they signaled we should do. I do know they favored moving at night. We really had no idea how many miles we traveled while being collected together or in the group movement later. The farmhouse was near a partisan headquarters. Some of the later records obtained from archives at Maxwell AFB in Montgomery, Alabama indicate that members of the crew were picked up near or traveled through such Yugoslavian villages as Pecigrad, Kladusa, Topusko, Buzim, Gospic and Bihac.

Two days after arriving at the farmhouse all of us were taken to a relatively flat area which had been cleared of rocks. We were informed we would soon be picked up and flown back to Italy. It had turned dark when we were dazzled with fires lit by the many partisans with us and almost simultaneously a plane approached a makeshift runway area outlined by the fires. Just about the time the plane was about to land, the partisans began firing their weapons into the air, creating a tumult of noise and glow of tracers in the night sky. It looked like a fourth of July celebration. The pilot of the incoming plane gunned the engines, aborted his landing and took off into the night. That ended the attempt to evacuate us by air.

We learned later that the weapon firing was a joyous celebration by the partisans of the news that Belgrade had just been liberated by a joint Russian/Partisan force. It was October 20, 1944.

The aborted incident on October 20 was the last attempt to move us out of Yugoslavia by any means for some time. Days began to pass at the farmhouse with no news of what was happening, although our group did grow larger. Three black P-51 pilots joined us. However, unknown to us, the group to be evacuated was growing by significant numbers elsewhere.

Apparently, several collections were taking place because by the time we actually were on our way out of Yugoslavia by land our travel companions numbered: 62 Americans, 26 British, 29 French, two Belgians, one Dutch and one Greek. Many of these people were former prisoners of war who had escaped a prison camp at Ljubljana during a bombing raid. Enroute, we were also joined by