

loved ones were profoundly affected by the October 14 mission. My wife of six months (now 50 years) received a "regrets" telegram on November 2, followed later by confirming letters. I am sure the other crew members' next of kin received similar messages. We had it easy, at least we knew we were alive and well. Robert Bell-one of the P-51 pilots with us at the farm-provided some much needed diversion for all of us, including the Yugoslavians. Bell would sing and tap dance and he attracted some visitors from the local area.. He was very likable, talented and very black. For most of the Yugoslavians, our three P-51 pilots were the first black people they had ever seen. I guess Bell especially aroused their curiosity because the word Bell means "white" to them. (So I was told).

On November 18, 1944 we were advised we would be leaving for the Yugoslavian coast and began our move to another location where we joined some of the 120 plus people who would eventually make up our party. We left there crammed into three trucks, one of which was reserved for the partisans who were escorting us. There was no room to sit and whenever we were in the truck we stood packed together in the open area behind the truck cab. As I remember it was a very large Italian truck and very old.

As it turned out we did not have to stand very long at a stretch because soon we were on an unpaved twisting, turning mountain road filled with ruts and shell holes requiring us to get out of the truck almost constantly. Much of the trip was walking up the mountains or hills and then down again and then up again. Nobody much cared because we were on our way.

We were unloaded at most of the shell holes so that the trucks could be cajoled past each one. In some cases there were steep drop offs at one side and I remember watching with amazement as the partisans piled some rocks in the hole, then placed themselves at the drop off side and physically pushed the truck as far as possible to the safe side when the driver inched past.

We reached Obravic after midnight and stayed there the rest of that night. There was a delay going into Obravic and the sound of gunfire could be heard. Most of the escorting partisan group had gone ahead of us and we could only assume there was some sort of skirmish prior to our getting the OK to proceed. Carl reported he saw some bodies as we pulled into the village.

At Obravic, after consultation with a partisan leader and a British officer, it was agreed Frank Oliver (who held a Captain rank) would remain in Obravic as long as necessary to manage further movements since not all of the evacuees could be immediately accommodated on the next leg of the journey. The rest of our crew, including me, left Obravic for Zara (Zadar) the following morning. Once again we were on a road with plenty of switchbacks, but this time it was mostly downhill to sea level. We arrived after dark and stayed the night on a British cruiser. We arrived at Ancona, Italy on November 22 after a jolting ride across the Adriatic via the British destroyer HMS Hammersby. We slept on the floor in an ordinance depot at Ancona that night and were transferred to 15th Air Force Headquarters at Bari on November 23 via C-47. After a good meal, a thorough delousing, a good bath, some new clothes and a debriefing by intelligence officers we were flown back to our base at Torretta.

Frank returned to Italy later with the last of the group of over 120 escapees, evadees and refugees. Our longest mission was over.

The mission of October 14, 1944 was, for me and others on the crew, the most memorable of all those we flew. Details of those

days are more entrenched in memory than any of those involving intense combat such as Lobau, Vienna, Munich, Ploesti, Blechhammer etc.

When we bailed out over Yugoslavia it was with considerable trepidation. The onerous reputation of the Ustase and the lack of information of who controlled what territory in Yugoslavia was disturbing to say the least. We apparently bailed out at the right place, God was with us that day and those that followed.

The situation in Yugoslavia today is even more disturbing. In 1944 there was a common enemy (except for the Ustase) and dedication to the liberation of their country. This was enough to put aside old enmities, at least for a time. Today the old disputes (many with religious origins) have erupted again and terrible acts of war and atrocities between groups within the former Yugoslavia are common daily events.

The people who helped us in 1944 were a mixture of Croatian, Serbian and Moslem unified by the Partisans and all fighting for a common cause. We are indebted to them and especially to a number of Moslem people we encountered. It is our prayer that the present terrible conflict can soon end.

As pilot that day I worried for years afterward about the loss of a valuable B-24 airplane and what went wrong with the first engine ?-what happened to all the gas ?-was there a terrible mistake made in gas transfer ?-how could the bailout have been avoided?

That mission was the first time I ever had to turn around before reaching the target in nearly 50 missions and it bothered me. But after all this time I can truly say I am at peace with myself. It all turned out Ok. All 11 of the crew returned safely and completed their tours of duty.

I flew my last mission on December 17, led by Col. Keese. It was back to Odertal with a newly arrived crew from the US, except for Fred Dodge who was along again as Engineer-gunner. From historical records I learned that there was heavy fighter resistance and plenty of flak.

Our group was credited with eight enemy fighters downed-five of them by 827th Squadron gunners and one each by the 824th, 825th and 826th. But unlike October 14, I don't remember anything about that mission, except that it was the last of 35.

Now after nearly 50 years I have been privileged to attend recent reunions with some of the October 14th crew. At the association's Dearborn reunion there was the emotional meeting with Frank Oliver when neither of us was aware the other would be attending. Then at Harrisburg, I spent many hours with Carl Voss and Henry Walrond. We were all disappointed Frank Oliver and others of the crew were not there. None of us was aware that Frank was so ill or his time so short. I have learned recently that Tom Reimer could not attend the Harrisburg reunion because he is now seriously ill. It is truly too bad we lose touch with each other over the years; however, the good memories from years long ago and from recent reunions shall always remain.

I would be delighted to hear from any of the crew anytime, especially those we have not yet been able to contact. At this time I do not know the status and/ or whereabouts of Fred Dodge, Art Dunmire, Vince Fornieri, Robert Parsons, "Chief" Wakolee, or Harold Sykes.

*\* Mission totals reflect policy of double credit for some missions which apparently was discontinued while we were in captivity.*

