

from the sea. Rowboats enter by pulling on a chain suspended from the ceiling while everyone ducks low. Once inside, the cave opens into a large room. All the light comes from an underwater opening and creates an incredible effect of silvery blue water that illuminates the interior. Capri lies in the Bay of Naples. We were heading back to Naples and war all too soon.

Missions began again. Another one I recall was July 7th to Blechhammer, Germany. This was a very long flight. Fortunately we had P-51s as escort with a range sufficient to cover us at the target. We were attacked by Me 109s and FW 190s. However, our escort intercepted them. It was the only time I witnessed German fighters flying into their own flak to escape American fighters.

One night Boldy, Rookie and I went into Cerignola. Someone suggested that it would be fun to swipe a jeep from the motor pool. We tried several but none could be started. Finally Rookie was able to start a Weapons Carrier. This was like a small pickup. We drove back to camp. Parking it in the officers tent area, we removed the distributor rotor and padlocked the steering wheel. On our return from the mission next day we learned the Supply Officer had driven it to town where he was detained by the MPs. Since he was unpopular the search for the culprits was half hearted.

On July 11th the Archangel crew was forever changed. Our target was the submarine pens at Toulon, France. We were flying deputy lead position A 12. Because it was our responsibility to assume the lead in the event something happened to the leader, a Staff Pilot, Captain William Riddle, flew as Pilot and Shippy as co-pilot. Records show that Crafton was replaced with two navigators but I don't know why. He was perfectly capable of leading the Group. As we dropped our bombs we suffered a direct hit by a shell which did not explode. It may have been an 88mm, which was fired by the standard anti-aircraft gun or perhaps a naval shell since there were warships in the harbor. The shell entered the plane just forward of the bomb bay and exited in front of the windshield on the right side. Shippy's leg was severed and there was extensive damage to all the control cables in front of the cockpit. The plane fell about 5000 feet on its left side. The bailout alarm sounded and once again the guys in back stood by an open escape hatch. Meanwhile Dutch crawled into the nose section and worked furiously to clear the mess. In the process he cut his hands badly. Red pulled Shippy from his seat and placed him on the bench in the adjacent flight deck. He tended Shippy's injury and attached a cord to his parachute in case a bailout was ordered. After a short time Riddle gained partial control and headed for Corsica. The only available runway was a fighter strip used by the Free French flying Spitfires. As we turned onto the final approach Dutch was sweating us out. He was sitting co-pilot and knew we had no rudder control and had to use the engines to turn. However, he looked at Riddle and saw that he was in control of the situation. With a 3000-foot runway we had to slam on the brakes hard.

After the ambulance took Shippy and Dutch to the hospital we examined the damage. At the point of entry the shell had formed a semi cylinder in the aluminum skin with greasy rifling marks on it. Recently I talked to a Ground crew member who had records on all our planes. He said that when our B-24 was flown back to base three engines were damaged by the maximum power settings during take off.

Red, Dutch and Captain Riddle all received Distinguished Flying Crosses and Dutch and Shippy Purple Hearts for this mission. The only other crew member to ever receive a Purple Heart

was Carl Naimon who was struck in the thigh by flak on an earlier mission.

The next three weeks were the hardest time I had. Although I flew four missions to Wiener Neustadt, Ploesti twice and Bucharest the hardest part was not knowing what would happen to the crew. We were hoping to have Adams for our Pilot or at least keep the crew intact. I was so discouraged I accepted the fact that I would not live to return home. For three weeks I seldom shaved and went all day with my shoes untied. It was during this time that I started smoking. My addiction was to chewing gum, but there was no gum for a few days. One night Boldy, Rookie and I went to a movie at the 461st who shared our field. Being helpful buddies they suggested I smoke a cigarette. Next day it was 3 packs a day and continued for many years.

All of my remaining missions were flown as a replacement gunner. The practice was to put an experienced pilot and gunner on new crews. Sometimes two or three of us would fly together. Many of these missions were flown in the Ball or Nose turrets. My only recollection of flying the top turret was watching the long narrow wings called Davis wings flap up and down about a foot while in flight. It took a while to feel comfortable about the wings not falling off.

Several other missions bring back memories. On August 9th the target was oil refineries in Hungary. I was flying Ball and we had a combat photographer on board. Normally the Ball was retracted except just before dropping bombs to observe their fall or whenever fighters attacked. The Ball was suspended from a large hydraulic shaft. To prevent its unintentional lowering two large hooks held it in place. To lower the Ball it was necessary to pump the hydraulic pump handle twice to raise it slightly, then when the hooks were disengaged, a valve was opened to lower the turret. This operation was automatic on our crew with either Red or Dusty lowering the Ball as soon as fighters were spotted. Fighters attacked and I waited to be lowered. I saw an Me 109 about 150 feet below us flying parallel to us. His goggles were pushed up on his helmet. He was point blank but for some unknown reason did not attack. At this time I opened the door and jumped out. The combat photographer was standing there stupidly looking at the hydraulic pump. Grabbing him with both hands I threw him about five feet to the Waist and lowered the Ball myself. By this time the attack was over. The German fighter pilot had been a sitting duck and lucky I could not fire. We were also a sitting duck and were lucky that the German did not shoot us down.

Two missions were flown on August 14th and 15th in support of the invasion of Southern France. As we returned to the French coast there were mountain ridges paralleling the coast. Far below I spotted a B-24 that must have lost an engine. He would fly down a valley until he found a gap to make his way to the next valley. He was making a valiant effort to get to sea but with not enough power to fly over the ridges. I watched him do this three times before he disappeared in the distance.

The next flight to France found me in the Ball turret. As we approached the coast I said a prayer. Suddenly I was gripping two soft hands instead of the hard plastic control handles. Being skeptical I searched for crucifixion nail holes and felt them. At that time a great sense of peace filled me. I felt no assurance that I would survive the mission or the war but there was absolute knowledge that everything would be all right. That knowledge has remained ever since.