The Brave and Friendly Partizanski

In July, 1944 our crew of eleven was forced to bail-out of a badly damaged and disintegrating B-24 near the Austrian and Yugoslavian borders. Fortunately, all of the crew made it out of the plane succesfully. However, at this point, fate took over and each of us had to follow his own path.

After W W II was over and various stories drifted back, a pattern slowly developed. The fortunate crew members that were contacted by the Partizanski were warmly greeted, well taken care of and returned to Italy in few days or weeks. The opposite was true of the members that were contacted by the Chetnics. They were turned over to the Germans to spend the rest of the war in various prison camps.

After my semi-successful jump which included a plunge through a large tree, I decided to try and make it on my own to the middle of Yugoslavia where we had been briefed that the Partizanski controlled a major part of the area. I wandered around in a general southerly direction for a few days hiding in the woods and corn fields until one afternoon a German soldier tracked me down. Frankly the German Corporal was pretty dumb because he made no effort to conceal himself. I was amazed at the deadly impact of the heavy old 45 Cal pistol we all carried. The German soldier had 2 pistols, a rapid fire automatic Luger 9MM, and a small 6.35 MM Bulgarian clip pistol. I still have the small pistol as a reminder of the encounter, but gave the Luger and my 45 Cal to the Partizanski later on.

A few days later, fate brought me in contact with six Partizanski members of a forward patrol. This patrol came from the Partizanski controlled area near Zagreb. The leader, whose name was Joseph, his wife Maria and four other men. (They were the ones who found me). The patrol's assignment was to harass and terriorize the German units under movement outside of the German controlled areas. The group moved each day to a different spot in the woods and slept in their clothes huddled to-gether for warmth on a pile of leaves. One afternoon they took me to a train bridge that had been dynamited. It was quite evident their timing had been very good as part of the train was still in the ravine and they were quite proud of their work. A couple days later, while we were arranging our bed for the evening, a look-out spotter came running into camp guesturing " be quiet, Germani, Germani, 10 fingers, plus 10 fingers, plus 10 fingers, were close by. Six Yugo's, and one scared Air Corp fly-boy took off in a big hurry. I guess the next event was the more scary part; at least I thought so.

About thirty minutes later, we found ourselves in an old stone quarry and our backs to a granite cliff about 40-50 feet high. My God, when I saw that cliff, I knew we had bit the apple until I found out that our frantic run to the quarry was part of an escape plan. One of the four men had been raised in the area and had played many times at the quarry. He knew of a fairly steep path up the cliff and we all were up on top within a few minutes. A while later dusk set in and we quietly waited up on top for our pursuers to arrive. As darkness fell, the Germans moved in and attacked the cliff with machine guns. We followed Joseph's instructions and waited. He always carried a sack of grenades which he dispersed to his men and he handed one to me so as not to hurt my feelings. When the Germans moved in closer to examine the bodies at the bottom of the cliff, over the top went the grenades. We waited quite awhile until we heard no sounds so one of the men climbed down, found a flashlight and counted the bodies. We then started a long steady hike until almost dawn. Seven exhausted people finally took a much needed rest for a few hours before starting another long hike through the day. This pace continued for another two days and they finally told me that we were back in Partizanski territory and to relax, smoke, and talk. After arriving at the Partizanski camp they gave us time to take a bath (in a cold stream),clean up and join some Yugo leader who was at the camp. They had a dinner party with the best food I had tasted in a long time and lots of their liquid clear dynamite called (I think) Drava. They presented me with a Partizanski cap with the Red Russian Star on it and a slip of paper with the Red Star stamped on it that said "July 1944 25 Germani Morta ". I still have these two momentoes someplace in a foot locker where they have been for over forty years.

The next night, a small flimsy British two engine plane that was similiar to our Cessna AT-17 landed in a pitch black night on the grass field and brought me back to Bari, Italy.

I've often wondered how many 15th Air Force crew members owe their lives to these people that risked their lives and homes to protect, nurish, and arrange our return to our Italian home away from home.

" GOD BLESS THEM ALL ".