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Dear Martha,

Sorry to take so long getting the next “chapter” of the B-24 crew saga in the mail. Part of my feeble excuse for delay is time spent searching for a particular photograph with Bill in it. While we were on R&R in Naples in 1945 we had a photo taken by a street photographer. Included were me and Bill and a very pregnant Italian whore (who was still working the area notwithstanding her condition, and whose services we did not hire) and some other (enlisted) crew members that I can’t now remember the names of. Do you have a copy of that photo? Anyway, I haven’t yet located the darn thing. If I ever do, and if you haven’t got a copy, I’ll have copies made and send you one. My kids would probably like to have copies too. So, the search goes on.

But back to Italy, where we spent a rainy, muddy Christmas in 1944. The rain finally slowed down enough so we flew our first mission on January 8, 1945 to bomb a railroad marshalling yard in Klagenfurt, which is in southern Austria about 30 miles north of Trieste. It was not very heavily defended – some anti-aircraft fire, but no enemy aircraft. We were like kids in a candy store; all agog over really being in the war; really being in “combat”; we watched the puffs of smoke from the exploding ack-ack shells around us – some black from those with shrapnel, and some white from phosphorus which set planes on fire and made nasty burn wounds on human beings. We lost one or two planes and watched them spiral down, so it wasn’t exactly a “milk-run”, but unknown to us then it was one of our easier missions. Maybe those in charge of such things sent green crews to easy targets at first to give them some seasoning. Maybe it was just luck-of-the-draw, but we all watched it unfold with wide-eyed wonder, fascinated like a moth by a flame, and not the least bit frightened.

This “fascination” and lack of fear lasted for another mission or two, but then, of course, reality set in. Other targets such as Linz and Vienna and especially the oil refineries, were much more heavily defended, and we lost more planes, some from our own squadron, and holes from shrapnel appeared in the planes we were flying, and a photographer on our plane was hit by shrapnel. So, wonder and fascination

were soon replaced by fear and occasionally, abject terror. Instead of looking forward to the next mission (usually scheduled anywhere from 3 or 4 days, to possibly a couple of weeks in the future) we began to read the flight schedules posted on the squadron bulletin board and hope that the next mission wouldn't be ours.

You mentioned in one of your letters that we had been shot down on one mission, and walked out. We did get shot up pretty badly on one Vienna mission. Our hydraulic lines lost oil and pressure so landing gear could not be lowered hydraulically (by pushing a button, that is) and the flaps on the wings, tail and stabilizers did not respond properly. We lost altitude after we crossed the Alps on the way home, but we were able to limp into a British air-base in extreme northern Italy, where we cranked the landing gear down manually and managed a precarious and bumpy landing. However, we didn't have to walk home. The Brits patched up the hydraulics sufficiently after a couple of days, and got one cranky engine running a little better, so we were able to fly the old war horse to our Cerignola field where better repairs were made. The worst part about that sojourn to the British air field was the food. Have you ever eaten canned boiled mutton in gravy shipped from New Zealand, or maybe Australia? It simply can't be described.

Well, I didn't get to our trip to Naples with Bill. Will make sure it's in the next chapter.

Best wishes  
Bruce