



BY WALTER DRAGICH

November 6, 1995

HI Walt,

Your story about the "UNINVITED" is outstanding. I'm sure that you could get it published in some magazine, say "The New Yorker." Maybe even a "movie."

At least now I and the rest of our crew know the debt of gratitude we owe you for saving our aircraft and possibly us.

Here's what happened "up front": When the shrapnel cut the main ELEVATOR CONTROL CABLE, the nose of the airplane dropped and my pulling back on the control yoke had no effect. Remembering that the autopilot had separate control cables, I engaged it, praying that these cables hadn't also been cut. Sure enough, with the autopilot I was able to bring the nose back up. I continued to fly the airplane using the A.P. while you did your repair work on the "main" elevator control cable.

Walt, I would not have been able to land using the A.P. because "lowering the flaps" would have changed the pitch of the plane enough to "override the A.P." and knock it off. Making a "no-flap" landing on our short runway using the A.P. was out of the question.

Yes, indeed. When we came in to land and I knocked off the autopilot, our lives did depend upon your repair work!

Walt, you did an outstanding job and all of us owe you a lots. Thanks from the bottom of my heart.

Best regards,

Dan McGeary

Dan McGeary, pilot, "The UNINVITED"

Preface

An article in "Air Force" (May 1945), the official service journal of the U.S. Army Air Forces, prompted me to write this story about our mission to Moosbierbaum on Feb. 7, 1945. The article reads as follows:

"Up in the air, when FLAK or gunfire severs a bomber's control cables there is usually very little that can be done to repair them, and, in most cases, the plane has to be abandoned.

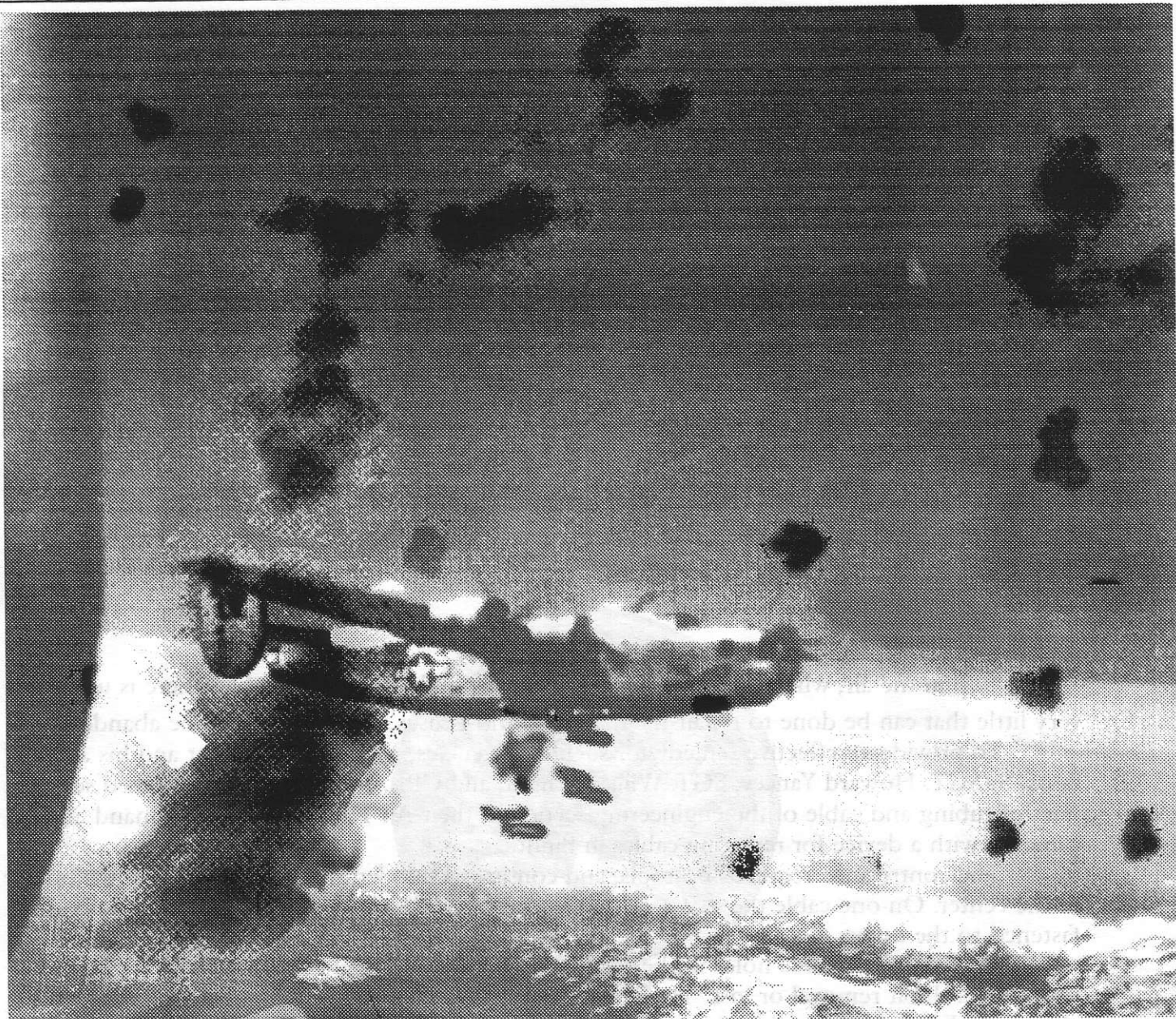
To provide an effective remedy for such emergencies, Major Jesse Wright and his assistants, S/SGT. Howard Yancey, SGT. William Yuran, and CPL. John L. Speer ransacked scrap piles of tubing and cable of the engineering section at their Air Force Service Command and came up with a device for repairing cables in flight.

The contrivance required no tools, and consists of two lengths of cable with a turnbuckle in the center. On one cable the male end of the turnbuckle is clamped, while the female end is fastened to the other.

In each of the three holes in the turnbuckle a six-penny nail is inserted with its point flattened to prohibit removal or loss. The outside end of the cable is equipped with a "U" bolt clamp and has an ordinary hex nut on one arm, but the other nut is on a T-shaped extension to permit tightening by hand without interference.

As used in an emergency control cable repair, the severed line is located and the new portion is clamped to the broken portion with as tight a tension as possible. Then, holding the nails in one hand, the other nails in the turnbuckle are tightened until the correct tension is achieved. Such a procedure can be performed by any crew member and enough cable is carried as standard equipment to enable a splice made around pulleys, if this procedure becomes necessary."

The above cable repair kit was not carried on our bomber, "The Uninvited". Neither I, nor anyone else in our squadron or group heard or knew about this procedure. Nevertheless, the cables were repaired on "The Uninvited" and we came back to base, as you will see in the story.



Artist's impression of 'The Uninvited' during its bomb run over Moosbierbaum.
- Photographer unknown.

"The Uninvited Over Moosbierbaum," by Walter Dragich

1995 Walter Dragich

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The "Uninvited" over Moosbierbaum.

Place: 15th Air Force in Italy
304th Wing
455th Bomber Group (H), stationed
in San Giovanni, Italy
740th Bomb Squadron
Crew #14 as follows:
Plane B-24-J Liberator Bomber –
"The Uninvited"¹

Crew: Pilot: 1st Lt. W. "Dan" McGeary
Co-Pilot: 1st Lt. Hurely W. Lane
(Co-Pilot on Feb. 7th mission name
unknown).

Navigator: 1st Lt. Michael J. Rolak
Bombardier: 1st Lt. Charles R. Love
Engineer/Top Turret Gunner:
T/SGT. William E. Carter

Radio Operator/Waist Gunner:
T/SGT. Jess Muro

Armorer/Waist Gunner: S/SGT.
Virgil R. Crain

Ball Turret Gunner: S/SGT. Walter
Dragich

Nose Gunner: Charles Brookman

Tail Gunner: Sterling Bryant

Mascot: Windy Miniature Collie²

Crew #14 is alerted for a combat mission Feb. 7, 1945. A pilot of a replacement crew will fly with us as co-pilot to gain some combat experience. I will refer to him as "Lt. X", as I cannot recall his name.

The evening before a mission was usually spent writing letters to loved ones back home. This evening was a rainy one. As the rain pelted our tents, which leaked like a sieve, we had to erect additional canvas over our cots to keep dry.

Carter staggered in the tent, loaded to the hilt, I told him "It's not a time to drink heavily before the mission." With a smart reply he plopped in his sack and passed out.

We were now halfway through our missions and every one of us were on edge. Morale was sinking. The few missions that we flew in January were rough. We also had to fight bad weather to and from our targets in enemy countries.

It seemed that I had just closed my eyes when I was awakened by a slight shake from the squadron sergeant. We trekked to the mess hall in the mud and rain. I called Carter, but he just rolled over and groaned with a hangover. After a breakfast of powdered eggs and bacon, we boarded the truck to the "pit"³ for a briefing on the mis-

sion.

When the curtain opened on the huge map of Europe, the ribbon went from the spur of Italy all the way to Vienna, Austria. The mission was greeted with a slow groan by all the crews. It was a "rough one"; over 1900 FLAK⁴ guns (88's) could bear on the group. Maximum effort was divided into a red and a blue force. Col. Snowden was leading the blue force, which we were a part of, and scheduled take-off at 1012 hours. The load was ten 500 pound RDX bombs. Altitude was 24000 feet. The length of the mission would be approximately seven and a half hours. Flack would be heavy. The target would be cloud covered, so we were set up to use the pathfinder method (Radar) for the primary target. The 455th bomber group's meteorologist, Lt. Col. David W. "Stormy" Wolf, briefed us on the weather and said it would clear by take-off time.

When we left the "pit", we boarded the trucks which took us to the planes. The bags we carried to the plane were laden with gear: new electrically heated two piece suits, "electric slippers"⁵, Alpaca lined pants and jackets, Parachutes, "K" rations, knives, .45 pistols and ammo, and electric gloves and mittens. I also carried a sharp sheath knife and a pair of wire cutter pliers in addition to my escape kit. The escape kit included fifty dollars of American gold currency and also silk maps of different countries in Europe.

When we reached our plane, the ground crews had finished loading the 500

pound RDX bombs and the crew chief briefed McGeary on details about our plane, "The Uninvited". The plane's engines would be warmed up and the gas tanks would be topped off with additional 100 octane gas. All the gas caps would then be "safetied" with strands of copper wire which was prepared by the ground crew.

The flight crews and the ground crews never associated very much with each other. The reason was obvious: if you made friends and they were lost or killed in combat it makes it worse for you than if you never got to know them.

I assisted Crain in checking the bomb load. Crain was our armor-gunner, a tall, good-natured fellow from Pierre, South Dakota. He was a real handyman that took care of things when the going was rough, whether it was

around the squadron area or in combat. Crain was designated to be a ball-turret gunner, but being over six feet tall, it was sure a handicap for him. I was then "elected" to become a ball-turret gunner. I wasn't exactly pleased about switching to "the ball" from the top-turret. Crain then became a waist-gunner and Carter, the engineer, would fly in the top-turret. The line chief told the pilot that we had special Radar equipment in the ball-turret for this mission. I would be flying without a gun position. Crain and I checked out this new piece of equipment in the ball turret that had replaced the usual twin fifty caliber machine guns.



Our ship, 'The Uninvited,' held the record in the squadron for most FLAK holes, but always made it back.
-Photograph by S/SGT W. Dragich.

As we got out of the plane, Crain's pet dog, Windy, greeted us with a loud bark. The dog always came to the plane and when we taxied out he knew he wasn't going with us, so he returned to the squadron area.

One day Windy, out of nowhere, walked into our tent and Crain and Windy became attached to each other. Crain was now his master and Windy followed him everywhere. Crain talked to me about designing an oxygen mask for him so Windy could go on a mission with us.

McGeary started up the engines for a check and "warm up". Carter, the engineer, still hadn't shown up, so SGT. Brookman helped with the pre-flight of the plane with McGeary.

There was still time left before take-off. There was drizzle of rain and the skies were black. I looked for the red flares to tell us that the mission was scrubbed, but the rain stopped. McGeary turned off the engines and Crain and I played with Windy. I looked up at the sky, there was a small opening in the clouds showing a blue sky. The green flare went up - the mission is on!

I started to complain to Crain about the mud slick steel mats⁶ on the runway, the dangerous take-off, and the battle with clouds to Vienna, Austria and back, if we make it through the heavy FLAK at the target.

In a mad tone of voice, Crain responded, "Quit your bitching. I want to get these missions over with. My wife is due

to have a baby in April. If I get my thirty-five missions in, I'll get a chance to go home."

I responded "The war will be over soon and flying each mission increases the odds against us, but you're right, I guess I bitch too much."

Then I realized that Carter was still in the sack so I got a ground crewman to drive me in his jeep back to the squadron area. I rushed to our tent and Carter was dead asleep. I splashed some cold water on his

face, packed up his bag, and helped him dress. We got back to the plane and we were ready to take off shortly.

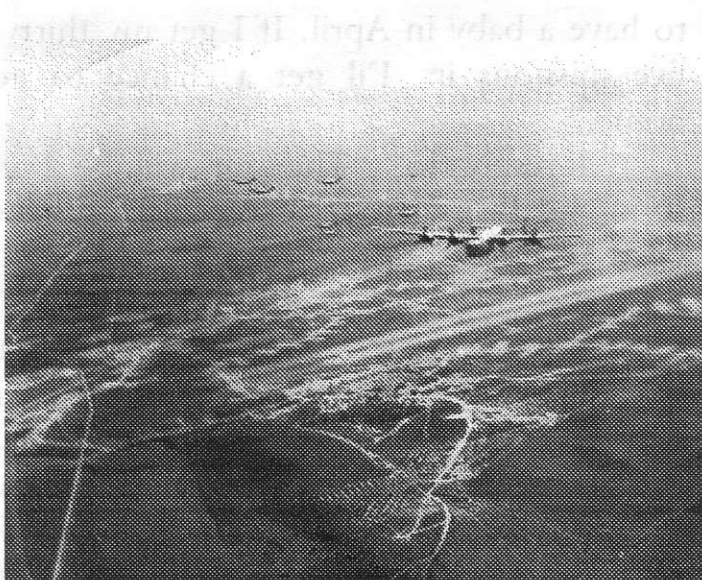
Carter went inside the plane to go on oxygen to sober him up. The ground crews topped off all the gas tanks⁷. The gas caps had to be safetied (Carter's job), so Mike

Rolak and I had to go on the wing to safety the gas caps. We didn't finish the job, it was time to start the engines and we were called down. Hopefully, everything would be OK. Brookman was the assistant engineer and I presume he took Carter's position on take-off. Crain, Bryant, Muro, and I were in "the waist"⁸ of the plane on take-off.

As "the Uninvited" roared down the mud-slick runway, McGeary used up all the runway before we lifted off. On the first bank to the left, gasoline splashed against the left waist window. All the gas caps had not been safetied. In a short while, the gasoline dried out and the fumes disappeared.



Enlisted Crew of 'The Uninvited' (Left to right), top row: Crain, Bryant, Dragich, Rolak, Muro. Bottom row: Brookman, Carter. -Taken at March AFB, July '44.



The 455th Bomb Group B-24's over San Giovanni, heading out for a mission, 1944. - Photographer unknown.

We waited a while longer before we decided to smoke. I passed the cigarettes to Crain and Muro. The three of us smoked on every mission when we were airborne. I would pass the cigarettes and Crain gave us a light. He used box matches and just knew how to cup a match with his hands so it wouldn't go out. He'd give me a light, then Muro and he would put the match out and strike another one to give himself a light. Never three on a match, which was considered unlucky. That was our ritual on every mission, but this time, there was only one match left in the box.

Crain gave me a light and then he gave Muro a light. He paused with the lit match, shrugged his shoulders, and with the same match, lit his cigarette. No one said a word, but on a mission you do not press your luck, superstition or not.

The group rendezvoused over Cerignola, a small town about six kilometers from our air base at San Giovanni, at about 8,000 feet and we were on our way to Vienna. I started to picture a solid black wall of FLAK (anti-aircraft fire from the

nineteen-hundred 88's). The formation spread out to let the gunners test fire their .50 caliber machine guns. The formation kept climbing until we were now flying over the clouds that concealed the ground below at about twenty thousand feet with the temperature reaching close to minus fifty degrees. Our breath was freezing in our oxygen masks, which we started to wear at ten thousand feet of altitude.

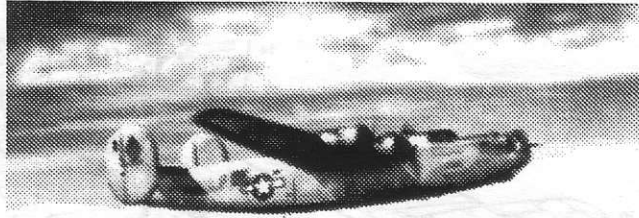
I settled down to listen to "Axis Sally's"⁹ music. My favorite song was "Sentimental Journey". She would interrupt the music with messages to us like who our group leader was, the target that we were going to, and our bombing altitude. But recently we had captured two German spies who dressed as aerial gunners and infiltrated our ranks to join us at mission briefings in the "pit". After the briefing, they, with the help of two Italians, relayed the message to Berlin via radio from the nearby town of Cerignola. From then on, security in the briefing room was much tighter. That day, "Sally" was playing music for us but without comment otherwise!

In flight to Vienna, I noticed that Bryant was not feeling well in the tail turret. I asked him if he wanted to trade positions with me, as it was a lot warmer at my position and he could rest better because he would not have to look out for enemy fighters. After some persuading, he finally agreed to let me operate the tail turret.

Bryant's plug in cord¹⁰ was too short so Crain exchanged places with him so he could plug in his electrical suit to keep him warm. Crain was now in my position and if necessary he could also man the waist gun from that position. He will also turn on the automatic chaff dispenser¹¹ that was

installed recently in "the Uninvited".

This was the first time for me in the tail turret and what a great view of at least a hundred B-24s behind us!

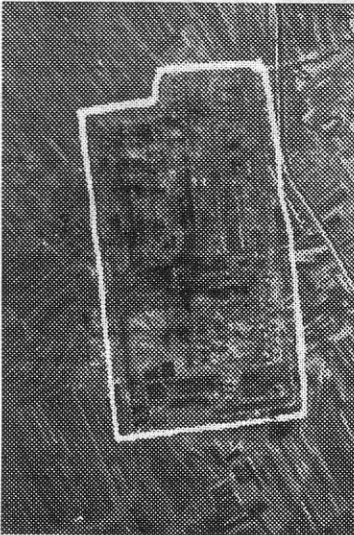


'The Uninvited' in flight. - Photographer unknown.

McGeary came on the intercom, "I have great news for you guys. We're not going to Vienna. We are going to bomb 'Moosbierbaum. Only ninety-nine can bear on us."

Someone commented, "Milk run."

McGeary announced that we were at the "I.P." (initial point). Only seconds later the FLAK started to come up very close and very intense. Then all hell broke loose. We were hit in the waist with a large explosion. I looked back in the waist and saw Crain go up in the air and land on the escape hatch which was almost in front of my turret. I jumped out of the turret to render aid to Crain. Just as I cleared the turret, the lower end of the turret was destroyed by FLAK. I looked for his wound, but I couldn't find it.



The target: Moosbierbaum Oil Refinery. - Photo by Group Aerial Photographer.

Crain was dead. I noticed that my oxygen hose was severed and my intercom cables were also cut. Luckily, the hose was cut below the coupling and I was able to plug in an emergency bottle of oxygen.

I removed Crain from the escape hatch and exchanged my head gear (helmet) with his intercom cables. I plugged into a station in time to hear "Bombs away!" I covered Crain with a blanket and the other crew members realized Crain was dead. Bryant was also hit by FLAK and

bleeding under the armpit.

SGT Brookman, the nose gunner, went to see if all the bombs he toggled had cleared the bomb bay. He found

SGT. Bryant in a dazed condition, moved him to safety in the waist, and immediately put him on full-rich oxygen to revive him.

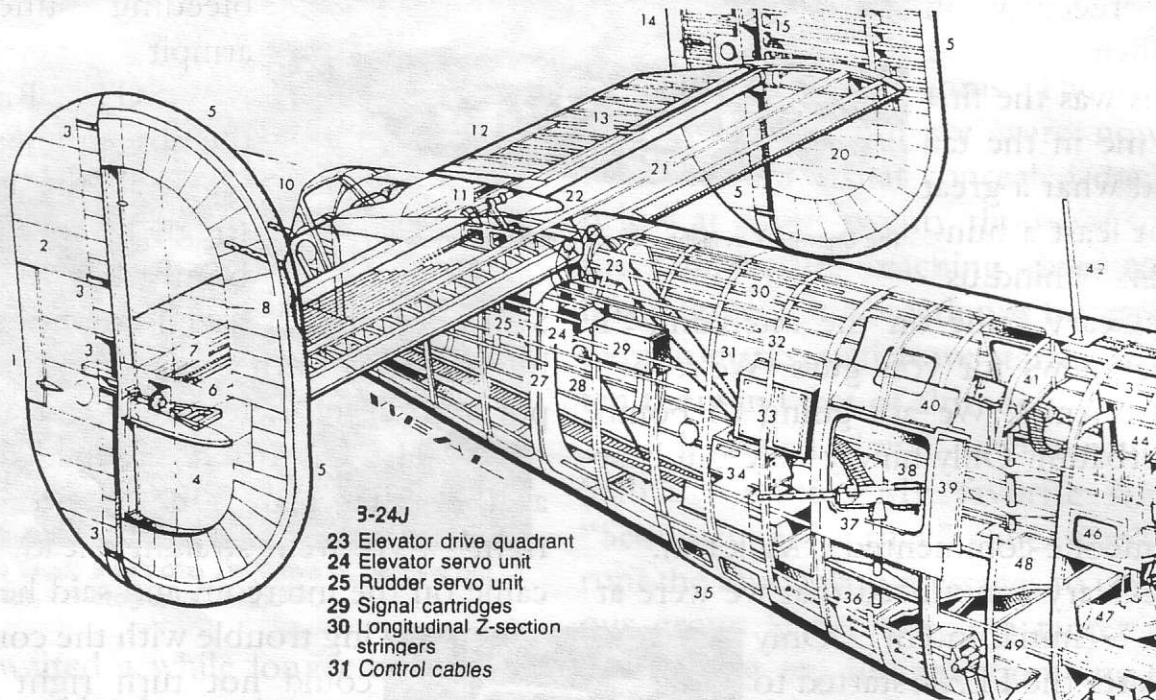
"The Uninvited" lurched downward as the other planes in the group turned right¹². We went straight ahead. McGeary came on the intercom and said he was having trouble with the controls and could not turn right with the rest of the squadron. We had received prop wash from the other planes that turned right and we lost a good bit of altitude.

I located the severed cables in the waist. I told McGeary about the severed cables and got him to send Carter back with the spool of safety wire¹³. Rolak, the navigator, entered the waist and took a look at Crain. Carter came back with piece of stiff

brass arming wire.

I was furious, "What in the hell can I do with that?" I snap on my parachute, unplug my oxygen supply and go through the bombay to get the spool of copper wire that was in a box behind the pilot's seat. McGeary and the co-pilot were struggling with the controls.

I made it back to the waist but felt a little weak from the lack of oxygen. I quickly plugged in the oxygen and turned it to full rich. I felt revived with the oxygen. I



A diagram showing the tail and waist of a late-model B-24 Liberator, note the position of the control cables. - Artist: Weal (taken from *Jane's Encyclopedia of Aviation*, Portland House: New York (1989), pp. 260-261, without permission granted).

quickly took about six or eight strands of the copper wire and twisted them together. I reached in my leg pocket of my alpaca trousers for my wire cutters that I carried with me on all the missions. I would not have been able to do the job without them. I cut the twisted wire with Muro holding one end and I holding the other end. I managed to tie the cable together. Then I worked with the other severed cable in the same manner, Muro helping to get the cables together and I tying them together with wire. I went to the turnbuckles that were on the cables and took up the slack on both cables until they had the proper tension. I got on the intercom and called McGeary. I told him that the cables had been spliced. Everything's was under control now and the flight was more stable. The rudder and elevator cables are working.

I looked out the right waist window and we were flying through the snow covered peaks of the Austrian Alps. We had lost about twelve-thousand feet of altitude. I

kissed the wire cutters and put them back in the leg pocket.

McGeary instructed Muro to send a message to Foggia for an emergency landing. Our Navigator, Rolak, was now plotting the course down the Adriatic sea.

McGeary called me on the intercom, "Dragich, do you think that the spliced cables will hold if we go to land? I'll have to use the pedals¹⁴ hard on the landing. Maybe we should bail out."

I responded, "I'll try to reinforce the splices."

I looked at the wire splices and I knew that I couldn't say that they would hold. I was ready to tell McGeary not to take a chance and that we should bail out over the field when we get there. I couldn't tell him that we should bail out because we would have to leave Crain's body behind.

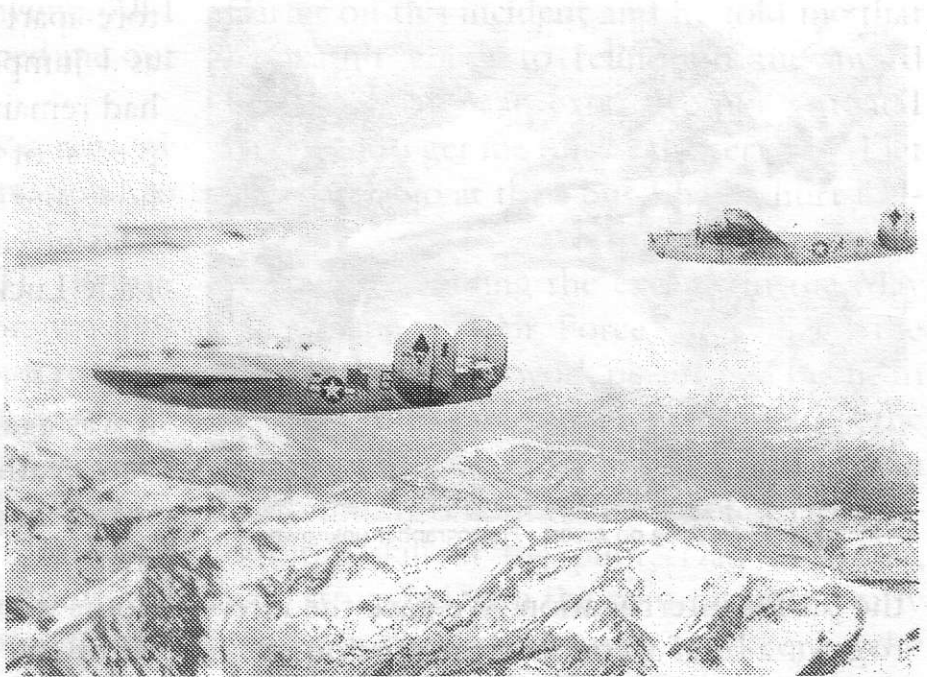
Suddenly, I saw what I could do! Staring at the emergency rations, I saw a float with a length of cable attached to the rations. The float was painted yellow and

was a cylinder about a foot in diameter and about eighteen inches high. In a ditching operation¹⁵, it would float above the water so the emergency rations could be located easier in the water. I immediately took my wire cutters and cut a piece of cable from the float and rations. The piece of cable was large enough for me to make a good cable splice in place of the copper wire that held the controls together. I called McGeary to steady the plane and told him that I was going to make a better splice on the cables.

I cut the piece of cable in two equal parts and the cable was the same size as the rudder cables. I cut away the wire splice on the one control and attached a piece of cable with a square knot to both ends of the rudder control cable and I did the same splice on the other severed cable. With the final adjusting of the control cables with the turnbuckle, the square knots tightened nicely and I was now sure that the controls will hold. For additional assurance, I took the thin copper wire and I "safetied" the square knots on the splices. I felt secure that the cables would hold for landing. I thanked God that He gave me the spiritual guidance in this emergency and that we were able to bring Crain back with the rest of us.

I called on the intercom "Land this plane, McGeary, the cables will hold!"

The rest of the flight down the Adriatic was smooth and McGeary decided to go all the way to the home base at San Giovanni instead of landing at Foggia. As



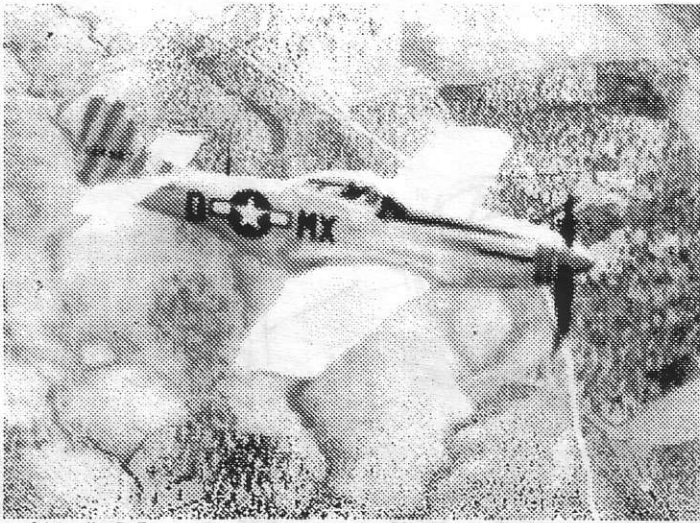
Other planes of the 455th Bombardment Squadron - Photographer Unknown.

we approached the 455th base at San Giovanni, McGeary came on the intercom, "If anyone wants to parachute out, they can."

Everyone decided on landing with "the Uninvited". Muro shot up a red flare as we circled the field to indicate that we had wounded aboard for a priority landing. We taxied to the stand and were greeted by ambulances, medics and ground crews. McGeary had Lt. "X" bring Crain's body out of the waist. Bryant was helped out by the crew and was taken to the ambulance by the medical crew.

Lt. "X" emerged carrying Crain, his Mae West covered with blood. Windy was also there, standing beside me, waiting for Crain to come out. When the co-pilot put Crain down, Windy did not move, but he whimpered softly twice, turned, and went away. The dog knew that his master was dead. Tears came to my eyes. I was overcome by sadness for Crain and his little dog that loved his master so much.

The crew piled into jeeps and went to



A friendly P-51 Mustang on escort - Photographer unknown

the pit for interrogation. We gave the interrogator a brief account of the mission. After that, we were served our usual quota of whiskey (three ounces) and then we returned to our tent in the squadron area.

Windy was standing by the tent. As I entered, the tent, I heard him whimper again. I called him to come in the tent, but he wouldn't come in. I looked for him again, but he was nowhere to be found. I doubt if any one of us went to the mess hall for dinner that evening. We laid in our cots and spoke very little that evening. It was breaking daylight when I fell asleep. I was awakened by a burst of FLAK. I was glad it was just a dream.

In a day or two, the flight surgeon gave us a report on Crain's death. A piece of FLAK or shrapnel about the size of a .22 caliber bullet penetrated the right hip and went up on a diagonal and lodged in the center of his heart. It was then that I realized that Crain was killed in my position, because he was in the process of turning the machine that dispensed the chaff to full speed.

It just wasn't my time to go that day. I believe in fate. The burst of FLAK that

tore apart the bottom part of the tail turret as I jumped out could have killed me if I had remained in the turret. I didn't feel the pieces of FLAK that severed my oxygen hose and intercom cables. I do not know who saved me. Was it my guardian angel, Lady Luck, or fate?

Our next mission was a week later and it was again to Moosbierbaum, but, due to bad weather, we hit the alternate target, the marshaling yards at Klagenfort. Thankfully, there was no FLAK at the target and in six hours we were back at the base. I was greeted by the ground crew at the stand and was given high praise for the work on the cables. They said that they were recommending me for the D.F.C. (Distinguished Flying Cross). I gave them a brief description of what occurred on the mission. There were over two-hundred holes in 'The Uninvited', the largest being more than a foot in diameter, plus damage to the cables and tail turret. Several weeks later, when the crew was working on one of the engines, a piece of FLAK that was larger than my fist was found embedded in the cowling of number three engine. Luckily, it caused no damage. Also, most of the damage was in the waist and tail. In a way, that was fortunate, otherwise we might not have made it back. If the wings on the plane and the gas tanks were hit, it could have touched off an explosion, destroying the plane and crew.

A replacement gunner was assigned to our crew. He took over the ball turret and I completed my missions in the top turret or the waist gun positions. I don't remember the name of the replacement gunner, but I apologize for the cool reception he received from us. As I said before,

we didn't want to get close to anyone. All I can say about him is that he helped me out in many ways.

The group held an awards ceremony about a month after the mission to Moosbierbaum. Our pilot, Dan McGeary, received the Silver Star. S/SGT. Bryant received the Purple Heart for wounds received on the mission (he recovered nicely and was able to fly again, but he was ill with hepatitis). S/Sgt. Crain was awarded the Purple Heart posthumously. S/SGT. Brookman was nominated for the Soldier's Medal, but it was denied. For his deeds, the medal would have been appropriate and rightly deserved. T/SGT. Carter, the engineer, was wrongly awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for the work that was performed by me. I approached

Carter on this incident and he told me that he wasn't going to relinquish the award because "That's an extra five points that I will need to get me out of the service." I let the matter go at that, but I had a hurt feeling.

After reading the excerpt in the May 1945 issue of "Air Force", I realized the importance of the work performed by me in splicing the cables which brought "the Uninvited" back to the 455th base at San Giovanni. It is important to note that without the skill of the pilot, Dan McGeary, who struggled with the controls in the early stages of the mission to keep "the Uninvited" from losing too much altitude, this story might have had a different ending.



T/SGT Muro, Radio Operator, standing in front of 'The Uninvited'. -Photo by Dragich.



S/SGT Dragich on rest leave on the Isle of Capri, Christmas, 1944 - Photo by Muro.



The Crew of the Uninvited as they posed for a publicity shot (Note: the Plane in the background is not 'The Uninvited') From left to right, top row: 1st Lt. D. McGeary, 1st Lt. H. Lane, 1st Lt. C. Love, 1st Lt M. Rolak. Bottom Row S/SGT V. Crain, T/SGT W. Carter, S/SGT C. Brookman, S/SGT W. Dragich, T/SGT J. Muro, S/SGT S. Bryant. -Photo taken by Group photographer at San Giovanni.

Footnotes

¹ "The Uninvited" was a B-24J model of a four engine bomber (B-24 Liberator). The bomber was named by Lt. Col. Robert M. Tank. I presume that he and his crew flew the B-24 Liberator from the States to Italy.

² Windy was a beautiful little dog with a buff colored body, a white Ruff (collar), white paws, and a white tip on his tail. I named him "Windy" because his collar was of thick fur and he looked especially nice with the wind fluffing up his collar.

³ The pit is a briefing room. The 455th Bomb

Group used a huge Italian wine storage building at San Giovanni as briefing room.

⁴ FLiegerAbwherKanone - Anti-Aircraft guns <Ed.>

⁵ I hated the electric slippers that were issued to us because we could not wear our regular "GI" shoes. Of course, we had fur lined boots to wear over the slippers, but what happens when you would have to abandon the plane? When parachuting out, you would lose the sheep lined boots and you would be left with a pair of slippers.

To remedy the situation, I stripped the electric wires from the slippers and had an Italian seamstress (I gave her an old jacket) fashion a pair of large socks that I could slip over my G.I. shoes and she attached the heating wires to the socks that she made. The sheep lined boots fitted snugly over the socks and shoes and they stayed with you in case you had to bail out!

⁶ Steel Mats - interlocking steel with perforated holes about two inches in diameter are laid over dirt and gravel to form a more stable runway for take-off and landing.

⁷ The gas tanks on a B-24 hold twenty-seven hundred gallons of 100 octane gasoline. Additional amount of gasoline is used to top off the tanks after the engines are warmed up.

⁸ The waist is the section of the B-24 after the bombay. There are two single .50 caliber machine guns, one on the right side and left side. Also, the ball-turret is located in the waist. The ball-turret is lowered and it must be retracted while the gunner is in the turret. The ball-turret gunner is retracted from the ball when the plane is on the bomb run.

⁹ "Axis Sally" was a propaganda artist Nazi Germany and she would broadcast messages and

play American music for us on every mission.

¹⁰ A plug-in cord is plugged into an electrical receptacle to provide warmth from the electrically heated suits that the crews wore under their alpaca lined pants and jackets.

¹¹ Packaged strips of tin foil, called "chaff", was thrown out of a B-24 to disrupt enemy RADAR. Now this new equipment will dispense it automatically, with three adjustable speeds: slow, medium, and fast.

¹² As the B-24's in our formation turned right, we could not turn and that is when we lurched downward because we received 'propwash' from the other planes that turned right - reason: our cables on the rudder were severed by FLAK.

¹³ "Safety wire" is thin copper wire that I used to safety the gas caps prior to take off.

¹⁴ The pedals on the floor are linked to the cable for the rudder.

¹⁵ A 'ditching operation' is landing the plane in a body of water and abandoning the plane. Rubber life rafts are immediately thrown out, but the crew is responsible for throwing out the other emergency equipment.



About the Author

Walter Dragich was born and raised in Johnstown Pennsylvania, on December 2, 1919. He enlisted in the Army in 1943, the second of three brothers to do so. His two brothers were also Aerial Gunners, S/SGT George Dragich (waist Gunner on an 8th Air Force B-17, 452nd Bombardment Group, 729th Squadron) and S/SGT Ted Dragich (gunner on a B-24 of the 5th Air Force in the Pacific). S/SGT Dragich completed his 35 missions in April (and was discharged in July) of 1945.