

December 8, 1943. Lt. William C. Glasgow flying his P-40 on his 80th and last required mission before his ticket home. It was a bombing/strafing mission near Orsogna, Italy. Prior to this date, while Lt. Glasgow had suffered some mechanical issues and totaled one plane on landing, he had never so much as returned with a bullet hole in his plane. This is his after action report.

“I left my heavy wool jacket with my crew chief, and flew the mission in just a khaki shirt, confident I would be back in an hour or so. Everything went swell until I started to pull out of the bomb run, and the first burst of ack hit my ship. It felt like somebody set a firecracker off under my search, and I was dazed for a moment. When I recovered, the ship was burning and headed down in a dive. The canopy had been blown off and I saw that my trousers were torn and bloody. I thought to myself: ‘This is it, I’ve had it, so what the hell ...’

I undid the seat belt and stood up in the cockpit, fully expecting to hit the tail section when I jumped. Somehow, I missed it, and the next thing I knew I was sailing peacefully through space. When I started tumbling head over heels, I realized it would be smart to pull the ripcord and open the chute. I gave it a good jerk, and the chute jerked back, the chest buckle hit me in the mouth and out three teeth. It seemed to take forever to get down, and I could see flashes from artillery fire and Jerry soldiers running around all over the place.

I landed in open country and got out of my chute in a hurry. I threw away my flying equipment and beat it for the protection of a small hill. As I ran around the side of the hill I ran right into a group of German soldiers. They yelled at me to halt. They were carrying submachine guns so I halted. I was then taken to a car with a British warrant officer seated in it – he had also just bailed out – and the two of us were driven to a small town and given first aid and treatment.

At the town I met the German officer in charge of the ack ack battery that had knocked me down. He kept proudly telling me how the first burst from one of his guns nailed me: ‘Vas goot?’ he asked. So I said, “Ya, vas very goot” and that seemed to make him happy.

The German doc insisted that I be given a tetanus shot, but the Britisher was sick from his, and I did not want to be in the same boat. I complained loudly, insisting I has been given a shot in the past month, and I finally talked him out of it.

We were taken to a building that was being used as a clearing station for casualties, and it was filled with victims. The orderlies told everyone I was a bomber pilot and I half expected one of those bomb happy boys to slit my throat. Some of them had been shocked into insensibility by our raids, and had to be led in like blind men unable to see, hear or talk.

No one paid much attention to the Britisher or myself, so after two or three loads of Germans had been taken out by ambulance I decided to try to walk out of the place. There didn’t seem to be any guards around, and Italian civilians were walking in and out, so I told the British chap my idea and he gave me his escape kit containing maps, money, and a compass. When I was all set, an ambulance pulled up in front and we were loaded in. After we started moving, I tried the rear door, but found it locked. I started to batter it with my feet, but the noise attracted the attention of the German soldiers in the front seat, and they made me quit it.

We were taken to a hospital at Chieti, and then driver to a large base hospital at Penne. I was treated very good there. The evening meal consisted of mashed potatoes, green, a piece of meat as big

as a baseball, and tea spiked with rum. I feigned more serious injury that I had, groaning and grunting every time I was moved.

That first night, after a minor injury to my wrist had been treated, I discovered my watch was missing. I complained to the chief surgeon, and a few minute later the officer brought back three watches and I picked mine out.

On trips between the ward and the operating room I observed as much as I could of my surroundings, and tried to figure out possible ways to escape. I noticed that the first night a light was left burning in the ward, but the second night it was turned off. So at three o'clock in the morning, after the orderly had made his last inspection, I got dressed and walked to the washroom. There was a window high off the floor, so I climbed on top of the latrine partition and started to pry it loose. I had been hard at work a few minutes when in walked the orderly. He had his head down, and came into the stall next to the one I was perched on, so close I could have patted him on the head. I held my breath and tried to keep my knees from shaking. Just as I was about ready to collapse, he left. I was shaking with fright, hurriedly finished breaking open the window, and fell to the ground fifteen feet below. I lay there a few minutes listening to the guard coughing and hacking: he trotted right by me, but never looked in my direction, and finally I got up enough nerve to make a break down the hill and away from the hospital.

I had seen the snow-capped peaks of the Gran Sasso mountains to the southwest, so with the aid of the compass and bright moonlight, I struck out across county toward the hills. I walked until dawn, plowing through muddy field and keeping clear of towns and roads. I spend the entire next day hiding out in the woods – cold, hungry, and wet. At dusk I approached a farm house and received food from the Italians, but no lodging as the farmer feared reprisals.

For the next two days I traveled only at night, sleeping in barns and hen houses during daylight. On the third day I found three isolated farm houses owned by three brothers who took me in for the next three days and nights. These Italians treated me swell. They fed me plenty of macaroni, brown bread and wine, and farmers came from all around to see me and try out their rusty English. There were also three single girls living in one of the houses, which made a good situation even better.

One afternoon I was down at the girls' house having lunch when a couple of kids came down to tell me German soldiers were at one of the houses trying to get chickens. I went outside and hid in the bushes. But after they left, I decided to leave also as too many people knew my whereabouts.

I left later that night. About midnight I stumbled across a young Italian who had been visiting his girlfriend and he offered to take me home for dinner. But upon arriving at his house we found four German soldiers were there. I waited outside while the kid brought me a plate of cold macaroni and a bottle of wine. The following day, after a good night's sleep in the home of an Italian who had once lived in the States, I was led to the hideout of eight Allied escapees. Some of these Britisher had been captured during Wavell's first push into Libya, [Dec. 1940] and had escaped from the Italians after the armistice. [Sept. 1943].

These British soldiers had been farmed out to different homes for one or two hot meals a day, and in between they lived on dried figs and bread obtained from nearby farms. They knew little of the battle situation, and were kept in a state of indecision by many rumors. Their clothes were in shreds, and they

were in no condition to make the final break across difficult terrain. Their most haunting fear was that some civilian's tongue might wag and they would be found out. We had the hell scared out of us one night when we heard German voices at the entrance to our hideout. There was a mad scramble to douse the fire, and then three Italian boys walked in, laughing. We felt like choking them but had to laugh with them.

I remained in the hideout for two days, then with a rough and ready British paratrooper, and a red-headed sergeant, both of who 'knew the ropes', I decided to make a break for freedom. We left that night, hoping to dodge areas of German military activity while we headed for the snowline in the mountains. It was rough going over almost impassable terrain, and we ran across numerous steep ravines that took hours to navigate. My shoes were soon in tatters, and on one occasion we had to fall to the ground when a lone German soldier passed by a few feet away.

The first night was spent in a straw hut where civilians had built a fire and fed us roasted rib of lamb. The next morning dawned with a heavy fog, much to our pleasure, and we started out on the last leg of our journey. We went down one side of a very steep ravine, and were then unable to get up the other side. We decided to follow a small path at the bottom of the ravine but it led into a small town a woman said was filled with Germans. We had a hurried consultation. We hated to go through the town, but the prospect of back-tracking across the ravine to find a new way out was even worse. We decided to chance going through the town. We made it! We sneaked through the town and hid in an abandoned house until after dark. We learned from civilians that Eighth Army [British] held a small town only four miles away, but they were to be the longest four miles of the entire trip.

We started out in darkness to cross a road, which was one of those winding affairs that meant we would have to cross it three or four times before making open country. German soldiers kept walking down the road to chow, and we were shaking in our boots. The paratrooper dashed across first. A few minutes later the sergeant sneaked across. I was waiting for my turn when I heard a German voice yell, "Halt!"

I felt like digging a hole in the ground and hiding in it. I could hear the mumble of German voices off to my right, so I held my breath, prayed, and dashed across the road away from the sound. I made my way through an orchard filled with slit trenches, and with every tree branch looking like a gun pointed at me. I went to our prearranged rendezvous point, but my friends never showed up. I don't think I could have made it as far as I did without their help, and I sure hated to go on without them – and only a few miles from freedom.

I slept in a barn after walking about three miles and was awakened in the morning by the sound of rifle and machine-gun fire. I went to a farm house but an Italian woman excitedly warned me away, telling me the Germans were using the house for an observation post. She directed me to stay in the ravine and make for a small town a few hundred yards away that was held by the British.

After a short walk I came upon a group of civilians and I could tell by the way they greeted me that I was out of enemy territory. They escorted me into town, and the Italian clothes I had picked up enroute made such a good disguise that the British soldier guarding the road didn't even give me a second look. I was so glad to see him, however, I could have hugged him. I never heard what happened to my two friends, but I know now that four miles can be a long way from freedom."

Upon reuniting with Allied troops on Dec. 22, 1943, Lt. Glasgow reported the positions of enemy troops, gun emplacements, and supply depots he had passed on his journey. He was awarded the Silver Star and the Purple Heart for his actions to go along with an earlier awards: The Distinguished Flying Cross, The Air Medal with Six Oak Leaf Clusters, The American Defense Ribbon, The EAME Theater Ribbon with Four Stars, and the 79th Fighter Group Citation.

From Jan. 28 to Feb. 14 1944 Lt. Glasgow was hospitalized in order to recover from the shrapnel wounds he had suffered on Dec. 8. Promoted to Captain, he then resumed duty as an Acting Group Operations officer for the 85th Fighter Squadron of the 79th fighter group. Captain Glasgow finally returned to the US on May 17, 1944. Due to Army regulations which placed escapees on "restricted duty", a later request to return to combat with the 79th was denied. Capt. Glasgow then chose to join the Fighter Test Pilot program at Wright Field in Dayton, OH in Nov. 1944. He was killed in a crash of the experimental fighter XP-55 in May, 1945. Captain William Glasgow was subsequently buried with full military honors in his hometown of Niagara Falls, NY.