



Chow line, Massicault, Tunisia. (Courtesy of R. Amos)



Francis Langford, in borrowed khakis, accompanied by Tony Romano. (Courtesy of R. Headrick)

one notable meal of record. That was the Thanksgiving dinner on November 25, described as the "first real meal." A further boost to morale came when Christmas packages, many containing "eats," began arriving from home.¹²

Beyond the mere necessities of life, those deprived by war yearn for rest, recreation and particularly for companionship. One of the first squadrons to try and fulfill that yearning was the 429th. Field and evacuation hospitals had moved into the area around Constantine, probably in preparation for the Sicilian campaign. These units had many newly-arrived nurses. On June 10, the 429th held a "long remembered" party at Chateaudun.¹³ The 20th Squadron followed with a formal dance at Chateaudun on June 19.¹⁴ The warehouse at Ain M'Lila was the first base facility with enough space to conveniently hold unit parties and dances. An officer's dance party was held in the warehouse on June 26. A Group orchestra, led by Sgt. Irving N. Federgreen, furnished the music. There was some disappointment because not enough nurses attended.¹⁵ On July 10, the 429th sponsored a party and dance for the entire Group. A week later, on July 17, the 96th hosted a formal dance that brought out formals, corsages, liquid refreshments, fresh hamburgers and devil's food cake.¹⁶

As the means and time became available, most of the squadrons built "clubs" for their officers and men. The 96th opened its officer's club August 15. The idea for a club came from a visit to another Group. The building was constructed of scrap lumber, mostly from packing and fragmentation bomb cases. The roof was a canvas fly. The interior was decorated with green palm fronds. A bar occupied one end and was stocked with liquor brought from Cairo. The club was named the "Sixty-Fifty Club" after Lt. Vincent J. McIntyre's plane, and in honor of him and his crew who were the first crew to be lost in combat by the 96th. They were shot down on the forty-third mission, July 14, over Messina, Sicily. On August 30 the 96th's enlisted men's club, "The Red Devil's Heaven", opened with some fanfare. The Group orchestra played popular tunes of the time, and Majors Caruthers and Clapp made speeches. The club was constructed

primarily of P-38 packing cases and other scrap lumber and was similarly decorated with palm fronds and sported a bar stocked from Cairo.¹⁷ Unfortunately, the club had a short life. A couple members got seriously carried away by their liquor and Maj. Caruthers closed the club. It was then converted into the Squadron mess and became the first such facility with sit-down benches, tables and screened windows and doors.¹⁸ The 20th Squadron club was very similar to the others. It had tables and chairs, wood side walls up to the tent roof, with screened openings that had hinged covers. There was a bar and a back bar with a replica of the Squadron emblem, "Pineapple Pete," hanging above the back bar. The club was a favorite hangout for gin rummy and poker players. It also became the object of a P-38 buzzing when a member of the nearby 14th Fighter Group, who had downed five enemy planes, completed his combat tour and came to say goodbye to a friend in the 20th. After the congratulations and farewells, the visiting fighter pilot took off in his P-38 and twice thoroughly raked the 20th Squadron area, giving particular attention to the club, before wagging his wings and scooting homeward. The prop wash enveloped the club in a cloud of dust, toppled the back bar and brought "Pineapple Pete" crashing down together with several bottles of Cairo imported liquor. Club occupants vacated the premises after the first pass, then watched the second pass at some distance. Although they didn't necessarily like what was happening to the club, they could well appreciate and envy the display of enthusiasm over successful completion of a combat tour. The liquor loss was nominal. More irksome was the job of tidying up the place.

In late August, Lt. Gen. Spaatz, Maj. Gen. Doolittle and Brig. Gen. Atkinson visited the Group. Maj. Haynes of the 49th Squadron took them on a tour of his Squadron area. The Generals were especially pleased with the enlisted men's club which the men had erected and equipped.¹⁹

Sometime in mid to late summer, movies became a routine part of the diversion from the

cares of work and combat. They were shown two and sometimes three times a week, the same movie being repeated for those unable to attend the first showing. Movies were shown in the warehouse at Ain M'Lila, but seating was limited. Showings were later moved out-of-doors during those months of good weather with the audience sitting on the ground, or on blankets or bomb fin crate stools brought from the tents. Movies were regularly scheduled after Sunday evening church services, because the long daylight hours meant that the movie couldn't start until 9:00 P.M. or later. The shows were frequently interrupted to change reels, or because of projector breakdown or malfunction, power interruptions and occasionally, weather. So eager were they for entertainment, audiences never gave up in frustration if there was any hope of completing the show. After the move to Massicault, movies gained in popularity. The 20th Squadron camp area was in a natural amphitheater. At what would have been the stage location, there was a large electrical transformer tower with white masonry walls that made an ideal projection surface. This "theater" drew audiences from surrounding military units. On October 6, the movie "Somewhere I'll Find You," starring Clark Gable and Lana Turner played to a packed house of about 2,000. Some of the other attractions included "A Stranger In Town," with Frank Morgan and Jean Rogers, "Flight For Freedom," starring Fred MacMurray and Rosalind Russell, "Now Voyager," with Bette Davis and Paul Henreid, and the technicolor production of "This Is The Army," during which the sound mechanism went bad, but a patient audience waited twenty minutes on a bitterly chilly night in November for the repairs.²⁰

Of course movies were no match for the real thing. On August 14, Bob Hope and his troop played to a huge audience at Massicault from the back of a flat top trailer in the wheat stubble across the road from the farm house occupied by Group Offices. Songstress Frances Langford had to resort to a pair of borrowed khaki trousers, from the diminutive Capt. Headrick, when her billowy skirt became uncontrollable in the



A "Little Friend" buzzing 20th Squadron area, Massicault, Tunisia. (Courtesy of J.Harris/B. Hanson)



Capt. Clyde Knaggs and German Focke-Wulf 190, Elouina Airdrome, Tunis, Tunisia. (Courtesy of R. Amos)

desert wind. Tony Romano sang and played the mandolin and Jack Pepper offered songs and comedy.²¹

On September 16, Jack Benny, Winnie Shaw, Larry Adler and Jack Schneider put on a one-and-a-half hour evening show at Tunis El Aouina Airport. The audience was estimated at 15,000. These shows were described as great morale builders because they were the type of entertainment the troops were used to back home.²²

For a time thereafter live entertainment became relatively plentiful. On September 30, a USO show, starring singer Julia Cummings and a U.S. Navy Lt. Holland, a hypnotist, was one of the most entertaining shows the Group had experienced since coming over seas. Lt. Holland used members of the Group for his several feats of hypnotism, which proved to be highly popular with the audience.²³

A French stage show with songs, dancing, and magic, including glass eating, entertained the Group for two hours on October 2.²⁴



FW-190 foreground, Me-110 background, El Aouina Airdrome. Part of German aircraft graveyard made by Allied air raids. (Photo Section)

The 1943 World Series, between the New York Yankees and the St. Louis Cardinals, had the rapt attention of all who were free and had access to a radio, from October 5 through October 11, which the Yankees won handily, four games to one.²⁵

On October 12, some 1,200 troops were entertained by the 1st Armored Division English Revue that included excellent band music, singing, dancing, imitations and comedy skits. The Red Cross sponsored a two hour show of singers and dancers on November 16.²⁶

Left to their own devices, members of the Group sought their own diversions besides letter writing, cards and kibitzing missions over drinks at the club. They took excursions to nearby cities, the seashore, to ancient Roman ruins at Carthage, and to the fields of some of the most fiercely contested ground in the Tunisian campaign. Constantine was one of the first cities to be visited. Located on a gently sloping mesa, the city rests in a beautiful natural setting that confidently commands the surrounding countryside from behind the reassuring walls of a deep chasm that encircles the city on three sides. The city was overrun by the Allied military population based there and those visiting from nearby installations. Still, there was a modest amount of shopping, some food and movies. The best shows were at the Red Cross Club. French movies with English sub-titles were shown in the native theater. The surrounding gorge, with its suspension bridge, was a natural attraction.

After the move to Massicault, nearby Tunis proved to be a much better off-duty haunt. At the conclusion of the Tunisian campaign, British army units had rolled into the city so swiftly and unexpectedly that German troops were caught still engaged in leisurely pursuits. So the city did not suffer the destruction rained down

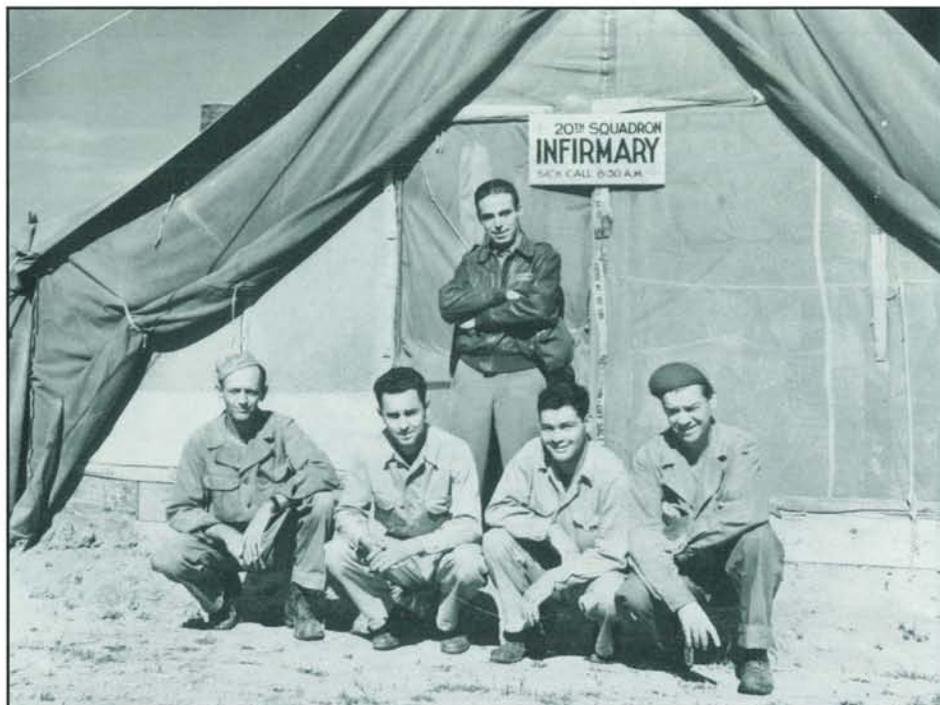
on other hotly contested cities and towns in the area. The early focal point was the Red Cross Club. It was located on one of the main boulevards with islands down the middle landscaped with palm trees, shrubs and flowers. In his history, Covell describes the club and the city thusly: "There was always a line of horse-drawn carriages standing along the curb, waiting to taxi soldiers around the city. Inside (the Club) was a lobby with an information desk, a snack bar and a combination reading room and lounge. Along the avenue and on the nearby streets were several movie theaters, a restaurant or two, a few bars, barber shops and other small businesses. The largest of the movie houses had been taken over by the Allied Military Government and all shows (both movies and live stage shows) were free to Allied military personnel." He goes on to state that the European (French and Italian) section of the city was clean and comparatively modern. Arab children swarmed the streets, selling shoe shines, salted almonds, oranges, figs and whatever else they had. Street vendors sold some food and cold drinks. Covell and a buddy found the first real ice cream they had enjoyed since leaving the States.²⁷

Saturday night, November 20, a Group Officer's Club opened in Tunis with a dance. A Group orchestra, led by Sgt. Federgreen, furnished the music. French girls attended. The club building was requisitioned with furnishings and personnel, including a kitchen operated by a Frenchman, in the hopes he might improve on mess hall food. The second dance was held November 25, the evening after the great Thanksgiving dinner.²⁸ Dances were scheduled each Saturday at the Tunis club but this social frill was short-lived. The move to Italy started December 9.

Among the off-base lures were the booty and

relics of the war in that part of North Africa. Massicault was barely outside the shadow of Hill 609. The country side was littered with the carcasses and spoils of the Tunisian campaign. There were burned out tanks, vehicles, and airplanes, abandoned equipment and munitions storage areas, and unguarded gun emplacements, complete with shells. Tunis El Aouina Airport was a veritable graveyard of Luftwaffe airplanes. Besides those destroyed on the ground by Allied fighters and bombers, something over 600 planes remained on fields in the Tunis, Bizerte, and Cap Bon areas when Axis forces surrendered.²⁹ Members of the Group wandered about these relics, particularly the airplanes and pondered whether they were admiring their own handy work. Others picked up souvenir guns and ammunition from unguarded dumps. Some of these were confiscated when the troops got too exuberant with their use around the camp. The German Luger pistol was a particularly prized find. Vehicles, such as BMW motor cycles, and a German staff car were converted to Allied use.

The Arabs about the camps were a matter of concern and irritation. This was especially true at Ain M'Lila, because the base was in the midst of a lush grazing area. While at Ain M'Lila, the Group was under constant threat of a potential Arab uprising (rumored to be against the French). A perimeter guard of the base was instituted and was continued until the move to Massicault.³⁰ Most of the men slept with side arms handy. Luckily, the uprising did not materialize.³¹ Intensifying the concern was the practice of the Arabs, mostly the nomadic Bedouins, straying heedlessly onto the base with their camels, goats, sheep and donkeys. The starkly different language, religion, culture and lifestyle on each side, created an almost unfathomable gulf between the Americans and the Arabs. The Arabs were viewed with suspicion and disdain. For their part, the poor Arabs must have viewed the Americans and their possessions with immense envy, and which they judged to be lavish by comparison with the Arab's lot. Petty thievery was an intense temptation. Arabs slipped into the dispersal area one night and stole the personal effects of some ground crews who slept on the line. M/Sgt. Nilo Abel, a crew chief in the 96th, lost everything but the clothes he had on. The culprits were apprehended later in the hills and turned over to French civil police.³² Another intrusion didn't turn out nearly as well. A crew chief woke up in the night to see a knife had punctured the side of his tent and was cutting a slit to the ground. The chief quietly slipped from bed, lifted his Tommy gun hanging from the mosquito net bar, and tiptoed outside. He rounded the tent corner to find two Arabs pulling a duffle bag through the slit in the tent. The terrified Arabs took off. The Chief drew down on the thieves, killing one and setting much of the flight line in an uproar. The French police were summoned and they took the body away.³³ There is no known record of how many episodes of this or a similar nature took place. It is known that the U.S. Government paid the French Government burial indemnities for seven Arabs killed at Ain



Capt. Lyman H. "Doc" Ihle, 20th Squadron Flight Surgeon and his staff. (Group Photo / W. Greenhalgh)

M'Lila. Given a chance, there was perhaps a better way to deal with Arab relations that might have reduced these incursions and avoided the harsh retaliation they brought. A couple examples of simple humanity bear testimony to how relations might have been better.

Capt. Richard F. Kuhn, 96th Squadron Flight Surgeon, described some of his humanitarian work with the poor Arabs. The most common ailment among Arabs was trachoma, a persistent infection of the conjunctiva and cornea of the eye. The infectious organism is spread by contact and possibly by flies. Untreated, trachoma leads to complications and may cause blindness. All the factors for making this the most common disease were rampant among the poor Arabs. And if flies were carriers, there were hordes of these infuriatingly tenacious pests. All Dr. Kuhn had for treating the disease was sulfa-cream which he used to pack the infected eye. The results were sufficiently good that sulfa-cream is still one of the drugs of choice for treating the disease. Dr. Kuhn relates some other examples of his work with Arabs: "One day two men came to my camp in a two wheel buggy and wanted me to go with them. I told them to go ahead and John (Sgt. John Monroe, a medic) and I would follow them. After about two hours we came to their camp. There we found a young woman that had been in labor two days. John produced some rubber gloves and I found that the baby was in a face up position. There was no bed, the woman was laying on a bedding pad. I was on my knees, and without anaesthesia, I was able to rotate the baby's head and deliver a boy. Needless to say after that my enlisted men never had need for fresh eggs. She was the daughter of one of the local Sheiks.

Because most of our men in the Squadron were young and virile, we had very little sickness other than malaria and the 'GI's.' As a result, I welcomed the patients from the desert.

One evening they brought me a man that had a scalp split open down to the bone and five inches long. I had no choice but to try and stop the bleeding, and suture him up in layers — no x-rays, no anti-biotics — but he came back in five days feeling okay and we took out the sutures. I had many opportunities to visit the native French and Italian people. Some of them had stepped on land mines and had parts of their hands and feet mutilated. We did the best we could under the circumstances and the people were always happy to have some help.

On December 23, 1943, Mohammed Lamine, Pacha-Bey of Tunisia presented me the Nichan Iftikar Medal, third class, for my services to his Tunisian people.³⁴

One enterprising Arab offered to buy a 96th Squadron B-17 for 20,000 eggs when Arabs were selling eggs to the Americans for six cents each.³⁵ When the Group moved from Ain M'Lila, much of the home improvement furniture had to be trashed. It was hauled to a dump to be burned. That wouldn't have been necessary. The Arabs swarmed over the truck before it stopped backing up for the dump. The Group crew didn't have to bother with unloading.³⁶

When the rains came in late September and October, the bivouac area at Massicault turned into a quagmire. The Arabs told the Group that the area would remain wet and flooded until summer. On November 3, the Group started moving to higher ground. The move took until November 7. It rained every day from the 4th to the 8th of November. Innovation turned to stoves. The occupants of practically every tent contrived a stove of one sort or another. For the most part, these were gas, fuel oil or a combination of both, piped into some container of sand, gravel and or rocks.³⁷ Empty barrels were a common fire box. One welder charged \$50.00 for a stove, with a hinged door, fashioned from part of a barrel. Chimneys were a challenge. Some



Capt. Richard F. Kuhn, 96th Squadron Flight Surgeon, and Sgt. John Monroe, medic, giving humanitarian medical treatment to poor Arabs. (Courtesy of H. Fox)



Sunday evening church services in Group briefing room, Massicault, Tunisia, November 1943. Chaplain Capt. Ira B. Allen to left and Cpl. Harris, chaplain's assistant to right of lectern. S/Sgt. Leo H. Heim, choir director at the organ, and choir at the far right. (Courtesy of W. Greenhalgh)

were made of tin cans from the mess hall. Capt. Stoeger stayed up all night making a stovepipe out of five gallon cans, with tin snips, to fit the stove he made of a tomato can with rocks in it. His fuel tank was an airplane windshield deicer tank that had been removed as a potential combat fire hazard.³⁸ Others discovered that 88 mm artillery shell metal shipping cases made excellent chimneys. They had removable caps, and when these were removed, the cases

fit together much like a regular chimney. Troops risk scrounging for them in old German gun emplacements.³⁹

One enduring feature of camp life was regular church services. Catholic mass was usually held Sunday afternoons and Protestant services in the early evening. Jewish services were less regular because a Rabbi had to come from some other location. Special services were conducted on religious holidays. Periodically services were

led by visiting Chaplains from higher headquarters and these were enhanced by visiting choirs. The briefing tent at Chateaudun, the briefing room in the Ain M'Lila warehouse, the briefing room in the former cow barn at Massicault, and the great out-of-doors, all served as chapels. Services were even held in a circus-like tent after all the other tents had already been taken down in preparation for the move from Massicault to Italy. Church services seemed always to be well attended.⁴⁰

Endnotes:

- ¹ Covell, personal history
- ² Wade O. Douglas, diary
- ³ McCoid, Group History, October 1943, page 2
- ⁴ Covell, personal history
- ⁵ Don Stoeger, WW II Private Video; Covell, personal history
- ⁶ Covell, personal history
- ⁷ Ibid
- ⁸ Walt Clausen, "GI Journey," (Second Bombardment Association, Sacramento, CA, 1970) 58
- ⁹ McCoid, Group History, 148
- ¹⁰ Howard Fox, personal account, (Second Bombardment Association Newsletter, June 1994)
- ¹¹ Covell, personal history
- ¹² McCoid, Group History, November 1943, page 2
- ¹³ McCoid, 429th Squadron History, June 1943
- ¹⁴ Douglas diary
- ¹⁵ McCoid, Group History, 43
- ¹⁶ Ibid, 67
- ¹⁷ Mundy, 96th Squadron History, 8-15, 30
- ¹⁸ Covell, personal history
- ¹⁹ Surhe, 49th Squadron History, August 1943, page 25
- ²⁰ McCoid, Group History, 136, 137, 144, 148, 160, 175
- ²¹ Ibid, 88
- ²² Ibid, 130
- ²³ Ibid, 137
- ²⁴ Ibid, 138
- ²⁵ Ibid, 143, 144, 148
- ²⁶ Ibid, 149, 172
- ²⁷ Covell, personal history
- ²⁸ McCoid, Group History, 175; J. Robert Gibson, 20th Squadron History, November 1943, page 2
- ²⁹ Craven and Cate, 204
- ³⁰ Covell, personal history
- ³¹ McCoid, 429th Squadron History, 25
- ³² Ibid, 25
- ³³ Covell, personal history
- ³⁴ Dr. Richard F. Kuhn, captions to photos, undated
- ³⁵ Mundy, 96th Squadron History, July 1943, page 33
- ³⁶ Covell, personal history
- ³⁷ McCoid, Group History, 165
- ³⁸ Donald J. Stoeger, video diary
- ³⁹ Covell, personal history
- ⁴⁰ McCoid, Group History, 115, 126, 148, 152, 160, 175, 184, 189

CHAPTER XII

COMBAT NORTH AFRICA — MASSICAULT

MASSICAULT, TUNISIA

Massicault offered several operational advantages over prior bases. It put the Group about 180 miles east-northeast of Ain M'Lila and cut that distance off of missions in line with the toe of Italy. The savings in distance diminished for targets north of the Italian toe. The other advantage was the dual, parallel runways that yielded operational efficiencies and fuel economy from the rapid assembly procedure. The first mission scheduled from Massicault, the San

of the three men survived, yet they were uninjured, they were first to leave the plane and thus closest to land and their chutes had all opened.

2nd Lts. Ronald E. Beck, N, and William B. Mahood, B, knew something was seriously wrong when a loud explosion, they thought to be an oxygen tank, scattered debris all around the nose compartment. Lt. Beck was the first to leave through the nose hatch. Because they were under attack by fighters, he delayed pulling his rip cord until approximately 3,000 feet altitude. He watched the airplane descend, checked his watch when it crashed into the water at precisely "six (6) minutes and twenty (20) seconds after two (2) o'clock." He hit the water at "14:07." His Mae West inflated but the waist and leg straps were broken making maneuvering difficult. He finally rigged them together with his belt. He took the machete, matches, D-rations and compass from his jungle kit and put them in his pants and jacket pockets. He started swimming to the east when he heard a splash—turned—and saw a big fin about ten feet away. He waved his machete, yelled, kicked and splashed and the shark went away only to return with a second one. Lt. Beck repeated his previous routine. Inexplicably the sharks went away. Beck had been swimming for about six hours, calling every twenty minutes and getting no response, when he decided to lay back and rest a little. Then he heard two voices. He called and started swimming in their direction.

Lt. Mahood opened his chute shortly after jumping. He counted nine other chutes in the air. While descending, two Me-109s circled him so close he could see the pilot's faces, but they never attacked. He hit the water, got out of his chute, and his life vest inflated okay. He took the compass out of the escape kit and started paddling east. A couple hours later two sharks came near. He thrashed in the water. They didn't come any closer. Mahood continued trying to make his way east the rest of the day. At 7:00 that evening he heard someone calling. After an hour of calling back and forth, Mahood and Sgt. Doone reached one another. They tied themselves together with their belts. By then it was completely dark. Miraculously, within an hour, by following the sound of repeated calls, they were joined by Lt. Beck, and within five minutes, Sgt. Haffner came floating in. They all tied themselves together and rested for the night.

After giving the bailout signal, Lt. Chrismon and co-pilot, 2nd Lt. Robert L. Kurz, set the airplane on autopilot. Chrismon pulled back the throttles to let all planes pass and he and Kurz started for the bomb bay to bail out. They saw T/Sgt. Wells A. Macoy back in the waist. Macoy had on his Mae West, flight jacket, a winter flying suit and coveralls, over an OD uniform! He was so bulked-up he couldn't buckle his parachute. He had taken off his Mae West and was taking off his flight jacket when Chrismon and Kurz got to him. The fire had spread and the heat was now intense. There was only time for Chrismon and Kurz to buckle the chest and one leg strap on Macoy's chute. Kurz bailed out the waist door followed by Macoy and Chrismon. Kurz chute didn't open. He reached around and "pulled something" with both hands. "Something" worked, the chute opened. Later he discovered he had put the chest

pack parachute on backwards! Macoy, to his immense relief, didn't fall out of his harness when his chute opened.

Once in the water, Kurz's Mae West wouldn't inflate and he couldn't twist the valves around to the open position to manually inflate it. Reluctant to give up on his only floatation device, Kurz continued to struggle with it for half an hour without success. Disheartened, he abandoned it. He took off all his clothes, except his under shirt, and tried to just float to conserve energy.

Macoy, without a life vest, landed within a quarter mile of the plane. He removed all his heavy clothes and started swimming toward the plane. He found a yellow raft that had been blown from the plane, but only half of it would inflate. The other half had a hole burned in it. He crawled in.

Chrismon hit the water at "14:18" hours. That's when his watch stopped. His Mae West inflated. He was within a half mile of the plane and in little over an hour he joined Macoy in the half-inflated raft. While swimming toward the plane, Chrismon found the other life raft. It was unserviceable but he did retrieve two cans of water from it.

Meanwhile, Kurz had been floating for about an hour when a swell carried him high enough to see a life raft in the distance. He yelled. They waved a paddle. He swam toward them until near exhaustion. "Then a shark came in close, and I kicked him with my feet, he would go away for half a minute or so, and I would either kick him or butt him with my hand, he rubbed against me several times, and I had to keep turning around in the water so that I could see him in time to ward him off." Chrismon and Macoy could plainly see the frantic Kurz trying to stave off the menacing shark. They paddled furiously, but the water-swamped raft was agonizingly slow. After interminable terror, Chrismon and Macoy arrived. They dragged and rolled the exhausted Kurz into the raft. The fingers on his left hand and his left arm were bleeding from the shark encounters! There was no first aid kit. Kurz held his arm up into the breeze, it dried, and the bleeding stopped. With three now in the raft, it sank even lower in the water. Chrismon had to get out of the raft to blow up the good half by mouth. Later they found a hand pump for raft inflation, but still sat in water. They spent a sleepless night fighting off the sharks with paddles, and with Kurz cold and suffering a pain in his side. One shark cut Chrismon's heel.

The three men drifted most of the next day, after paddling proved futile. They found two more small cans of water and a little chocolate in the raft. They rationed themselves to one can of water and part of the chocolate that day. That evening a B-26 Marauder, with British markings, flew over. The three signalled frantically and Chrismon was successful in getting one flare to fire. The Marauder circled, then dropped dinghies and some other objects half a mile away. Shortly, three Me-109s appeared and the Marauder left. The fighters circled briefly and flew away. That night was miserably cold. Trying to attract the Marauder, the three men had stood up, fell out of the raft and were still wet when the sun went down.

The Marauder had dropped four one-man

rafts and other articles over the other four crewmen. Two rafts proved unserviceable and one of the good ones had a small hole and a leaky valve. The other articles were never retrieved. They spent the night, two men to a raft, with Beck and Haffner sharing the task of keeping hands and fingers on the leaks. During the night a shark circled the raft, pressing so close that its fin knocked Haffner's finger off the leaky valve. The men kept quiet and the shark did nothing more than circle.

After sunrise the next morning, the two groups made contact. The four-man group was too spent to tell how they were except that they needed water. Chrismon gave them two of the remaining three cans. They tied all the rafts together. At 7:45, according to Mahood's waterproof watch, a PBY came searching in the area but apparently didn't see them. Another thirty minutes passed before they were able to attract the attention of a Bristol. The Bristol circled for about forty-five minutes, then left. Within minutes, five P-38s were over head. They circled and circled until the PBY returned, landed and hauled the thoroughly exhausted crew aboard. It was 9:45, forty-three hours and twenty-seven minutes since Chrismon's watch had stopped.⁴

The crew was flown to the 56th Evacuation Hospital in Bizerte. Chrismon called the 96th Squadron from the airport. Capt. Kuhn, the 96th Flight Surgeon, drove to Bizerte and consulted with doctors. Chrismon went back to camp that afternoon. The others stayed in the hospital over night. That night the Germans raided Bizerte and a bomb exploded across the road from the hospital. The rest of the crew returned to the 96th Squadron the afternoon of August 7.⁵

Lt. Chrismon continued to fly. On the second mission after being shot down, he was co-pilot to Lt. Patrick G. Train when they were forced to make a crash landing near the field, after dark, with three engines out. Chrismon was later promoted to captain, became commander of the 20th and completed fifty missions. Lts. Kurz and Mahood were transferred back to the U.S. September 25, 1943. Lt. Beck completed fifty missions on October 15, 1943 and was ordered back to the States. T/Sgts. Doone and Macoy and S/Sgt. Haffner completed fifty missions on November 10, 1943 and were returned to the States.

The story of the rescue spread rapidly through the camp and was embellished as it spread. The crew had been literally plucked out of the Bay of Naples in full view of the harbor while P-38s defied the enemy to interfere. The embellishment, in part, reflected air crew hunger for assurance that if they went down in the water someone would come. Ever since the loss of the first crew on the May 9 Mother's Day raid on Palermo, each trip across the Mediterranean was accompanied by the foreboding specter of possible abandonment. Lt. Thompson's crew had gone down, and all ten men were seen floating in their life jackets as two Squadron mates circled over head calling their exact position to air-sea rescue, then nothing. Again, on the July 8 mission to Gerbini, 2nd Lt. Kline and crew were shot down over water at mid-day on a Thursday. Within an hour a P-51 was circling over head. At that time Lts.

Kocher, the navigator and Grace, the copilot, and several others were still alive. Some time that night Lt. Grace died. Lt. Kocher was finally picked up Saturday night about 9:00 P.M. by a passing destroyer. He had been in the water more than fifty-five hours since being sighted by the P-51. He was the only survivor. Because of these experiences, many crews viewed air-sea rescue as an empty promise; a myth propagated to pump up morale. At least with the Chrismon crew rescue there was budding hope that airmen downed in the water would no longer be abandoned.

MISSION 53, AUGUST 6, 1943

MESSINA, SICILY, HIGHWAY BRIDGE

MISSION 54, AUGUST 9, 1943

MESSINA, SICILY, HIGHWAY BRIDGE

The ground campaign in Sicily had made steady progress. By the first week in August, Axis forces had been pushed back into the northeast end of the island. This was all mountainous terrain with narrow roads curving through canyons and around steep cliffs – easy to defend and simple to mine and destroy to delay the Allies. Messina took on increasing importance as the Axis point of evacuation. The highway and bridge were now in constant use by the enemy. The 2nd preceded the 99th over the target. There was a heavy concentration of bombs on the target and the bridge was believed to be severely damaged if not demolished. Flak was moderate to intense and slightly damaged fourteen aircraft. Fighters were absent, probably because after August 1 there were no enemy fighters based in Sicily.

The highway bridge on the second mission was north of the one attack on the 6th. Maj. Caruthers led the mission with Gen. Doolittle as copilot. This was the second time the General had flown with the Group, only to have it jinxed by weather. On his first mission, the Group was forced to abort because of weather. On this one, the target was under 9/10s cloud cover. Bombs were dropped in the town and port area, damaging commercial buildings, the customs house and naval installations. Flak did nominal damage to eight Group planes. No enemy fighters were seen. As would be learned later, in spite of both Tactical and Strategic efforts, the Axis effected a more successful withdrawal than should have been allowed. The withdrawal had been carefully planned and started during the latter part of July. A small fleet of craft operated day and night and could cross the narrow Messina straits in minutes. According to Admiral Karl Doenitz these craft could transport up to 7,000 men with equipment, and 10,000 without equipment, daily. From August 11 to 17, the Germans and Italians, working independently and with extensive use of night traffic, evacuated more than 100,000 men, 9,800 vehicles, 47 tanks, 150 guns and 17,000 tons of munitions and stores.⁶

The Group salvaged something from General Doolittle's visit. He was complimentary of the war room.

Landing on the return in low visibility in dust, 2nd Lt. Elias Dahir of the 49th Squadron hit the berm along the drainage ditch at the end of the runway. He went around, giving his crew the option of bailing out and they unanimously

agreed to stay with him. The landing went well until a tire blew out on the roll causing the wheel to rotate back and lock against the wing. The sudden stop pitched the airplane up on its nose and left wing. The nose, left engines and wing were all damaged. The crew was unhurt. The airplane was turned over to the Service Squadron for repair.⁷

MISSION 55, AUGUST 13, 1943

ROME, ITALY, SOUTH END SAN LORENZO MARSHALLING YARDS

The 99th Group was assigned the north end of the yards. The Groups attacked shortly before noon. Independent observers and photo interpreters judged the results to be very good. Many fires were started and heavy smoke spewed up. Forty-five minutes earlier, B-25s, B26s, and the 97th and 301st Groups attacked the Littorio yards. The 2nd came away from this mission untouched.

That evening twenty B-24s landed at the base on the return flight from a raid on the Daimler Airframe Works at Weiner Neustadt, Austria. The mission was more than 1,200 miles long, forcing intermediate stops on the return to their bases near Bengasi, Libya. The raid achieved almost complete tactical surprise. Four of the five groups met no opposition. One, faced five to ten fighters at the target and another ten or fifteen over the southeastern tip of Italy, and lost two planes. The B-24s were part of the 44th, 93rd, 98th, 376th and 389th Groups loaned from the Eighth Air Force to the Ninth Air Force for the raid on the Ploesti, Rumania oil refineries on August 1. They returned to Bengasi the next morning.⁸

MISSION 56, AUGUST 17, 1943 MARSEILLE, FRANCE AREA AIRDROMES — GROUPE I/LE TUBE

During the last weeks of the Sicilian campaign, the Germans increased their bombing activity. They attacked Allied targets in Sicily, shipping in North African ports and along ship convoy routes. They attacked Bizerte on August 4 and 14. NACAF fighters kept total damage small. Most of the German bombers operated from Italy but Allied reconnaissance disclosed 140 He-111s, Do-217s and Ju-88s based in southern France. This was a marked increase in strength.⁹ The four B-17 groups were sent after them in a maximum effort mission. The 2nd, in its largest single strike ever to date, put 49 airplanes, out of a total force of 180, over the target. Maj. Melcher led the Group. One of the 2nd's assigned targets, Istres, was completely covered with smoke and dust. The Group bombed Le Tube' instead. Photos showed 195 aircraft visible on the field at the Fifth Wing attack time. Of these, fragmentation bombs destroyed 68 and damaged 20. Also there were gliders on the field and 45 of these were destroyed and 16 damaged. Hangars, service facilities and probable assembly buildings were severely damaged and some set on fire. At Groupe I there were 31 aircraft on the field. The raid destroyed four, damaged several facilities and set the fuel storage on fire.

As a counter-air mission the raid was hugely successful. In all, 94 enemy aircraft were destroyed on the ground and 28 others damaged. The Group claimed one probable from the six fighters that attack, had one man wounded and lost one airplane to flak. Lt. Carroll L. Fisher, 429th, in plane number 42-30388, "Sunny Boy," was hit by flak before reaching the target. The



Gunner crew briefing for mission 56 to Marseille, France, August 17, 1943. L to R: Capt. Koller, Gp. navigator; Lt. Col. John N. Melcher, Dep. Gp. Cdr.; T/Sgt. McMurdo, UTG; S/Sgt. Martel, WG; S/Sgt. Rzonca, TG; S/Sgt. Casselberry, WG; and T/Sgt. Garone, ROG. (Courtesy of R. Amos)

burst smashed into the right wing area setting the number 4 engine on fire. The flames spread along the right wing and fuselage. The right wing came off, the plane began to spin down, out of control, then started to disintegrate as the fuselage separated just aft of the radio room. Witnesses gave mixed counts of six and seven chutes.¹⁰

According to liberated crew members, seven survived. 2nd Lt. Henry W. Kinnan, CP, 2nd Lt. Harry M. Ochocki, N, 2nd Lt. Orville H. Taylor, B, and T/Sgt. Henry R. Petroski, UTG, all bailed out through the front hatch. S/Sgt. Harry S. Barrett, TG, went out his escape hatch. Lt. Fisher left through the bomb bay. Sgt. Edward J. Kasper, LWG, went out his waist window because the waist door jettison control was jammed. Sgt. Donald R. Turner, LTG, S/Sgt. Warren C. Ziegler, RWG, and S/Sgt. Dominic L. Karcich, ROG, were all still in the waist trying to free the jammed waist door, when Sgt. Kasper decided to leave through his waist window. It is believed the three men waited too long before seeking an alternate egress.

German sources told survivors that the bodies of Sgts. Turner and Ziegler were found in the airplane waist wreckage. Sgt. Kasper's German captors put Sgt. Karcich's body in the same truck used to haul Kasper to captivity. Sgt. Turner was not a regular member of the air crew. He was a turret maintenance specialist substituting on this mission for the regular ball turret gunner killed on the August 4 mission to Naples.

Lt. Kinnan and Sgt. Petroski were taken to a German hospital at Arles, France for treatment of wounds and bailout injuries. The other four crew members tried to evade and escape but were unsuccessful.¹¹

The conquest of Sicily was completed August 17, 38 days after the invasion. General Marshall reported that the Axis lost 167,000; 130,000 Italians and 37,000 Germans. The Allies lost 31,158 killed, wounded and missing.¹² One of the main reasons for the comparatively smaller Allied loss was its overwhelming air superiority. Systematic, persistent and heavy bombing of the enemy airfields drove more and more of the German and Italian airplanes out of the island, until there were none based there. The enemy was forced to abandon 1,100 aircraft, 600 of them German. Approximately 740 more were lost in combat with Allied air forces. NAAF losses were about 375 planes.¹³

MISSION 57, AUGUST 19, 1943 FOGGIA, ITALY, TRANSFORMER STATION/ MARSHALLING YARDS

Foggia was the most wrenching mission of 1943, yet the bombing results were among the most successful. The five aircraft losses on this mission would turn out to be third highest of any single mission, albeit a distant third, of the 412 missions flown by the Group during WW II. Fourteen were lost on mission 150 to Steyr, Austria on February 24, 1944 and 9 were lost on mission 263 to the Moravska Ostrava, Czechoslovakia, Privoser Oil Refinery, on August 29, 1944. In terms of lives lost — 29 — it was the second-most costly mission in the Group/Wing's history.

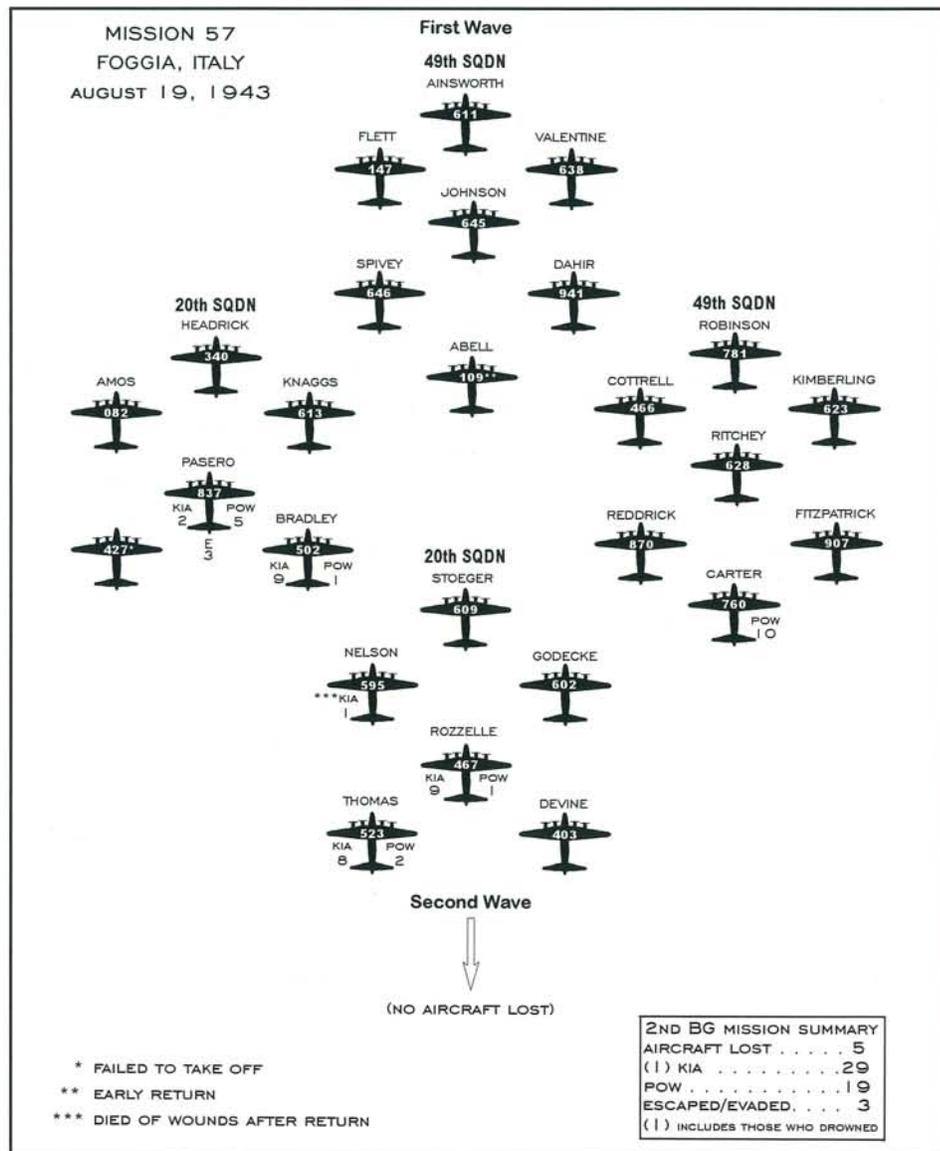
Plans and preparations for the invasion of Italy by the British at Reggio, (code name BAYTOWN), and the Americans and British at Salerno, (code name AVALANCHE), moved forward rapidly with the fall of Sicily. The war plans for these invasions called for Strategic Air Forces to attack enemy airfields in central and southern Italy up to September 2, to prevent enemy build-up and force movement of Axis air forces to more northerly bases. Once this requirement had been met, remaining available air effort was to be directed at lines of communication. Strategic Air had gone a long way toward realizing these two objectives by the end of the Sicilian campaign. All of the more important enemy airfields in southern Italy had been largely neutralized except for Foggia and its satellites. Likewise, considerable progress had been made toward destroying and disrupting the rail system. The greater part of the supplies moving southward had to pass through one or more of three choke points: Rome, Naples and Foggia. Thus Foggia was of paramount importance in fulfilling both the counter-air and interdiction objectives.¹⁴

On August 16, B-24s of the Ninth Air Force attacked the Foggia airfield complex. They were

engaged by 75 to 100 fighters, lost 8 airplanes and shot down 45 enemy aircraft.¹⁵

The 2nd and the 301st led the first of the day-long and night assaults against Foggia on August 19. The 97th and 99th followed an hour later. Then came 77 Liberators, followed that night by British Wellingtons. Maj. Ainsworth led the 2nd's forty-two airplanes against the Foggia electrical sub-station, marshalling yards and the city. The results were exceptional. Bombs smothered the sub-station and caused a large explosion. Numerous hits were scored on the marshalling yards. Locomotive and repair shops, rolling stock and near-by factories all suffered considerable damage. The rail lines connecting Naples, Bari and Manfredonia were cut. When the British Eighth Army entered Foggia on September 28 it reported that this attack, together with later bombings, has been "most effective" and that the damage surpassed all earlier estimates.¹⁶

For its part, the 2nd had twenty-seven airplanes damaged by flak, ten men wounded, one of whom died the next day, and five planes knocked down by flak and fighters — four from the 20th and one from the 49th. One rogue P-38 was seen flying in a formation of Me-109s. It





Foggia, Italy, August 19, 1943 -- strike! (Courtesy of M. Caruthers)



2nd Lt. John (NMI) Bradley shot down on first mission as crew commander flying with a replacement crew on the August 19, 1943 mission to Foggia, Italy. Lt. Bradley had flown as co-pilot with Lt. Col. Thomas on five of the first ten Group missions. (Courtesy of R. Amos)



The Pasero crew on the move from Ain M'Lila to Massiacault. They were shot down nineteen days later on the August 19, 1943 mission to Foggia, Italy. Back L to R: Sgt. Charles M. Stewart, RWG; S/Sgt. Edgar N. MacDonald, LWG; Sgt. Jerome J. Herzing, LTG; Sgt. Harold O. Lee, ROG; 1st Lt. Kemp F. Martin, N. Front L to R: 1st Lt. Kelley H. Erwin, B; 1st Lt. Bernard B. Pasero, P; 2nd Lt. Donald H. Porter, CP; T/Sgt. Robert H. Eaton, UTG; Sgt. Raymond J. Farrell, TG. (Courtesy of K. Martin)

broke from the formation, fired on one B-17, then flew away.¹⁷

The first to go down was 2nd Lt. John Bradley and crew in number 42-30502. He was flying the right wing of his element leader, Lt. Pasero. Both planes lost two engines to flak over the target. The element began to lag and was soon set upon by fifteen to twenty emboldened fighters. The fighters chose Bradley as the most opportune victim. In the short, one-sided battle, the out-gunned Fortress was set afire. It moved to the right away from the element, and one chute

appeared before the plane exploded, blowing off both wings and sending the fuselage on an end-over-end tumble to an explosive crash.¹⁸ Later an Italian civil police Captain told Pasero they had counted nine bodies in the wreckage and three unexploded bombs.¹⁹ Lt. Bradley had been Pasero's copilot. This was his first mission as a crew commander.

The one survivor who bailed out was S/Sgt. James J. Bradley, left waist gunner. He saw the right waist gunner, Sgt. John T. Westmoreland get hit and go down. The ball turret, operated by

S/Sgt. Eugene P. O'Brien, had fired only a few bursts, then went silent. Sgt. Bradley was hit in the knee by 20 mm fire and went to the radio room and found T/Sgt. Maynard T. Rogers, the radio man, on the floor. Lts. Bradley and J. D. McPhee, pilot and copilot, had both been shot and although the engines were still running, the plane was out of control. Sgt. Bradley bailed out at 15,000 feet. He was captured, and repatriated on March 13, 1944.²⁰

With Bradley out of the way, the fighters were now free to go after Pasero, and crew in airplane

42-5837, “ ‘ C’ Batt.” Withering 20 mm cannon fire quickly enfeebled the already ailing airplane and wounded five crew members. The tail gunner, Sgt. Raymond J. Ferrell, had numerous slight wounds on his face and arms. Sgt. Charles M. Steward, RWG, had a badly mangled left leg. S/Sgt. Edgar Neil MacDonald, LWG, was first hit in the shoulder and knocked down. He got up and continued firing. Then he took a hit in the heel and a worse one in the right leg just above the ankle.²¹ With his radios out, elevator controls shot away, two engines out and a third now on fire, Pasero rang the emergency alarm bell signalling bailout. The two waist gunners and the tail gunner all left by the main fuselage door. By the time Sgt. Jerome J. Herzing, LTG, got to the door, flames from the number three engine fire were being swept back past the door. He exited through the left waist window. Pasero set the plane on autopilot. By now the cockpit was filling with smoke. The copilot, 2nd Lt. Donald H. Porter, and top turret gunner, T/Sgt. Robert H. Eaton, went out through the bomb bay. Pasero went back to jump from the bomb bay. It was then that he noticed Sgt. Harold O. Lee sitting on the radio room floor with his hands over his face. He had been hit by numerous 20 mm fragments and was bleeding from wounds about the face and neck. Pasero urged him out and both jumped from the bomb bay, Pasero waiting momentarily for tracer bullets to stop passing underneath the plane.²²

In the nose, the navigator, Lt. Kemp F. Martin, and bombardier, Lt. Kelley H. Erwin had been busily engaged with the fighters. One of the fighters pressed a very close attack and Martin saw his counter-fire tracers hitting near the cockpit. The fighter pulled up sharply, winged over into a steep dive with heavy smoke pouring from the airplane. Later, one of the gunners said he saw the plane crash into an adjacent mountain. When the nose section began to fill with smoke, Martin opened the astrodome for ventilation. The resulting wind noise and their gun fire prevented the two crewmen from hearing the bailout alarm. Martin had a habit of unzipping the insulated upholstery padding at the back of the nose compartment so he could see up into the cockpit. After firing the last blast at the fighter, Martin glanced up into the cockpit. It was empty. He immediately prepared to bailout through the nose hatch. At the time Martin jumped, Erwin signalled he was ready to follow.²³

Martin's chute oscillated violently making him nauseated. He landed in an apple tree and sprained his back. A civilian crowd gathered. He was taken to a nearby farm house, where one of his captors punched him in the face. The assailant was removed. The farmer offered food and wine but Martin was too nauseated to eat. Two civilian authorities arrived and escorted him to the nearby village. He was again assaulted in route by a stinging blow to the back of his head. He was taken to the police station at Pantalainorte where he met Porter and Lee. Porter's lip had been cut completely through. Martin had slight flak wounds to his right thigh and left side. The Italians administered first aid but their supplies were meager to non-existent — very little dressing material, a teaspoon of iodine in a glass of water for antiseptic wash and worn and rusty instruments. Porter's lip was

taped together using bandages and adhesive tape from Martin's first aid kit. Lee's many shrapnel wounds were cleaned but not dressed. Later that afternoon, Lt. Erwin's parachute was placed in the room with them. The implication was that Lt. Erwin had died on impact, due either to failure or malfunction of the back pack parachute. That evening they were served a generous meal of food and wine which was more than they could eat. About 9:00 P.M., a priest came in and told them that Lt. Erwin was dead. Martin asked the priest to provide a Catholic burial and the priest agreed. That night the three slept on the floor at the police station. The next morning they were taken by motor car to Avolona and later that day were joined by Pasero, Eaton, Ferrell and Herzing. At some point the Italian police brought in equipment and items worn by the crew for Lt. Pasero to examine, in order to identify that belonging to Lt. Erwin. Pasero noted that Lt. Erwin's steel helmet was not dented or misshapen in any way that might indicate an impact from Erwin's fall.²⁴

Pasero landed on the roof of a two-story building, but when his chute collapsed it pulled him off. Fortunately he fell on his jungle kit, and though dazed by the fall, he was otherwise all right. When he came to, he was surrounded by civilians and an Italian Sergeant. One civilian had a shot gun. After assuring themselves that Pasero wasn't armed, they took him to a nearby house and offered him food — bread, fruit and pork. Pasero couldn't eat. The Italian Sergeant came and took him to the town jail in Cuisano. That evening he was driven by pickup truck to Avellino where he spent the night in the ante room of the police station. The next morning, Eaton, Farrell and Herzing were brought in. That afternoon Martin, Porter and Lee were brought to Avellino and put in the guard house at the officer's candidate school. The next day all seven of them were taken to Benevento and placed in a room upstairs over the Headquarters of the Italian Third Air Force. Here they were thoroughly searched and everything taken away from them — including jewelry and identification tags — except for a compass in Martin's collar button.²⁵

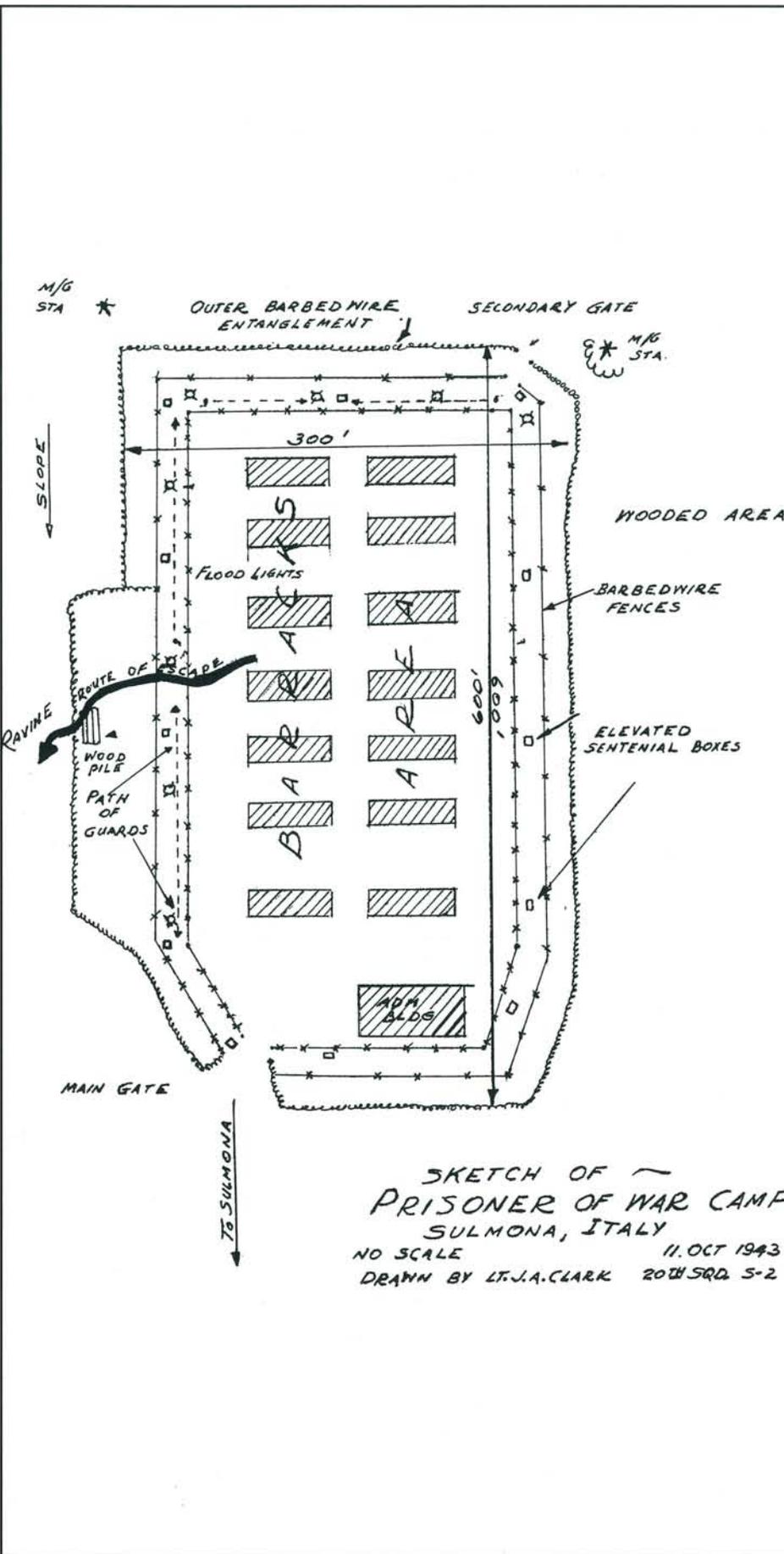
Early the next morning the crew was put on a train, with an individual guard for each prisoner, and taken to a small railroad station in the suburbs of Rome. They were taken by truck to the main railway station where they waited several hours before being taken by truck to a suburban station north of Rome and put on a train, and taken to a prisoner of war camp at Poggio Mierteto, about forty kilometers northeast of Rome. Here they were thoroughly searched again, interrogated and put in solitary confinement. The interrogation went on intermittently for about two weeks. The Italian interrogating officer was relatively friendly, but security was very tight. They were fed in their rooms and allowed to exercise in the open, under guard, approximately one hour each day. On the sixth day Porter was put in Pasero's room and on the eighth day, Martin joined them. On September 5 they were transferred to a camp at Chieti, Italy, on the Adriatic Sea, approximately 145 kilometers north of Foggia. Here they met Capt. Jack Bentley, his navigator, Capt. Groom and bombardier, Lt. Heaberg, who had been shot down June 21 on a Naples raid, 2nd Lt. Richard M.

Bentley, copilot on Lt. McIntyre's plane shot down over Messina, July 14, and 2nd Lt. Robert E. Kingsbury, copilot on Lt. Richard E. Rozzelle's plane, shot down on the same Foggia mission, August 19.

Some time after the armistice with Italy was signed on September 3, the prisoners were told that the Germans had been to the camp, but had said as long as no one escaped, they wouldn't take over the camp. The Germans came every day to take inventory of the prisoners. Several days passed, then the prisoners woke one morning to find the camp heavily guarded by German paratroopers. The German officers made several rigid inspections. The Germans assured the prisoners they wouldn't be moved because there was no transportation available. This was a false promise. The prisoners were soon moved to another camp at Sulmona, about 35 kilometers southwest of Chieti. That same day the Germans announced that the prisoners would be taken to Germany the next day.

The prisoner of war camp at Sulmona was located on the side of a hill. Three barbed wire fences enclosed twelve to fourteen barracks and an administration building. The compound was approximately 300 feet by 600 feet and was well guarded with machine gun stations and sentinel posts. Midway along the 600 foot, down-hill side of the compound, there was a ravine. The ravine was the turning point for guards pacing that side of the compound. It, and a nearby wood pile held promise as an enticing alternative to a prison camp in Germany. Pasero timed how long it took the guards to walk their post. He filled a box with toilet articles and a blue sweater given to him by a British soldier. He tied the box and tossed it over the fence into the ravine. A guard dismissed it as trash. That evening at supper Pasero, Porter and Martin discussed and agreed on an escape attempt that night. They secured several short lengths of rope to tie the barbed wire strands together. At dark, Pasero got under the fences undetected, hiding briefly between the outer two fence lines for the guard to pass, and tying the strands to give better clearance. He was soon joined by Martin and Lt. Harry Elliot, a copilot from the 97th, who joined the escape, uninvited, and on impulse at the last moment. Porter didn't come. The three escapees were a couple hundred yards away when the camp erupted — shots, flares, shouting and the sound of running through the brush. They heard search parties but weren't discovered. Later they were told by friendly Italians that the Germans had shot two prisoners who attempted to escape the same night.

The escapees walked all night. At daylight they met an Italian on a secondary road. Fortunately, he proved friendly. He warned them against going into the town ahead because there were those who would turn them in to the Germans for reward. They were to hide in the woods until the Italian returned from work that afternoon. They did and met as agreed. That night they hid in the hills and the next morning the friendly Italian brought them the food and clothing they had asked for. Later they made contact with an American citizen who lived in the area. That person told them they were in great danger because the Germans were conscripting labor to be taken to Germany. This person mapped an escape route south off the main roads, gave them



Lts. Pasero and Martin upon return to the Group at Massicault, Tunisia, October 11, 1943. (Courtesy of R. Amos)

a good supply of bread and apples in a gunny sack, and walked six miles to lead them out of the Sulmona valley. They traveled south keeping to back roads, sheep trails, and away from main roads. Friendly peasants gave them food and water. At a crucial point, in the hills, they chanced upon an old man who told them they should go no further. There were numerous German machine gun nests and patrols in the area. He took them to his barn where they hid for five days. The old farmer brought them food morning and evening. While there they witnessed several skirmishes between German and Allied patrols. On the morning of the sixth day, the old farmer told them the Germans had withdrawn during the night. They immediately headed toward the Allied lines. Their first contact with friendly forces was with Canadians. They were taken to the division headquarters, interrogated, given more food and clothing, and a room for the night in the town of Luce. The next morning they were taken to the advance Air Force Headquarters at FOGGIA! That afternoon they were flown to El Aouina airdrome in Tunis and driven to 12th Air Force Headquarters in Tunis, but it was too late to meet with Gen. Doolittle. Pasero and Martin were brought back to the 20th Squadron area at Massicault in Doolittle's staff car. It was October 9, fifty days since they bailed out.²⁶ The following day Pasero and Martin went back to 12th Air Force Headquarters, met with Gens. Spaatz and Doolittle, and told their story of capture, escape and evasion. When they had finished, Doolittle ask them the dates of their rank as 1st Lieutenants, told, he promoted them on the spot to captains.²⁷

Pasero's two waist gunners, S/Sgt MacDonald and Sgt. Stewart, both badly wounded and among the first to leave the airplane, were never able to join the rest of the crew. MacDonald lost his oxygen mask in the midst of the air battle and several minutes before he bailed out. He was suffering fatigue, shock and the pain of his wounded leg. During his parachute descent he detached the first aid kit that was strapped to his parachute harness, took out the morphine syrette, rolled up his sleeve and

Schematic of Sulmona, Italy POW camp from which Lts. Bernard Pasero, and Kemp Martin, 2nd Bomb Group, and Harry Elliot, 97th Bomb Group, escaped. (Courtesy of R. Amos)

injected himself. Once on the ground, his attempt to hide his chute and escape, failed. He was soon surrounded by a hostile crowd of men, women and children. An elderly man hit him over the head with an axe. When they learned he wasn't armed, they became less belligerent, but still disrobed him of his flying clothing, and took his watch, identification tags and escape purse as they dragged him to a small settlement. An Italian soldier arrived, took charge of the prisoner and escorted him to a large house in the community. Here he met Stewart whose wounded leg was nearly severed. In a few minutes two Italian men came in. One professed to be a doctor and proceeded to finish cutting off Stewart's leg with some sharp knife or razor-like instrument. He had no medicine or bandages. MacDonald's wounds went untreated except for the antiseptic powder he had sprinkled on the them just as the mob accosted him. By this time the Italian soldier had secured a truck. The two prisoners were put into it, together with several Italian soldiers, and driven to St. Angelo about six miles away.

At St. Angelo they were taken to the town's doctor who had a small surgical clinic in his home. The doctor was assisted by his son who was also a doctor. The older doctor showed great concern for the two wounded men. Sgt. Stewart was put on the operating table and the doctor surgically trimmed the botched amputation and dressed the stump. Again, there were few medical supplies. But Sgt. Stewart had lost so much blood and was in such a state of shock from his harrowing experience, that he died on the operating table. This visibly grieved the old doctor. The doctor next cleaned and dressed MacDonald's wounds. During the time that MacDonald was in the doctor's care, they used only two bandages. Each day the soiled one was removed and washed to be used again. The doctor prevailed upon Italian military authorities to leave MacDonald in his hospital rather than remove him to a military hospital, on the pretext that he suffered from so much shock it would be dangerous to move him. MacDonald was put in one of the small hospital rooms where he stayed for thirty-seven days.

Once in bed, MacDonald slept for fifty-four hours. On the fourth day, an Italian captain, lieutenant, two government officials and an interpreter came to interrogate MacDonald. MacDonald gave them his name, rank and serial number, feigned illness and turned his face to the wall. The interrogators left. Soon thereafter two guards were placed outside his door, around-the-clock, until the armistice was signed. While still under guard, townspeople were allowed to visit him. The visitors brought meager amounts of food and letters from family members who were interned in the U.S.

During those thirty-seven days, MacDonald never left his room. The doctor continually cautioned him not to show signs of recovery lest he be evacuated to a prison camp just outside the city. A few days after the armistice, a German Captain drove to the clinic, and asked about the prisoner. The doctor told him the prisoner was not in condition to be moved. The Captain left without further questioning. MacDonald was liberated when the Allied 45th Infantry Division captured the town. The old civilian doctor and his son, who so befriended MacDonald, were reported favorably to a major in the Medical Corps at the first medi-

cal detachment contacted. The detachment was to move into that area within a very short time.²⁸

S/Sgt. MacDonald spent several weeks in evacuation hospitals before being returned to the Group at Massicault on November 27, 1943. He transferred with the Group to Italy in December and was waiting orders assigning him back to the States when he learned that his father was looking for him. His father, a Merchant Marine Chief First Officer, had arranged a trip on a merchant ship to the Mediterranean when word came that Sgt. MacDonald was an Italian prisoner of war. The father decided it was too late to change plans so he sailed anyway. His ship docked in Italy, but he was told his son's unit was in Africa. So he went to Africa in search of information about his son. Sgt. MacDonald learned that his father had gone to Africa and he got permission to go there. Through a mutual acquaintance, Sgt. MacDonald was able to appear, completely unexpected, for a joyful reunion on his father's ship. An understanding Air Force captain had orders cut authorizing Sgt. MacDonald to return to the U.S. aboard his father's ship.²⁹

The toll for that wretched day over Foggia was far from over. Lt. Richard E. Rozzelle, a veteran pilot, was flying a new crew — that of 2nd Lt. Robert E. Kingsbury on its third mission. Kingsbury's copilot, 2nd Lt. Herbert J. Schachtschneider, was flying his third mission as copilot with 2nd Lt. Herbert D. Thomas who was also shot down. Rozzelle was leading the second element in the second squadron of the 20th, in plane number 42-20467, "Big Jeff." His plane was seen to be in trouble a few miles off the Italian coast. The number 3 engine was on fire and the plane began to fall behind the formation. As flames from the engine fire spread toward the fuselage, five crewmen bailed out. The uncontrolled plane went into a series of turns and dives and in the end it hit the water in a glancing blow, crashed and burst into flame. 2nd Lt. Robert G. Kingsbury, CP, was the only survivor. He got out of his chute okay, inflated his Mae West and started swimming east toward land. Before long he abandoned all the excess weight except under shorts, and the waterproofed escape kit, containing a knife, candy bars, matches and a flare. These items proved of no use. During a pause he opened the escape kit and a wave took the candy, matches and flare. Later the knife would literally threaten his life. Kingsbury spent thirty-one hours in a lonely struggle to survive. He suffered excruciating sunburn and life-numbing fatigue. His yells went unanswered. He bore the taunting irony of having a British air-sea rescue plane fly, unseeing, directly over him, spraying water in his face from its prop wash. He was followed and circled for twenty minutes by two sharks. He clutched his knife, prepared to fight them off, only to have a wave whip the knife into an unintended nick in his bare thigh. The bleeding was slight, but he was terrorized by his own imagination about what such a powerful lure might bring. The sharks took no heed and never came closer than about one hundred feet. Resisting the temptation to give up, Kingsbury doggedly kept stroking in the direction of land. Sometime around 7:00 P.M. August 20, he staggered ashore and collapsed. He awoke to find himself surrounded by Italian civilians. Shortly thereafter, an Italian sentry took him into custody. He put in a stint recovering and recuperating in an

Italian hospital. Subsequently, he was confined at Poggio with several other prisoners from the 2nd, including Lt. Pasero who, following his escape and evasion, brought back news of his meeting with Kingsbury. Lt. Kingsbury was transferred with the other 2nd prisoners to Sulmona, and when the Germans took over, he was taken to Stalag Luft III, eighty miles southeast of Berlin, where he spent the rest of the war.³⁰

Lt. John T. Carter and crew were assigned to the 49th as a new crew on June 25. On the Foggia mission they were flying aircraft number 42-29760 as "Tail End Charlie" in one of the 49th's two squadron formations. The plane was seen to be in trouble a few miles off the Italian coast line. It was below and ahead of its formation and was being attack by fighters. The fighters were taking deadly aim with 20 mm cannon shells that appeared to be exploding right into the fuselage. The flagging plane, now trailing smoke and flames, made a slow descending turn to the right. Chutes began to appear. The number of chutes sighted varied from two to seven, but eye witness sightings were interrupted by the plane disappearing from view and attention being diverted to fight off attackers. By now the plane was about thirty miles off shore. It continued circling to the right steadily losing altitude then crashed into the sea.³¹ All of the crew survived, were captured, interned and spent the rest of the war as prisoners.³²

2nd Lt. Herbert D. Thomas flying plane number 42-29523, "Precious," was on Lt. Rozzelle's left wing in the second element of the second squadron of planes from the 20th. When the formation was approximately five miles off Licosa Point, to the southeast along the coast of the Gulf of Salerno, a Ma-202 took up a position barely more than forty feet directly above Thomas's plane. The fighter stayed there long enough to drop twelve to fifteen aerial bombs which exploded with a red flash and white smoke. The bombs fell in trail on either side of the airplane suggesting they were dropped from wing mounts. Gunners, who saw the attack, were afraid to fire on the fighter for fear of hitting the Fortress. The top turret gunner on the Thomas crew, S/Sgt. Stanley J. Mikula, was busy firing at fighters attacking from the rear and apparently never saw the one above him because he didn't fire on it. The Fortress began to slip out of formation, and fifteen miles off Licosa Point, it started to circle and dive. All engines seemed to be operating normally but the plane was flying out of control. Ten chutes were counted as the crew abandoned the airplane before it hit the water.³³

2nd Lt. John F. Ebberle, the navigator on 42-29523, and one of only two survivors, reported that during the German fighter attacks, a fire developed in the bomb bay. The interphone were shot out. That, together with the fire, cut communication between the front of the plane and everything aft of the bomb bay. Repeated attempts were made to communicate with the men in the waist and tail, to no avail. Then the alarm bell was sounded. Sgt. Mikula, who had fragment wounds in the head, was the first to bail out, and he left through the nose hatch. 2nd Lt. Herbert J. Schachtschneider, CP, was next, followed by Ebberle. Lt. Schachtschneider came down in the water near Salerno. He swam ashore and was captured by Italian soldiers. Eventually he was transferred to Stalag Luft III where he spent the rest of the war. Ebberle doesn't know what happened to the rest of the crew. He spent twenty-three hours



Back L to R: Lt. A.L. Nelson, P; 2nd Lt. J.D. Horn, N; 2nd Lt. G.W. Schmal, CP; 2nd Lt. T.F. Morris, B. Front L to R: Sgt. B.K. Shuping, UTG; S/Sgt. T.R. Townsend, RWG; S/Sgt. H.W. Edelman, TG; S/Sgt. C.C. Adams, LTG; Sgt. Buster Andeel, LWG; T/Sgt. A.E. Cole, ROG; Unknown ground crew member; Sgt. Andeel died of wounds the day after Foggia mission; Sgt. Shuping was shot down December 19, 1943, on his 49th mission and became a POW. (Group Photo)

in the water before making it to shore. During that time he never saw or heard any other member of the crew. He was captured and liberated.³⁴

Two other 20th Squadron planes, caught in the melee with the thirty-five to fifty fighters coming off the target, barely escaped, but made emergency landings at Bocca di Falco Airdrome outside Palermo, Sicily. Each was flying in an element just ahead of the elements that lost two airplanes each. One was Lt. A. L. Nelson in aircraft number 42-29595. His plane had some flak and fighter damage but was not disabled. His gunners destroyed two enemy aircraft and probably another. Sgt. Buster (NMI) Andeel, left waist gunner, was badly wounded when a 20 mm shell exploded in his face. Nelson decided to land at Palermo to hasten medical treatment for Sgt. Andeel. Nelson was able to return to Masicault that afternoon. Sgt. Andeel died the next day, August 20, at the 91st Evacuation Hospital. His death brought the death toll for the Foggia mission to 29.

Capt. Knaggs, in airplane number 42-29613, had over one hundred flak and fighter shell holes in the airplane. Tail gunner, S/Sgt. Paul A.

Simmons suffered two bad flesh wounds in one leg and a slight arm wound. The hydraulic system and left brake expander tube were shot out. Both pilot compartment windshields were broken by brass ammunition casings. The left life raft was set afire and had to be jettisoned. It caught on the horizontal stabilizer, causing severe damage, and the airplane fell out of formation. Fortunately, 613 didn't become a straggle victim. The crew destroyed three of their attackers. Knaggs was having some airplane control problems. Concerned about damage to the stabilizer and about Sgt. Simmons, Knaggs landed at Bocca di Falco. The plane wasn't repaired until August 21, when Capt. Philip Glassman, 20th Squadron Engineering Officer, brought over a new left stabilizer. The second night in Sicily, Knaggs and his navigator, Lt. Wade O. Douglas went on an all night PT boat patrol with the Navy. They went within a mile of the Italian coast. The only ship the patrol made contact with was an Allied hospital ship. Sgt. Simmons was treated at a hospital and was able to return with his crew.³⁵

The day after the Foggia mission the Group received a teletype message:

"COMMENDATION 8-20-43

TO: COMMANDING OFFICER, 2ND BOMB GROUP (HEAVY). THE FLIGHT WHICH ATTACKED THE POWER STATION ON YESTERDAY'S MISSION ARE COMMENDED FOR EXEMPLARY PRECISION BOMBING
ATKINSON"³⁶

MISSION 58, AUGUST 21, 1943 AVERSA, ITALY, MARSHALLING YARDS/RAILROAD INSTALLATIONS

The target was about nine miles northeast of Naples. Seventy-two P-38s from the 1st and 14th Fighter Groups provided high cover and close support. The "Little Friends" were most welcome after the Foggia experience. The effort was dubbed only partially successful. About half of the bombs missed the target altogether. Those that did fall in the target area seemed to make up for the failed half. The entire yards were blocked by burned-out rolling stock. Most of the tracks were heavily cratered and many trains were left

82nd Ftr. Gp.	9:30-10:00	Strafe	Satellites 3, 7, 9, 10
1st Ftr. Gp	9:30-10:00	Strafe	Satellites 1, 2, 4
14th Ftr. Gp	9:30-10:00	Strafe	Satellites 5, 8
99th BG	10:45-11:00	Bomb	NE 1/2 Satellite 2
97th BG	10:45-11:00	Bomb	SW End Satellite 2 & Satellite 4
2nd BG	10:45-11:00	Bomb	Satellite 7
301st BG	10:45-11:00	Bomb	Satellite 10

burning. The Rome-Naples line was blocked by craters in three places and other lines were littered with debris. A warehouse adjoining the station was half gutted. There was no flak at the target. There was some on the outskirts of Naples, and from Ischia Island, that caused slight damage to four aircraft. A few fighters were seen but they were taken care of by the escort and none attacked. Lt. Col. Thomas led. Col. Ruben Kyle Jr from the mission planning section, NASF Headquarters, flew as copilot with Capt. Donald J. Stoeger of the 20th.³⁷

MISSION 59, AUGUST 25, 1943

FOGGIA, ITALY, SATELLITE NUMBER 7

Beginning in early June, the Axis had started building a galaxy of satellite landing grounds around Foggia, after the Allied Sicilian campaign counter-air offensive had forced withdrawal of the GAF to the heel, then the boot of Italy. Ten satellites had been constructed. Foggia was now the most important German bomber and fighter base in Italy. In addition, many transports were based there.

Within the 2nd there was an understandable lack of enthusiasm about going back to Foggia. The mission briefing and operations plan gave some degree of comfort. Foggia satellites were to get a sizeable dose of Allied fire power. Between 9:30 and 10:00 A.M., three fighter groups were to make minimum altitude strafing runs, and about forty-five minutes later thirty-seven aircraft from each of the four B-17 groups were to attack with fragmentation and general purpose bombs. Even more comforting were the thirty-six P-38s that would provide escort at the target. In outline, the plan was as above in chart:

The 2nd's effort destroyed two planes on the ground, two in the air and damaged several buildings.³⁸ Over all the assault wreaked havoc among airfield buildings, destroyed forty-seven enemy planes and damaged thirteen. After these raids there was a sharp decline in the number of Allied bombers lost to enemy fighters in the Italian campaign, indicating this may have been a major event in the Mediterranean air war.³⁹

Flak damaged four airplanes slightly. Aerial bombs were dropped, but were inaccurate and did no damage. Lt. Leon F. Mohill, piloting airplane number 42-3096 was attacked by three Ma-202s before reaching the target. The fighters dove into the formation from 12:00 o'clock high com-

ing in very close before rolling down and away. Mohill's crew shot one down. Right after that, the number 4 engine failed on 42-3096 and Mohill salvaged his bombs to keep up with the formation over the target. Just after the target, number 1 engine failed and Mohill fell behind the formation. As soon as they were over water, the crew began throwing loose weight overboard. Mohill made it safely to the east airdrome at Termini, Sicily. Replacement engines had to be brought in and the plane wasn't flown back to base until August 29. Maj. Roderic D. O'Connor, commander of the 429th led the Group.⁴⁰

MISSION 60, AUGUST 26, 1943

CAPUA, ITALY, AIRDROME

The airdrome was eighteen miles due north of Naples. The Group put up only three squadrons. On the portion of the airdrome assigned to the 2nd, there were twenty-three aircraft on the ground. Eleven were destroyed, six were damaged, a hangar was hit and a fire started in a small building. The combined results for all the Fortresses was that this fighter base was "pulverized."⁴¹ Opposition was negligible — no flak and six to twelve fighters came up but were very cautious, not coming closer than 1,000 yards.⁴²

The bombing results were a fitting tribute to the last time that Lt. Col. Thomas would lead the Group. This may have been the reason that Gen. Atkinson flew with him as copilot. It was Col. Thomas's fifty-fifth mission. Few air combat units had the invaluable good fortune to be led from the beginning by a combat savvy commander. Thomas was a committed and courageous leader. He never shied away from the tough mission. He led the Group on 17 of its first 39 missions and in his fifty-five missions he aborted only once when a life raft accidentally deployed. His flying skills as a formation leader, in particular, endeared him to the combat crews. Good formation, that produces the best bombing results and the most effective defense against enemy interceptors, demands precision flying by the formation leader — precision in maintaining airspeed, course, altitude, rates of climb and descent, and avoiding abrupt or unexpected maneuvers — makes it infinitely easier to fly a close and disciplined formation. There is a fine margin of tolerances for maintaining good formation at high altitude in a heavily loaded bomber. To violate these tolerances is to

risk formation disintegration and invite disaster. Some leaders never fully mastered or comprehended these leadership qualities. They flew as though their's was the only plane in the sky, leaving followers to fend as best they could. Good formation flying for long hours is hard work. Every wing man and especially every "tail-end Charlie" knew who the good, the inept and the inconsiderate formation leaders were. Col. Thomas was an unexcelled leader in that evaluation.

MISSION 61, AUGUST 27, 1943

SULMONA, ITALY, MARSHALLING YARDS/ FINISHED EXPLOSIVE STORES

Parts of the marshalling yards were parceled out to each of the four B-17 groups. The 2nd was the last group over the target and was assigned the north end of the marshalling yards. The explosives store was northwest of the yards.

Just as the formation made landfall over Anzio, airplane number 42-30456, "Cactus Clipper," piloted by Capt. William P. Koch, 96th Squadron, took one or more direct bursts of flak. One burst hit right at the number 2 engine, blowing the left wing off. There was a secondary explosion just back of the radio room. The airplane folded like a jack knife at the position of the ball turret. Most observers reported seeing two chutes. One chute drifted out over the water and the other came down near the beach. Another observer saw a chute "blow out of some part of the plane," just before it crashed. The severed wing fell in the water. The other two major sections crashed ashore and the bombs in the forward section exploded.⁴³ Only three crew members survived — 2nd Lt. Charles A. Shuck, CP; S/Sgt. Edgar M. Stuart, TG; and Sgt. James M. MacDonald, LWG.⁴⁴

Sporadic flak followed the formation to and from the target wounding two men of the 96th. There was no flak over the target. Five enemy fighters intercepted the formation and one was shot down. The marshalling yards were obscured by smoke from previous bombing so the Group dropped all its bombs on the explosives store. Hits were scored on above and below ground stores and on adjacent buildings which caused three violent explosions. Bombs also fell on the highway running northwest out of the city. Maj. Caruthers of the 96th led.⁴⁵

Generals Spaatz, Doolittle and Atkinson made a short inspection visit to the Group on August 27. The Generals were particularly impressed by the war room in the former cow barn and with the various officer's and enlisted men's clubs, so much so that Gen. Spaatz ordered pictures taken that he could send to Gen. Arnold. The favorable impression of the facilities was as much a tribute to the ingenuity they represented as to the functions they served.⁴⁶

MISSION 62, AUGUST 28, 1943

TERNI, ITALY, MARSHALLING YARDS

Terni is fifty miles north of Rome and is on the major north-south rail line that served southern Italy. The line also served a very large industrial complex, including chemical works, a jute factory, aluminum works, Royal Arms fac-

tory, woolen mills, steel mills, iron works, gas works and a railroad repair shop. The mission was very successful and resulted in widespread destruction to the yards, rolling stock, freight sheds and several factories in the industrial area.

Only one airplane was touched slightly by flak and there were no fighters, thanks to the 14th Fighter Group that shot down two enemy fighters stirred-up by the raid.⁴⁷

MISSION 63, AUGUST 30, 1943

VITERBO, ITALY, AIRDROME/ DISPERSAL AREAS

The target was divided between the 301st and the 2nd — the 2nd getting the dispersal area on the northwest side of the field. Viterbo was a medium bomber base. The Group used fragmentation bombs to destroy fourteen and damage six of the fifty-eight twin engine bombers on the field. Many fires were started among the aircraft in the dispersal area. One of two gliders on the field was damaged. Between ten and twenty enemy aircraft attacked on the turn off the target. They fired unusually heavy volleys of 20 mm cannon shells, but the attack was brief, probably because of the P-38 escort. One of the attackers was shot down and the pilot seen to bail out. The enemy also used aerial bombs but these were inaccurate. Eleven aircraft were slightly damaged by flak and fighters but no one was injured.⁴⁸

MISSION 64, AUGUST 31, 1943

PISA, ITALY, PIAGGIO AIRCRAFT FACTORY

One hundred fifty-two (152) B-17s amassed in the sky over Pisa to attack the factory, the yards, gas works and other industrial plants. The rail lines were cut and there was widespread destruction among industrial targets.⁴⁹ The 2nd's bombs smothered the factory. Eight fighters singled out one 49th Squadron Fortress and lost one of their number for the effort. There was limited damage and no injuries among the Group. Capt. Bradford A. Evans, 429th Squadron, had engine problems and turned back. He bombed a small freighter, seventy miles off the coast of Sardinia, from 3,000 feet. Bombs fell close, but caused no observable damage. The ball turret gunner strafed the full length of the freighter. Two planes made emergency landings in Sicily because of mechanical problems.⁵⁰

MISSION 65, SEPTEMBER 2, 1943

TRENTO, ITALY, HIGHWAY BRIDGE/ RAILROAD JUNCTION

This mission was a very good example of precision bombing in an interdiction role.

Trento, one hundred miles northeast of Milan, is on the southern slopes of the Alps, below the Brenner Pass. The target was a highway viaduct over the railroad. It was a key junction in the transportation lines through the Pass, and the closest route for movement of troops and supplies from Germany to Italy. Bombs cut the highway bridge and knocked out the east approach to an adjoining highway bridge over the Adige River causing it to collapse into the river. Col-



Piaggio aircraft Factory, Pisa, Italy. Factory just to left of marshalling yards, under the clouds of smoke. Note Leaning Tower of Pisa and Basilica next to finger of cloud in upper left, August 31, 1943. (Photo Section)

lateral damage was done to oil storage, freight sheds and the railway station. Enemy interference was negligible. The Group used only three squadrons led by Capt. Richard T. Headrick, 20th Operations Officer.

This same day, twenty B-17s from another group destroyed a bridge across the River Iscara and cut the only rail line running south from Brenner Pass to Merano. These raids temporarily blocked all surface traffic from Germany to Trento.⁵¹

September 3, was a non-operational day, and the day Lt. Col. Thomas departed for Washington D. C. Maj. Melcher, the Deputy took over the Group temporarily. Thomas had led and developed the Group into a skilled and competent combat unit. Under his tutelage, several Group and squadron officers had developed mission leadership skills. He had been an innovator. He approved the test, then used the salvo bombing technique suggested by Lt. Taylor, the Group Bombardier, that proved so effective in attacks against small, vital targets. His most important innovation was the bomber defense formation that took advantage of the Group's collective firepower. The Group lost 15 aircraft to enemy action during the first 65 missions under Thomas's leadership. Enemy fighters succeed in shooting down only four of those while they were in formation and one of those was by collision with a fighter, whose pilot was apparently killed or wounded. Thomas left a good legacy that was appreciated.

September 3 was also the date the British Eighth Army invaded the toe of Italy at Reggio, (BAYTOWN). NAAF had done much to assure success of the first Allied invasion of the European mainland. Allied reconnaissance reported on the eve of BAYTOWN that NAAF assaults had blocked communication lines and stopped

rail traffic at several cities in central Italy. Movement by rail south of the Naples-Foggia line was practically at a stand still. The Axis was having to rely more and more on road transport, which had less capacity than rail, put more strain on fuel supplies, and deprived field units of needed vehicles. The counter-air offensive had been likewise effective. The Italian air force was at a stage of low enthusiasm, had suspect equipment, and was poorly trained, having lost its best pilots in the North African campaign. The GAF did not appear capable of offering a serious challenge. But neither could they be ignored. Combined, Italy and Germany still had 1,500 operational aircraft of all types in Italy, Sardinia, Corsica and Southern France. Bases that had been attacked had to be revisited.⁵² The 2nd's next four missions, on consecutive days, were scheduled against airdromes, but two were thwarted by weather, and one alternate and a target of opportunity were bombed instead.

MISSION 66, SEPTEMBER 4, 1943

TERRACINA, ITALY

MISSION 67, SEPTEMBER 5, 1943

VITERBO, ITALY, AIRDROME

MISSION 68, SEPTEMBER 6, 1943

VILLA LITERNO, ITALY, MARSHALLING YARDS

CIVITAVECCHIA, ITALY, CITY

MISSION 69, SEPTEMBER 7, 1943⁵³

FOGGIA, ITALY, SATELLITE NUMBER 2

The Capua airdrome, the primary target, was completely obscured by clouds. There was a landing ground three miles west of Terracina, a summer resort town sixty miles up the coast from Naples. Maj. Haynes selected the landing ground as a target of opportunity, but the area was also



Lt. Edward A.J. Mroz with officer crew. From L to R: 2nd Lt. Herbert L. McDaniel, B; Capt. Douglas T. Metcalf, P; Lt. Mroz, N; Capt. Richard F. Kuhn, 96th Squadron Flight Surgeon; 2nd Lt. Harold B. Turner, CP, Ain M'Lila, June 29, 1943. Lt. Mroz was first member of the original Group to finish 50 missions. (Courtesy of E. Mroz)



Group Commander, Col. Herbert "Sandy" Rice and crew. Back L to R: Capt. R. Koller, N; Col. Rice; Capt. John F. Taylor, B. Kneeling L to R: T/Sgt. John G. Garone, ROG; T/Sgt. Andrew T. McMurdo, UT; S/Sgt. John S. Rzonca, TG; S/Sgts. Walter S. Casselberry and David N. Martel, WGs. Missing: S/Sgt. Stanley T. Filipek, LTG; Co-pilots were taken from 20th Squadron and not regularly assigned. (Photo Section)

partially overcast. Opting not to return with bombs, the formation dropped its bomb load through a hole in the overcast in the midst of hotels, a Casino, commercial and public buildings and residences of no known military sig-

nificance. The landing ground wasn't touched. There was no flak or fighters. The weather for the Viterbo raid the next day wasn't much better. The target was 9/10s covered by clouds. Part of the first wave succeeded in dropping its bombs

in the target area, post-holing portions of the field and damaging the hangar and some other installations. Fifteen ships in the second wave couldn't see the target, and brought their bombs home. Two jettisoned their bombs over water. Five ships bombed Civitavecchia on the way out of Italy with unknown results. Flak was nominal and ineffective. Fighters dropped aerial bombs that missed and two attackers sped away as soon as fired on. Weather continued to hamper assigned missions. Capodichino airdrome was completely overcast the next day. The Group was briefed to bomb any marshalling yard as an alternate. Part of the formation sighted considerable rail traffic at Villa Literno, and nine ships dropped bombs. Photos showed good results with several direct hits and near misses on the tracks and rolling stock. Villa Literno was on the Rome-Naples rail line. Everyone else brought their bombs home. After three frustrating days, the Group had a mission of consequence.

On September 7, the 2nd led the four B-17 Groups back to Foggia, without fighter escort. By this date, the Eighth Army had broken well out of the Reggio beachhead and was moving steadily up the Italian toe. Tactical air forces were pounding all available targets ahead of the ground advance. Allied reconnaissance showed that enemy airfields, which might pose a threat to the invasion force, had been evacuated.⁵⁴ The Foggia complex was no doubt the recipient of planes forced out of the more southern Italian fields. Enemy interceptors put up a determined defense. Fifteen to twenty fighters attack the formation for twenty-five minutes, coming in four and six at a time to within 300 yards. For the first time gunners described what looked to be rockets because they left a trail of white smoke. The flak was intense and accurate. Together the flak and fighters damaged 15 airplanes and wounded five crewmen, two of them severely. The enemy losses were seven fighters destroyed and two probables. The fragmentation bombs from the 31 planes were well on target and destroyed or damaged several planes on the ground.

Four planes made emergency landings in Sicily on the return. Lt. Henry S. Vogel, 429th, landed at Bo Rizzo to get medical treatment for his bombardier, 2nd Lt. Bernard J. Lewis who suffered a moderately severe scalp wound. Lt. Elias Dahir, 49th, also stopped at BoRizzo because number three engine was out and the bombardier was slightly wounded. The other two planes landed at Bocca di Falco. 2nd Lt. Fred M. Osborne, 20th, had two wounded men aboard. One was slightly wounded but the other, S/Sgt. Lehmon E. Shively, RWG, suffered amputation of his right leg and fracture of his left leg from an exploding 20 mm cannon shell. The wounded were left at the hospital for treatment and Lt. Osborne prepared to takeoff. Then some one noticed that shell fire had penetrated the number 3 feeder and main tanks. Repairs were made and Osborne returned to Massicault that evening.

2nd Lt. William J. Valentine, 49th, Squadron, had the number 4 engine disabled by flak. A replacement had to be flown in and the plane didn't return until September 11.

On September 5, Lt. Edmund A. J. Mroz, N, in the 96th Squadron, became the first crewman to complete all fifty missions while a member of the Group. By September 15 at least one or

more members of each Squadron had completed their fifty-mission tour. Thereafter, the completion rate began to accelerate.⁵⁵ The first combat returnees were left to their own devices to hitch rides to Casablanca for transport to the U.S. This haphazard approach soon changed when three air transport planes were brought in to airlift a backlog of sixty returnees on October 9.⁵⁶

Col. Herbert E. Rice became the new Group Commander effective September 5. Col Rice started his military career as a private on March 4, 1925. He was appointed as an aviation cadet and graduated from flying school March 5, 1926, and received a reserve commission in February 1927. He went on active duty July 1, 1927 with the 16th Observation Squadron, commanded by now, Gen. H. H. Arnold. Rice's last assignment was as Commander, 457th Bomb Group (H), Camp Rapid, South Dakota. He flew his first mission September 6 as copilot to Lt. Col. Haynes on the partially abortive mission to Villa Literno.⁵⁷

The night of September 5, the Germans attempted a major attack on the harbors at Bizerte and Ferryville. They sent over about forty-five Ju-88s and He-111s, that dropped doppel (chaff) to jam Allied radar, but to little apparent effect. The raiders managed only to set a fuel dump on fire while losing five planes to Allied night fighters and four to anti-aircraft guns.⁵⁸

The fire works could be heard and were visible, along the distant horizon, from the base. One enemy aircraft was seen to go down. A friendly airplane flew over the base during the raid setting off defensive ack ack until the plane fired the friendly identification flares. The air raid alarm started a mad scramble in the camp for fox holes, which proved to be in short supply. The shortage was quickly alleviated the next day and several holes were dug deeper.⁵⁹ The Germans made another raid on the coast the night of September 7, with little success.

MISSION 70, SEPTEMBER 8, 1943

FRASCATI, ITALY

GERMAN HIGH COMMAND HEADQUARTERS

Frascati, a town of beautiful villas, was eleven miles northeast of Rome. The villas quartered the German High Command, specifically that of Field Marshall Albert Von Kesselring, the Commander-in-Chief of German forces in central and southern Italy. The four B-17 Groups were sent after this target with 130 airplanes, loaded with a mix of 500, 1,000 and 2,000-pounders. The 389 tons of bombs dumped on the city destroyed the German headquarters and Field Marshall Kesselring narrowly escaped death according to the Axis radio.⁶⁰ A cathedral received several direct hits and near misses and was destroyed or severely damaged. Villa Gorghese suffered damaging near misses. The southeast half of the Villa Falconieri was demolished. The Villa Ruffinello, Villa Lancellotti, Villa Torlonis and the Grand and Tusculussi Hotels were all damaged. The north end of the Pope's summer home, Villa Aldobrandisi, was demolished. Villa Muti was damaged. The northwest half of Villa Pallavigni was demolished. The roof was blown off the southeast wing of Collegio Dei Salosiani. Villa Orazioli received direct hits and damaging near

misses on the south wall and on one of the out-buildings. Several bombs fell among commercial, public and residential buildings in a suburb south of the city. Heavy smoke was rising from the ruins when the 2nd, the last group over the target, turned away. The importance of the target to the enemy was apparent for the vigor of the defense. Flak was intense and very accurate damaging 18 of 28 aircraft and slightly wounding two crewmen. Fifteen to twenty fighters attacked the formation very aggressively, coming within fifty yards on many passes. The thirty minute battle proved to be one-sided. Gunners scored fourteen destroyed and two probables without losing an airplane or suffering a serious wound.⁶¹

A combination of events seemed to suggest that something important was about to occur. There was strong emphasis from 5th Wing and at the Frascati mission briefing that the German High Command headquarters must be destroyed. Two weeks earlier, a few crews from the 2nd were excused from combat operations to practice for an undisclosed secret mission. They practiced two-ship night formation flying with airplanes blacked out except for the blue formation lights on top of the fuselage and wings. At 6:30 P.M., September 8, the Italian surrender was announced. In the early hours of the following morning, elements of the Fifth Army were spilling onto the beaches of the Gulf of Salerno, under operation AVALANCHE. These two events, the Italian surrender and AVALANCHE, were the culmination of secret negotiations and Allied military successes.

The defeat in Africa, the impending loss of Sicily, and the July 19 raid on Rome, confirmed the private thoughts of important Italians that the war was lost. Plans were made to remove Mussolini, the architect of Italy's defeat, from power. The Fascist Party Grand Council met and passed a vote of no confidence in Mussolini and approved formation of a National Government. King Victor Emmanuel III charged Marshal Pietro Badoglio with the task. That night, Sunday July 25th, Badoglio went on radio and broadcast the news to the world. Two days later, on orders of Badoglio, Mussolini was interned on the island of Ponza.

The new government started secret peace negotiations with the Allies. Gen. Eisenhower was anxious to take advantage of an Italian surrender, by announcing it to coincide with the main invasion of Italy. The Italians did not want the announcement made in advance. Under virtual occupation by the Germans, the Italians were having to feign continuance of the Axis Alliance and were not free to accept and announce the armistice terms as desired by the Allies. The Italians wanted an Allied landing north of Rome to protect the Government and the city from the Germans. Eisenhower decided to alter part of the AVALANCHE invasion plan. Instead of the 82nd Airborne Division dropping in advance of the Salerno amphibious force, it would land at the fields around Rome, provided: the Italians signed and announced the armistice as desired by the Allies; the Italians prepared and protected the airfields, and stop anti-aircraft fire; provide supplemental support such as fuel, transport and supplies; and that the Italian divisions in the Rome area take action against the Germans. The

armistice was signed September 3. The invasion at Salerno was set for the early morning hours of September 9.⁶²

By September 7 it was apparent to both parties that the Italians could not fulfill the commitments made by their Armistice Commission. The Germans had increased their forces around Rome and cut off fuel and ammunition supplies to the Italian troops. Italian military leaders could provide neither effective aid to the airborne troops nor guarantee security for the airfields. Eisenhower cancelled the Rome airborne landing but now it was too late to reinstate the 82nd's drop around Capua designed to hamper southward movement of German reinforcements toward Salerno.⁶³ With the signed armistice in hand, Eisenhower announced the unconditional surrender of the Italians at 6:30 in the evening of September 8. An hour later, Marshal Pietro Badoglio, read a proclamation to the Italian people. It stated that the Italian Government recognized the impossibility of continuing the unequal struggle against the overwhelming power of the enemy and had requested an armistice which had been granted. The Italian Forces, he declared, "will therefore cease all acts of hostility against the Anglo-American Forces wherever they may be met. They will, however, oppose attacks from any other quarter."⁶⁴ The Germans immediately began encirclement of Rome. The Badoglio government, other high officials and the Royal family succeeded in slipping out of the city and down the Adriatic to refuge at Brindisi.⁶⁵

The secret night mission which 2nd crews were practicing was cancelled just prior to take off, and immediately following announcement of Italy's surrender. The mission was intended to support the originally scheduled pre-invasion, nighttime drop of the 82nd Airborne Division in the Capua area, which was now cancelled.

At 3:30 A.M. September 9, elements of the Fifth Army were assaulting the beaches of the Gulf of Salerno as planned, except for participation of the 82nd Airborne. The announcement of the Italian surrender, to coincide with the invasion, didn't yield the benefits hoped for. The Germans had anticipated Allied intentions. They reacted immediately to Eisenhower's announcement and took over Italian coastal defenses. The Germans had steadily increased their forces in Italy following the downfall of Mussolini and formation of the new Italian government, fearful that Badoglio would seek an armistice. Enemy resistance never seriously threatened the success of the initial landings at Salerno, but by the middle of the month German counterattacks on the established beachhead escalated to crisis proportions. Despite a mounting number of daily sorties from all air force units and serious disruption of their lines of communication, the Germans were able to bring in reinforcements. Two Panzer divisions arrived from the south and parts of two others came from beyond Rome. On September 12, the Germans mounted a counteroffensive, and in two days drove a deep wedge along a two mile front between the VI and 10th Corps of the Fifth Army along the Sele River. At one point the enemy was within 1,000 yards of the beach. The situation was critical. It took the combined efforts of Allied ground, air and naval forces to save the day.⁶⁶ Heavy bombardment units, including the 2nd, were pressed into tacti-

cal roles in direct support of besieged battlefield units.

MISSION 71, SEPTEMBER 9, 1943

CANCELLO, ITALY, HIGHWAY BRIDGES

MISSION 72, SEPTEMBER 10, 1943

BOTANO, ITALY, BRIDGE/HIGHWAY

MISSION 73, SEPTEMBER 12, 1943

BENEVENTO, ITALY, HIGHWAY BRIDGE

MISSION 74, SEPTEMBER 14, 1943

BATTIPAGLIA-EBOLI, ITALY, ROAD

MISSION 75, SEPTEMBER 15, 1943

BATTIPAGLIA-EBOLI, ITALY, ROAD

MISSION 76, SEPTEMBER 16, 1943

CASERTA, ITALY, MARSHALLING YARDS

These six missions were flown without any fighter encounters. There was scattered flak on three missions, which did no damage on two missions, and only slight damage to five planes on the other. There were no injuries from enemy action. The targets on the Concello mission were one railroad and two highway bridges. The railroad bridge was not damaged, but lines at the approaches were cut. Direct hits were made on one highway bridge and to the approaches, but the bridge was still standing. The third bridge was not damaged.

Col. Rice had his first mission scotched as group lead. The weather was lousy going to and from and over the primary targets at Vinchiatiuro. Of the thirty-five airplanes that got off, nineteen returned early, fifteen bombed targets of opportunity near Botano — a bridge and highway. Bombs were dropped on a secondary road and on a main through highway, but the bridge was missed.⁶⁷ Lt. Gathercole of the 96th, flew into prop wash and fell out of the formation in bad weather northeast of Sardinia. Because of the bad weather he was unable to find, and rejoin the formation. He took his crew past the sortie line to get credit for the mission then ask if they wanted to continue by themselves. All the men wanted to continue. They were flying under the overcast at 12,000. Shortly after landfall, they sighted a bridge over the Tiber river fifteen miles from Rome. The plane did not have a bombsight. When salvo bombing was used, bombsights were frequently not carried in airplanes not in lead positions. The crew made two passes over the bridge, dissatisfied with the first one, and dropped their bombs visually. They missed the bridge, made one hit on the highway and bracketed it with the rest of the bombs. There were no fighters or flak.⁶⁸ Gathercole's singular mission became a matter of some controversy. He had gotten in the "dog house" with his commander over the buzzing in Montana. He was the last to deploy to Africa, coming over with a make-up crew following Lt. Knaphus's crash. He was relegated to copilot status for several missions before being reinstated as a crew commander. The controversy over his single plane raid was whether he should be court-martialed or rewarded, perhaps with a medal, for unusual initiative. The two sentiments cancelled out each other. The crew received credit for a sortie.⁶⁹

The target for the Benevento raid was a highway bridge over the Colera River. Direct hits on



Lt. Patrick Train's night crash landing, September 15, 1943. (Courtesy of M. Caruthers)

the masonry structure did not drop the bridge but both approaches were left temporarily unusable.

On September 14, as the ground situation reached its most critical stage, NAAF flew all-out in direct aid to the Fifth Army. That day bombers, fighter-bombers and fighters flew more than 2,000 sorties. Attention was divided between roads leading to Salerno and the Battipaglia-Eboli sector immediately behind the front lines where the Germans had a high concentration of troops and supplies.⁷⁰ The 2nd flew its two consecutive missions against the Battipaglia-Eboli road. These were maximum effort missions. The Group put 41 aircraft, with 100-pound general purpose bombs, over the target on the first raid, and 38 aircraft with 250 and 300-pounders on the second. Mission altitudes were dropped to 12,000-15,000 feet. Crews were nervous in this ground support role at medium bomber altitudes in close proximity to the ground troops. To improve bombing accuracy and increase the concentration of bombs on a narrow, curving target, the Group used the salvo bombing technique developed earlier in the summer, and used with much success at Messina and San Giovanni, and with great success against the power plant at Foggia.

On the first raid, led by Col. Rice, bombs bracketed and damaged the Battipaglia to Eboli road but didn't put it out of use. There was extensive collateral damage in the area. On the second raid, led by Lt. Col. Haynes, there were direct hits on and along the highway for half a mile and along three quarters of a mile of the railroad cutting it in at least twenty-five places. The highway was severely cratered but one lane appeared to be still useable. The combined results were more devastating than Group photo interpretation indicated.

On September 15, the date of the second raid, NAAF's planes flew about 1,400 sorties. The results of the concentrated bombing and strafing from September 12 to 15 were profound. The towns of Battipaglia and Eboli were all but obliterated, while roads and railroads were. Enemy troops and motor transport concentrations were severely damaged or wiped out. The Germans could not withstand the bombing, naval shelling and ground fire. According to enemy documents, the combined attacks caused such heavy losses that the Germans had no choice but to call off the attack. On the 16th they began pulling back, and the Fifth Army prepared to go on the offensive. The beachhead was now secure and the

Allies were on the mainland to stay.⁷¹

The Group returned from the last Battipaglia-Eboli raid after dark. The landing pattern was a madhouse. Lt. Patrick G. Train, in airplane number 42-30449, 96th Squadron, had number 2 engine fail on the way back to base. When he was about ten miles from the base, number 3 engine failed due to excessive oil consumption. He was on the final landing approach, when another plane cut in front of him. Lt. Train was forced to abort the landing on two engines, one of which, number 4, failed due to power overload. He was able to keep the plane airborne long enough for the crew to huddle in the radio room to ride out the inevitable emergency landing. With flaps down, wheels retracted, and the aid of his copilot, Lt. Chrismon, Train made a near-perfect crash landing on the slope of a small hill. No one was injured except Train. In the rush of the emergency, he had failed to fasten his safety harness and lost several front teeth when he was thrown forward in the cockpit by the sudden deceleration of the airplane on impact. This was Lt. Chrismon's second mission since being rescued after bailing out of his burning plane on August 4. The next day the plane was turned over to the Service Squadron for salvage.⁷²

The attack on the Caserta marshalling yards on September 16, cut the tracks, did extensive damage to freight yards and rolling stock. A railroad overpass was not damaged but the south approach was cratered. Five tank cars exploded setting fires. Lt. Douglas L. McCarter, 429th Squadron, had engine trouble before reaching Italy, feathered the propeller and flew to Bocca di Falco. Two other engines malfunctioned on the way, but McCarter landed safely. One engine was replaced, two were repaired and the airplane was returned to base September 20.⁷³

The complete diversion of all the air forces for several days to support AVALANCHE left the GAF in northern and central Italy untouched. Enemy airfields in southern Italy had also gone five days without being bombed and were showing signs of increased activity. Gen. Eisenhower ask for, and received, approval from the Combined Chiefs of Staff for return of the three B-24 groups from England that had operated in the Mediterranean during July and August. Eighty B-24 crews from the 44th, 93rd and 389th Bomb Groups returned to Africa, started operations September 21, and continued to fly for NAAF until October 1.⁷⁴ From September 16 through 18, NAAF units went after the airfields used by the GAF to make hit and run attacks on invasion

forces and to attack Allied shipping with radio-controlled, and glider bombs.

MISSION 77, SEPTEMBER 18, 1943 VITERBO, ITALY, AIRDROME

The 2nd preceded the 99th over the target. At the time of the attack there were ninety airplanes and five gliders on the field. The 2nd destroyed eight twin and one four-engine aircraft, and damaged another seven twin engine and 4 four-engine airplanes. Bombs struck the fuel storage and service buildings, causing two fires. The landing area was rendered largely unserviceable by bomb craters. There were no encounters and flak slightly damaged two airplanes.⁷⁵ By the time the three-day blitz against the airdromes was over, some 600 bombers had dropped in excess of 700 tons of bombs, and 91 P-38s had made successful strafing attacks. More than 300 GAF planes and gliders were destroyed or damaged and most of the airfields in southern Italy, including four of the most active at Foggia, were so badly battered as to be of little or no use. The Germans were forced to withdraw their bombers to northern Italy and southern France, and their fighters to the Viterbo and Lucca areas. By September 21, Allied fighter bombers were moving to bases on the Italian mainland.⁷⁶

The 389th Bombardment Group, one of the B-24 units on loan from the Eighth Air Force, commanded by Col. Jack W. Wood, began arriving September 18. The 450 officers and men were assigned to the 2nd for quarters and subsistence, and many common functions shared facilities. Their first assigned mission was September 21 against Leghorn shipping, but weather forced them to an alternate of the docks and shipping at Bastia, Corsica.⁷⁷

Lt. Col. Robert E. "Pappy" Haynes, Commander, 49th Squadron was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross on September 18, the first member of the Group to be so honored.⁷⁸

The Group had three welcome non-operational days, when missions scheduled on September 22 and 23 were cancelled because of weather. The 22nd was a particularly miserable day. Sirocco winds came off the desert sending the temperature to 110 degrees and cutting the visibility to zero at times in stifling dust. The wind and dust played havoc with everything, particularly tents, clothes, and airplanes. Tents were blown down and the fine dust and sand soiled clothes and bedding, and clogged aircraft engine air filters. During the Sirocco season it was not uncommon to have dust horizons as high as 20,000 feet all the way to Italy. Those who could, escaped to the beaches at Tunis and Ferryville. The improvised showers were in high demand. When weather permitted, the new replacement crews were scheduled for flying practice. Operations resumed on the 25th.⁷⁹

MISSION 78, SEPTEMBER 25, 1943

BOLOGNA, ITALY, MARSHALLING YARDS

MISSION 79, SEPTEMBER 28, 1943

BOLOGNA, ITALY, MARSHALLING YARDS

The railroads through Bologna branched to such cities as Venice, Genoa, Milan, Ancona and Florence. Bologna had a sizeable industrial com-

plex, including a small arms and munitions plant, sugar refinery and a large stores depot. Weather was not good en route but there was a hole in the clouds over the target. The Group started inland at the wrong location, encountered flak, reversed course back to sea, and re-entered. The 2nd was the last group over the target after the 99th and the 97th. The target was overcast when the 97th made its run and that Group bombed alternates. The 2nd, briefed to bomb on an azimuth of 120 degrees, bombed from a heading of 270 degrees. This created confusion that probably limited bombing results, although the target was fairly well covered. Photos showed damage and destruction to the yards, tracks, rolling stock, repair shops and freight sheds and to commercial, industrial facilities and residences, but attribution of credit for results couldn't be determined because of the multiple group raids. There was no opposition over the target. Flak at the coast was intense but inaccurate. Seven airplanes made emergency landings on the return because of fuel shortages. Five landed at Decimomannu landing ground in Sardinia, some ten miles northwest of Cagliari. Sardinia had only been freed for two days. Crews reported there weren't any maintenance facilities, fuel was difficult to get, and quarters were scarce. The officers were given quarters, but the enlisted men had to sleep in the airplanes. One crew, short on fuel, made it to Tunis. Another, Lt. Harry M. Abell, 49th Squadron, ran out of fuel and crash landed in seventeen feet of water ten miles east of Bizerte. S/Sgt. James A. Jesse, Jr., TG, suffered a compound fracture of the left leg in the crash, otherwise the crew was unhurt. Lt. Abell was awarded the Soldier's Medal for saving the injured Jesse. The airplane was lost. Col. Rice led the Group.⁸⁰

On the 28th, Capt. Donald J. Stoeger, 20th Squadron, led thirty-four airplanes back to Bologna, but the target was completely overcast. Nineteen ships returned with their bombs and fifteen jettisoned them at sea.⁸¹

The Group had planned a celebration in observance of the first anniversary since the first cadre of personnel was assigned, September 24, 1942, to the predecessor organization, the 304th Bombardment Group. A fast-paced year had passed since then. A scheduled mission to Civitavecchia on Sunday, September 26, was scrubbed because of weather, giving opportunity for the celebration. It was fitting that the day begin and end with religious services. Group Chaplain Ira B. Allen, and the Group choir, were guest participants in the NASAF Headquarters morning service, which was broadcast over short wave radio to the United States. Cpl. William Boyer of the 96th Squadron, and choir soloist, sang "Abide With Me." Chaplain Allen preached the sermon. Father Beck held early morning mass in the briefing room at Group Headquarters.

The festivities began with Lt. Col. "Pappy" Haynes, his original crew and airplane, "A Merry Can," buzzing the field before disappearing to the west on their way to the U.S. for a war bond selling tour. Later, more than one thousand joined in a beach party at La Goulette, whose harbor had been the site of the Group's third mission. The four-hour celebration featured the Group band and traditional beach fare of hot dogs and beer. In one year the Group had organized, trained and deployed — moving eight times in the process —

served under three commanders, flown 77 missions, destroyed, probably destroyed and damaged 151 enemy aircraft in aerial combat, while losing 15 to enemy action, and 3 crews and 6 planes to accidents. The day closed with Chaplain Allen conducting evening services in the 96th Squadron enlisted men's club. It started raining at 9:00 P.M., for the first time since early May. It rained hard for about forty-five minutes, turning the base into a muddy mess. Even that was a welcome change from the intervening four months of heat and dust.⁸²

September 29 and 30 were non-operational. On the 29th a letter was received from Gen. Doolittle transmitting a commendation from the Commander of the 15th Army Group and Gen. Mark Clark, Commander of the Fifth Army, to all units of NAAF for "... the magnificent support given them" during the Salerno invasion. "You have contributed immeasurably to the success of our operations and to the final victory which will inevitably follow." Gen. Doolittle commented particularly on the work done by the Strategic Air Force during the recent critical days.⁸³

The rain at the end of September signalled start of the rainy season and deterioration of weather throughout much of the Group's area of operation. There were 12 non-operational days in October due to weather. Of the 14 missions flown, weather adversely effected 6 by limiting bombing results or forcing selection of alternates. On two occasions returning planes had to be diverted to alternate fields with surfaced runways because base runways were too muddy. Ten missions were over northern Italy, three to Greece and one to Austria. Targets were eight marshalling yards and railroad bridges, three airfields, and two were against the same ball-bearing factory. On the one other mission, a single plane attacked an alternate target. All the rest jettisoned their bombs. Overall, the October effort was reduced to marginal success. The weather seemed to hamper the bombing offensive more than it did enemy resistance. The Group lost three crews, two to flak and one to fighters, and had eleven men wounded. In return, gunners claimed ten enemy fighters destroyed, and eleven probables, mostly Me-109's and FW-190's.

MISSION 80, OCTOBER 1, 1943

BOLOGNA, ITALY, MARSHALLING YARDS

This was to have been the Group's first raid over Germany. The target was the parent factory of the Messerschmidt Company at Augsburg. The factory was the center of experimental work and undertook assembly of new planes to work out production "bugs." A successful mission was thought to set back production of the new Me-410 fighter by three to six months. The distance was at the extreme end of the Tokyo tank B-17 range and refueling was arranged in Sardinia on the return. The Group had only 19 Tokyo airplanes. Three of these failed to take off and four returned early, leaving Col. Rice in the lead with four airplanes and Capt. Stoeger with eight. All four B-17 Groups were to attack the target at half-hour intervals. The 2nd was to be the last over the target. The 97th pushed through to the target but it was overcast, and they bombed alternates in Germany and Italy. The 99th got through the weather, but was attacked by so many fighters it had to turn back. It is believed that the 301st also turned



Left to right: Capt. Clyde H. Knaggs (left) with officer crew outside their "quarters" at Massicault; 1st Lt. Richard W. Howes, B, with his dog "Flak;" 2nd Lt. Robert F. Amos, CP; and 1st Lt. Wade O. Douglas, N. Celebration photo – Howes and Amos finished fifty missions September 28, and October 5, 1943. Knaggs and Douglas followed October 21, and November 10, 1943. Note wash stand and foot scraper.

back.⁸⁴ Weather was probably the 2nd's salvation that day. Earlier raids by the other groups eliminated tactical surprise, and alerted enemy fighters. It isn't difficult to imagine what might have happened to the Group's twelve unescorted B-17s flying into the heart of Bavaria. Heavy frontal weather over the Alps, with icing above 10,000 feet, was the formation's undoing. Col. Rice turned into one dark cloud to avoid another one and disappeared. Stoeger stayed on course and topped the front at 23,000 feet with six of his planes following. Convinced that he didn't have enough oxygen to complete the mission at altitude, Stoeger turned back with his formation.⁸⁵ Col. Rice took two wing men over the Bologna marshalling yards. They missed the yards but hit a warehouse and other buildings.⁸⁶

A half dozen fighters made determined attacks near La Spezia, while the Group was inbound. The encounter was a standoff, no victories on either side. The other groups were attacked by far larger numbers of enemy aircraft and were defended by P-38 escorts, but still lost three B-17's. The B-24's bombed Wiener Neustadt and lost 14 of their number to flak and fighters and had 52 damaged. After this mission, the three B-24 groups on loan from the Eighth Air Force returned to England.⁸⁷

MISSION 81, OCTOBER 4, 1943 **BOLZANO, ITALY, RAILROAD BRIDGE**

This was another mission for the Tokyo tank airplanes. The Group could put only thirteen airplanes over the target. The four B-17 groups managed to launch just sixty-four Tokyo tank airplanes. The bridge over the Isarco River carried traffic coming through the Brenner Pass. The results were very good. Several direct hits

were scored on the RR bridge, the rail lines to Trento and Merano were severed, some cars on the train in the yard were destroyed and the highway bridge and its approaches took direct hits.⁸⁸

Capt. Jack Bentley, shot down June 21 on the Naples raid, and 2nd Lt. Robert E. Kingsbury shot down on the Foggia mission August 19, were among a trainload of POWs in the Bolzano train yards during the bombing. The prisoners were being taken to Germany. One of the prisoners in Lt. Kingsbury's box car had smuggled an Italian bayonet aboard the train. There were no toilet facilities in the box car, and the bayonet had been used to cut a fairly large relief hole in the wooden floor of the car. When the air raid started, two of the smaller, thinner prisoners were able to escape through the hole. The sliding doors on the box cars were secured by a pivoted metal bar that rotated into a metal notch. The two escapees unfastened the door to their car. Prisoners poured out, some running for cover and others ran along the train unfastening doors. In the chaos some prisoners tried to escape, others merely went into Bolzano looking for food. According to this report, all of the prisoners were eventually rounded up except two British captains who were caught in women's clothing attempting to ride bicycles out of town. They were shot.⁸⁹

According to another account, a munitions train was hit and the resulting explosion blew open a door or doors on the POW train. (This account did not explain how an external blast that would likely blow doors inward, did so without casualties among train occupants.) Nickalus Katzenbach, a POW and former navigator on a B-25, was among prisoners thus freed. Unfortunately, Katzenbach and others were recaptured about four hours later.⁹⁰

MISSION 81A, OCTOBER 4, 1943 **PISA, ITALY, MARSHALLING YARDS**

The non-Tokyo tank planes formed the second mission for the day. Five separate rail lines connecting with other major Italian cities converged at Pisa. An excellent bomb attack rendered the yards inoperative, cut two of the five lines, caused two explosions and fires and one tremendous explosion believed to be munitions. Two planes had a little damage from flak. There were no injuries and no enemy fighters. Col. Rice led.⁹¹

MISSION 82, OCTOBER 5, 1943 **BOLOGNA, ITALY, MARSHALLING YARDS**

The enemy struck at the Group with the most damaging effects since the fateful August 19 attack on Foggia. The 2nd was first of the four B-17 Groups over the target. One hundred twenty-four (124) B-17s dropped 367.5 tons of general purpose bombs with very good results. Both ends of the yards were well covered. One large explosion, indicative of munitions, erupted accompanied by several smaller explosions. Fifteen warehouses, seven train sheds, rolling stock and tracks were all severely damaged. The yards were put out of commission but at a price.⁹²

Flak and fighters dealt nasty blows that day. Twenty-five to thirty fighters attacked the whole formation. One crew was lost and twenty bombers were damaged by a combination of flak and fighter shells. Seven men were wounded. 2nd Lt. Grover C. Blissard, a copilot in the 429th, had a 20 mm shell smash into his right knee then tore through his left thigh. Lt. Blissard administered first aid to himself and despite great pain continued to perform as copilot throughout the mission until an emergency landing was made in Sardinia. One and a half hours later, three medical specialists arrived from North Africa. The three doctors were able to save Lt. Blissard's left leg but, sadly, the right had to be amputated above the knee. Later he was moved from Sardinia to the 3rd General Hospital at Mateur, Tunisia. S/Sgt Franklin W. Fitzgerald, waist gunner from the 96th, was severely wounded by shrapnel in the right hip and was hospitalized in Tunis.⁹³ The others were less seriously wounded.

2nd Lt. Earl W. Fitzpatrick and, crew in plane number 42-29907 of the 49th, took a flak burst between engines 1 and 2 leaving the target. Number 2 engine was feathered and number 1 was smoking when another burst struck engine number four and left the prop windmilling. The plane fell behind and rapidly lost altitude. Six to eight fighters pounced on the crippled plane and the crew quickly abandoned it. The plane crashed and burned on the side of a mountain. Accounts vary as to the exactly what happened to S/Sgt. William K. Guilfoil, TG, except that he did not survive. Some surviving crew members, including Lt. Fitzpatrick, said that Sgt. Guilfoil did not bail out, that he was killed by a machine gun burst from an enemy plane. Guilfoil ask for help when he was hit and was told that other crew members were too busy fighting off attackers to leave their posts. Guilfoil was heard to say he would stay with his guns. An Italian priest later told the crew that Sgt. Guilfoil was buried at



The "Zelma" crew -- taken just before Amos's 50th mission to Bologna, Italy, Oct. 5, 1943. Back L to R: 2nd Lt. William C. Golden, B; S/Sgt. John H. Clepper, LWG; 1st Lt. Thomas R. Cochran, CP; S/Sgt. James L. Meadows, TG; 2nd Lt. Robert F. Amos, P. Front L to R: S/Sgt. Troy F. Moore, RWG; T/Sgt. Edward J. Williams, ROG; T/Sgt. James D. Crowley, UTG; S/Sgt. Charles DeVito, LTG; 2nd Lt. Albert E. Dowsing, N. (Lt. William Golden was killed in action Jan. 10, 1944 while flying with another crew on a raid to Sofia, Bulgaria. All other crew members completed 50 missions.)



Mission briefing of gunner crew.



R. Amos and T. Cochran



Al Dowsing



T/Sgts. Williams and Crowley



S/Sgts. Clepper, DeVito and Moore



Left, M/Sgt. Clarence Degodt, "Zelma" crew chief, and crew, pulling through propellers for preflight check out.



Bologna, Italy marshalling yards, October 5, 1943, post strike photo. (Photo Section)



Bologna, Italy marshalling yards, October 5, 1943. (Photo Section)

Cimitero Laserra, Marliana, Pistrina, Italy.⁹⁴ In a joint returnee statement a year later on October 7, 1944, Lt. Fitzpatrick and S/Sgt. Willis I. Sheldon, LWG, stated that five crew members got together immediately after bailing out, evaded and lived together for about two months. They decided to separate when they learned the Germans were starting a search of the area. One left with a British ex-POW, two left together, as did Fitzpatrick and Sheldon. The latter two evaded successfully for a year by hiding out in the hills and with the aid of a friendly Italian farmer. The other three, 2nd Lt. John M. Carlson, CP, T/Sgt. Stanley J. Austin, UTG, and S/Sgt. Homer H. Hutcheson, LTG, likewise evaded and eventually returned to Allied control. The remaining four survivors, 2nd Lt. Thomas F. Berschig, N, 2nd Lt. Robert D. McCain, B, S/Sgt. Joseph R. Hunt, RWG, and T/Sgt. Joseph A. Chilek, ROG, were all wounded, and incapable of getting away, and became POWs. Lt. McCain was observed to be beaten by a Fascist, and required hospitalization, but survived. This was the first crew loss in twenty-one missions. Capt. Knaggs feathered number 2 engine just after leaving the target. Then he lost oil pressure on number 1 engine and feathered it. After several attempts he got number 2 running again. He managed to escape the fighters and made it safely to Sardinia.⁹⁵

The Group history and the mission report differ as to Group aerial victories over enemy aircraft. The history records two destroyed and ten probables. The mission report claims eight destroyed, one probable and four damaged.⁹⁶

MISSION 83, OCTOBER 6, 1943

MESTRE, ITALY, MARSHALLING YARDS

Only thirteen airplanes were scheduled for this mission. Two of these returned early. Two others got as far as northern Corsica where one turned back because of engine malfunction, and the other lost the formation in bad weather. The remaining nine got to Mestre but their bombs fell to the left of the target. Capt. Bradford A. Evans, 96th Squadron, led the mission. Heavy rain at the base forced eleven planes to divert to alternate fields in the area. Runways had dried sufficiently for the planes to return to base the next day.⁹⁷

MISSION 84, OCTOBER 9, 1943

ATHENS/ALUESIS, GREECE, AIRDROME

MISSION 84A, OCTOBER 9, 1943

ARGOS, GREECE, SOUTH LANDING GROUND

In early October, photo reconnaissance revealed that the GAF was increasing its fighter and bomber strength in Greece and on Crete. The enemy build-up in Greece posed a triple threat to the Allies: to the port of Bari and the airfields around Foggia; Allied holdings in the Aegean; and to Allied shipping in the narrow waters between Crete and the Cyrenaican bulge. These Greek airfields became priority targets.⁹⁸ As more replacement airplanes arrived with Tokyo tanks and with the ability to stage planes from Sicily and Italy, the Group could extend its range. As the Allies extended control of the



Center, Maj. Marion Caruthers, Commander, 96th Squadron, completed fifty missions October 9, 1943. Left is Capt. Edward Bergin, 96th Squadron Executive Officer and right, M/Sgt. William Orebaugh, 96th Maintenance Chief. Caruthers' plane, number 42-5776, "Eager Beaver," with a new crew, was shot down December 20, 1943 on the Group's 111th mission to Athens/Eleusis Airdrome, Greece. (Photo Section)

air, the GAF was forced to move its planes farther away, and counter-air operations had to extend their reach.

The Group was split into two forces for these raids. Fourteen Tokyo tank airplanes attacked the Aleusis Airdrome. The other formation of fifteen airplanes went to Argos.

The city of Aleusis is on the Bay of Aleusis, 11 miles northwest of Athens. The airport is 2 miles northeast of Aleusis. The bombing was fair, with some bombs overshooting the target. The flak was inaccurate, but ten to fifteen fighters came at the formation aggressively and repeatedly, some pressing to within 100 yards. These repeated, close attacks favored Group gunners, who took down 5 fighters and damaged another. Only one B-17 was damaged and no one was injured.⁹⁹

Argos is sixty miles southwest of Athens. The bombing objective was to crater the landing ground. Results were good and four or five aircraft were left burning on the field. No fighters attacked and flak did slight damage to six air-

craft. There were no injuries. This formation did not have Tokyo tanks. Arrangements were made for emergency refueling near Taranto, Italy or non-emergency refueling at Gerbini, Sicily. Some did stop at Gerbini.¹⁰⁰

MISSION 85, OCTOBER 10, 1943

ARAXOS, GREECE, AIRDROME

Sixty (60) Fortresses of the four B-17 Groups were to strike the Tatoi Airdrome near Athens, Greece. The Group lead, Maj. O'Connor, judged the weather toward the primary target to be too bad and chose to lead the seventeen planes to the alternate at Araxos, ninety-five miles west of Athens. The western end of the airdrome and runway were extensively damaged as well as the main dispersal taxi strip and the supply areas. Of the 30 airplanes in the dispersal area, only one was damaged. There was no opposition and all planes returned safely.¹⁰¹

On October 13, Italy declared war on its old

ally, Germany. When Italy surrendered, Italian pilots flew 225 air planes to Sicily and immediately began training to fly with NAAF. These Italian Air Force planes were used primarily in support of Italian armed forces, the Balkan patriots and as couriers and for air sea rescue. They continued to operate with Allied air forces until the end of the war.¹⁰²

MISSION 86, OCTOBER 14, 1943

TERNI, ITALY, MARSHALLING YARDS

These yards had been successfully bombed on August 26 but by October 14 they were back in service as a vital line to move troops and supplies supporting German operations farther south. The yards also served a large industrial complex, including chemical works, jute factory, aluminum works, the Royal Arms Factory, wool mills, blast furnaces, steel, iron and gas works and a railroad repair shop. The bombing was successful, with bombs from two squadrons in the target area and those of the other squadron in buildings near the yards. A number of fires were started and one large explosion erupted with orange and red flames believed to be the gas works. Ten to fifteen fighters vigorously attacked the formation for twenty-five minutes. They used a new tactic in which the fighters dove past the formation from the 11:00 o'clock high position then came up from below to fire at the rear of the formation. The Group claimed two Me-109's destroyed. Two members of the 20th Squadron were wounded. S/Sgt. Franklin G. Thometz, waist gunner, received a machine gun bullet hole through his right heel and right calf. Pvt. Kester D. Matheny, waist gunner, suffered a machine gun bullet through his right calf. Both were hospitalized at the 35th Station Hospital, Depienne, Tunisia.

2nd Lt. Robert T. McCarty and crew of the 429th Squadron, in plane number 42-29581, "Sugarpudding," were lost to the fighters. The plane was seen to be lagging slightly and under fighter attack with white smoke pouring from an inboard engine. The engine caught fire and it spread to the wing. The plane went into a near vertical dive and at about 12,000 feet it disintegrated. Five or six chutes were counted, two on fire. The chutes and pieces of the airplane landed in the water. All crew members perished. This was Lt. McCarty's 49th mission!¹⁰³

On October 19 three members of the Group were awarded Silver Stars, the first such awards to original members of the Group. The recipients were Maj. Marion F. Caruthers, 96th Squadron Commander, Capt. Burton R. Thorman, 429th Squadron Navigator, and 2nd Lt. Richard C. Morrow, bombardier in the 429th Squadron. Maj. Caruthers received his award for leadership on the June 21 Naples raid. Thorman and Morrow received theirs for gallantry in continuing to perform their duties after being seriously wounded on the June 25 mission to Messina, Sicily. Maj. Gen. Doolittle made the presentations to Caruthers and Thorman in a ceremony at XII Bomber Command in Tunis. Morrow's medal was sent to the U.S. for presentation. He had been relieved of combat duty because of his wounds.¹⁰⁴

MISSION 87, OCTOBER 20, 1943

ORVIETTO, ITALY, RAILROAD BRIDGES

MISSION 88, OCTOBER 21, 1943

ALBINIA, ITALY, HIGHWAY/RAILROAD BRIDGES

The Group did its best job of precision bombing for the month on mission 87. A double-tracked railroad bridge crossed the Tevere River sixty miles north-northwest of Rome and 8 1/2 miles from the village of Orvieto. The line carried German resupply and reinforcement traffic. At least four bombs made direct hits on the bridge and a few others dropped on or near the rail lines at the approaches. There was no opposition. The next day the Group was to bomb another bridge near Orvieto but cloud cover led to selection of targets of opportunity. These were two highway and one railroad bridge across the Albegna River near Albinia about thirty-six miles up the coast from Civitavecchia. Photos showed direct hits on the approaches to the railroad bridge and on one highway bridge. Bombs fell on and near adjacent, unidentified buildings. The other highway bridge received near misses. There was no opposition.¹⁰⁵

MISSION 89, OCTOBER 24, 1943

WEINER NEUSTADT, AUSTRIA

AIRCRAFT FACTORIES

This first foray into Austria against a strategic target created heightened expectations and some apprehension. Weiner Neustadt is thirty-five miles southwest of Vienna, and was the sight of seven facilities credited with 20% of the entire German production of single-engine fighters and 40% of Me-109 production. Because of the distance, it was necessary to stage through Sicily and Italy. On October 23, the Tokyo tank airplanes flew to Comiso and the Gela Ponte Olivo airdromes in Sicily, and the non-Tokyo tank planes flew to Grottaglia airdrome, Italy. Crews of the other three B-17 Groups similarly staged to these same bases. The crews took rations and bedrolls for the overnight stays. The next morning the Group assembled over Foggia, Italy, except that 13 planes at Ponte Olivo were forced to abandon the mission when fire destroyed gasoline supplies the night before. One additional plane aborted because of a leak in the oxygen system. This reduced the 2nd's force from 42 to 28 planes, and on the way to the target 6 more planes aborted leaving only 22!

Col. Allen of the 97th led the four B-17 groups. He was joined by Brig. Gen. Charles F. Born, Assistant Chief of Staff, NASAF.¹⁰⁶ The climb out across the Adriatic and the cruise speed towards the target were too fast and the formation became confused and badly strung out. Fortunately, the GAF was weather-bound and didn't rise to meet the formation. The target was overcast, and all the planning and effort virtually came to naught. Five planes dropped bombs in the vicinity with unknown results. One plane bombed railroad tracks and a bridge near Friedsburg, Germany.¹⁰⁷ One joined part of the 301st which bombed through the flak smoke.¹⁰⁸ Another six-teen planes of the 301st went seven miles beyond

Weiner Neustadt and hit Ebenfurth with excellent results. Twenty-three Liberators of the 98th Group bombed the target by dead reckoning.¹⁰⁹

The flak was heavy and intense but inaccurate. One gunner in the 20th did catch flying glass in one eye which was successfully treated on the return. The crews flew back to their staging bases, remained over night then returned to Africa on October 25.

MISSION 90, OCTOBER 29, 1943

GENOA, ITALY, MARSHALLING YARDS

The mission was briefed to bomb the ball bearing factory at Turin. That target was overcast and the Group took the alternate at Genoa as did the other three B-17 Groups. The 97th and 301st bombed first, followed an hour later by the 99th and 2nd. Bombing results were mixed and attribution difficult. Photos showed that most of the 2nd's hits were outside the marshalling yards, but there were many industrial, commercial and public buildings adjacent to the yards that were worthwhile targets.¹¹⁰ The total raid by 133 B-17s and 20 B-24s severely damaged tracks, rolling stock, the Ansaldo steel works, the San Giorgio instrument factory and electric and ordnance plants.¹¹¹

Plane number 42-30398, "Patches," piloted by Lt. George R. Howell of the 429th Squadron, took a devastating flak strike through the fuel tank for number 3 engine seconds after bombs away. Now in flames, the plane nosed up, rolled completely over, went into a spin and soon started to disintegrate. Observers reported four and five parachutes.¹¹² S/Sgt. Francis X. Hughes, LTG, gave the following statement after liberation from prison camp: "About 30 seconds after dropping our bombs our plane was hit by burst of flak. One burst hit at the radio room and the other hit at the tail wheel. As soon as our plane was hit, the pilot told us to bail out. . . After getting out of the turret and getting on my chute I saw that the front of the plane was broken off at the radio room and I bailed out through this opening. . . At the time I also saw that the plane had broken off at the tail wheel, leaving only the waist of the plane floating. I landed in the water of Genoa harbor and was shot in the right shoulder while in the water, was given first aid and then taken to a hospital. After around two days, in a private room, I was moved and I met Sgt. (Robert L.) Thompson, (tail gunner), who told me that Lt. (John W.) Cashore, (navigator) had just left for prison camp. During all this time I did not see nor hear of any of the rest of the crew not mentioned above." These three crewmen, Hughes, Thompson and Cashore were the only survivors.¹¹³

One of those who perished on Lt. Howell's crew was the radio operator, T/Sgt. Robert H. Bryson. He had written the poem which is recorded in the 429th Squadron history (see top of next page).

MISSION 91, OCTOBER 30, 1943

IMPERIA, ITALY

RAILROAD FACILITIES/DOCKS

PORTO MAURIZIO, ITALY

RAILROAD FACILITIES

During the continuing bad weather from mid to late October, the Group was given as many as four alternate targets. The primary target for this mission was the Turin ball bearing factory and once again it

LIGHTNING IN THE SKY

Oh, Hedy Lamarr is a beautiful gal
And Madeline Carroll is too;
But you'll find if you query a different theory,
Among any bomber crew;
For the loveliest thing of which one could sing,
(This side of the heavenly gates)
Is no blonde or brunette of the Hollywood set;
But an escort of P-38's.

Yes, in the days that have passed when the tables were massed,
With glasses of Scotch or Champagne;
It's quite true that the sight was a thing to delight,
Us, no longer the same nowadays in this game,
When we head North from Messina Straits;
Take the sparkling wine, make mine every time,
An escort of P-38's.

Byron, Shelly and Keats, ran at least a dozen dead heats,
Describing the view from the hills,
Or the valleys in May, when the winds gently sway,
An army of daffodils;
Take the daffodils, Byron, the wild flowers Shelly;
Yours is the myrtle, friend Keats,
Just reserve me those cuties, those American beauties,
An escort of P-38's.

Sure, we're braver than hell:
On the ground all is swell,
In the air, it's a different story;
We sweat out our track, through the fighters and flak;
While we're willing to split up the glory,
Well, they wouldn't reject us, so heaven protect us,
And, before all this shooting abates;
Give us courage to fight 'em and -
One other small item -
An escort of P-38's.

T/Sgt. Robert H Bryson

S/Sgt. Edgar N. MacDonald created a happy stir in the organization when he returned November 27 from missing in action since the August 19 raid on Foggia. His story is told as part of the mission number 57 account.

MISSION 92, NOVEMBER 2, 1943 WEINER NEUSTADT, AUSTRIA AIRCRAFT FACTORIES

This was the third trip to Weiner Neustadt since October 1. The Allies were as determined to cripple these fighter production plants as the enemy was to defend them. The five B-24 groups, that raided the complex on October 1, encountered heavy flak and about 60 fighters, some with 37 mm cannons in their wings, and others that lobbed rocket-type shells into the formation with deadly accuracy. The Liberators inflicted damage on the plants, but didn't cripple fighter production. The follow-up raid, by the four B-17 groups and one B-24 group, on October 24 was largely to no avail because of weather, although the twenty-three Liberators did bomb through the overcast by dead reckoning with undetermined results. Now back again with 131 B-17's and thirty-eight B-24's, the skies were clear and the battle was joined.¹¹⁷

An estimated 120 to 160 FW-190's, Me-109's, Me-110's, Ju-87's, Ju-88's and Ma-202s took on the bomber force in a tenacious and continuous forty-minute battle, before, during and after the bomb run. The 2nd's crews estimated their attackers to number between 60 and 80 fighters. The size of the defending force and the duration and ferocity of its opposition showed the importance the enemy attached to his fighter production. Five (5) Fortresses, 2 from the 2nd, and 5 Liberators were destroyed and 1 Fortress was reported missing. The bombers claimed 56 of the enemy destroyed, 27 probables and 8 damaged, of which the 2nd received credit for 13 destroyed and 11 probables. This was the trade-off between the aerial combatants for sufficient target destruction and damage that the Weiner Neustadt complex was not considered worthy of attack for another four months. According to Allied estimates, the raid eliminated 30 percent of the total enemy production of single-engine fighters and deprived the GAF of future production of 250 fighters per month for several months. The Fifteenth Air Force considered the mission the "outstanding event" of its first four months of operation.¹¹⁸

Maj. Donald H. Ainsworth, Acting Deputy Group Commander, led the Group's fifteen airplanes on this 1,600 mile mission. The remaining thirteen flew back to Gela/Ponte Olivo Air-drome in Sicily that evening where they stopped overnight. Group and squadron intelligence personnel flew to Sicily to immediately interrogate the crews. The planes returned to Massicault the next day, November 3.¹¹⁹

The two crews lost were from the 429th Squadron. The aerial battle was so intense and engrossing, there were no eyewitnesses to the fate of the two planes, except that they were thought to go down over the target.¹²⁰ Airplane number 42-3341, "Lady Be Good," piloted by 2nd Lt. Lester R. Gillan had four survivors - 2nd Lt. Peter H. Diglio, N; 2nd Lt. Merideth D. Fink, B; S/Sgt. Anthony J. Delatte, LWG; and S/Sgt.

was completely overcast. Because of the early aircraft returns in bad weather, Col. Rice had only nine planes left, so he chose to forego the designated alternate, the marshalling yards at Leghorn, and bomb targets of opportunity. Porto Maurizio and Imperia are 1 1/4 miles apart along the coast forty-miles east-northeast of Nice, France. The nine planes bombed as follows:

- 1 B-17 bombed Imperia docks resulting in some fires
- 3 B-17's bombed Imperia marshalling yards with good coverage of the target
- 2 B-17's bombed railroad west of Imperia with two probable direct hits
- 1 B-17 bombed Imperia and railroad with hits on the tracks and in town
- 2 B-17's bombed Porto Maurizio and railroad with hits on north side of town and along the tracks.¹¹⁴

Heavy rain at the base caused diversion of all but three planes to other adjacent bases. Two early returns were able to land safely on the one dirt strip. Col. Rice landed on the newly surfaced runway. Others might have safely done so but would have bogged down in the taxi strips to the parking areas. Trucks were sent to the other bases to bring air crews back to

base and for mission debriefings. An October 31 mission was cancelled.¹¹⁵

In November the Group was sent to wide-ranging targets in Austria, France, Italy and Greece, but weather had even greater effect on results than in October. Twenty missions were planned, nine of which had to be cancelled. Weather prevented bombing on three of the remaining eleven, leaving a net of only eight missions where bombs were dropped. The Group achieved outstanding results against an airdrome and submarine facilities in southern France and against a viaduct at Recco, Italy. The Group lost five crews and planes and one gunner to enemy action, while extracting fifteen victories and eleven probables from the Luftwaffe.

The first of the month the Group moved to a new Massicault bivouac area on a nearby hill where the ground was drier, and there was better drainage. Arabs told Group personnel that the original bivouac area was under water much of the winter and didn't dry out until summer.¹¹⁶ Surfacing of the runways and taxi ways was completed, but finishing work on parking areas was halted in the middle of the month in anticipation of a move. On November 23 an advance detail left for Foggia, Italy which was reported to be the Group's next location.

Ladies Page

Peg Yoder and Ken Spinning met while they were working together at the Main Office. Ken went to war in December, 1941, and they were married in Alabama on Aug. 5, 1942, the day he got his wings. During training the crew had adopted a black-and-white dog, "Skippy," as mascot, and named their ship after him. Skippy went to Africa with them, and 7 times, wearing a midget oxygen mask, he accompanied them on bombing missions. Skippy was left at the base on Ken's forty-eighth mission, a raid on a point near the Brenner Pass. As Ken flew back his Fortress was forced



Captain Kenneth W. Spinning, Jr.



Shippy was a star performer in the Mediterranean Theater. After a mission he came to the canteen for "coffee and" with the rest of the crew.



Shippy and his namesake, a Flying Fortress, with Ken in the cockpit.



Photo by International
Peg and Shippy are waiting for Ken.

down in the Mediterranean near Corsica.

A friend flew Shippy from Africa to the States, and he arrived at the Spinning home at New Rochelle, N. Y., on March 26.

Although Ken was officially reported missing on Nov. 10, 1943, Peg and Shippy wait hopefully for his homecoming, for most of the crew were seen floating with their life preservers inflated after the plane sank.

Helen

Source: "Relay", The Family Magazine of R.C.A. Communications, Inc., Vol V, No. 5, May 1944, pages 12,13. (Courtesy of M. [Spinning] Walker)

Howard L. Reese, TG. The four became prisoners of war but records have no survivor statements.¹²¹

The other plane, number 42-30133, "Raggedy Ann," pilot 1st Lt. Richard F. Eggers, was hit by flak over the target. Two crewmen, Sgt. George J. Brand, LWG, and S/Sgt Thomas A. Zalesko, TG, were severely or mortally wounded and went down with the airplane. The remaining crew members, Eggers, F/O Donald E. Elder, CP; 2nd Lt. William C. Thompson, N; 2nd Lt. Charles E. Major, B; T/Sgt. Chester S. Ehredt, UTG; Sgt. Malcom R. Mathews, LTG; S/Sgt. Marion M. Bembrook, RWG; and T/Sgt. Claude T. Roper, ROG; all bailed out and became POW's. F/O Elder evaded for two days. Later his captor, a gendarme, showed him Sgts. Brand and Zalesko's dog tags and a pair of baby shoes that S/Sgt. Zalesko always tied to the "Y" of the ball turret. As Elder was being taken to Vienna, his captor stopped at a farm house to get information about Elder's airplane that supposedly had crashed on the farm. Elder was not allowed to leave the car to verify the identity of the plane. At Dulag Luft, Frankfurt, Germany, a German Sergeant showed him the identification tags of his two deceased crewmates and said they had been buried at a town close to where the plane crashed.¹²²

One other casualty of the mission was S/Sgt. Joe D. Nicholson, a waist gunner in the 20th who was fatally wounded by flak and died on the airplane.¹²³

MISSION 93, NOVEMBER 9, 1943 GENOA, ITALY, MARSHALLING YARDS MISSION 94, NOVEMBER 10, 1943 BOLZANO, ITALY, MARSHALLING YARDS

Genoa was bombed as an alternate when visibility proved too poor over the primary target at Bolzano. The bombs fell to the west of the marshalling yards, mostly into a commercial and residential area causing no damage of discernible military importance. Flak damaged twenty-two of the twenty-five planes on the raid. Fortunately there were no injuries and all planes returned. One plane from the 49th Squadron crashed on take off for the mission. Just after take off and wheels up, the propeller came off the number four engine on Lt. Richard C. Flournoy's airplane. Flournoy made a belly landing, damaging the airplane beyond repair but the crew came out unscathed.¹²⁴

The Group launched 25 airplanes for the Bolzano mission but 16 got separated in thick overcast en route. Fifteen returned early. One, Lt. Covert, of the 96th, tried to catch the formation. Still 20 miles behind at the Italian coast, his oxygen system sprung a leak. The crew selected a bridge and railroad tracks at Loano as targets of opportunity. They missed the bridge but put direct hits on the tracks. The attacking formation was now down to only 9 airplanes and

a much easier prey for fighters. The 2nd followed the 301st and 99th groups over the target. The raid left widespread destruction and damage to sheds, shops, tracks and rolling stock. A goods shed was set afire.

Five to ten fighters attacked the formation from the rear before it reached the target. They made only one pass at the formation. One FW-190 was shot down, but during that one pass they crippled airplane number 42-29609, piloted by 2nd Lt. Raymond J. Wika, of the 20th Squadron. The plane began to fall behind the formation and the fighters quickly swarmed over it. The plane went into a steep dive and a slow spin, and at about 20,000 feet, it exploded.¹²⁵ Four members of the crew successfully bailed out. Lt. Wika and S/Sgt. Merlin S. McCloud, UTG, were captured by the Germans and became POW's. 2nd Lt. Jeremiah F. Corcoran, copilot, and 2nd Lt. Wallace B. Baldwin, bombardier, met on the ground, evaded and eventually made it to Switzerland. The navigator, 2nd Lt. Leonard C. McCully, did not have his parachute on when the airplane went into the spin. He was last seen alive crouched beside the escape hatch shortly before the plane exploded. The remaining five crewmen, radio gunner, T/Sgt. Jack (NMI) Raznick, Jr.; two waist gunners, S/Sgt.'s Merle E. Canfield and Luke H. Barga; lower turret gunner, S/Sgt. Clarence L. Berlin; and tail gunner, S/Sgt. Mack H. Kidd, were all killed in the fighter attack.

Their bodies, plus that of Lt. McCully were recovered, given services, and buried by the Italians. Lt. Corcoran attended services for four of them and saw the body of another.¹²⁶ (Note: S/ Sgt. McCloud came to Africa with the crew of 2nd Lt. Richard F. Underwood. That crew was part of the a provisional group being sent to England. On February 14, 1943, while flying from Natal to Dakar, the number 3 engine lost oil and the propeller couldn't be feathered. Because of the drag from the windmilling propeller, the plane ran out of fuel just at landfall. Underwood ditched the plane successfully, and the crew got out safely, but the plane was lost. The crew was stranded in Africa without an airplane. They found a plane in the theater in need of extensive repair. Scrounging parts and service, the crew finally got the plane flyable and was assigned to the 20th Squadron. All of S/Sgt. McCloud's crewmates in Underwood's crew successfully finished their missions.)¹²⁷

About five minutes after leaving the target, Capt. Kenneth W. Spinning, 49th Squadron, in airplane number 42-29646, called Maj. Headrick, leading the formation, saying he had an engine shot out and was dropping behind. Maj. Headrick slowed down, allowing Spinning to regain the formation. After leaving the Italian coast, Spinning called again and reported he now had two engines out. The formation slowed further, but Spinning was unable to keep up. Headrick gave Spinning the course to the nearest land then took the formation in a 360 degree circle which put Spinning ahead of the formation. Spinning continued to have engine problems. Shortly after that, one engine exploded and another quit for want of gas. Spinning reported he was going down and was given instructions on how best to land in the heavy sea. Spinning crash-landed about twenty miles north of Corsica in twenty-foot swells. The plane broke up and sank within eight seconds. Headrick then left the Group formation and began circling over the crash site. No life rafts were seen to open. Eyewitness accounts vary as to the number of men in the water after the crash. T/Sgt. Edward E. Nowak, Headrick's lower turret gunner, counted nine men in the water in Mae Wests. Tail gunner, S/Sgt. Charles C. Gervin also counted nine men in the water in Mae Wests, one group of four and one group of five. The navigator, 1st Lt. Charles E. Dehler, counted only six, five in one group and one man about 100 feet away. He also saw one empty Mae West and what seemed to be two cushions. Headrick reported seeing nine objects, six men in Mae Wests and three empty Mae Wests on the surface. Headrick continued to circle the area for over two hours. During this time, three one-man life rafts and two five-man rafts were dropped near the survivors. One of the large rafts failed to inflate. Two men in the water were seen to try unsuccessfully to retrieve rafts, but in other instances, men within 25 feet of a raft made no visible effort to get them. Also during this time, Headrick and crew were carefully plotting the location and drift direction of the downed crew and had called for air-sea rescue efforts. Headrick remained at the scene until 3:48 P.M., when he had to leave because of low fuel supply. Having made advance arrangements by radio for refueling and a supply of air-sea rescue gear, he landed at Ajaccio Airdrome,

Corsica at 4:15. Refueled and with the rescue gear aboard, Headrick returned to the crash scene at 5:11 and stayed until 5:51, when darkness and weather forced abandonment of the search. Headrick and crew returned to Ajaccio, remained over night, and resumed the search at daylight. Only one of the rafts dropped the previous day was found and it was empty. During this search, Headrick lost his number 2 engine because of an oil leak. As he returned to Ajaccio for repairs, he passed one of the search launches headed toward the crash scene. After engine repairs, Headrick and crew returned to Massicault. Air-Sea Rescue searched the area throughout the day, November 11, with no success. None of the Spinning crew survived.¹²⁸

After this mission, Capt. Spinning's dog "Skippy," and survivor of the Braymer, Missouri crash the night of February 18, 1943, was cared for by Lt. Gene Simmons and Capt. Jack Emerick of the 429th Squadron. "Skippy" had received wide publicity during his combat tour. He had flown seven missions and was a familiar sight at mission briefings and de-briefings. Capt. Spinning's widow, Margaret, asked that "Skippy" be returned to her. "Skippy's" return to the U.S. became a subject of official correspondence. In a "To Whom It May Concern" letter of 24 January 1944, the acting commander of the Fifth Wing, Col. N. D. Frost, declared "Skippy" to be part of Lt. Spinning's "person effects" and as such authorized shipment to his home. An Executive for Priorities and Traffic of the North African Air Transport Command approved passage for "Skippy" accompanying Capt. Emerick, who returned "Skippy" to Mrs. Spinning on March 26, 1944. "Skippy" died following cancer surgery in 1953.

November 11 through 15 were non-operational days because of weather. On November 14, all airplanes equipped with Tokyo tanks were exchanged with the 301st Bomb Group for non-Tokyo tank airplanes.¹²⁹ "Skippy," airplane number 42-3098, Capt. Spinning's original airplane was among those exchanged with the 301st. Capt. Spinning was flying with a new crew in another airplane when they went down in the water off of Corsica.

MISSION 95, NOVEMBER 16, 1943 **ISTRES, FRANCE, LE TUBE AIRDROME**

This counter-air mission was directed at the base and installations recently used by the GAF to attack Allied shipping in the Mediterranean. All four B-17 groups participated and did severe and extensive damage to the field and its facilities, including hangars, barracks, factory work shops, the field, taxiways and tarmac. Some ammunition stocks and barracks were set afire. One twin-engine aircraft was destroyed on the ground. Flak slightly damaged eight Group airplanes. The Group Navigator, 2nd Lt. Clarence J. Kurz Jr. suffered a compound fracture of his right hand from flak over the target and was hospitalized in Tunis. The Group had no fighter encounters. Gen. Atkinson flew as copilot in the lead ship with Col. Rice and sent the Group the following message after the mission:

"CO TWO BOMB GP
I DESIRE TO COMMEND YOU AND

ALL PARTICIPATING PERSONNEL ON YOUR EXCELLENT MISSION YESTERDAY. THE FORMATION DISCIPLINE THROUGHOUT THE MISSION WAS EXCELLENT. KEEP IT THAT WAY AND YOUR LOSSES WILL BE LESS AND YOU WILL GET TO THE TARGET WITH A MINIMUM OF CONFUSION EVEN IN ADVERSE WEATHER CONDITIONS.

SIGN ATKINSON"¹³⁰

MISSION 96, NOVEMBER 18, 1943 **ATHENS/ELEUSIS, GREECE, AIRDROME**

This counter-air mission was to help the British who were being driven from Leros and Samos, Greece by German air and ground forces. Although successful, the mission did not alter the course of events on the ground.¹³¹ The 2nd, with twenty-five planes, led the 99th over the target. The Group used 20-pound fragmentation bombs against the 6 single-engine and 43 twin-engine planes on the ground at the time of the raid. Of these, 5 twin-engine planes were destroyed and 5 damaged, and 1 single-engine plane was destroyed. There was considerable damage and destruction to buildings and service facilities, and to installations throughout the length of the dispersal area. One B-17 was eventually felled by flak and another seventeen were slightly damaged. P-38s from the 82nd Fighter Group provided escort and no enemy fighters rose to challenge the bombers.¹³²

1st Lt. Richard C. Flournoy and crew of the 49th Squadron, who had survived the crash on take off just nine days earlier, had two engines shot out, two damaged, and the radio damaged by flak over the target. The flak caused no fires or injuries. The plane, number 42-5397, was unable to keep up and at 11:30 fell behind the formation. The crew broadcast "May Day" calls. The P-38's gave the distressed crew complete coverage until about 11:45 when the struggling plane entered a cloud bank at 9,000 feet northwest of Araxos, Greece. Lt. Flournoy had enough control and power to fly to the Greek island of Corfu. There he made a safe crash landing near Levkimal Point. The crew tried to destroy the plane by fire, but was unsuccessful. The crew evaded capture and later all were returned to Allied control.¹³³

November 19, 20 and 21 were non-operational.

MISSION 97, NOVEMBER 22, 1943 **TOULON, FRANCE, NAVAL BASE** **MISSION 98, NOVEMBER 24, 1943¹³⁴** **TOULON, FRANCE, NAVAL BASE** **ANTHEOR, FRANCE, VIADUCT**

The initial mission to Toulon was aborted because of weather, and all thirty-nine airplanes returned with their bombs. The mission was rescheduled as soon as weather seemed to make it feasible. The naval base had docking and repair facilities for both submarines and surface vessels. It was France's largest such facility on the Mediterranean, and it served most of the eleven to fifteen submarines operating in the Mediterranean. The Viaduct, the designated alternate, located 58 miles northeast of Toulon, was

crossed by a double-tracked railroad which was the main coastal rail line connecting France and Italy. The thirty Forts on the raid were in two waves, with the second wave stacked down. This put the higher, first wave, above an overcast, so it bombed the Viaduct scoring near misses. The second wave, below the overcast, bombed the naval base with excellent results. Many fires were started, buildings demolished, facilities destroyed or severely damaged, and hits were scored on two submarines in dry dock.

The first wave encountered some flak, slightly damaging ten planes, and wounding S/Sgt. John H. Chisholm in the left leg. He was a left waist gunner from the 20th, in Col. Rice's lead crew. Sgt. Chisholm was hospitalized at Ajaccio, Corsica. This wave was also attack by ten to fifteen fighters and one FW-190 was shot down. The fighters caused no injuries or serious damage. The second wave was unopposed except for slight, inaccurate flak. Four planes made emergency landings at Ajaccio and one at Decimomannu, Sardinia because of engine troubles or fuel shortages.

To everyone's delight a long mission briefed for Thanksgiving Day, November 25 was cancelled because of weather. This gave all personnel the opportunity to enjoy "the first real meal the men had since being overseas." It was the traditional roast turkey feast, even down to real butter and pumpkin pie. The standard fare of modified "B" rations with canned food, powdered eggs, and wax-like margarine, that didn't melt even in the heat of summer, was a major source of poor morale. A string band played during the entire dinner at the 429th Squadron mess. That evening there was a dance at the Officers Club in Tunis

Bruce Hopper, former Harvard University professor, and now historian for the Eighth Air Force, visited the Group on historical matters over Thanksgiving. He was complimentary of Lt. McCoid's history of the Group. Professor Hopper was a flight leader in the 96th Squadron during WW I in France. He and Group Adjutant, Maj. Clapp, had served together then and now renewed old memories for the first time in twenty-five years.¹³⁵

MISSION 99, NOVEMBER 26, 1943 RECCO, ITALY, VIADUCT

The Viaduct, nine miles down the coast from Genoa, carried a double track electric railroad, was 1,350 feet long, 40 feet wide and 30 feet high, was curved, and had 22 masonry spans. Twenty-nine planes, led by Maj. Headrick, covered the target with direct hits and near misses. The structure was not destroyed, but was damaged extensively, and the line was left impassable. The flak was ineffective and there were no fighters. Seven planes landed in Corsica and Sardinia because of mechanical problems and fuel shortages.¹³⁶

MISSION 100, NOVEMBER 27, 1943 VERGATO, ITALY RENO RIVER RAILROAD BRIDGES

These two single-track bridges were approximately twenty-five and thirty miles southwest



L to R: Maj. Richard T. Headrick, Col. Joseph A. Thomas and Col. Rice on occasion of the Group's 100th mission, November 27, 1943. (Courtesy of R. Headrick)



L to R: Maj. Joseph W. Triggs, Cdr. 20th Squadron; Capt. Bradford A. Evans, Cdr. 96th Squadron; Maj. Walter F. Kutschera, Cdr. 429th Squadron; Maj. Headrick, Cdr. 49th Squadron; Gen. Joseph H. Atkinson, Cdr. Fifth Wing; and Col. Rice on occasion of the Group's 100th mission. (Courtesy of R. Headrick)

of Bologna. Ten airplanes got separated from the formation in weather and returned early. Of the remaining planes, ten attacked one bridge and six the other. Bombs temporarily cut tracks, damaged or destroyed nearby small buildings and damaged adjacent highways, but neither bridge was destroyed. General Atkinson, Col. Joe Thomas and Col. John H. Brown, former commander of the 301st Group, all from the Fifth Wing, visited the Group for the interrogations and to join in the celebration of the Group's 100th mission. They attended the dance that evening at the Tunis Officers Club. The next morning,

Chaplain Allen held a special service for all personnel. The service included songs by the Group Choir, congregational singing and short talks by Col. Rice and Chaplain Allen.¹³⁷

MISSION 101, NOVEMBER 29, 1943 FIANO ROMANO, ITALY, LANDING GROUND MISSION 102, NOVEMBER 30, 1943¹³⁸ MARSEILLE, FRANCE, SUBMARINE PENS

Twenty-seven (27) enemy fighters were reported on the landing ground twenty miles north

of Rome. They were being used to support German ground troops and for bomber interceptor missions. Thirty of the Group airplanes got over the target, but were unable to bomb because of solid overcast. All planes returned with their bombs.

The submarine pens were under construction, heightening Navy concern about use of submarine packs in the Mediterranean. The formation got as far as Sardinia before being recalled because of bad weather over the target.

MISSION 103, DECEMBER 1, 1943 **TURIN, ITALY, BALL BEARING FACTORY**

Ball bearings had been identified as one of those strategic resources to be denied the enemy in the effort to render the Luftwaffe ineffective. A raid on November 8 was thought to have done sufficient damage to eliminate two months of production. The famous October 14 raid by the Eighth Air Force on the Schweinfurt, Germany plant was a major blow to fifty percent of Germany's ball bearing production. The Fiat ball bearing factory at Turin took on increased significance as Germany was expected to increase production to compensate for other losses. December opened with a major raid on the Fiat factory. One hundred eighteen (118) B-17's, including 31 from the 2nd, with P-38 escort, dumped 354 tons of bombs on the factory, severely damaging the works, nearby industrial buildings and the yards and rail lines.¹³⁹ Capt. Evans, 96th Squadron commander, led the Group. Flak was intense and accurate, slightly injuring one man and damaging twenty planes. Eight to ten fighters engaged the formation for twelve minutes without causing significant damage. Group gunners downed two Me-109's and received probable credit for one Re-2001. As became common on these long missions, some airplanes had to stop in Corsica or Sardinia for fuel on the way home.¹⁴⁰

MISSION 104, DECEMBER 6, 1943 **GRIZZANO, ITALY**

RAILROAD BRIDGES/MARSHALLING YARDS

MISSION 105, DECEMBER 8, 1943

MONTALTO DI CASTRO, ITALY

RAILROAD BRIDGES

MISSION 106, DECEMBER 9, 1943

DEVIA/MONEGLIA, ITALY

RAILROAD BRIDGES

These three missions illustrate the frustration and frequently the futility of using high altitude bombers in the interdiction role in bad weather. In the first instance, Maj. Triggs, Commander of the 20th, led 38 airplanes over the primary and three alternate targets, all were overcast. The hunt for targets reduced fuel supplies sufficiently that the Group put in to Foggia for refueling and for the night. They might have flown a mission from Foggia but there was no re-supply of oxygen available.

On December 8, Col. Rice led 13 airplanes, from the 20th and 96th Squadrons, on an uncharacteristic low altitude mission at 2,300 feet, against four railroad bridges in the vicinity of Montalto Di Castro. None of the bridges was

hit, and the bombs did seemingly inconsequential damage to the surrounding areas.

The next day, on the last mission from North Africa, Maj. Ainsworth led a small formation of 14 airplanes, from three squadrons, after three bridges seventeen miles up the coast from La Spezia. The formation got half way up the east coast of Sardinia when weather made it obvious that the effort was futile. All planes returned with their bombs.¹⁴¹

Now that the runways and taxiways at Massicault were surfaced, the Group had recently moved to higher and drier ground, cots had been issued, and the Tunis Officer's Club had been opened, it was time to move. The move to Italy started in earnest on December 10. A cynical observation about the timing didn't alter the fact that the progress of the war had firmly predetermined a move of strategic air forces northward across the Mediterranean as soon as it was reasonably safe to do.

The Group started combat in North Africa with an abortive mission on April 28, and ended it with an abortive mission on December 9. In the seven and one-third months in between, it had helped to wrest huge chunks of territory from Axis control. Tunisia, Pantelleria, Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica and almost half of Italy were now in Allied hands. Allied air power dominated Mediterranean air space. Certainly there were pockets of resistance, mostly at the periphery, but the Luftwaffe could no longer deny Allied planes access to any airspace in the area. In this quest, the Group lost twenty-four planes and part or all of their crews, to enemy action. Still, in the air there was more yet to do than had been done. Little of a strategic bombing nature had been accomplished aside from a few tentative forays into southern France and Germany, Austria and Greece. That would change with a move to Italy. The Group could then become an effective partner in the Combined Bomber Offensive (CBO) between the Fifteenth and Eighth Air Forces. POINTBLANK was the code name given to the CBO. The basic objective of POINTBLANK was to render the German Air Force (GAF) ineffective. For the next few months POINTBLANK would concentrate on attacking and destroying GAF airplanes in the air and on the ground, their bases of operation and maintenance, and their production.¹⁴² POINTBLANK didn't relieve the Group of its role to support the ground campaign in Italy. The selection of targets for CBO would give priority to those that offered the greatest potential for achieving the objective. For POINTBLANK to be most effective, all potential targets had to be within striking range. After the move to Italy, no target, in Germany or its occupied territory, would be out of reach of Allied bombers. The 2nd, and its sister bomber groups, would be sent to fight their way into and out of the heart of Naziland. Resistance would be fierce as the Luftwaffe battled for survival.

The demands of POINTBLANK started at a time when most of the original crews had finished their tours, and many of the airplanes were suffering combat fatigue. Engine failures, aborts and early returns of airplanes, for want of replacement engines and spare parts, had been a problem for over three months. Fortunately, the Group would keep its ground echelon whose dedication and in-

genuity knew no bounds. The Group also had on hand battle-hardened commanders capable and willing to lead novice crews into the aerial combat thickets.

Endnotes:

¹ McCoid, *Group History*, 80

² *Ibid*, 80

³ Richards, *Missing Crew Reports*

⁴ *Ibid*, *Mission Reports, Returning Crew Interrogations*, (Washington National Records Center, Suitland, MD)

⁵ McCoid, *Group History*, 81, 82

⁶ McCoid *History*, 85, 86

⁷ Craven and Cate, Vol II, 472, 473

Samuel Eliot Morrison, "History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, Vol 9:

Sicily, Salerno, Anzio: Jan 1943 - June 1944, (Little Brown, Boston 1954) 215, 216

⁷ *Mission Reports, Returning Crew Interrogations*, (Washington National Records Center, Suitland, MD)

Richards, *Missing Crew Reports*

⁸ McCoid, *Group History*, 87, 88

⁹ Craven and Cate, 476

¹⁰ McCoid *History*, 89, 90

¹¹ Richards, *Missing Crew Reports*

¹² Churchill, "Closing the Ring", 41

¹³ Craven and Cate, Vol II, 485

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 503-505

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 506

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 506

¹⁷ McCoid, *Group History*, 91

Mission Report No. 57

¹⁸ *Mission Report*

¹⁹ *Escape Statement of Lt. Bernard B. Pasero, Oct 11, 1943, to 1st Lt. James A. Clark, Interrogation Officer, 20th Squadron*, (Washington National Records Center, Suitland, MD)

²⁰ Richards, *Missing Crew Reports*

²¹ *Escape Statement of S/Sgt. Edgar Neil MacDonald, Oct 28, 1943, to 1st Lt. James A. Clark, Interrogation Officer, 20th Squadron*, (Washington National Records Center, Suitland, MD)

²² Pasero *Escape Statement, Oct 11, 1943*

²³ *Escape Statement of Lt. Kemp F. Martin, Oct 11, 1943, to 1st Lt. James A. Clark, Interrogation Officer, 20th Squadron*, (Washington National Records Center, Suitland, MD)

²⁴ Pasero and Martin *Escape Statements, Oct 11, 1943*

²⁵ *Ibid*

²⁶ *Ibid*

²⁷ Kemp F. Martin, *Interview June 4, 1994*

²⁸ MacDonald *Escape Statements, Oct 28, 1943*

²⁹ Richards, *Missing Crew Reports*

³⁰ Robert Kingsbury, "Domestic Engineering Magazine", January 1954, 100-01, 160-61, Pasero *Escape Statement, Oct 11, 1943, 167-68, 171*

³¹ *Mission Report, eyewitness accounts*

³² Richards, *Missing Crew Reports*

³³ *Mission Report*,

³⁴ Richards, *Missing Crew Report*

³⁵ Wade O. Douglas *Diary*

³⁶ McCoid, *Group History*, 91 - 100

³⁷ *Ibid*, 100, 101

³⁸ *Ibid*, 102

³⁹ Crave & Cate, 507, 509

⁴⁰ McCoid, *Group History*, 101-103

⁴¹ Craven & Cate, 509

⁴² McCoid, *Group History*, 103, 104

⁴³ *Mission Report*

⁴⁴ Richard, *Missing Crew Report*

⁴⁵ McCoid, *Group History*, 105

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 106

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 106, 107

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 107, 108

⁴⁹ Craven & Cate, 506

⁵⁰ McCoid, *Group History*, 109

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 110, 111

Craven & Cate, 506

Mission Report, (Washington Nat'l Records Ctr., Suitland, MD)

⁵² Craven and Cate, 507, 511

⁵³ McCoid, Group History, 112 - 119

Mission Reports, (Washington Nat'l Records Ctr., Suitland, MD)

⁵⁴ Craven & Cate, 518

⁵⁵ McCoid, Group History, 114, 128

⁵⁶ Ibid, 146

⁵⁷ Ibid, 114

⁵⁸ Craven and Cate, 518

⁵⁹ McCoid, Group History 116

⁶⁰ Craven and Cate, 517

⁶¹ McCoid, Group History, 119 - 123

⁶² Craven and Cate, 519

⁶³ Ibid, 520

⁶⁴ McCoid, Group History, 123

⁶⁵ Winston S. Churchill, "Closing the Ring" (Houghton Mifflin Company Boston, 1951) 113

⁶⁶ Craven and Cate, 529

⁶⁷ McCoid, Group History, 124, 125

⁶⁸ David Mundy, 96th Squadron History, Sept 1943, page 46

⁶⁹ Clark B. Gathercole, Interview June 5, 1994

⁷⁰ Craven and Cate, 534-536

⁷¹ Ibid, 534-536

⁷² Mundy, 96th Squadron History, Sep '43, page 48

⁷³ McCoid, Group History, 129, 130

⁷⁴ Craven and Cate, 536 - 539

⁷⁵ McCoid, Group History, 130 - 131

⁷⁶ Craven and Cate, 539

⁷⁷ McCoid, Group History, 131 - 132

⁷⁸ Ibid, 132

⁷⁹ Ibid, 133

⁸⁰ Ibid, 133 - 135

⁸¹ Ibid, 137

⁸² Ibid, 135, 136

⁸³ Mission Report, Sep 29, '43

⁸⁴ McCoid, Group History, 138, 139

⁸⁵ Stoeger, Video Diary

⁸⁶ McCoid, Group History, 139

⁸⁷ Ibid, 138 Craven and Cate, 550, 551

⁸⁸ Ibid, 138

⁸⁹ Robert G. Kingsbury interview September 8, 1995

⁹⁰ Burton R. Thorman, 429th Squadron Navigator, Vignette. (Kazenbach later became the Attorney General in the Kennedy administration)

⁹¹ McCoid, Group History, 138, 139

⁹² Mission Report, No. 82

⁹³ McCoid, 429th Squadron History, Oct '43, page 2

⁹⁴ Richards Missing Crew Report

⁹⁵ Douglas Diary, Oct 5, 1943

⁹⁶ McCoid, Group History, 139 - 143; Mission Report No. 82

⁹⁷ McCoid, Group History, 143, 144

⁹⁸ Craven and Cate, 550

⁹⁹ McCoid, Group History, 144, 145

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 146

¹⁰¹ Mission Report, No. 85

¹⁰² Craven and Cate, 554

¹⁰³ McCoid, Group History, 149 - 151

Mission Report, No. 86

Richards Missing Crew Report

¹⁰⁴ McCoid, Group History, 152, 153

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 153, 154

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 156

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 154, 155

¹⁰⁸ Douglas Diary, Oct 24, '43

¹⁰⁹ Craven and Cate, 559

¹¹⁰ McCoid, Group History, 158, 159

¹¹¹ Craven and Cate, 558

¹¹² McCoid, Group History, 157

Mission Report No. 90

¹¹³ Richards Missing Crew Report

¹¹⁴ Mission Report, No. 91

¹¹⁵ McCoid, Group History, 160

¹¹⁶ Gibson, 20th Squadron History, Nov '43, page 1

¹¹⁷ Craven and Cate, 450 - 459

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 582

McCoid, Group History, 161

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 165

¹²⁰ Ibid, 161, 162

¹²¹ Richards Missing Crew Report

¹²² Ibid

¹²³ McCoid, Group History, 161

¹²⁴ Ibid, 166, 167

¹²⁵ Ibid, 167 - 169

¹²⁶ Richards Missing Crew Report

¹²⁷ Raymond P. Erpelding, Navigator on Lt. Underwood's crew, interview Apr 25, 1994

¹²⁸ Mission Report, No. 94

¹²⁹ McCoid, Group History, 171

¹³⁰ Ibid, 171, 172

¹³¹ Craven and Cate, 584

¹³² McCoid, Group History, 173, 174

¹³³ Richards Missing Crew Report

¹³⁴ McCoid, 175 - 178

¹³⁵ Ibid, 178

¹³⁶ Ibid, 178, 179

¹³⁷ Ibid, 179, 180

¹³⁸ Ibid, 184, 185

¹³⁹ Craven and Cate, 592

¹⁴⁰ McCoid, Group History, 186, 187

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 188, 189

¹⁴² Craven and Cate, 573

CHAPTER XIII

THE "MEANS" — MERIT AMIDST THE GRIT AND GRIME

Every war has its unsung heroes. The war in the Mediterranean area, and particularly, the air war, has been called the forgotten war. That judgement is perhaps over-stated, but the war there was certainly under-publicized compared with the attention given the war in western Europe and especially that lavished on the Eighth Air Force. If the air war in the Mediterranean was under-sung, then the work of those who toiled long in the grit and grime as members of a ground echelon must be the lost chord in the chorus for unsung heroes. Their enemies and burdens were different, but they had them all the same.

Air crews trained, deployed conveniently and relatively quickly in their aircraft, completed a definite combat tour (acknowledging that many did not) and came home — frequently to a hero's welcome. Ground crews, by contrast, started training at the same point and time, but, at least those of the 2nd Bomb Group, deployed by troop train, by congested, sick-at-the-rail, U-Boat-threatened convoys, and finally by ancient, dung-littered French rail cars, or by a jarring thousand-mile-long vehicle convoy ride, to be ensconced in tents for the duration. They were finally allowed to return home, mostly in that amorphous mob that flooded back after the war. In the meantime they fought battles of their own for more than two years.

Air warfare is waged by a triumvirate — a three-some of men and machines, whose common bond is the machine. The machine is the link between the ends and the means. There are those who go up in the machine to achieve the ends and there are those who nurture the machine to provide the means. In the records of aerial combat, the ends garner the lion's share of the glamour and glory. This bit is about the "means."

There is a hierarchy in the genealogy of an airplane that traces its origins from Uncle Sam by serial number, to the unit by tail markings,

and to the crew by nose art. Many airplanes prove so worthy, so reliable and seemingly so indestructible, they take on a persona of their own. They become more than merely prized possessions, but full and trusted partners in the life and death struggle that is aerial combat. There is a revered and mutual respect, yes, even a love affair between men and such machines. The sagas of such planes as the "Memphis Belle," and the 2nd's own "Sweet Pea" are testimonies to this truism. Their names become proxies for the exploits of the crews who flew them and are well remembered after the names of the crews are forgotten. Yet the qualities that gave such planes renown are not inherent, but they are sustainable with careful service and maintenance. In a bomber unit, the person to whom that care and maintenance was most directly entrusted was the crew chief. On the ground the airplane belonged to the crew chief, and woe be to him who tinkered with the plane without the chief's knowledge or consent. Access to the airplane wasn't given lightly and not without a careful check of credentials.

At the start of combat, most chiefs and their crews slept with their airplane. Tents were located near the plane hardstand parking area. Some crude, additional shelter was usually erected to store the crew's tools and equipment. This arrangement was one of work convenience and security. The North African bases were located in the open countryside that afforded easy access to nomadic Arabs and their grazing animals. Security and safety of the airplanes were paramount considerations. Later, crews had their tents in the squadron camp area, but they also had some form of shelter on the flight line where they could grab a wink or two during those many days and nights when the time between completion of aircraft service and maintenance and the launching of the next mission was too short for the trip back to the camp.

The maintenance crew's day usually started when the air crews got up for a mission. While air crews were at the mission briefing, the ground crew performed the airplane pre-flight, started and warmed the engines, checked all the engine gauges and scanned the airplane with practiced eyes for any tell-tale signs that might effect performance. When the air crew arrived, there was a short conference over any maintenance and repairs since the last mission. The ground crew stood by with fire extinguisher and the auxiliary power unit through the engine start-up, and guided the pilot safely out of the hardstand area and into the taxi stream. They watched as the airplane took its proper place, in the nose-to-tail line of planes, to be in the right sequence for take off and assembly in its assigned position in the formation.

Lift off of a bomber fully loaded with crew, weapons, and fuel was always a tense and vulnerable time. All engines had to work at near-perfection to sustain lift and carry the airplane safely through the transition to full flight. A plane that disappeared in the dust, stirred by torrents of air streaming behind other planes, or that staggered, even momentarily, in prop wash, added drama to a mission launch.

The ground crew's best assured respite from work was during the hours of a mission, unless their airplane aborted and returned early.^{1*} Air



"Touch of Venus" (Photo Section)



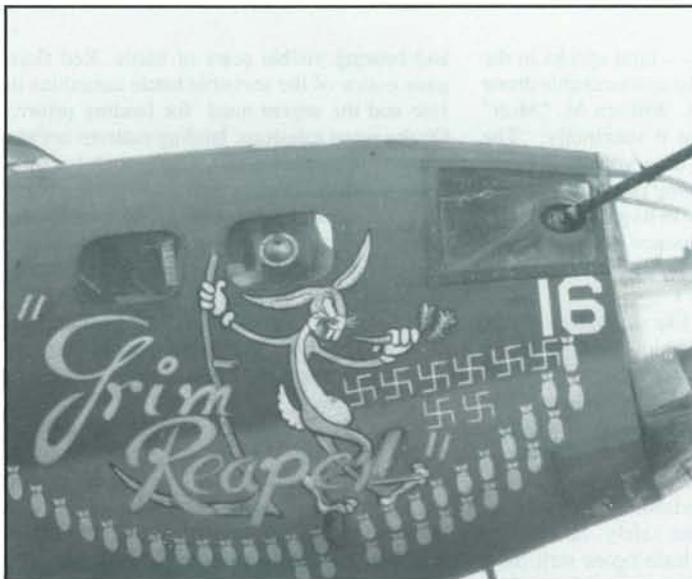
"Bambi Dear" (Photo Section)



"Wiley Witch" (Photo Section)



"Sad Sack" (Courtesy of Photo Section/G. Wolp)



The "Grim Reaper", reaped victories. (Photo Section)



"Wolfpack", Crew Chief M/Sgt. Milo Abel. (Courtesy of Photo Section/G. Wolp)



"High Tension II". Note modified nose section with single 50 caliber machine gun firing forward. (Courtesy of Photo Section/G. Walp)



"Lassie and her Lads" (Photo Section)



Sgt. James R. "Bob" Harris and Manuel Segal, 96th Squadron, parachute riggers, among other things, Amendola, Italy, 1944. (Courtesy of J. Harris via B. Hanson)



"Thundermug", aircraft number 42-29604, served Capt. Godecke's crew for their 50 missions. Lt. Thomas Cochran and crew flew the airplane to its 85th mission. "Thundermug" completed its 100th mission April 13, 1944. (Photo Section)

and ground crews alike hated aborts, most particularly the ground crews. Abort was like a demerit — a blotch on their performance — which didn't have to be written down or posted. It was enough to have them on one's conscience. The chief and his crew's most treasured badge of merit was a long, unbroken streak of missions without an abort for mechanical reasons. The odds against such a streak mounted, regardless of crew merit, with the wear and tear of warfare in the aerial trenches and with the insidious toll of the elements on the ground. Engines were a particular bugaboo and new engines were the least trusted of all. The number of engine problems and failures on the new airplanes pick-up at Kearney, and the Lt. Blackford crew tragedy because of new engine failures on take off, were ample reasons for that distrust. An engine that survived the break-in period was a treasured asset.

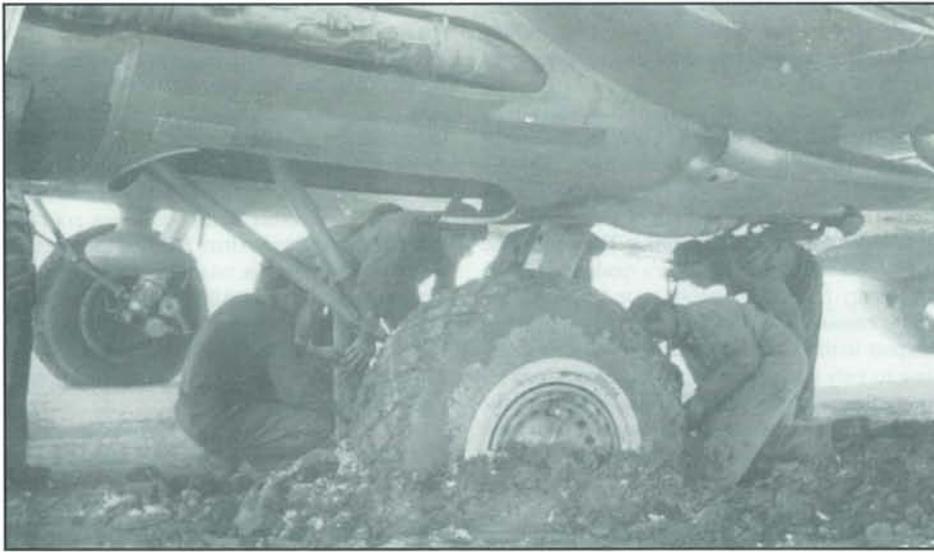
As the mission return time approached, anxious crews watched and listened for the first signs

of the formation's return — faint specks in the distant sky or horizon or the unmistakable drone of far-off engines. M/Sgt. William M. "Mott" Prather, a crew chief, put it succinctly: "The worst part was from the time your first heard that faint roar of the returning planes to the time you recognized your plane in its place in the formation. You have to experience it to know. The pressure was tremendous. Sometimes your plane wasn't there."²

Returning formations, like sky writers, wrote a message as to how the mission went. Those on the ground became expert at reading the message long before the planes landed. When all had gone well, the formation was in tact, even jaunty, and the pattern and landings were orderly and smooth. A contagious conviviality quickly spread about as crews relished the mission, happy to have another one safely chalked up against their tour. When it hadn't gone well, there were ominous vacancies in a ragged formation, and planes limping along with feathered engines,

and bearing visible scars of battle. Red flares gave notice of the invisible battle casualties inside and the urgent need for landing priority. On the worst missions, landing patterns became a melee of airplanes in a vain search for order among competing priorities. Some planes, though badly damaged, were brought safely, and softly back to earth, by commendable feats of airmanship, as if to ease the pain of the wounded on board. Others, with insurmountable odds, were forced to come skidding and crashing back to earth, hopefully, with no further injuries and somewhere that didn't obstruct the runway for those to follow.

Ground crews agonized over the missing airplanes and crews. Perhaps, they hoped, the missing ones were still straggling with engines out or had just stopped short somewhere for fuel, or maintenance, or to get early medical treatment for the wounded, and would be back soon. But ground crews agonized most over those missing planes that weren't straggling, hadn't stopped



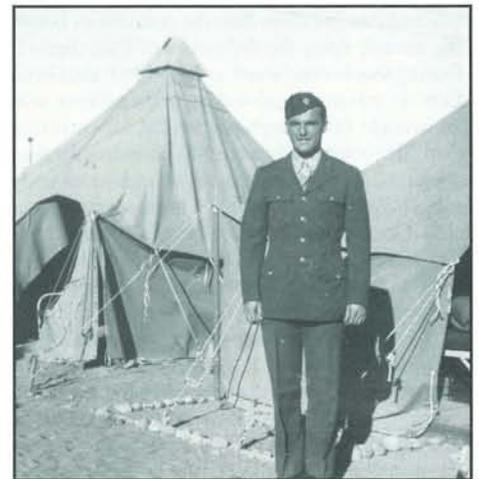
It happens, and two or three hours later -----. (Courtesy of W. Covell)



Lt. Bernard B. Pasero's, "C Batt," ground crew for airplane number 42-25837. Photo taken during the move from Ain M'Lila to Massicault. Nineteen days later, the plane went down on the August 19, 1943 Foggia raid. (Courtesy of K. Martin)



"Zelma" line crew. L to R: Cpl. Arthur Burrow; M/Sgt. Clarence Degodi, Crew Chief; Cpl. Robert Rounds, and S/Sgt. Walter Bingham, Assistant Crew Chief, 20th Squadron, Massicault, Tunisia. (Courtesy of R. Amos)



S/Sgt. Joseph F. Brager, Assistant Crew Chief, 20th Squadron. Burned May 11, 1943 in fire on the line. Died May 26 -- first ground crew casualty. (Courtesy of B. Cohen)

short, and weren't coming back. It was then that ground crews suffered under the burden that haunted every man who worked on an airplane - the knowledge that their work and their performance effected the safety and lives of the air crews. That was their burden throughout the war — a continuing battle of conscience. They took little solace in the obstacles and the odds they were expected to overcome: always too little time; too few people; not enough equipment; too few parts; and no cozy, well-lit, fully-equipped hangar backed up by bins of parts and bulging warehouses. Their hangar was the great outdoors, in the heat and dust, or the rain and mud, and in daylight or at night. Mostly, it was at night because the days were consumed by the missions. Everyone knew they had to perform regardless of conditions. War made no allowances, even for unfair odds.

After the planes were parked, another quick conference ensued between air and ground crews to learn what had gone right, what was questionable and what was wrong, and to survey the damage. Now the work began — to confirm what was right, to verify the questionable, and

to fix what was wrong. It didn't matter what the time or conditions, or how long it took. Missions weren't supposed to wait for service and maintenance. It was more common than rare that maintenance and service crews worked well into and through the night.

An airplane in combat, and particularly a bomber, is a monstrous consumer of fuel, weapons and maintenance. No matter how competent the crew chief and his mechanics, they were still dependent on a host of other people, and on a logistics pipeline that stretched thousands of miles back to factories, plants, refineries and depots in the U.S. A small horde of people descended on the returned planes to ready them for the next mission. Mechanics removed engine cowlings, access plates and panels to start inspections and repairs. Shrapnel and machine gun shell strikes were traced on their dastardly course through the innards of the plane, to find and to fix all the vital organs they may have struck. Sometimes, when planes were shredded by flak and shell fire, damage went undetected and was found only after it produced tell-tale symptoms of an ailment. It was always the fervent hope

that symptoms wouldn't flare up at a critical point on a mission. Holes in fabric and skin had to be patched. Some required new surfaces or the skills of sheet metal and fabric specialists.

Gas and oil trucks made their rounds, as did radio and communications specialists. Photo section technicians removed mission cameras and rushed the film to the lab for processing so that mission results could be assessed. Cameras had to be serviced and reloaded with film for the next mission, but couldn't be installed until the formation for the mission was known. Parachute riggers, part of the personal equipment team — bore that same burden of knowledge that their handiwork would provide the last hope of survival for numerous airmen — crawled through the airplanes inspecting parachutes, oxygen masks, life vests and the stowed life rafts. Oxygen tanks and walk-around oxygen bottles had to be refilled.

Armors removed and hauled away the ammunition "slugs", cleaned and repaired machine guns, resupplied ammo boxes and carefully realigned machine gun cartridges in their belts because a misaligned cartridge could jam a gun

at a crucial point in an aerial slugfest with an enemy fighter. Among the last to get to the airplane were the “bomb loaders,” — those ordnance people who filled the belly of the bomber with the ordnance for the up-coming mission. Their trucks and trailers spent much of the day plying back and forth from the bomb and ammo storage area to preposition the weapons and ammunition for the next mission.³ A B-17F carried twelve 500-pound bombs, or 6,000 pounds. A formation of 30 airplanes, a fairly typical number, gobbled up 360 such bombs weighing 180,000 pounds or 90 tons. For a maximum effort mission of 48 airplanes, the number of 500-pounders increased to 576, weighing 288,000 pounds or 144 tons. Even with lifts and hoists, bomb loading was back-breaking and finger-smashing work. T/Sgt. Walt Clausen, a bomb loader, put his experience this way: “Tough and physically-hardened ordnance men — well conditioned as we were — found the protracted loading binge demanding and unusually exhausting. I can recall no other period throughout the war that required a more dedicated effort from the ammunition handlers than the continuous bombing assault upon the defenders of Pantelleria.”⁴ During that second week in June 1943, the Group flew six missions in five days to Pantelleria, with an average of 30 airplanes loaded for each mission. The bomb loads were 500-pounders for three missions, 1,000-pounders for two missions and a mix of 500 and 1,000-pound bombs on one mission. Ordnance men were perhaps effected more than most by the vagaries of mission scheduling — aborts, recalls, and rescheduling of missions, frequently with different bomb loads.

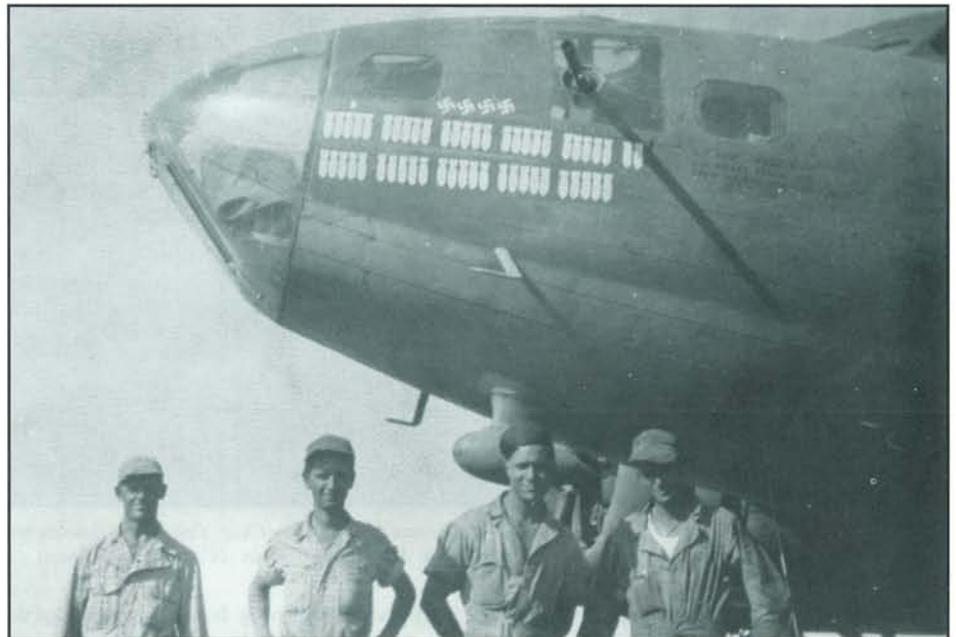
Numerous other technicians and organizations provided back-up for the direct maintenance and service of the airplanes, including Supply, Engineering, and Transportation. Also included in the ground echelon, that was committed to serve for the duration, was an operating and support network. Operations, that scheduled the missions, planned and directed all flying operations, and kept individual flight records. Intelligence, that assessed the opposition, developed or disseminated target information, gave pre-strike briefings, conducted post-strike interrogations, and did strike photo interpretation. Weather officers, who tried to fathom the fickle nature of fronts, clouds, winds and temperature. Personnel, that kept up with the myriad tasks of general administration.

All of these functions had to feed the war’s insatiable appetite for records. They did the feeding with manual typewriters and carbon paper, working mostly in tents.

There were the doctors and medics who treated the sick and wounded, and the emotional needs of those under the stress of war. Special Services, whose task it was to provide recreation and diversion from the tedium of seemingly endless repetition of assigned tasks. The cooks and KPs, who had to meet the war’s random schedule of twenty-four hour operation and who ate the same monotonous diet that others continuously carpiped to them about preparing. Anxious as anyone to vary the wearisome dullness of issued rations, the mess officers and sergeants scoured the country side for fresh fruits, vegetables and meat. The chaplains were there to be everyone’s spiritual mentors, and worked to provide divine assurance against the deadly threats of combat. Sometimes even a chaplain’s spiritual resources were sorely challenged, when he had to deal with one of the sad and poignant cruelties of war.

On the October 5, 1943 mission against the marshalling yards at Bologna, Italy, 2nd Lt. Earl W. Fitzgerald and crew were knocked down by flak and fighters. When the airplanes returned from that mission, Chaplain Allen and one of his enlisted assistants were sitting in the chaplain’s jeep at the end of the runway waiting for Lt. Fitzgerald’s crew. The wife of one of Fitzgerald’s gunners had given birth to a child. The new mother developed uremic poisoning and wasn’t expected to live. The Red Cross, as was their task during the war, confirmed the legitimacy of the emergency. Chaplain Allen, with emergency leave orders in hand for the gunner, was waiting to help hasten the new father on his way home. Nine of Fitzgerald’s crew survived, but that was unknown to Chaplain Allen at the time.

The ground echelon also suffered one of the first Group casualties of the war. Aircraft number 42-5778, the one of the missing bombsight episode at Morrison Field, was brought to North Africa by Lt. Gathercole. The airplane was assigned to the 20th Squadron, and Lt. Col. Thomas flew it as the Group lead airplane on four of



Capt. Donald J. Stoeger’s ground crew for airplane number 42-20609. L to R: Sgts. Stanley F. Bonkowski; John Pizzola; Edward Powicki; and crew chief, M/Sgt. William M. Prather. This airplane had only one abort for mechanical reasons in 50 missions. (Courtesy of W. Prather)



Cpts. Norman E. Annich, Gp. Intelligence Officer and Rudolph C. Koller, Gp. Navigator. Capt. Annich was a recalled WW I veteran. (Courtesy of R. Amos)



M/Sgt. William M. “Mott” Prather receiving the Bronze Star Medal. (Courtesy of W. Prather)

the first five Group missions, while his airplane was undergoing engine work. Airplane number 42-5778 had developed some engine problems. On May 11, the assistant crew chief, Sgt. Joseph F. Brager, was cleaning oil, from a bad oil leak, off of the number 2 engine. He was using gasoline as the cleaning fluid, but for reasons that are not known, he hadn't disconnected the battery. It is believed that the liquid gasoline shorted across the battery terminals, instantly erupted into a deadly blaze that severely burned Sgt. Brager about the hands, face and shoulders, and enveloped the engine in fire. M/Sgt. Bernard B. Cohen, 20th Squadron Line Chief, riding the flight line in his jeep, noticed the fire, drove to the scene, grabbed a fire extinguisher, and doused the blaze. Sgt. Brager was quickly taken to a nearby British field hospital where he died from his burns on May 26. May 11 became a fateful day for Group. T/Sgt. Ramsey, wounded on the Bizerte raid, and 2nd Lt. Seng, wounded on the first Palermo raid, both succumbed to their wounds on May 11, making them the Group's first combat casualties of the war. Sgt. Brager became the first ground echelon casualty since activation of the 304th Bomb Group at Geiger Field, Spokane, Washington. May 11 was also the date of the final surrender of Axis forces in North Africa.

M/Sgt. Cohen wanted to replace the engine on 42-5778 and repair the aircraft, but was overruled. Someone in Engineering decided to cannibalize the airplane for critically needed parts.⁵

Occasionally, ground personnel volunteered or were pressed into service on air crews. Sgt. Donald R. Turner, a ball turret specialist, was killed in action on the August 17 mission to the Marseille, France area airdromes, when he substituted for a ball turret gunner killed on a prior mission.

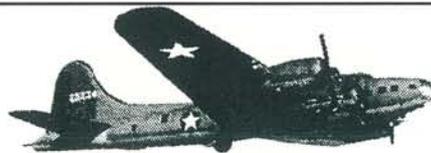
Many ground personnel went voluntarily on one or more missions as observers to better understand their role in support of the air crews. Intelligence officers were the most frequent volunteers. Their work made them trained observers. Capt. Norman E. Annich, Group Intelligence Officer, was the most frequent volunteer observer in the early months of the Group's North African tour. Other observers included armament, ordnance, engineering, bombsight, and special services officers, chaplains, and enlisted NCOs from operations and intelligence. It was common for officers and men to be assigned additional duties. Then of course there was KP, guard and other special duty rosters.

These were the people who provided the "means" — day in and day out for over two years, against some incredible odds, and frequently under long hours, and horrible working conditions — that made the "ends" possible. No bombs could have been delivered without them.

Endnotes:

¹ James M. Prather, letter, Dec 1, 1994

² *After the summer months of heavy flying, supply of replacement engines and cylinders became a problem. At the end of September, the Group had 55 assigned aircraft. Eight were unserviceable because they needed replacement engines or cylinders. On October 31, out of 52 airplanes assigned, 12 were unserviceable and needed 16 engines and 8 cylinders. At November 30, there were 49 airplanes assigned, of which 10 needed engines or cylinders and 3 others were at the Service



sustineo alas

"I SUSTAIN THE WINGS"

"Those two Latin words beneath a golden urn in which reposes three plumes are the literal motto of THE ARMY AIR FORCES TECHNICAL TRAINING COMMAND. Many an Air Force enlisted man cannot translate Latin, but his heart translates the meaning -

"I SUSTAIN THE WINGS"

"I am the Air Force Technician who makes it possible for flyers to be heroes and heroes to be flyers. I drill and work, and fight. I work that others might fly and fight. I fight that I might work to keep them flying. I am the mechanic, the machinist, the radio man, the armorer, the weather observer, the gunner, the instrument man. I'm the technician, but I fight like a commando.

"I am one of those three plumes signifying an unbeatable trio. The plane, the air crew, the ground crew, each indispensable to the other two. Without me the plane would be a motionless machine, the pilot a helpless gladiator.

"When I trained, I chafed at the constant stream of repetition of routine, but now I realize I was learning to act on instinct. I griped at scrubbing and shining and cleaning, but now I realize neatness means a clean job of every task. An unbuttoned pocket seemed trivial, but now I know a forgotten button might be a forgotten cotter key and that forgotten key might mean a plane destroyed and a crew killed. Because of strict training I am good, and I know I'm good.

"The folks at home may never know how important I am, the public may never see my name in print. I am the plodding lineman of modern football. I make long runs possible for All-Americans. I am the blocker that never carries the ball.

"But that pilot there knows me. He knows when he climbs aboard, she sits ready. He knows those motors are perfect, the radio, his ears, the instruments, his eyes. That Bombardier knows his hits are going to be perfect. And when they come back there is something in their handshake no newspaper could describe, no medal could equal. It is the grip of men whose lives depend on me."

"I SUSTAIN THE WINGS"

sustineo alas

- Pvt. William J. Mentzer.



Squadron for major maintenance. (McCoid, Group History, Sep, Oct, Nov 1943) During this same three-month period the Group flew 37 missions. A total of 69 airplanes returned early on 27 of those missions, for reasons other than weather. Record continuity was interrupted by the move to Italy during December.

² Walt Clausen, "GI Journey", (Second Bombardment Association, Sacramento, CA, 1986) 67

³ Ibid, 43

⁴ Bernard B. Cohen, interview, August 15, 1994

CHAPTER XIV

FORMATION OF THE FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE

As World War II progressed into the late months of 1943, the German Armed Forces were

pushed northward along the Italian peninsula by the Allies. The British Eighth Army took the Foggia Plains and on September 27 and captured the vital complex of airfields in the Foggia area.¹

At the Headquarters of the Commanding General, United States Army Air Forces, Washington, D.C., a decision had been reached to supplement the CBO of the U.S. Eighth Air Force, and the British Royal Air Force (RAF) against Germany and her allies. The decision required that a new strategic air force be created to operate from Italy. This would be the Fifteenth Air Force.

The Fifteenth would be built up in size and be able to concentrate on strategic bombing attacks against CBO targets and other targets across Southern Europe and Germany which could not be bombed from England. With bases

in Italy, centered on Foggia, and extending south-eastward into the Italian "boot heel", the Fifteenth was presumed to have more operational days in the winter and would be able to operate twice as often as the Eighth flying out of England.²

With the birth of the Fifteenth, the Twelfth Air Force was reorganized and became the tactical air force in the Mediterranean Theater.

The Fifteenth Air Force was activated on November 1, 1943, with headquarters in Tunis, Tunisia, and was commanded by Major General James H. Doolittle. The headquarters was moved to Bari, Italy, on December 1, 1943, and was to remain there until after the war in Europe was over. Major General Nathan F. Twining became the Commander on January 3, 1944, and remained in that position until after the war.³

Prior to the activation of the Fifteenth, the Ninth Air Force (called the Desert Air Force) had been disestablished, and its number moved to England in October, 1943, to form a new tactical air force. Most of its aircraft, equipment and personnel were transferred to the Twelfth, thus increasing the strength of the NAAF by two B-24 groups, the 98th and 376th Bomb Groups. These two groups, the first heavy bomber groups to be assigned to the North African campaign,

added to the heavy bomber strength of the four B-17 groups in the 5th Wing. The 5th Wing at that time was composed of the 2nd, 97th, 99th and 301st Bombardment Groups.

On activation of the Fifteenth Air Force, eleven combat groups were transferred to it by the Twelfth. They included six heavy bomb groups (four B-17 and two B-24), three P-38 groups, another fighter group being re-equipped with P-47s and the 68th Reconnaissance Group. Also sent to the Fifteenth were the 42nd Bomb Wing of three B-26 groups and the 47th Bomb Wing, including the original B-25 groups of the Twelfth. The B-25s were returned to the Twelfth on November 3 and the 47th became a heavy bomb wing. The 47th then took command of the two B-24 groups which had been transferred from the Twelfth and began operations on November 24, 1943. The 42nd Bomb Wing and its three B-26 groups returned to the Twelfth at the end of the year. In January 1944, reconnaissance of strategic targets was assigned to six aircraft from the 15th Squadron of the 5th Photo Group, Twelfth Air Force, which were placed under Fifteenth Air Force control.⁴

The Fifteenth Air Force heavy bomber strength was rapidly increased in January, 1944, when three B-24 groups, the 449th,

450th, and 451st were added. In February three more B-24 groups, the 454th, 455th, and 456th joined the new Air Force. In March came two B-24 groups, the 459th and 460th, and a B-17 group, the 463rd. Three more B-24 groups, the 461st, 464th, and 484th, and a B-17 group, the 483rd, joined in April. In May the bomber force was completed with the addition of two B-24 groups, the 465th and 485th. Fifteen B-24 groups and six B-17 groups then comprised the heavy bomber force of the Fifteenth until the end of the war.⁵

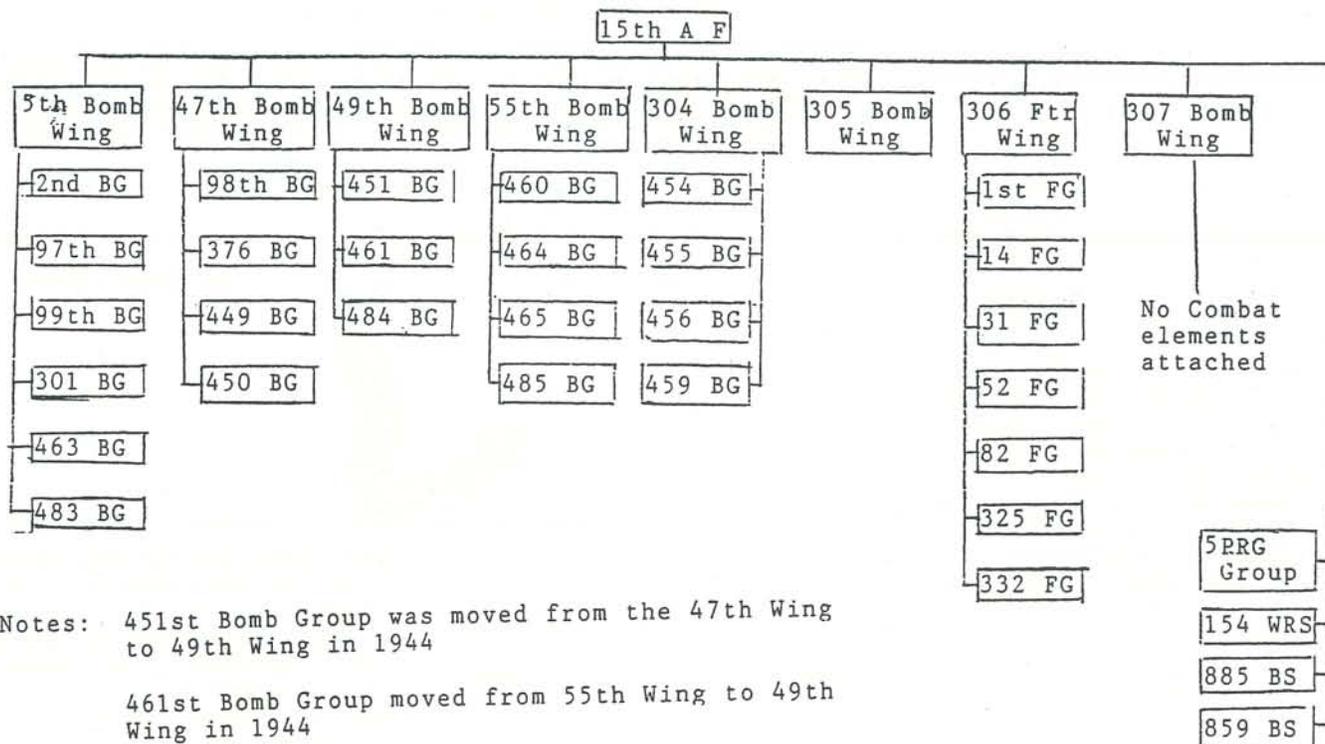
From the time it was established, the efforts of the heavy bomber force of the Fifteenth were directed mainly to accomplishing four objectives:

1. To destroy the German Air Force in the air (by making the enemy fighters come up and fight) and on the ground wherever it was within range of the Fifteenth's bombers.

2. To participate in the CBO in the destruction of German fighter aircraft plants, ball bearing plants, oil refineries, rubber plants, munitions factories, submarine pens and bases, and any other targets selected for the CBO.

3. To support the ground war on the Italian mainland, mainly by attacking communication targets in Italy along the Brenner Pass route, and in neighboring Austria.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART - Combat Units of the 15th Air Force, 1943-45*



Notes: 451st Bomb Group was moved from the 47th Wing to 49th Wing in 1944

461st Bomb Group moved from 55th Wing to 49th Wing in 1944

1st, 14th, 52nd, 82nd, and 325th Fighter Groups were moved from the 306th Fighter Wing to the 305th Bombardment Wing in 1945

*Source, "Fifteenth Air Force Story, Ken C. Rust. Sunshine House, Terre Haute, IN. And "Air Force Combat Units of World War II, Office of Air Force History, Washington, D.C.

4. To weaken the German position in the Balkans.

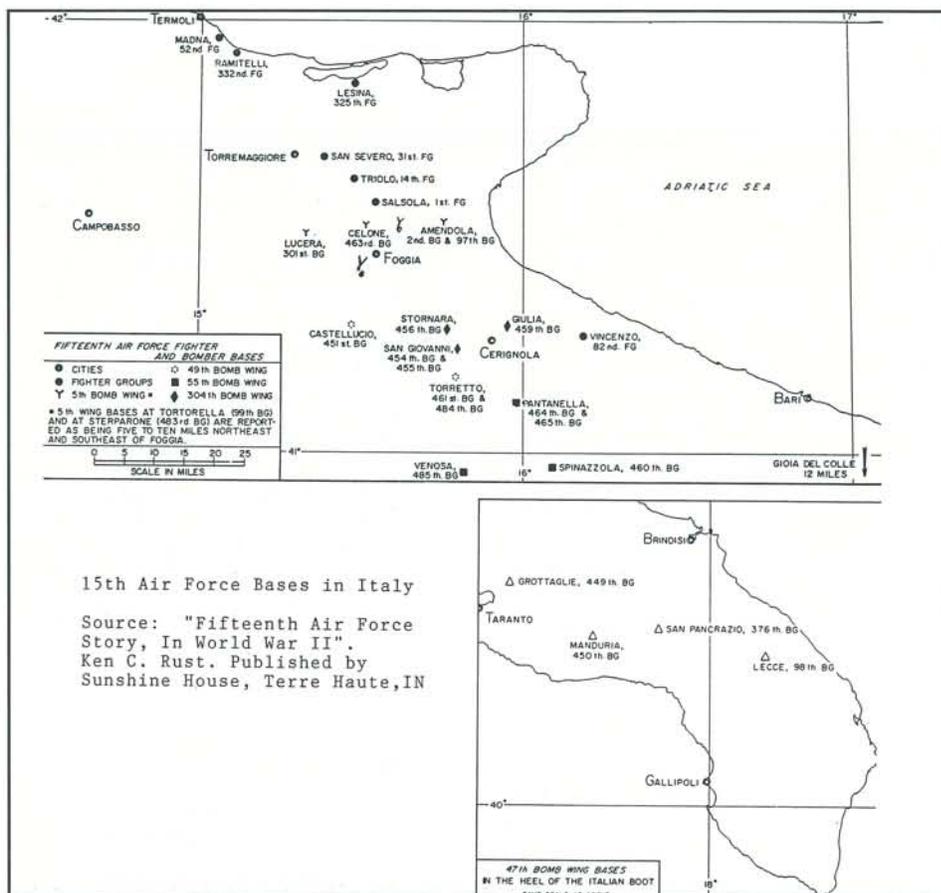
In addition, a set of targets was later established to prepare for the invasion of Southern France in August, 1944.⁶

The Fifteenth was neither as large nor received the recognition and renown as the Eighth Air Force, but it deprived the GAF of vitally needed oil, denied it refuge and sanctuary beyond the Eighth's range and thus greatly hastened its demise as a decisive force in the final days of the European war.

In eighteen months of operation, the 15th destroyed approximately half of the enemy fuel production capacity in Europe, and a good part of the German fighter production capacity, and crippled the enemy's transportation system over half of occupied Europe. It dropped 303,842 tons of bombs on enemy targets in twelve countries including major installations in eight capital cities. It flew 148,955 heavy bomber sorties and 87,732 fighter sorties.⁷

Endnotes:

- ¹ B.G. Vincent J. Exposito, Chief Editor, "the West Point Atlas of American Wars, Vol II, Operations in Italy," (Preager Publishers, 1972) map 948
- ² Ken C. Rust, "Fifteenth Air Story", (Sunshine House Publishers, 1989), 5
- ³ Ibid, 5
- ⁴ Ibid, 6
- ⁵ Ibid, 4
- ⁶ Ibid, 6,7
- ⁷ Ibid, 44



CHAPTER XV

THE 2ND BOMBARDMENT GROUP IN ITALY

With the availability of the new air bases in Italy, Fifteenth Air Force bombers and fighters were some 400 miles closer to the targets in Italy, France, Austria, Germany, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, and Bulgaria. In addition, long flights over water were no longer necessary to reach most of the targets, a fact especially important for crippled bombers and fighters returning from the well-defended targets in southern and central Europe.

As part of the Fifteenth Air Force move, the 2nd Bomb Group moved from Massicault, Tunisia, to Staz Di Amendola Landing Ground in December, 1943. This base (always simply called Amendola) was twelve miles northeast of Foggia, Italy. It was the home of the Group until the end of the war in Europe.

Writers at the time reported that the move was so confused a Philadelphia lawyer could not have untangled it. Perhaps the confusion is understandable considering that nearly two thousand men and a huge amount of equipment and supplies were moved several hundred miles across the Mediterranean to a new base with only five days curtailment in operations. It is to the considerable credit of all personnel that the last mission was flown from North Africa on December 9, 1943, and the first mission from Italy was flown on December 14. A mission was scheduled for December 13 but was not flown because of bad weather.

December 10 was a non-operational day

for the Group. Most of the air echelon, together with the Squadron and Group Intelligence Sections, flew to Amendola. Airplanes were loaded to capacity with luggage and personnel. Take-offs started at 11:30 A.M. Scheduled flying time to Amendola was approximately three hours.

Besides the Group B-17s, twenty five C-47s and C-53s of the 313th Troop Carrier Group moved key personnel and equipment to the new location. Some of the airplanes arrived at the new base the same day; others were delayed in Sicily because of the weather. All of the transport airplanes had arrived by the afternoon of December 12.¹

The Group lost two airplanes in the move. The first was the Group Commander's airplane, number 42-29595. Colonel Rice lost an engine on the heavily loaded airplane on takeoff from Massicault. He was forced to make an emergency landing in an open field a short distance from the base. The airplane was destroyed along with some of the baggage. The crew was badly shaken, but uninjured, except Sergeant Joseph Rosenthal, who suffered a brain concussion and some broken ribs. He was taken to the 58th Station Hospital in Tunis for treatment. Sgt. Rosenthal was an RAF man on detached service with the Group doing special radio work.²

So ended the flying life of B-17F number 595. It had been assigned to the Group at Kearny, Nebraska and had served well. It had been modified at Tinker Air Force Depot in February, 1943 and was made a more formidable aerial combat adversary. It served three Group Commanders — Colonels Lauer, Thomas, and Rice as a lead plane.

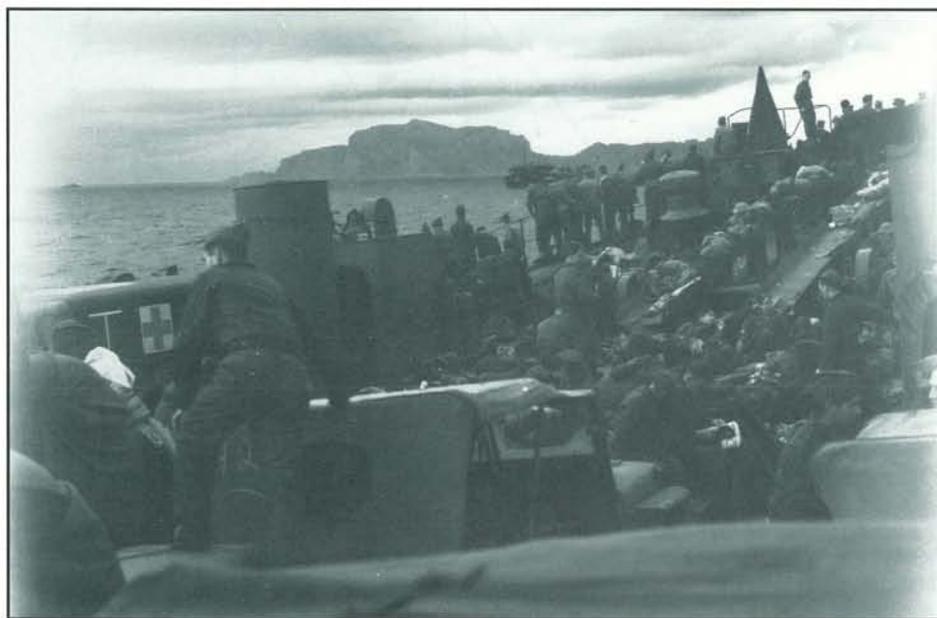
Except for one incident on its second mission, when a life raft deployed on take off and hung up on the horizontal stabilizer, 595 never had a serious in-flight mechanical problem during combat while leading more than fifty of the Group's first one hundred missions. It suffered, but survived, the wounds of aerial combat including several machine gun holes, and on one occasion 800 flak holes. Its crews suffered no casualties while garnering five victories over enemy aircraft. At its demise, number 595 had the good grace to fail in friendly territory and protected the crew to the end. Dubbed "TADLUR" (Through All Danger Let Us Ride) by the enlisted crew, number 595 proved true to its name.

The second unfortunate accident occurred when 2nd Lt. Joseph H. Taylor of the 49th Squadron was unable to proceed to Amendola because of weather and decided to land at Palermo, Sicily. Too late, he discovered that the runway was not long enough for the heavily loaded airplane, which ran into a stone wall at the end of the runway. The plane, number 42-29617, was completely demolished. M/Sgt. William Myer was killed. 2nd Lt. Warren G. Gay, B, and T/Sgt. John J. Wybra, ROG, were injured and were hospitalized at the 59th Evacuation Hospital in Palermo. The other crew members were badly shaken up, but uninjured. The rest of the Group airplanes arrived safely at Amendola, most on the same day they left Africa.³

Movement of the ground echelon and equipment took more time. On December 3, the bulk of the ground crews of the 20th and 429th Squadrons, along with advance units of the 49th and 96th Squadrons, left Massicault for Bizerte, Tu-



2nd Bomb Group, moving from Africa to Italy, December 1943. (Group Photo)



2nd Bomb Group, 49th Squadron Ambulance, moving to Italy on an LST, December 1943. Isle of Capri in background. (Group Photo)

nia. They were delayed for two days awaiting transport, which finally arrived on December 5. The men and equipment were loaded on Landing Ship-Tanks (LSTs) and left Bizerte the same day. They arrived at a small port north of Naples, where they unloaded and traveled over land to Amendola. The first men of the unit arrived at Amendola at 3:00 A.M. on December 9 and began setting up camp.

On December 7 another unit composed of more ground crew personnel from the 49th and 96th Squadrons left Massicault. Other units along with more of the Group's motor vehicles, left on December 9, traveled across by LSTs, and arrived at Taranto Harbor on December 13.

On December 12 the bulk of the remaining ground personnel and equipment left Massicault for Bizerte where they too embarked on LSTs, arriving in the vicinity of Naples on December 15.

On December 14 the remaining ground personnel and equipment left Massicault. One contingent, including personnel of the 96th Squadron, arrived at the Bizerte staging area in the rain. The convoy pulled into a level field and disgorged its passengers to set up tents. The cooks set up a field kitchen under a tarp fastened to the back of a 6' x 6' truck and handed out "C" rations and coffee.

It rained most of that night, soaking gear and clothes in the hastily erected tents. The contingent was held in the staging area for about a week, living in the mud and in unlit and unheated tents. The area was one large transient camp with Allied soldiers from all manner of units awaiting transport to Italy. Finally, the order came down to "move out" and the unit packed up, loaded tents and gear back on the truck convoy, and marched to the waiting LSTs at the dock. The Group contin-

gent shared an LST with a British Army unit. The convoy sailed west around Sicily to Naples. What harbor was left at Naples, after Allied bombing and German demolition, was over-loaded with ships seeking berth. The LST joined others sailing to a flat beach area north of the harbor where the captain ran its nose ashore, opened the bow doors and dropped the ramp. By the time it was the 2nd contingent's turn to unload, it was growing dark and had started to rain! The contingent disembarked under black-out conditions and then convoyed to their new home at Amendola.⁴

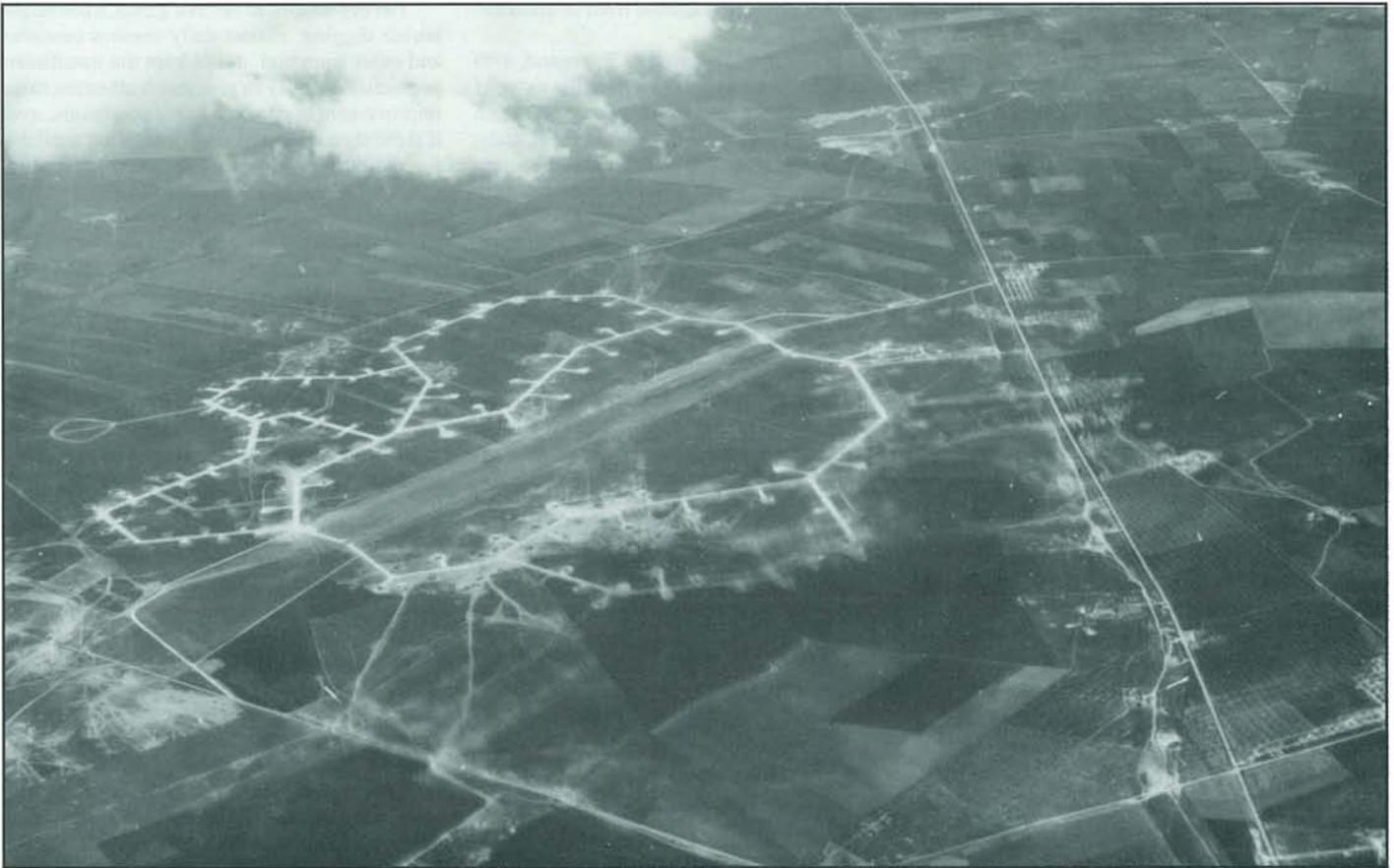
By December 24 all of the personnel were together again at the new base in Italy. A great amount of crated equipment, however, was yet to arrive. S/Sgt. William G. Covell, 96th Squadron IFF/radio mechanic, remembered when the equipment arrived. "In about ten days the freight we had shipped from North Africa began arriving. It was trucked to an open field a few miles down the road from the camp and dumped. Every day, the Squadron would send a truck and some men to look through the piles of boxes and bring back those marked for the 96th Squadron. In the end we managed to find everything we had shipped."⁵

A HOME BASE IN EUROPE

For the first time since World War I, the Group was ready to fly combat missions from a base on the continent of Europe. The Amendola Landing Ground had parallel, steel-mat landing strips, taxi ways and dispersal areas. It was located about twelve miles northeast of Foggia, and just south of the Foggia-Manfredonia highway. The field became the operational base for the 2nd and 97th bomb groups. The 97th was sent originally to the field at San Giovanni, southeast of Amendola. Because of poor drainage, San Giovanni proved unsuitable for heavy bomber operations. The runways and taxiways simply could not bear up to the weight of the bombers. After struggling with impossible conditions for a month, the 97th was ordered to Amendola and started the move January 17.⁶ Once again the two groups would share a base, this time until the end of the European war. The 2nd occupied one side of the field and generally used one runway while the 97th occupied the other side and used the other runway. The field was also used by the RAF for night operations, and was used, on occasion, by other Fifteenth Air Force units.

The airfield was on fairly level ground just south of low, rough hills among which local shepherds grazed their sheep. Sometimes the sheep would wander onto the flying field and become a hazard to moving aircraft. Sometimes, as well, a local shepherd would complain to the Americans that one of his animals had been killed by an airplane. Their attempts to obtain reparations generally received a cold shoulder.

The Group bivouac was established in a farming area about four miles northeast of the airfield, on the north side of the Foggia-Manfredonia highway. The terrain was simi-



Staz Di Amendola Landing Ground. Home of the 2nd and 97th Bomb Groups. (Group Photo)



The "Salon", 49th Squadron area. (Group Photo)

lar to that of the airfield but was on higher ground, and the airfield could be seen in the distance.

IMPRESSIONS OF THE NEW HOME BASE

Some of the enlisted men later wrote about their impressions of the base in Italy when they first arrived. They came upon the scene at different times and under different circumstances, so they may have had different viewpoints.

From S/Sgt. Leslie J. Nash, 429th Squadron: "The first thing that greeted us upon arrival at the Port of Naples was dozens of dirty Italians, mostly women and girls, selling fruits and nuts, and begging candy, cigarettes and C rations. They plainly showed the effects of living in a war-torn coun-

try. It was evident that food and clothing were not to be had, but much was heard of the black market which was beginning to flourish around Naples with stolen American products.

We were told that our new base was located at Foggia, across the country from Naples. The advance echelon started out immediately for the new base. Lt. Leo E. Goodman and Lt. Angus V. Atchley headed the party and got lost from the convoy at the first cross street in Naples. The rest of the convoy arrived in Foggia all right. After spending the night in a bombed building, we proceeded to our base twelve miles from Foggia on the Manfredonia road. Again the convoy was lost and made its way almost to the front lines above San Saverio. Finally we reached the base and soon erected a tent city in this one-time olive grove.⁷

Another impression is from Cpl. James Alderman of the 20th Squadron: "On December 7, 1943, the 20th Squadron first saw its new home, an olive grove with its stone wall. Veterans of many camps in Africa, their tents were soon pitched. From mysterious sources flooring, doors and sidewalls appeared. Improvements soon saw stoves, stove pipes and water pipes developed.⁸

A third impression is from the pen of Sgt. Edward W. Holmes, 96th Squadron: "On that cold rainy December day all it looked like was a big empty field, a mud hole, a place to by-pass or, if necessary, bivouac for a night, but not to pitch camp for a stay. But this was it, and as we rolled in and came to a stop, the old familiar GI BITCH could be heard coming from the lips of all present. Why this place? Isn't there a camp site in Italy without all the trimmings of mud? Where's the barracks we heard about before we left Africa? What a hole! The griping was heard from the bottom to the top, with Mother Nature egging it on by sending rain and more rain just in case anyone showed signs of being satisfied. Still, we had arrived, and even though threats of swimming back to Africa were plentiful, everyone started to make a spot for his future home. Tents were scarce because a good share of our equipment was still on the road, but what were available soon had their tops skyward and sheltering nine or ten tired GI's beneath each. The lucky guys who had been able to pack their stoves and themselves together soon had them in working order, and with pieces of wood that came the same way, their bunks took shape and formed a happy spot for that much needed sack time.

The flight line was having troubles too. What a pain establishing the Engineering Office, Tech Supply, a place for the Parachute Department. What headaches! In addition, the airplanes had to be kept flying every day. Finally we established a place big enough to hold half of the personal equipment and finished an office large enough to hold two desks, a stove and two Tech Orders. Then Mother Nature let loose her barrage. A wind storm toppled everything to the ground, tearing and ripping supply from stem to stern and pushing the engineering office all over the field. The equipment was soaked until it looked as if it had been dumped in the Mediterranean. The tools and parts that the ground crews had diligently unpacked and placed in use were scattered. The aircraft which were parked in the dispersal area were pushed until it seemed that nothing could hold them down. All of this just

after getting started. The wind tried to undo everything."⁹

And from First Sgt. Lloyd R. Townsend, 49th Squadron: "The advanced echelon in the move of the 49th Squadron, 2nd Bomb Group (H) from Tunisia, Africa arrived at Amendola Field, Italy, on 7 December, 1943. The officer and sixteen men in the advance party had scarcely commenced to prepare the camp-site at the location in the damp and weedy olive grove designated by Col. Rice, Group Commanding Officer, when the Squadron's air echelon, including three ground men for each of the thirteen aircraft, set down on their new home base for the first time on the 10th of December. With most of the tentage and equipment remaining with the rear echelon in Africa, the stiff mountain wind, frequent cold rains, and thick mud, impeded progress in preparing the campsites. Living was made an annoying trial.

Twenty-four-hour aircraft guard, foxhole and latrine digging, almost daily combat missions, and other squadron duties kept the insufficient personnel too busy to give much attention to the improvement of personal living conditions, even if there should have been any material available for the purpose. At least, the advance and air echelons of the other three squadrons had likewise arrived and were undergoing the same hardships."¹⁰

A PILOT REMEMBERS

Dwight Hastings was a pilot in the 20th and 49th Squadrons during the spring and summer of 1944. He says he remembers the general layout of the living area but not many specifics.

"I believe our tent had four officers in it and we slept on unfolded cots with inflated mattresses. We used mosquito netting most of the time in spite of the medication we took to try to prevent malaria. We sort of lived out of our personal foot lockers.

The officer's club was up the hill, probably no more than 150 yards from our tent, and not far from the road to Manfredonia. The living area was sloped down from northeast to southwest, and most of the officer's tents were on higher ground in the upper portion of the tent city living area, and more handy to the officer's club.

I remember that the enlisted members of my crew were proud of the quality of the meals they were getting in their mess. After they begged me, I joined them for a meal (sans rank insignia) and they were right. Much better fruit and vegetables than we were getting in the officer's club. Their mess sergeant was aggressively bartering with the local population, while ours at the officer's club was not.

To cool our beer, we put a can in a sock, dipped the sock in some captured German aviation fuel, and hung the assembly on the line to let the evaporation cool the beer. It worked beautifully.

I remember how, when we returned from missions, we were transported by 2-ton trucks from our plane to Group Headquarters for debriefing. Usually as we arrived in the HQ area, there were hot coffee and doughnuts being dispensed by young ladies from the Red Cross (usually Americans). The coffee was made by boiling it in a fifty five (55) gallon drum. It was perhaps the best coffee I ever had. (The Flight Surgeon was always on hand too, to distribute a shot of 'medicinal whiskey' to any combat crew member desiring it.)

Our Squadron HQ was quite a walk down the hill from our tent location, and this was where we went for mail call, to check schedules, etc. I remember slopping through the mud to walk down to the squadron ready room on rainy days, and I seem to remember quite a few of those times. I don't remember how selections were made for service as censor, but I remember catching the duty a few times and noting that one of the enlisted men I knew was simultaneously writing love letters to at least three different girls in the U.S.

The Group mission briefings were given in a Quonset hut to the officers scheduled for the mission that day. Then I would brief my crew when joining them at the plane getting ready to go.



Home at Amendola, 49th Squadron. Note helmet bathing facility and door art. (Courtesy of C. Hollenberg)



Always a hazard. Sheep on the field at Amendola. 429th area. (Group Photo)



Entrance to the Cave Theater. (Group Photo)

The only cave I became familiar with was the underground theater where I recall seeing USO shows and movies."¹¹

THE CAVES

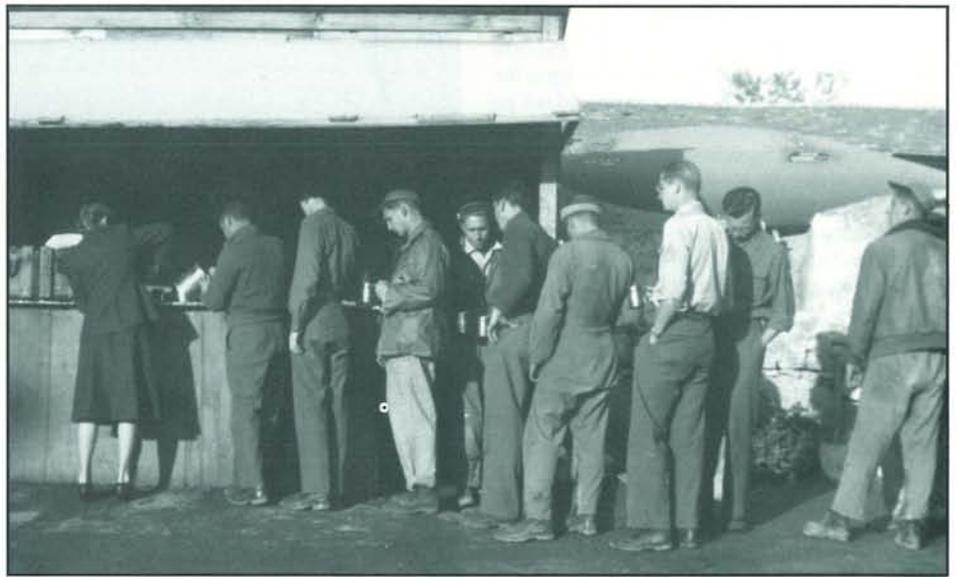
The immediate vicinity of the bivouac area had been a prime location for mining limestone, and some cave-like quarries were available for the use of the Group. At one time the Italians used the caves as wine cellars. When the Germans took over the area, they used them for prisoners of war and for stabling horses. After the 2nd moved in, Chaplain Allen was among the first to examine the caves and envision their potential. It took Yankee ingenuity and considerable hard work to convert the caverns to a major amenity. One of the caves was appropriated for an enlisted men's club. Another was selected by the Group Special Services Officer as the Group Theater. He and his helpers did a great job, going to extra pains to fix it up. They brought in bomb fin cases for seats for movies and stage shows. Entertainment in the theater included USO shows, shows developed and presented by various units of the Group, and occasionally shows staged by local Italians. A portion of the cave was sequestered by chaplain Allen and made into a very nice, well-equipped chapel.

Sgt. Phil Reidy came up with an appropriate name for the complex — "Rock Fella Social Center." Cpl. Charles S. Ford II, a former Hollywood cameraman was the early mastermind behind the movies and stage shows in the Cave Theater.

The Cave was a warm or cool place, depending on the outside weather, and could be used as a bomb shelter if necessary. It was a fine facility that met many of the needs for diversion from the pressures of the war.¹²

HOT SHOWERS

Adequate shower facilities were a long time in coming. Maj. Annich and Capt. Bradshaw took a truck load of Group personnel into Foggia on December 17 for a hot shower, the first in many days. It was a welcome respite for all concerned. Many truck loads followed this break-through in personal hygiene.¹³ Some months later the shower situation was greatly improved when four enlisted men from the 49th Squadron took the initiative. They were Bill Douglas, Elmo "Fin-



Red Cross coffee and doughnut stand operated faithfully by Miss Betty Doubleday, Red Cross Representative. (Courtesy of C. Holenberg)



The Cave Theater. "When does the show start?" (Group Photo)

gers" Pullen, Louis Turner, and Frank Lowery. Douglas says that he did not know who first came up with the idea, but the four of them set out to accomplish the task. They left camp in a 6' x 6' truck looking for center roof beams in the many abandoned collective farm houses in the area. They found three, pulled the center beams down with the truck, loaded them, and returned to the base. These were to support the shower roof and the water tank.

The next job was to find a large tank to hold the shower water. They concluded that since Foggia had been a frequent target of the Group while in Africa, a suitable tank should be somewhere in the rubble. Off to the Foggia rail yards they went where they found an abandoned Ital-

ian tank car, about half the size of an American tank car. Turner, a welder, soon had it free with his cutting torch. Alas, the tank was too large for the 6' x 6'. Undeterred, the men talked the 339th Service Squadron out of one of its aircraft engine flat bed trucks, and the tank, minus its undercarriage, was soon on the way to Amendola.

Frank Lowery then took over the operation. He was a corporal, but that did not deter him from ordering everyone about, including the officers and any master sergeants who might be about. Under Lowery's direction, the project went forward rapidly. Two 55 gallon drums were welded together for hot water, shower heads were made from "liberated" copper tubing, and the tank car was pulled up onto the pyramid of cottage center beams. Soon,

the men of the 49th were enjoying hot showers. The word spread throughout the Group, and men from the other squadrons began to show up in the line waiting to get in. The new facility did not go unnoticed by Group headquarters either, and Maj. Jake Bigham, 49th Squadron commander, was notified that, although the 49th had done a sterling job, the shower was to be shared. A schedule was worked out so that each man of the Group was allowed one hot shower a week. Finally, the men could comfortably stand down-wind of each other.¹⁴

In another move to improve camp life, Col. Rice assembled the officers of the Group on December 17 to discuss construction of an officer's club and mess. Most of the officers favored it and a board of officers was duly elected.

CLUB OFFICERS

President Capt. James A. Clark
 Vice President Maj. Charles E. Clapp
 Sec-Treasurer Lt. Lois L. Leibel

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

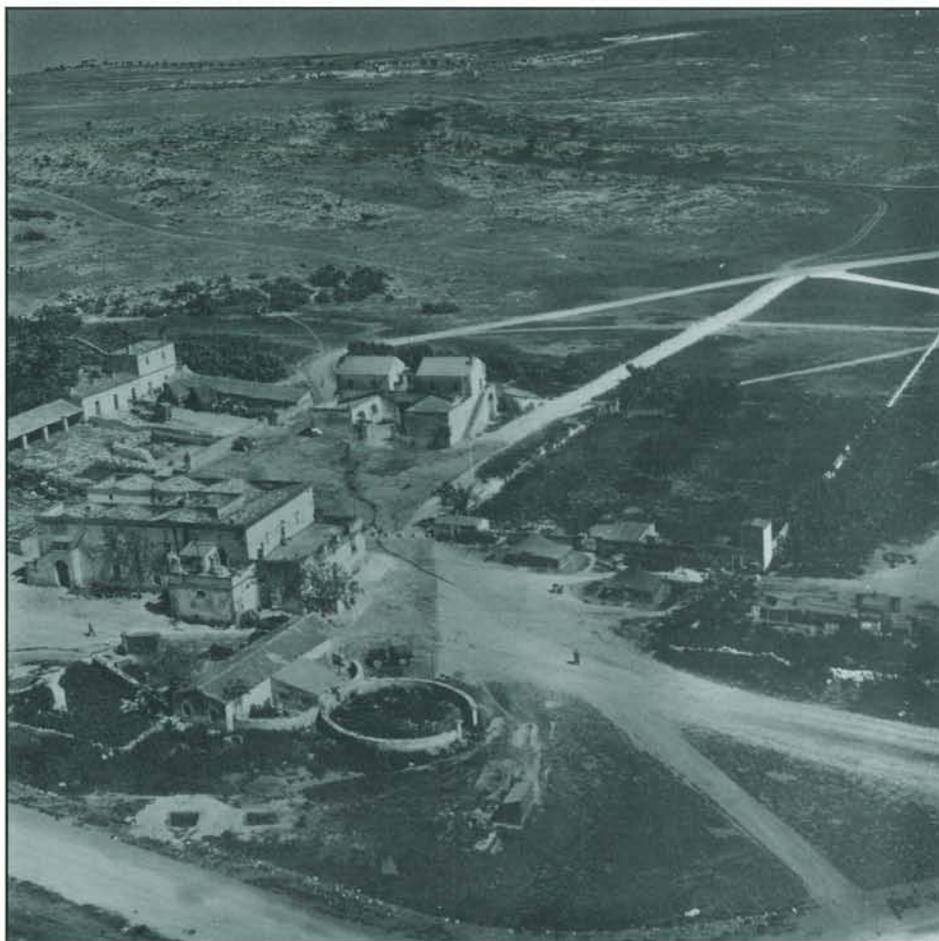
Group HQ Capt. Russell H. Bradshaw
 429th Sq. Lt. Lawrence G. Leisersohn
 49th Sq. Capt. Rudolph W. Suhre
 96th Sq. Lt. Norman J. Thomas
 20th Sq. Capt. Robert T. Stone.

The board promptly began scouting for building materials which would be the biggest obstacle. Each officer contributed \$10.00 to finance construction and furnishings. Using local Italian labor, and officer muscle power, the building was ready for use in March 1944. Stone from the quarries and wood from fragmentation bomb cases were used. The roof was not yet securely fastened when one of the area's sudden windstorms lifted a section and deposited it some distance away. The roof was quickly repaired, but not before some of the startled crews, returning from a practice mission, looked down to see the damage. "Axis Sally" had promised the night before that, "You boys at the 2nd Bomb Group will have the roof of your club blown off tomorrow."¹⁵

Chaplain Allen conducted the first church service in Italy at 7:00 P.M., December 19 in the briefing and interrogation room. The service, as always, was well attended.

Christmas arrived shortly after the Group settled at the new base. December 24 was non-operational, but a mission was launched Christmas Day to the marshalling yards at Udine, Italy. Lt. Col. Melcher lead 26 airplanes, with escort, almost to Venice where weather over the target and two alternates prevented any bombing. The formation returned to base with its bombs, sparing attackers and defenders the agonies of war on this day intended for universal peace.

The first Christmas in the theater of war was celebrated in a manner befitting the best spirit of the season. All squadrons served good dinners with the traditional turkey as the main dish. The Red Cross contingent served coffee and doughnuts and played recorded music throughout the day, their way of saying "Merry Christmas." Christmas trees and private parties



Group Headquarters area. Photo section left foreground. Group Headquarters left center. The cleaners in area above Group Headquarters. Group Commander's quarters, center, behind flag pole and up the stairs. (Courtesy of L. Moore)

abounded. Chaplain Allen held a communion service, and many men went to midnight mass at the cathedral in Foggia. The Group also fed one hundred poor Italian boys from Foggia, forty of whom were orphans. Chaplain Allen took charge and assigned each boy to an officer or enlisted man to see that the child was well cared for. Lt. Col. Paul S. Andrews, in charge of the Allied Military Government Office in Foggia, arranged to bring the boys to Amendola. He was Col. Rice's guest for Christmas dinner. The boys really enjoyed their day, eating their fill and going home with pockets stuffed with candy and gifts from the men.¹⁶

The several days of bad weather in late December allowed time for settling in at Amendola. The living conditions, though different, weren't much better than those in North Africa, but the potential for improvement was greater. A greater sense of permanence attended the relocation to Amendola than characterized the North African operations. This fostered the motivation and energy for steady improvements to the facilities for living, working, and recreation. Though aggravating periods of rain, mud and snow had to be endured, in time, Amendola became an excellent in-theater, base from which to prosecute the war as intended by the formation of the Fifteenth Air Force.

Endnotes:

¹ 2nd Bomb Group Narrative History, December 1943,

(Air Force History Research Agency, Maxwell Air Force Base, AL)

² Ibid, Dec. '43

³ Ibid, Dec. '43

⁴ Covell, personal history, 7-15, 7-24

⁵ Ibid, 8-5

⁶ Thomas F. Gully, committee chairman, "The Hour Has Come — The 97th Bomb Group in World War II," (Taylor Publishing Company, Dallas, TX 1993) pp 140, 143

⁷ S/Sgt. Leslie J. Nash, "One Year In Italy," (2nd Bomb Group Narrative History, AFHRA, Maxwell AFB, AL) Dec. '43

⁸ Cpl James Alderman, "A Year In Italy With The 20th Squadron," (2nd Bomb Group Narrative History, AFHRA, Maxwell AFB, AL) Dec. '43

⁹ Sgt. Edward W. Holmes, "One Year at Amendola," (2nd Bomb Group Narrative History, AFHRA, Maxwell AFB, AL) Dec. '43

¹⁰ First Sgt. Lloyd R. Townsend, "With Second Bomb Group in Italy," (2nd Bomb Group Narrative History, AFHRA, Maxwell AFB, AL) Dec. '43

¹¹ Dwight Hastings, 11777 Woodlea Dr., Waynsboro, PA, letter, Nov., 1993,

¹² 2nd Bomb Group Narrative History, December 1943;

Warren Parkinson, unidentified newspaper/magazine clipping

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Bill Douglas, letter, 1994

¹⁵ McCoid, Group History, 195-6

"Axis Sally" was Mildred Gillars, a U.S. citizen and radio propagandist for Germany during WW II, who broadcast to Allied service men by short wave radio.

¹⁶ McCoid, Group History, 207, 217



Amendola Landing Ground, 49th Squadron ready to land. (Courtesy of C. Hollenberg)



2nd Bomb Group and 97th Bomb Group takeoff on parallel runways at Amendola. Note circle Y (2nd) and Triangle Y (97th). (Group Photo)

CHAPTER XVI

COMBAT FROM BASE ITALY

The 5th Wing, anxious to take advantage of position, gave the Group little time to move and resume combat. Weather had interfered with operations during much of November and the first half of December. Little opportunity had been available to follow up on earlier successes in the CBO against the GAF. Further blows were necessary or the substantial results already achieved would be considerably dissipated.¹ The last mission from North Africa was flown on December 9. The move to Italy was made in stages. Part of the ground echelon and some of the Group's motor vehicles had not yet arrived at Amendola when the first mission from Italy to the Messerschmitt factory at Augsburg, Germany was scheduled on December 13. The mission had to be canceled because of weather. Another target was immediately scheduled the next day and the Group flew its first combat mission from European soil since the 1st Day Bombardment Group flew its last mission of WW I on November 5, 1918 against German-occupied Mouzon, France. In a sad coincidence, the two Groups suffered a casualty on each of these two missions. Lt. Karl G. West lost his life on that last WW I mission, and S/Sgt Joseph L. A. LeBlanc, a right waist gunner, from the 96th Squadron, was killed in action on this first successor mission.

During the last half of December, 1943, the Group flew nine missions. Six were against CBO targets in Greece and Austria. On the latter three missions, the Group lost a total of seven crews and planes in an ample demonstration that there was plenty of fight left in the enemy's combined air and ground defenses.

MISSION 107, DECEMBER 14, 1943

ATHENS/KALAMAKI, GREECE HASSANI AIRDROME

Hassani airdrome was attacked as an alternate when the Athens-Aleusis field was solidly overcast. Earlier photo reconnaissance on November 25 showed 97 aircraft on the field, indi-

cating heavy usage and making it an important target. Hangars and revetments, several with airplanes in them, were damaged extensively and four bombs exploded directly on each of the two runways. Flak at the target was accurate, wounding four men, one seriously. S/Sgt Olander B. Sheffield, right waist gunner, 49th Squadron, received a severe wound to his right eye and was later hospitalized. Despite P-38 fighter escort from the 14th Fighter Group, enemy fighters, variously counted from 15 to 20, got through to the Group. One crew was lost to flak. Group gunners confirmed ten victories.²

2nd Lt. Walter R. Ward, 96th Squadron, in aircraft number 42-5050, had a flak burst go through the number 1 engine nacelle and number 2 engine caught fire. Lt. Ward gave the bailout signal and he observed eight chutes in addition to his own after exiting the airplane. S/Sgt Frank Naro, LTG, heard something over the intercom, turned his turret forward and saw that the number 2 engine and part of the left wing were on fire. He realized he had heard the bailout signal. Then he noticed someone's feet sticking out of the front escape hatch. He got out of the turret, and hooked on his parachute. S/Sgt Joseph L. A. LeBlanc, RWG, was still in the waist, apparently reluctant to jump. While Naro was trying to urge LeBlanc out the door, the plane exploded and went into a violent dive. Loose material was flying about and Naro saw LeBlanc get hit by an ammunition box which appeared to knock him out. Sgt. Naro was likewise struck in the head by an ammo box and temporarily dazed. Then he saw an opening, jumped out, immediately pulled his rip cord, and landed on the ground within a few seconds. Pieces of the airplane fell nearby in a Greek peasant's yard. Several people in the yard rushed to his aid. They helped pick up and hide his parachute and told him to run to the house. Two women in the house frantically gestured out the window, saying "Germans." Naro saw three cars coming down the road toward the house. He quickly changed into peasant clothes and was sent to a nearby vineyard. Here he was given a pruning knife and joined the other field workers. German soldiers from the cars examined the plane wreckage, then began combing the area for survivors. Naro

saw two men in American flying clothes in one car and presumed them to be members of his crew.

While the Germans searched the area, a Greek peasant handed Naro a jug and a pick, which he slung over his shoulder, then another man led him out of the area. He spent two days with his Greek guide hiding in the open. The night of the second day, he was taken to a home in a city where he stayed overnight. He now had been taken into the Greek underground and was led and passed from point to point. He was given a modern set of clothing and kept for several days in the Athens area, once sleeping in a room next door to one occupied by a German officer. He attended a Christmas party and was taken on several rides in the city. At another time he attended a German movie. Part of the time he was kept and guided by an English speaking family. On December 28, he was again dressed as a peasant, given a "Greek Pass," and taken by truck northwest out of the Athens area accompanied by the truck driver and a young Greek woman guide. They passed through four German road blocks, bribing passage, without search, with cigarettes. One block was manned by German officers, who granted passage only after a bottle of Cognac was added to the cigarette bribe. Naro was taken to a Greek home where he stayed three days waiting for a British officer who came on December 31, and arranged transportation to a British mission where Naro stayed three days. He was then guided by another British officer on a six hour walk to another mission. Here he was given British battle dress and started on several days of walking with a Greek guide. The first night their destination brought them to a town where he met 2nd Lt. William F. Slaughter, a 20th Squadron pilot, who had been shot down on a raid to Athens December 20. Slaughter had been ill, but was recovered enough to join the walk. The two men were now in the hands of two Greek guerrillas, and together with two mules, they set out through the mountains and the snow. Ten days later they arrived at a port where they joined several other downed American airmen and some British soldiers who had escaped from prisoner trains going to Germany. That day two officers and five enlisted



gunners from the 20th Squadron arrived, which raised the number of men from the Group to nine.

From there the party was taken across the Aegean Sea to Turkey, flown to Cairo, where they were interrogated and eventually those from the Group were flown back to Amendola, arriving on February 13, 1944. In addition to S/Sgt. Naro, the evaders were Lt. Slaughter and seven members of his crew.

S/Sgt Naro's experience was typical of an increasing number of downed airmen whom the Greeks readily took in at the risk of their lives, sheltered, and led to safety.

Another young Greek who befriended Lt. Ward, said that S/Sgt. LeBlanc's body was found in the wreckage of the airplane. According to this source, the Germans came, identified Sgt. LeBlanc by his crash bracelet, but did not remove his body, apparently leaving it for examination by proper German authorities. Greek civilians in the nearby town covered the body with flowers. The informant said that he went among families in the area to collect money for burial and a tombstone. Lt. Ward knew there was an undertaker in the town, and he was told that Sgt. LeBlanc was buried in the area east of Athens.³

A WORD ABOUT NUMBERS

Aerial combat between bomber crews and enemy fighters was a highly intense, often confusing, and sometimes terrifying experience. Adding flak to the fray only intensified the experience. What crew members did and saw

could vary widely because of such factors as crew position, place in or out of formation, the weather and position of the sun, and what was happening aboard and outside the airplane. Also, due to human nature, the witnesses might see the same scene differently. Observations, which might otherwise have been conclusive, were often interrupted and diverted. For these reasons, eyewitness accounts that helped determine such statistics as numbers and kinds of attacking fighters, numbers of parachutes sighted, and aerial combat victory claims, frequently differed. As a result, mission reports commonly contain a range of numbers — fifteen to twenty fighters — or varied parachute accounts. Debriefing intelligence officers sought the consensus or predominant observations, considered an eyewitness' perspective of the event, and noted the confidence in the eyewitness' observations in summarizing such information for mission reports.

Gunner's claims of aerial victories — enemy aircraft destroyed, probably destroyed, or damaged — were tested more rigidly. Independent confirmation of the claim was required. For "destroyed" the plane had to crash, or to be seen descending completely enveloped in flames, to explode or disintegrate, or have a complete wing or tail assembly shot away, or the pilot seen to bailout of a single engine fighter. For "probably destroyed," there was no certainty of destruction, but flames or extent of damage seemed to preclude chance of a successful landing. "Damaged" claims were confirmed when parts of the plane were seen to be shot away.⁴

MISSION 108, DECEMBER 15, 1943 BOLZANO, ITALY, RAILROAD BRIDGES

Four main rail lines ran from the Brenner Pass through Bolzano over which passed the greater part of all military traffic between Germany and Italy. Bombs hit in the target area, but assessment of damage was limited by smoke and dust from earlier raids. Heavy, intense flak wounded four men, two of whom required hospitalization. 1st Lt. Alfred H. Bell, N, 96th Squadron had a severe wound to the jaw. 2nd Lt. Joseph M. Jaffe, B, also of the 96th, was wounded in the left arm.⁵

MISSION 109, DECEMBER 16, 1943 PADUA, ITALY, MARSHALLING YARDS

These yards served as the main goods sheds and sidings for the Port of Venice and were loaded for shipments to Bologna for distribution all along the Nazi front. Supplies were also believed to move from here through Mestre to the Balkans. Damage or destruction would deny the enemy the goods or require rerouting over much longer routes. The rail facility and adjacent industrial area were badly damaged by bombs of the 5th Wing.⁶

MISSION 110, DECEMBER 19, 1943 INNSBRUCK AUSTRIA. SMALL TOWNS

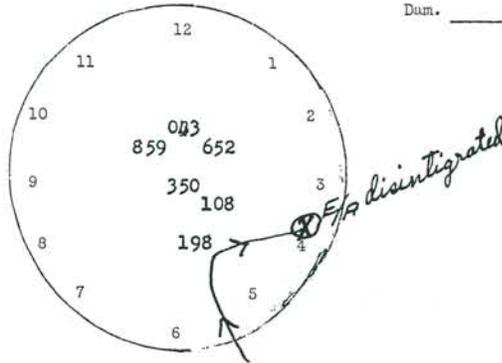
The original mission plan was to destroy the Messerschmitt Development Plant at Augsburg,

No 263

COMBAT CLAIM FORM

Date 29 August, 1944.

Claimant's Full Name M.E. Leppo Rank Sgt. ASN 33010396
 Home Address 155 N. Grant St. Manheim, Pennsylvania Crew Pos. Ball Turret Gunner
 A/C No. 198 Sqdn. 429th Date of Encounter 29 August, 1944.
 Time 1051 Place Target Area Alt. 24,000 feet
 Type E/A Encountered Me-109 Claim Dest. X
 Prob. _____
 Dam. _____



NARRATIVE: Enemy aircraft came in low firing. Claimant started firing at E/A at 400 yards out. E/A came into 300 yards and after claimant fired 200-250 rounds at it, the E/A disintegrated. Right waist gunner verifies this. Claim 1-Me-109 Destroyed.

Joseph M. McCoid
 (Name of Interrogator)
 JAMES M. MCCOID,

(GP. Intell. Officer)
 NORMAN E. ANNIGHAN
 Major, Air Corps.

Sgt. M.E. Leppo Combat Claim Form

Germany. The first alternate was the B.M.W., plant at Munich, Germany. Because of weather the Group chose the third alternate, the marshalling yards at Innsbruck. Col. Rice leading the Group had to turn back because of engine failure. Maj. Kutchera, 429th Squadron Commander, leading the second wave, was deputy commander, but the first wave had pulled away so far that he could not catch up and assume the lead. His wave of ten airplanes salvoed their bombs near Hall, Austria, trying to catch up and because they were being attacked by fighters. 1st Lt. Samuel Covert, of the 96th Squadron, who had been flying Col. Rice's right wing, took over Group lead. His wave of seventeen planes dropped its bombs near small towns east of Innsbruck. The mission was very confused indeed.

The enemy, always looking for a disorganized formation, came in with Me-109s, Me-110s, Me-210s, Me-410s, and FW-190s. A running thirty-seven minute fight developed, and three Group B-17s were shot down. Group gunners claimed eighteen enemy fighters destroyed.⁷

20th Squadron pilot, Lt. John C. Williams and his crew in airplane 42-5427 went down after seven enemy fighters concentrated their attack on them. The entire right wing was on fire and the airplane went down thirty-one miles east of Bolzano, Italy, where it crashed into a mountain and exploded. Other crews counted at least nine parachutes exiting from the stricken airplane. Lt. Williams and lower turret gunner S/Sgt. Howard E. Richardson were killed. All the rest of the crew became POWs. After his release from POW camp, 2nd Lt. Gail P. Hoffman, CP, stated that he knows nine men left the plane on William's bailout order, but Williams was still at the controls holding the airplane straight when he last saw him.⁸

2nd Lt. Robert D. Peterson and crew, 429th Squadron in plane number 42-5409, "Lydia Pinkham," were shot down about seventy-six miles southeast of Bolzano, Italy. The airplane had number 3 engine on fire and fell behind the formation where the fighters swarmed on it. Seven to nine chutes were counted by the Group crews. Radio gunner, S/Sgt. Allen T. Bennett

died, while all of the other crew members became POWs. Tail gunner S/Sgt. Roy K. Snyder was the last one to talk to Bennett before he died. German soldiers claimed he was shot while trying to escape but Bennett said he was shot while coming down in his chute.⁹

The third airplane lost was number 42-3065 piloted by Lt. Henry S. Vogel 429th Squadron. It was last seen 93 miles southeast of Bolzano. The enemy fighters concentrated their attacks on this unfortunate crew, causing a fire in the right wing. The airplane was out of control and one witness said it did at least one complete barrel roll before diving vertically into the clouds. Only two parachutes were reported, but the observers were so occupied at the time fighting the enemy, they could not watch closely. The following men were killed in action: 2nd Lt. Harry R. Ludwig, CP; 2nd Lt. Paul (NMI) Leland, N; 2nd Lt. Donald F. Parks, B; S/Sgt. Earl E. Bengston, RWG; and S/Sgt. James H. Redick, Jr., TG. All of the rest were captured and became POWs.

Pilot Vogel made the following report after his release from POW status, "My plane was struck by flak over the target. The two left engines were knocked out, and the left wing burst into flames. At the same time the plane was subjected to severe strafing by enemy fighters. Fire broke out in the radio room . . . With only one aileron and the horizontal stabilizer left and two engines not functioning. . . I ordered the crew to bail out over the inter-phone, but received no answer, so I cannot be sure it was working at the time. I also employed the warning bell. I was equipped with a seat type parachute and found that the control panel was so far back that I could not get out of the seat with the pack on. Since the copilot had a chest type parachute, I requested him to hold the controls while I removed the harness, got out of my seat, and replaced the chute. This circumstance placed me in the area behind the seats. With the wing on fire and an explosion sure to come, it was necessary to utilize every second of time . . . I ordered him (the copilot) as I fastened on the harness, to follow me back to the bomb bay, our most practical point of exit. As I turned away from him, I saw him swing around in his seat to the left as though to follow me. I immediately crawled through the upper turret and into the bomb bay and jumped without a minutes hesitation to clear the way for the copilot whom I presumed was behind me. I blanked out, came to enough to pull the ripcord, and blacked out again from the shock of the opening chute. Then when I recovered consciousness, I saw parts of the wing and fuselage sail past. This led me to conclude that the plane blew up almost immediately after I jumped."¹⁰

S/Sgt. George O. Solesbery, UTG, and S/Sgt. William W. Boyer, ROG, exited the plane together through the bomb bay as soon as the bailout order was given. S/Sgts. Donald J. Lewis, LTG, and Edward J. Fennessey, LWG, were blown out of the plane when it exploded, landed safely, and were captured. S/Sgt. Lewis said that S/Sgt. Earl E. Bengston, RWG, was with him in the plane when it exploded. Sgt. Bengston did not survive. One of the survivors saw S/Sgt. James H. Redick Jr., TG, dead in the waist. He had been wounded earlier at his gun position. None of the survivors

knew what happened to copilot Lt. Ludvig, the navigator, 2nd Lt. Paul (NMI) Leland or the bombardier, 2nd Lt. Donald F. Parks, but none of the three survived.¹¹

MISSION 111, DECEMBER 20, 1943 **ELEUSIS/ATHENS, GREECE, AIRDROME**

This airdrome was attacked as an alternate when weather prohibited bombing the primary targets in Yugoslavia. The target airdrome had been bombed by the Group twice previously on Missions 84 and 96. Since then the field had become active again. The raid caught many enemy airplanes on the ground since this was apparently one of the principle bomber bases used by the Germans to bomb the British forces in the Dodecanese Islands.

The target was well covered with 500 pound demolition bombs, but bad luck seemed to hound the Group for the second day in a row, when three airplanes were lost. Thirty to forty enemy fighters attacked before, during, and after the bomb run. The Group survived all of these attacks, even shot down ten Me-109s, only to suffer losses to flak.¹²

A silver colored, two engine enemy plane with a single tail vertical fin, and with red vertical markings on the tail, picked up the formation immediately after the IP and flew parallel about 1,000 yards to the right of the formation during the entire bomb run. This enemy made no attempt to attack the formation. The flak seemed to be withheld until the formation was well on the bomb run, but about a minute before bombs away, the first flak appeared and it came all at once. When the flak ceased there was an orange-colored burst.

20th Squadron pilot, 2nd Lt. William A Slaughter, in airplane 41-24345 was hit just after bombs were dropped. His number 2 and 3 engines were knocked out and number 4 caught fire and was feathered. The nose section was shattered, the instrument panel was demolished and the fire spread. Several crew members were wounded, but they fought off attacking fighters and shot one down. Power was eventually lost on all four engines. The plane rapidly lost altitude and as the fire spread, Lt. Slaughter ordered the inevitable bailout. Those who were not wounded helped those who were into their chutes and out of the airplane. The crew started an orderly exit of the plane at about 20,000 feet. Lt. Slaughter was the last man out, and shortly thereafter the plane exploded. Enemy fighters fired on some of the men as they descended. 2nd Lt. Clarence B. Lanham, B, had two panels shot out of his parachute and sprained his ankle on landing because of his fast descent. Otherwise, the crew landed safely. 2nd Lt William J. Nehila, N, was captured and became a POW. Uninjured crew members located and helped their wounded comrades. Friendly Greeks came to their immediate aid, hiding their gear, and leading them to a secret rendezvous in the mountains where they were guarded that night from German search parties. On one occasion the Greeks am-

bushed and killed a German search party to cover part of the crew's escape to the rendezvous. The next day the crew started its trek to freedom through the Greek underground. The journey took 31 days of walking an average of about 8 hours per day. They traveled mostly during the day and were secreted in different homes at night. Nighttime travel was used to cross main roads and areas heavily occupied by German troops. At times they passed close to German bivouac areas and had one encounter with a German patrol while crossing a main railroad during the night. Their Greek escort fired on the patrol while the crew ran across fields and forded a swamp to safety. They walked twelve hours that night and could hear German search parties on their trail. Through this process the crew was passed from underground hideaways to military missions until they joined up with S/Sgt. Frank Naro on his evasion from the December 14 mission to the Hassani Airdrome. All were returned to the Group on February 13, via Turkey and Cairo.¹³

On March 3, 1944, Lt Slaughter and his entire crew were awarded the Silver Star for gallantry in action and their daring escape against overwhelming odds. Those honored were: 2nd Lts. William F. Slaughter, P; Robert C. Ogletree, CP; William J. Nehila, N; Clarence B. Lanham Jr., B; T/Sgt. William D. Buell, UTG; S/Sgts. Durwood C. Clem, LTG; Hubert J. Isabelle, RWG; Harlow L. Nowell, LWG; Stanley F. Cwiek, TG; and T/Sgt. Belton D. Staphill, ROG.¹⁴

One other plane, from the 96th Squadron, also went down over the target — airplane 42-5776, "Eager Beaver," pilot, 1st Lt. David G. Rohrig. Seconds before bombs away, flak tore the airplane apart just behind the waist door. The front part of the airplane dove straight down and crashed into the airdrome. No parachutes were seen by any returning crew members. Lt. Rohrig; copilot, Lt. Adolph F. Dippolito; navigator, 2nd Lt. John F. Beck; upper turret gunner, T/Sgt. James L. Hiskey, Jr.; and T/Sgt. John H. Caputo, tail gunner, were killed. LWG, S/Sgt. Frank Horner, evaded. The four others became POWs. After returning to Allied control in July, Horner said he bailed out at 4,000 feet. After he jumped, the plane leveled off and he saw three other chutes open. He landed near Eleusis Airdrome and did not see any members of his crew.¹⁵

The third loss of the day was airplane 42-29736, "Hangar Queen," also from the 96th Squadron. The pilot was 2nd Lt. Orville L. Doughty. Numbers 1 and 2 engines were feathered over the target, and the plane was last seen over Corfu Island. Doughty's crew was not able to keep up with the Group on withdrawal, so 2nd Lt. Talmage W. Trevathan, also of the 96th, asked for and received permission from the Group Commander to go back and give the crippled plane protection. Travathan accompanied Doughty until he entered a cloud layer at 3,000 feet. Unable to do more, Lt. Trevathan returned to base. Lt. Doughty made a successful crash landing on the beach at Corfu and all of the crew were taken prisoner.¹⁶

MISSION 112, DECEMBER 25, 1943

UDINE, ITALY

MARSHALLING YARDS

MISSION 113, DECEMBER 28, 1943

RIMINI, ITALY

MARSHALLING YARDS

MISSION 114, DECEMBER 29, 1943

FERRARA, ITALY

MARSHALLING YARDS

MISSION 115, DECEMBER, 30, 1943

RAVENNA, ITALY, FACTORY AREA

The Group was diverted to support the Italian ground campaign for these four missions. The weather turned bad so no bombs were dropped on Udine. Some bombs landed in the marshalling yards at Rimini, but most fell in a residential area. The bombsight in the lead ship was frozen on the Ferrara mission and all bombs dopped beyond the marshalling yards. Some collateral damage was done to industrial buildings, roads and other rail tracks. There was no opposition on these three missions. Ravenna was bombed by seventeen airplanes when the primary, Verona, could not be reached. The bombs fell on a small, unidentified factory area. Seven other planes jettisoned their bombs in an open field rather than return them to base. There was no flak but twenty to twenty-five Me-109s and FW-190s attacked the formation for twenty-four minutes just before bombs were away. Fortress defenders shot down five Me-109s and two probables, but the fighters wounded three men, two severely, and damaged one airplane sufficiently to create an emergency that cost the lives of two officers.

2nd Lt. Hugh V. Quinn, N, 429th, had shrapnel wounds to his face, arms and chest and fragments pierced his brain and left eye. He was hospitalized and recovered. 2nd Lt. Fred (NMI) Sporer, Jr., CP, of the 429th, suffered moderately severe wounds to his right arm from an exploding 20mm cannon shell.¹⁷

The emergency befell Lt. George A. Levchak and crew in airplane 42-21458. Levchak was leading an element of the 96th Squadron when about ten fighters singled them out for attack. Fighter gun fire struck the number 2 engine and propeller, and the ball turret, slightly wounding Sgt. Karl J. Letters. The engine caught fire and began to violently vibrate. Levchak maintained control through the bomb run. Soon thereafter the airplane fell 13,000 feet before he regained control at about 3,000 feet. By that time they were 15 to 20 miles off shore over the Adriatic. Levchak had ordered 2nd Lts. Clyde W. Apple, N, and Oliver A. Toole, B, out of the nose and into the radio room to prepare for possible ditching. For reasons that are not known, the two men took to their parachutes. Their chutes were seen to open, but nothing more was ever heard from them. Levchak and his copilot, F/O Herbert L. Beal, skillfully brought the airplane back to base for a safe landing with the remaining six crewmen aboard.¹⁸

When the crews returned for debriefing, Brig. Gen. Atkinson, 5th Wing Commander was on hand. He was not pleased with the



Col. Rice carving a turkey in front of poor Italian children (some were orphans) who were Group guests for Christmas 1943. Lt. Col. Paul S. Andrews, American Military Government Office, Foggia, Italy, looks on. (Group Photo / W. Greenhalgh)



Control Tower at Amendola. General Twining's B-25 and Staff car standing by. (Courtesy of R. Keller)

day's bombing, or the bombing of the two previous missions.¹⁹

Gen. Atkinson's disappointment is understandable, because the Group had done little damage to the enemy during that time. However, consideration must be given to the fact that the crews were flying in the worst sort of bombing weather against hard to identify targets. The Group's performance quickly improved and graphic evidence was placed on the General's desk on January 3, 1944.

THE YEAR 1943

The Group closed out the year having flown 115 combat missions against the Axis Powers in the Mediterranean and Southern Europe. The Group had attacked targets ranging from Sardinia, Corsica, Pantelleria, Tunisia, Sicily, and Italy to Greece, Austria, France, Yugoslavia, and Germany.

During the year, the Group had moved from the northwestern United States to operational bases in North Africa and Italy. It had trained, deployed and flown combat against a determined and expert enemy. It had lost thirty-one airplanes and at least 310 combat crew members were either killed, captured, or had evaded. Other men, dead or wounded, were returned to base in battered airplanes. Several airplanes and crews had been lost in non-operational and training accidents, as well.

The Group, along with other Army Air Force units, had provided support for Allied forces pushing the Axis Powers out of North



Group 12-bed infirmary, Amendola, equipped with mosquito netting, radio earphones, bomb-fin-crate bed stands, and sinks with running water from P-38 gasoline belly tanks. (group Photo / W. Greenhalgh)

Africa, Sicily, Pantelleria, Sardinia, Corsica, and northward along the Italian Peninsula. In addition, targets such as airfields, railroads and yards, factories and supply facilities, shipping and harbors, and roads and bridges had suffered the weight of bombs from the 2nd.

The combat crews had flown their missions with courage and determination against an equally courageous and determined enemy

force of fighter planes and against barrages of anti-aircraft artillery fire. The ground personnel, from the flight line, to the mess halls, to the headquarters, had learned their jobs well and performed them under very difficult living and working conditions at a number of bases in the U.S., North Africa, and Italy. The Group was ready to enter the new year with improved capability to prosecute the war.

Endnotes:

¹ Craven & Cate, Vol II, 594, 595

² McCoid, Group History, 190-193

³ Ibid, 190-193

⁴ Ibid 289-298 Evadee Statements, Feb. 13, 1944

Richards, Missing Crew Reports

⁴ Craven & Cate, Vol II, 223

⁵ McCoid, Group History, 193-4

⁶ Ibid, 194

⁷ Ibid, 196, 200-201

⁸ Richards, Missing Crew Report

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

¹² McCoid, Group History, 201

¹³ Richards, Missing Crew Report

¹⁴ McCoid, Group History, 346, 347

¹⁵ Richards, Missing Crew Report

¹⁶ McCoid, Group History, 203

¹⁷ Ibid, 210, 211

¹⁸ Ibid, 212, 339

¹⁹ Ibid, 213



The Cave Chapel was full for services with Chaplain Ira Allen. (Group Photo)

THE WAR ENTERS 1944

JANUARY 1944

The year began with the four B-17 groups of the 5th Wing having to carry the heavy bombardment load alone. On December 28, the 376th Bomb Group (B-24s) on a maximum effort mission, (every possible crew and airplane), to the Vincenza marshalling yards, ran into stiff fighter opposition and lost ten Liberators. Virtually a complete squadron was wiped out. Due to the lack of experienced pilots, the 376th and the 98th B-24 groups were withdrawn from operations and placed on training status. (They returned to operations in early February). Two new Liberator groups, fresh from the States, joined the 5th Wing, became operational, and commenced attacking targets later in January.¹

Four CBO missions were flown during January, and other missions took place against rail



20th Squadron Engineering Section. Front center, Capt. Philip M. Glassman, Engineering Officer; to the left, Maj. Joseph W. Triggs, Squadron Commander; to the right with cap bill turned-up, M/Sgt. Bernard B. Cohen, Line Chief. (Courtesy of B. Cohen)

marshalling yards and bridges, airdromes and landing grounds, and naval targets.

The 2nd flew twenty-three missions during the month. That was the most missions flown in any month during WW II except March, 1945. The record was achieved despite the fact that the month started with two weather-bound days. From the 7th through the 24th the Group flew a mission every day. Evidently, the conclusion that bombers could fly from Italy while the Eighth Air Force was held down by weather was correct, at least for January, 1944.

Heavy rains and winds hit the living area beginning on New Years Eve. Many men found the insides of their tents almost as wet as the outsides. Others were even less fortunate when their tents were blown down. The Group had to dry itself out and put the tents back in order before it could fly again.

On Sunday, January 2, Chaplain Allen inaugurated church services in the Cave Chapel near the theater. He fashioned quite a nice house of worship in the underground cavern which was very conducive to worship and meditation.

MISSION 116, JANUARY 3, 1944 VILLA PEROSA, ITALY BALL BEARING FACTORY

This was a CBO mission, part of the continuing effort to knock out the German capacity to produce this vital item. Maj. Donald H. Ainsworth, Group Operations Officer, led twenty-seven airplanes off at Amendola, but

because of early returns, only twenty-two reached the target. Engine failure caused Ainsworth to turn back so Capt. Harold L. Chrismon took the lead. The target was smashed. Very few bombs went wild in this near-perfect example of pin-point bombing. It was judged that production would be curtailed for some time to come. Twenty-two flak batteries surrounding the factory caused minor damage to eighteen planes and wounded five men, two seriously. 2nd Lt. Arch J. Woods, CP, 96th Squadron, suffered a severe wound through his lower right arm. S/Sgt. Carl D. Coleman, LWG, of the 96th, received a severe wound to his left calf. Five planes carried cameras and obtained excellent strike pictures for the 2nd Bomb Group Commander to lay on General Atkinson's desk.²

MISSION 117, JANUARY 4, 1944 DUPNITSA, BULGARIA MARSHALLING YARDS

During late 1943, the Bulgarian Government had been trying to decide whether to get out of the war. The Germans, aware of Bulgaria's waver- ing, occupied the capital city of Sofia. They moved the Bulgarians out of the central business district, turned it into a military and civil seat of government, and made it the center of their government of occupation. Sofia city thus became a very important military objective.³

The Group was briefed for and set out to bomb this target, but because of the weather, it was unable to bomb Sofia or the alternate — the marshalling yards at Skopje, Yugoslavia — so the Dupnitsa marshalling yards were bombed. At least, the Wing navigator said that was what was bombed. There was so much circling and turning that no one knew exactly where they were. Three Me-109s attacked, and were driven off after one probable was scored. The P-38s of the 14th and 82nd Fighter Groups and P-47s of the 325th Fighter Group provided escort.⁴

MISSION 118, JANUARY 7, 1944 MARIBOR, YUGOSLAVIA AIRCRAFT COMPONENT FACTORY

MISSION 119, JANUARY 8, 1944 REGGIO/EMILIA, ITALY

AIRCRAFT FACTORY/MARSHALLING YARDS

Maribor was the first Group bombing in Yugoslavia. The primary target was to have been the Messerschmitt factory at Weiner Neustadt but it couldn't be reached because of weather. Maribor is in extreme north central Yugoslavia, near the Austrian border, and due south of Weiner Neustadt. Soon after the Germans occupied Yugoslavia they started construction of an aircraft components factory there. Earlier reconnaissance photos showed that parts of the factory were still under construction. Intelligence reports stated the plant was designed to produce airplane engines. The bombing was fair. Some direct hits were made and one large explosion was observed. The mission was a "milk run" with good fighter escort.⁵

The Germans had converted the factory at Reggio-Emilia from electric locomotive production to aero-engines and airframes. A double-

track railroad ran between Milan and Bologna and had 500 wagons in the yards at Reggio-Amilia on December 29. The bombing results were good with strikes on the tracks and surrounding industrial plants, but assessment of direct damage to the factory was limited by obstruction of visibility from earlier bombs. Opposition was nil.⁶

MISSION 120, JANUARY 9, 1944 POLA, ITALY HARBOR INSTALLATIONS/SHIPPING

Pola was an alternate to the torpedo works, oil refinery, and marshalling yards at Fiume, Italy. The very successful results had to be shared with other 5th Wing groups. There was extensive damage to harbor installations and to five merchant vessels, two submarines, two torpedo boats, and other smaller vessels. One severe explosion occurred at the east end of the submarine pens and two lesser ones near the west end. There was no opposition.⁷

MISSION 121, JANUARY 10, 1944 SOFIA, BULGARIA

The short string of "milk runs" ceased when the Group was sent back to Sofia after being foiled by weather on January 4. This time the 2nd led the 5th Wing. Seven cameras on Group airplanes showed that most of the bombs fell outside the targeted area. The going was pretty rough. Six to twenty-five fighters attacked for nineteen minutes before, during, and after the bomb run. One plane was lost, one man was killed, and five wounded. In turn, the Group gunners destroyed four enemy fighters, probably destroyed ten, and damaged one.

The fatality was T/Sgt. Burton G. Hanson, UTG, from the 429th Squadron. Two of the five wounded men required hospitalization. T/Sgt. John D. Vinson, ROG, 96th Squadron, had moderately severe scalp wounds caused by flak. S/ Sgt. John J. Kilgalen, TG, of the 429th, received moderately severe face lacerations from shattered plexiglass. Both were treated at the 30th British Mobile Field Hospital in Foggia.⁸

From the 20th Squadron, 2nd Lt. Thomas E. Finch and his crew in airplane 42-5811 were shot down by fighters while over the target. One observer said he saw an explosion and fire in the tail gunner's position. Another reported fire under a wing and that the airplane's wheels were down. No one saw it crash or anyone bail out.¹⁶ Lower turret gunner, S/Sgt. Robert W. Schumaker; RWG; S/Sgt. Donald D. Swank; and ROG gunner, Cpl. Harold M. Ross, were the only survivors. The other seven were killed. On release from POW camp after the war Sgt. Swank stated the following: "The radio operator, ball turret gunner, and I bailed out the waist door. They followed me out. Harold Ross and I were captured about the same time and taken to Sofia. Robert Schumaker turned up in prison camp about three months later. He had been in the hospital all this time as he had half his foot shot off. We did not know if he was alive or not until he showed up in the prison camp. As far as I know, all of the seven other members of the crew were still in the aircraft when it struck the ground.



To my knowledge, Lt. Finch, pilot, did not bail out and I do not know if he was injured. The last conversation that I recall from him over the inter-phone was to call out fighters as they started to attack. In my opinion, he was dead in the cockpit, because the ship was on fire when it went down and no other chutes were seen to come out of it.

I am almost certain that Lt. (Eugene F.) Weller Jr., copilot, did not get out, but do not know if he was injured. The last I heard from him was calling out fighters during the fighter attack.

As far as Lts. (Thomas G.) Wyatt, navigator, and (William C.) Golden, bombardier, I do not believe that they bailed out either. The last conversation from Lt. Golden was when he was pulling the pins from the bombs on the way to the target and from Lt. Wyatt, just before the bomb run. In my opinion, both were killed, as we had a furious attack from the front by fighters, and no one heard from them after the attack.

Schumaker told me that Cpl. Joseph (NMI) Pysnik, upper turret gunner, was killed during the fighter attack. He said that he was informed by the Bulgarians, while in the hospital, that the upper turret gunner was riddled in the chest by machine gun bullets.

S/Sgt. (Walter G.) Klutz, left waist gunner, did not bail out. He was killed by fire from the first pass that the enemy made on us. He was lying on the floor, dead, when I left the ship.

I have no knowledge as to whether S/Sgt. (Carol F.) Gantt bailed out. The last conversation from him was just as the enemy fighters were called as they began their attack. I would assume he went down with the ship because no other chutes were seen except the three."⁹

MISSION 122, JANUARY 11, 1944

PIRAEUS, GREECE

HALON BASON INSTALLATIONS/SHIPPING

Piraeus is located just west of Athens, Greece. The Halon Bason was being used extensively by the Germans to supply their divisions in the Balkan and Dalmatian Island campaigns. The 2nd followed the 99th over the target and a good job of bombing was done by the 5th Wing. Twenty-six units of shipping, including ten merchant vessels, four escort vessels, two torpedo boats, one destroyer, nine unidentified craft and miscellaneous small units, were either hit directly or damaged by near misses. There were direct hits and near misses on buildings and other harbor installations. Twenty-five to thirty Me-109s and FW-190s attacked the formation during and after the bomb run, but did little damage to the 2nd. The other B-17 groups, however, suffered eight losses, seven of them from collisions.¹⁰ P-38s of the 14th Fighter Group helped keep the enemy away from the Flying Fortresses.

On January 13, the Group went to bomb the airdrome at Guidonia, Italy, turned to the wrong heading on the initial point, and passed to the right of the target. The Group lead, Captain Harold L. Chrismon, decided against making a second bomb run when alerted fighters began to appear. Three bombers dropped on other tar-



Loading bombs at the 49th on a wintry day. Lt. Ostrowski and T/Sgt. Herbert Taylor supervise. (Courtesy of R. Amos)

gets and one released its bombs accidentally. The remaining thirty bombers brought their bombs back to base. The fighter escort took care of the interceptors and no damage was done. Gen. Atkinson refused to give credit for the mission. This was particularly galling to several crew members who were flying what they thought was their fiftieth mission.¹¹

MISSION 123, JANUARY 14, 1944

MOSTAR, YUGOSLAVIA, AIRDROME

This was a preventive mission to deny use of this base for staging by the GAF on intruder forays into southern Italy. The 2nd was the last of the four groups over the target following the 99th. Together with the 99th, the 2nd was to bomb the dispersal areas. There were twenty-four single-engine and two twin-engine airplanes on the ground at the time of the raid. Of these, four were destroyed, six damaged and possibly another six damaged or destroyed but smoke prevented confirmation. Flak damaged thirteen airplanes and wounded one man. 2nd Lt. Edwin W. Nunnery, B, 96th Squadron, was severely wounded in the left thigh.¹²

MISSION 124, JANUARY 15, 1944

CERTALDO, ITALY

MARSHALLING YARDS/RAILROAD BRIDGE POGGIBONSI, ITALY, MARSHALLING YARDS

Reports state that this mission was almost as confused as the move from North Africa. The mission was divided between two waves. One

was led by Col. Rice with nineteen planes which took off at 9:25 A.M. The second wave of twenty Forts, led by Maj. Kutschera left at 10:00 A.M.

The confusion began on the second wave bomb run when the lead bombardier, thinking the bridge already down, closed his bomb bay doors. This confused the other bomber crews, so only ten bombed the primary target. The other eight struck the alternate. One "Lone Eagle" tried to hit an airdrome, saying he thought it was a "swell target."

The Group encountered no enemy fighters or flak in the target area, but because of the confusion and errors in navigation, both waves flew in the vicinity of Perugia airdrome. The twenty-five to thirty airdrome defense guns threw up a flak barrage over a stretch of fifteen miles. The first wave came through with no losses, but 1st Lt. William I. Pederson and crew, 429th Squadron, in airplane 41-24364, were lost. Other crews last saw the crippled Fort forty-eight miles northeast of Terni, Italy, with number 1 engine feathered and smoke coming from number 4, as the airplane lost altitude. The plane left the formation and the crew jettisoned the bombs into a lake. With the airplane apparently under control, it seemed to turn back toward base. No fighters were attacking at the time, but the crew did not return.¹³

All members of the crew parachuted and landed safely. Pederson and four of his crew were captured while five evaded and returned to Allied control. T/Sgt. John B. Sergakis, ROG, reported the following on his return to duty June 5, 1944 after Rome fell to the Allies: "Our plane