



War Diary of the 340th Bombardment Group November 1943

Transcribed from US Army microfilm and illustrations added by
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*The 340th Bombardment Group on Corsica
Photo Credit: 57th Bomb Wing Archives*

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November 1, 1943

We start out the month with a brand new rumor: an imminent move to a new base. The 12th Group is on the march and the 306th service group pulled out this morning. Although we have had no official word about pulling up stakes, the dawn of some fine day in the near future will undoubtedly find us with several conflicting plans for evacuating San Pancrazio....Speaking of fine days, we finally enjoyed a day of operational good weather and sallied out with 36 aircraft to attack the harbor and shipping at Ancona on the northeastern coast of Italy. This was a fat and juicy target in contrast to the close support “pinpoint” targets the 340th has been drawing in recent weeks. The results were excellent, a direct hit being made on a 5,000 ton merchant vessel tied up in the harbor, and near misses on a war ship (Possibly a cruiser). Fires and explosions were started in the workshops and along the quays...The war effort seems to be picking up. Russia is doing marvelously and has the German army in a bad way over there. Our forces in Italy have advanced also, but in a small scale. News from the highly important Moscow conference was flashed over the radio tonight.

November 2, 1943

A railroad junction at Aquila in Italy was the target today, but from the interrogation and the developed films we learned the group did only fair work. Two-thirds of the aircraft bombed a junction southeast of the town; the others tackled one southwest of town...The headquarters mess is certainly nothing to shout about these days. It doesn't boost the morale on these chilly and frequently rainy days to come into the mess building at noon to find puddles of rain water on the floor (the roof leaks lamentably), the electric bulbs just barely glowing because of generator trouble, and a forbidding array of C-ration chili or meat-and-vegetable stew, and canned spinach. One looks in vain for hot coffee or cocoa on these rainy days, finds instead that the cooks have laboriously concocted cold lemonade. Back in hot, desert-like Hergla, Tunisia, we had the hot coffee.

[No entry for November 3, 1943]

November 4, 1943

No mission was given us today, so many of the personnel scuttled away to Lecce, twenty miles distant. That town is little scarred by the war, at least physically, but does not offer much in the way of diversion. One encounters pedestrian vino peddlers on every corner, despite AMG's (Allied Military Government) strictures. Pimps also abound, most of them children, some ranging as far down as seven and eight years old. Often the approach is direct rather than furtive. “Signorina?” the youngsters inquire with an eager business-like tone in their voices. One asks “Buona?” and gets the answer, “Multa Buona! Bella.” Sometimes the subject of their proposition is surprisingly attractive, but most frequently, in the words of the USAAF, “a baggy old bitch.”...Judging from the way our dispersal areas are being waterlogged by the constant rain we shall look for derricks to move our airplanes to and from the runways before the week is out. However, the pilots haven't had too much trouble getting the ships around when a mission goes out.

November 5, 1943

Today the 340th Group threw its weight against a purely strategic objective – or at least attempted to do so – in what eventually may be designated a new campaign theater, the Balkans. Thirty-six crews were briefed to attack the harbors and shipping at Ploca and Metkovic in Yugoslavia. Operations in this sector, when made by the Allies, will be in support of the Partisans, armed guerrillas representing various political complexions who are harassing the German army of occupation on a “hit-and-run” basis. They swarm out of the hills, waylay Nazi military trains, attack posts, cut communications, and in other ways, hinder the establishment of Hitler's New Order in Yugoslavia. By bombing the German-held ports in that country we will help to starve the enemy of food and military supplies thus giving the Partisans a opportunity to wreak greater damage. Our planes today encountered ten-tenths cloud cover over the targets and returned with their bombs.

November 6, 1943

The weather today was so bad operations were impossible, which is tantamount to saying it was thoroughly nasty. Because the abortive mission run against the Yugoslavian ports yesterday was officially called a mission, several men in the group finished their combat tour of fifty raids. When these dejected fellows, tired and chilled from the cold flight, learned late in the afternoon that Group Operations was designating the operation a bona fide mission there was a great deal of jubilation at reaching the 50-mission mark and thus becoming eligible to return to the States. There are now about 30 men in the 340th who have flown this number of missions and whose papers for return to the USA have been forwarded to higher headquarters for approval. The number includes such excellent pilots as Capts. Marshall Lambert and Bobby Rodgers, Lt. Robert McClay and Loren Jenne, and a group of our most dependable gunners and radio operators, among the S/Sgts. Andrew Myers, Joseph Coviello, and Herbert Birkley, and T/Sgts. Alban Gagne, Paul Driscoll, and Norman Grant.

November 7, 1943

One plane of the 487th squadron crashed on a non-combat flight from Bizerte yesterday and two are missing. Few details of the affair are available, but this much is known: The three airplanes, piloted respectively by 2nd Lt. Lee R. Cox and 1st Lts. Harold Hague and Charles P. McCabe started out from Bizerte yesterday afternoon en route to San Pancrazio and apparently ran into bad weather. About six o'clock in the evening, it being quite dark and rainy, one plane came over the field and shot a red flare. The lights were turned on for him, but he did not land. Lt. Cox was the pilot of this plane, and it flew on a few miles to Manduria where, out of gas, it was abandoned by all personnel by means of parachute. The plane crashed. Everyone is accounted for save one man, a S/Sgt. picked up as a passenger in Bizerte. He is know to have jumped, but so far we have no communication from him. A couple of the parachutists were slightly injured in the accident. We wonder what has happened to the other planes and hope anxiously that they were able to find a field somewhere and effect safe landing...The mission was to Ancona today again, with 29 planes dropping bombs in the target area despite poor visibility. Observation was difficult, but we probably did well, as fires were spotted and crews also reported probably hitting a 500-foot motor vessel.

November 8, 1943

Still no information as to what happened to Lts. McCabe and Hague, although we have been informed that non-com reported missing from Lt. Cox's ship has turned up uninjured. We have been making anxious inquiries via teletype in re the missing planes and crews.

November 9, 1943

Twenty-four of almost forty men who have finished fifty missions and are consequently looking forward to a trip back to the States were lined up in front of group headquarters this morning and "shot" by the public relations photographer, who takes care of such assignments according to the wishes of AAF Public Relations in Algiers. A lot of news and pictures, it seems, is gathered by army personnel for editing and release to the Allied press. If one waits for papers to go through military channels in this theater he waits until hell freezes over. Ergo, Captain Rodgers of the 487th was given permission to take a plane to Foggia, seat of the 57th Bombardment Wing (our next highest administrative command) and thence to Naples (where the 12th Air Support Command – one step higher administratively – is located). With him went the "going home" papers of several men. Captain Rodgers is to camp on official doorsteps until the papers are signed and, at the dim, far-off end of the line – orders are issued for the men to start back to the USA...Lts. Hague and McCabe flew in today with their story: In the face of forbidding weather they landed at Catania airfield. Lt. McCabe proceeding directly there after hitting the south Italian coast and Lt. Hague going there after trying to get closer to San Pancrazio. Their crews were uninjured, of course, and the planes in operational condition. With them were two enlisted men and an officer from the 12th Bombardment Group. Unfortunately all their equipment and much of their baggage went down in Lt. Cox's ship. A fourth member of the camera unit had to parachute out of that plane. For an organization that can be described as publicity-minded rather than modest we certainly give the publicitors a rough time of it.

[No entries for November 10th and 11th 1943]

November 12, 1943

An alternate target was the mission objective today. The crews were briefed to attack Tatoi airdrome at Athens (we're getting farther afield these days), but a forbidding weather mass turned them back over Albania, so 32 of the 45 aircraft participating bombed the alternate target of Berat Kucove airfield in that country. Captain John Nestor of Newton, N. J., a flight surgeon with the 489th squadron went along on his third mission, and his comments are interesting. "I knew we were going to Athens, but all of a sudden I saw a wall of black puffs in front of the formation and thought at first they were fighter aircraft. Then I realized we were making a bomb run, apparently on an alternate target. It happened too quickly for me to get scared." Captain Nestor is one of two of our five flight surgeons in the group who fly combat missions, the other being Captain Charles B. Wathen of Morganfield, Ky., of the 486th squadron. These two men, incidentally, are greatly admired by our combat crew men for their willingness to go along "and see what we have to put up with." Undoubtedly this type of experience gives the surgeons a better appreciation of the type of strains to which combat fliers are subject, and should aid them in better protecting the flier's health. The results of the mission were good despite sever-tenths cloud cover. It was a new country to hit.

[No entry for November 13, 1943]

November 14, 1943

The boys in the 340th tonight feel a little like the Tokyo raiders must have felt after they got down on the ground in China. Today we went to Sofia, Bulgaria, to bomb the marshaling yards there and to inform the Bulgarians rudely that they were in the war against a powerful USAAF. It was the first bombardment of the Capital city and proved successful. 321st Group went with us and probably did better with their bombs than we did with ours, although we did plenty of damage. Forty-three of our aircraft bombed, out of a scheduled 48. Enemy fighters rose to challenge us but an indomitable Lightning escort shot down nine of them without loss. 486th squadron reported one of their turret gunners teamed up with a tail gunner to knock down another. If the claim is borne out it will be the first enemy fighter credited to the 340th Group. Major Bailey of Group Operations and Major Hackney, 486th commander, were like two kids exuberantly relating the deeds of their matinée cowboy heroes, as they described how the P-38's swished around knocking down the ME-109's: "Like squirrels in a cage," crowed Major Hackney.

November 15, 1943

There was excitement to burn around group operations office this afternoon. We finally got to Greece today, going out with the 321st to bomb Kalamaki airdrome, Athens. Bad weather forced the 321st to turn back, but our 48 ships went on and hit the runway intersection with demolition bombs and the dispersal areas with fragmentation bombs. It was a marvelous job. Captain Fred C. Eggers of Glendale, Calif., our group photo interpreter, said the raid without a doubt was our most effective operation. The pictures showed destructive precision pattern-bombing at its best. Coming home from the target the fliers had to buck a strong headwind and very nearly came to grief for lack of gas. About five ships landed on fields closer to the coast than our own in order to refuel. 2nd Lt. Charles Barnett of the 489th ran out of gas as he hit the coast, so he feathered one propeller. On his final approach the other engine sputtered out, but by cool, excellent work brought the ship in on a mile long glide with little or no power. 2nd Lt. Hampton of the 489th almost did the same thing, coming with a feathered prop the last few miles. Well, the boys finally go to Greece.

November 16, 1943

Major Roy H. Paul, group executive officer, has been transferred, with Major Charles Murray, our deputy commander, replacing him, at least temporarily. Major Bailey will also be working around headquarters for some time to gain a little more experience on this side of the fence while Major Keller is picking up operational experience by taking over as Group Operations officer for a while...Back to Greece again today with the same sort of bad medicine we dosed Kalamaki with yesterday. This time the frags and demos crunched on the field and parked aircraft at Eleusius, just outside the ancient Greek capital. The results were again highly gratifying. The Air Officer Command called on the phone lauding the great work. We're also hearing about our Greek ventures over the radio...We are about to move again and it's going to be rough going at the new home. Word received today instructs us to move up to a satellite field at Foggia on the 19th of this month. We'll move two squadrons at a time and all are to be gone by the evening of the 21st. There is absolutely nothing up there in the way of

installations and living quarters. It's back to the old tents days again, and the wind this time, instead of the dust storm, will be whistling about our ears...The Allied war effort in Italy appears to have bogged down in the rain and mud. The going has been mighty tough up that way, but critics and cynics will see the explanation if they will look at the torturous terrain, so easily and economically defended by the Nazis.

November 17, 1943

Just in case we had any doubt about whether we would move off this field very shortly, they were dispelled this evening with the arrival of about 30 Liberator bombers. They came in after dark with the rain pelting down viciously and in the course of a confused and excited hour banged up two of their planes. One whacked into a taxiing plane as the first aircraft came in for a landing. Minor damage resulted. This Liberator group, of course, will do its level best to push us out of here as fast as they can, possibly even before we can conveniently move all our men and equipment. The Air Force over here, as its units move from on field to the next, reminds one of a vast digestive system. Just as one pushes the previous meal farther along the digestive system with a hearty supper, so does one group squeeze out another group on the move from field to field. We'll go up to Foggia and work the same game on one of the fighter groups up there...Today the 340th lost a bomber over the target in the daytime to enemy fighter opposition. That is the first time such an event happened in the combat history of this group. Six men were in the plane, which was a 486th ship piloted by 2nd Lt. John D. O'Leary, a recent replacement. [Co-pilot 2nd Lt. John E. Smith was injured but survived. Four crewmen were KIA: Daniel R. Duskiwicz, John P. Sweeney, Roderick M. McDougal and Frank E. Williams] On our side of the ledger gunners in the 487th squadron knocked down three ME-109's who attacked in the target vicinity. The objective was Kalamaki airdrome again, and for the second time we bombed brilliantly. Surely the 340th Group never had three such excellent days consecutively in all its history as it has these past three days. Without a doubt our boys have greatly lessened the air strength for weeks, perhaps months, to come in the Athens area.



B-24 Liberator Heavy Bomber

[No entries for the 18th through the 22nd]

November 23, 1943

Here at Sal Sola landing ground, Foggia satellite number three, we come to rest in a sea of mud, water and misery. Ten times we have moved since the day of our organization. Each time we run into new situations and new difficulties, and the move just completed well illustrates that phenomenon. "Just completed" is hardly accurate; some of our trucks and jeeps are stranded between here and the old

field, and units are dribbling (admirable word) in every hour of the day and night. The advance party arrived to find the 79th Fighter Group, the old tenants, still on the field and under orders not to vacate. Torrential rains turned the landing ground into a facsimile of a lake, so reasonable it was heartbreaking. Cursing stoically, the first echelon pitched their tents and did their best to keep warm, dry and fed until the airplanes, the main body of the group, and the squadron messes arrived. At the present writing the fighter group has now evacuated the field, but our planes can't fly in here from Foggia Main it is too sloppy. One of the squadron messes still hasn't arrived and all the men of that unit have to be distributed to the other three messes and headquarters mess for meals. There certainly is a terrific concentration of Allied air power on these several Foggia fields. We have a new officer in headquarters, 1st Lt. Kittay. We have assigned him to help Lt. Jacob Kaline as assistant cyphers officer. We also are getting some replacements in ground personnel...A flock of promotions for officers bounced back, and even 57th Bombing Wing is getting disgusted over the picayunish practices of the 12th Air Force in matters of promotions and decorations.

November 24, 1943

Here's something hot off the rumor board. It's reported that Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt are holding a conference in Tunis. Rumor further has it that there are some German representatives there also. It has been fairly well established that the big three are there, but the part about the German representatives seems to be strictly a figment of someone's too active imagination...General Spaatz, commander of the 12th USAAF, was in Foggia yesterday and he was supposed to have visited the field here. He didn't however, and that's shame; possibly if he had seen this place he would have moved us to a new site in a hurry...If the sun stays out for a couple of days this place may dry out enough for us to get into operational shape again.

November 25, 1943

Our first Thanksgiving overseas was celebrated here today although work went on as usual. Despite the foggy, rainy quality of the day appetites were boundless. Rations were drawn especially for Thanksgiving and the boys had a fine time knocking themselves out on roast turkey, French fried potatoes, pie, coffee, olives, candy, nuts dressing, etc. From Foggia Main, where most of our planes were this morning, we sent out a mission to infamous old Sarajevo in Yugoslavia, with instructions to unload on the port of Sibenik if it was impossible to bomb the primary target. Unfortunately clouds completely covered both objectives, so the returning bombers landed at Foggia number three and began to call it home...Headquarters mess has been shaken up somewhat, with the mess sergeant replaced by M/Sgt. Vandifard [sp?], who has served 15 years in the army. No doubt he hasn't forgot what good, varied meals the small peacetime army used to get and perhaps the memory will help him to improve the cuisine...Colonel Tokaz, the group commander, who has been feeling and looking raggedy of late, is going to Bari tomorrow for a week's rest. He is instituting a new policy regarding the tour of duty of combat crew personnel. In the past he has been recommending all men who have completed 50 missions to be returned to the zone of interior, the United States. Now he announces that due to the almost complete lack of replacement crews he will try to extend the tour of duty past 50 mission where ever he can. This will necessitate a check by the surgeon when a man has completed that number. If the surgeon thinks he can fly more missions without returning home he will continue to fly in combat. If not, he will be recommended for return to the States.

November 26, 1943

Major Charles Murray, deputy commander, is taking over Lt. Colonel Tokaz's job while he is resting in Bari. The boys flew a 12-ship mission up to Lanciano to create a road block for the Eighth Army and dropped 90% of their bombs in the target area. "Buono," as the Italians say. Another mission of twelve did fairly well on troop concentrations in the Fossacesia area. These missions spelled the 50-mark for more fliers and according to regulations put out by higher headquarters they are automatically grounded while the flight surgeons investigate the possibility of their future availability. We have only 27 effective crews on the field at present and no replacements in sight...Rumors continue to spread concerning the presence of some big political leaders in Africa. Where there is so much smoke there must be at least a little fire. Right now the worst of us rumor-mongers have Hitler, Von Ribbentrop, and Von Papen camping out with Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin. Maybe the war is coming to an end. Worse things than that could happen, say we.

November 27, 1943

Two missions went out today, 24 planes and crews to see what they could do to Travnik harbor in Yugoslavia and 12 against a road in or near Porto Civitanova on the Eighth Army front. The Travnik affair blew up en route because of bad weather, but six planes, at least, bombed Pescara and Roseto on the Italian coast. Results were pretty unsatisfactory. The Porto Civitanova raid was fair, bombs falling on the town and railroad yards...More news on the replacement of combat crew personnel. It has been decided that the boys who have been with us since we left the States will fly 50 missions and go home. Those who have come in as replacements and are nearing the end of their 50 missions – we have many who have been overseas only three months or so and have almost reached that figure – will fly past the 50 mission mark, where possible. These men haven't had the rugged life in the field that the others lived through during our first four months of combat history.

November 28, 1943

Our crews are flying daily missions again and haven't been running into much flak or fighter opposition. Many targets are quite near the bomb line and consequently are short; still TBF mixes up the assignments with an eye to tactical expediency and every other day or so throws a strategic target in our lap. Today was such a day. We hit Dubrovnik in Yugoslavia and did a good job of it...The weather has been clear for the past three days and our Allied ground forces in the Fifth and Eighth armies are laboriously and slowly inching forward. Not much headway is being made by either army, but that is natural and expected for the terrain is rugged and admirably suited for defense...The change in the headquarters mess was all to the good. Even the issue ration seems to taste better now, and the supplementary food we buy is unquestionably better varied and better prepared. Tomorrow we look forward to another "first": we are to be served pork chops in the mess for the first time since we waved good-bye to the West Point...Not much in the way of entertainment around here. We can't very well establish a movie as there is no place large enough on the field to accommodate the group and it is almost too cold at night to watch one outdoors. About the main source of diversion for the boys these days is watching sheep have little sheep. They are dropping them right and left on the pastures. One sees many chickens over here but no eggs. Possibly the Italian chickens do not lay eggs. Possibly they are not chickens.

November 29, 1943

November is nearly gone and as we look back upon our first month on Italian soil we must honestly say it hasn't been too bad. Along with petty annoyances and long-standing complaints we have had a few unexpected pleasures. At the moment we are fairly well set up here, but the field does not boast too many facilities. We are back at the stage of washing out of our tin hats and sitting on outdoor toilets. Worse things could happen of course, not the worst of them being washing not at all and having no toilets to sit on. It's a strange war. In one place comforts abound; later on and further up the line it's back to the old primitive way of living...The crews ran a mission today, against the railroad and the roads and bridges at Giulianova, and they fared excellently...There are no further rumors worth mentioning, although there should be, for news is scarce, and when that situation obtains the rumors fly like snowflakes...General Montgomery has told his men he expects them to push on north of Rome soon. Possibly an offensive will start there soon...The 12th Air Force is being separated from the 15th, which will probably be composed solely of heavies.

November 30, 1943

Month's end. No operations today. Not much noise coming from the tents of the 340th tonight, only the rustle of playing cards as they are shuffled and dealt and the patter of tiny cubes. But the Battle of the Titans is going on. The 340th is working on the redistribution of ready cash for the month of December. (And after all that trouble the finance agents went to this morning to arrange it neatly in individual envelopes).