



## War Diary of the 340<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group March 1943

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

March 1, 1943

The sea is rough today, and lacks the peaceful calm of our former voyage. We are being convoyed by a bomber that goes back and forth along our path. Everyone seems to be more on the alert than previously. This afternoon there was an order over the loud speakers for the sailors to "Man their Battle Station." The big guns were fired, and seemed like they would shake the ship to pieces. Everyone is a bit sea weary, and due to the wind and inclement weather, spend most of their time below decks.

March 2, 1943

Nothing new to report



Photo collected from: <http://paperindustryweb.com/mypage/westpoint.htm> November 2013

March 3, 1943

This morning we awoke in the Tasman sea and sighted the island of Tasmania. We have been traveling straight out of the sea south of South Island New Zealand. Tomorrow, we are scheduled to cross the Bass Strait and pull into Melbourne, Australia. The coast of Tasmania looks very rugged and bare, with high rocky mountains, probably of volcanic origin. However, land of any kind looks welcome. It must be the rainy season down here, for whenever we near land, we are greeted by long persistent spurts of rain and heavy overcast. Our bomber escort has evidently disappeared.

The sailors and marines are eagerly looking forward to shore leave at Melbourne, but the soldiers are justly pessimistic about being turned loose even a few hours. However, it is pleasant to think about, and if they were turned loose, I'm sure that they would cause an acute shortage of beef-steak in Australia, as they are all sick of the food aboard ship. We hope that they get some variety in our diet at Australia. We often joke about crawling into our holes, and having the jailer put the chains on.

Medical facilities are at a premium here, and though we have plenty of doctors, hospital facilities are few. Having a bad case of athletes foot with secondary infection, I have been going on sick call daily getting it soaked and painted. However with no improvement, I finally consulted Captain Waltham,

486<sup>th</sup> medical officer who replaced Captain Essrig [Irving M. Essrig], and he gave me some of the precious sulfonamide tablets that are so valuable for all kinds of infections. Major Brussels, Group surgeon, is with the Flight Echelon. Captain Marino [Benjamin Marino], former Group Surgeon and now 488<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron Surgeon, Captain Armistead [William W. Armistead], 487<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron Surgeon, and Captain Nestor, 489<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron Surgeon now with the flight echelon also, and our Medical officers. 1<sup>st</sup>. Lt. Nozick, is our group dental officer. I think we are quite fortunate in having a good medical staff.

The average G.I. is quite irresponsible as far as money matters are concerned. If he has any financial responsibilities at home, or intends to save any money, he makes an allotment, and promptly forgets all about saving. Gambling, extravagance, and other dissipation that gambling leads to, there, replaces all means of constructive entertainment. Whether or not the average soldier will be able to adjust his perspective on money when he returns to civilian life, is questionable. It must all boil down to the fact that the uncertainty of the future encourages recklessness.

March 4, 1943

It was rainy and overcast today and uneventful until afternoon when we pulled into the great harbor of Melbourne, Australia. This harbor is reputed to be one of the best natural harbors in the world, though it is hardly developed as yet, boasting only a few long piers. We pulled up to one of these directly opposite the great Dutch ship, Amsterdam. This ship is slightly smaller than our own West Point, and not in near as good repair, looking rather tacky. In front of us a hospital ship is anchored.

This evening we got news of the sinking of a large Japanese convoy by Allied Air Forces. B-25s were the most prominent airplane in the raid. Many of the sailors went ashore this evening, and it is rumored that we will get to go ashore tomorrow. Hope to be able to report on Melbourne tomorrow.

March 5, 1943

The big event of today was going ashore. Every man on the ship was given a chance to go ashore, though he was to be in a formation, closely escorted by an officer. Men were dressed in O.D.'s, cartridge belt and canteen, and raincoat. This was a rather outstanding unnecessary uniform, but the idea was to keep the soldiers conspicuous for the M.P.'s. Though all men were supposed to stay together, many strayed off.

To say that Australian people are hospitable would be putting it mildly. They took to our bunch of Yanks and our Yanks to them like ducks take to water.

When we fell out of marching formations yesterday, March 5, 1943, after parading from our boat, we scattered over a rather large and refined residential district, much to the surprise of the Aussies.

Several families served "a spot of tea," sandwiches and cookies in their yards, while other families entertained scores of us in like manner in their homes. Several headquarters men were in a group invited in by a small shop owner and his family. They served innumerable ham and bologna sandwiches, fruit, cake and coffee and tea, despite the fact that their tea is rationed. The big problem was bread, since it is rationed, too, but one of our men rustled up four loaves from a small neighborhood bakery.

The Australians were anxious to hear us talk and we were anxious to hear them. It was difficult for us to understand many of them due to their Limey accents. They use a lot of terms which are as exotic to us as tamales. Street cars are called "trams" and candy stores are called "lolly shops," to mention two examples.

All with whom we talked expressed a desire to visit the U.S. and were anxious for us to like Australia, although they freely admitted that the majority of Yanks who have been here any length of time do not like it because of the weather.

Along the marching route from the docks, we noticed that the homes and apartment houses all bore names, like Abbeville, Hollywood, Seavilla, Harbor Inn, etc. most of the dwellings are rather large and old, built after English design. However, further from the waterfront, there was an occasional ultra-modern apartment and they stuck out like sore thumbs.

Both in the residential district and in the city, we noticed the distinct difference in their shops from our own back home. If a shop sold meats, that is all it sold, while a bakery sold only bread and a grocery sold only staple groceries. Ice cream parlors sold only ice cream and milk products, and drug stores sold only drugs and a drink shop sold various drinks---the soft variety. Tobacco shops sold only smoking equipment and products, etc.

The city itself is sprawled over a tremendous area, circling the vast harbor and extending far to the north and northeast. Many of the buildings are huge, but they are not very tall, the biggest towering only five and six stories. All the buildings look old and weather beaten, and all are patterned after English buildings.

Another confusing element to us was the way traffic moves on the right side of the streets. Traffic lights were just like those in Los Angeles or New York City. And speaking of traffic, the Aussies are using a tremendous number of horse-drawn vehicles, and their autos and trucks are equipped with charcoal burners, since they are allowed only four gallons of gasoline per month.

One of our men, little Taxi [nickname of Hymie Setzer], to be exact summed up the consensus of our experience when he stated that all of us got the biggest kick out of being rooked out of our money and liking it. None of us understood the exchange of money, but that didn't stop us. In typical American style, when we saw something we wanted we asked for it and the most of us didn't give a damn about how much it cost. Indeed, most of us got what we wanted and held out a fist full of money and told the shop keepers to take what they wanted. One of our men, Jones [Clarence D. Jones], was literally buying out a candy store, or "lolly shop," with two of his buddies. One of the men got two American dollars worth of Aussie money and paid for some of the stuff, and then Jones got change for a five dollar bill and got less than the other fellow got for two....But what the hell, the value of the money was incidental.

The city boasted a number of large and swanky hotels, cafes and "pubs," the same as a cocktail lounge to us. Dinners in the cafes were priced rather reasonable, since we could get nice steaks for the equivalent of 45 and 50 cents. Beers and ale, on tap, sold for six pence usually.

The city itself was a beehive of activity and the large crowds of shoppers resembled Los Angeles or Chicago near Christmas time. However, the majority of the shoppers were of course women and elderly men. The Aussies we saw in uniform were mostly middle-aged and gray-haired men.

Other oddities we noticed include: The fact that most of the people, even the young men and women, have false teeth or an abundance of dental work as was made visible by fillings, plates, etc....The distinct lack of foreign races----since we noticed only a few Negroes, no Orientals and only one or two Latins...The English influence was manifest on every side, since a large number of shops and firms had London and other English cities stenciled on their plaques and signs...Everyone, especially the women and young girls, seemed anxious to make friends and freely started conversations, while the children were anxious to get American souvenirs, especially coins----always the English eye for business, eh....The Yellow Cab Co. is here, too...Department stores and Dime Stores sell a large variety of American made products...We saw far more Aussie women in uniform than we ever saw American women in 'em in the States...We noticed a great many American movies advertised and noticed that the Aussies go in for horse racing, roller and ice skating and dancing in a big way, but they tell us hit tunes and dancing styles are way behind the States...All Aussies are crazy about American cigarettes, but don't get many of them...Military uniforms are thick and represent every country in the British Empire.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

052235

*Woman Taxi Driver, Melbourne Australia June 1943*

The above is impressions of Melbourne, written by James Q. House of HQ section. Sgt. House, former San Francisco newspaper reporter, is official 340<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group reporter to Yank magazine, and has contributed to "FLAK" at different times.

March 6, 1943

This morning everyone was full of their adventures in Melbourne. M.P.'s brought men in from town all night last night. At approximately 1210 the boat cast off her ropes and pulled out into the harbor. As it left the pier, a soldier came scrambling down the dock yelling wildly. A tug nearby took him aboard, and caught the ship in time for him to get aboard. We left three officers and five enlisted men in Melbourne all told, which isn't bad. The sea was pretty rough this afternoon, and a few men were seasick. Towards night-fall we passed our destroyer escort, and headed on out into the seas.

Sometime during the night, it was told me by a sailor, several flares of light were detected off the port side, and it was feared for a while that we might be pursued by an enemy vessel. The boat's speed was increased to 32 knots per hour, and we evidently left our foe safely in the rear.

March 7, 1943

This morning we could still see the shores of southern Australia, but left them before noon. The sea is calmer today. This afternoon, we had our first funeral at sea. Complete silence was ordered over the entire boat as the body wrapped in a shroud, slipped down a chute beneath the U.S. Flag into the briny

deep. The enlisted man was said to have a weak heart.

We get fearfully hungry between breakfast at 8:30 and supper at 4:30. We are supposed to get a bar of chocolate per man next Tuesday, which will help out for that one day. Some of the men beg an extra slice of bread to chew on between meals, but no one can safely be trifled with in the afternoon. Casting fond memories upon the time we got three meals per day, we even relish the memory of the old 488<sup>th</sup> mess----brrrr brrrr.

Lt. Fowler and Lt. Hoffman slightly over-stayed their shore leave in Melbourne and are now to do repentance with 8-hour guard duty for a week.-----If Major Paul enforces his punishment. At any rate Lt. Hoffman is guard this week.

March 8, 1943

Monday offered cool weather and new speculations as to where the West Point was going, although by this time it is pretty well confirmed that we are going to Bombay, India, and from there -----.

Everyone is in ill spirits today because of hunger. The Post Exchange has ceased selling candy or other edibles, and the cry of hunger is rising during the long period from breakfast until evening chow. However, we had a good bit of very good beef stew for dinner this evening, appeasing practically all of the hungry stomachs. Entertainment was provided on deck this evening including the great stomach muscle control man, former circus man, Joe Sansone, and other musical and comedy acts. Tomorrow we are to be rationed one-quarter pound bar of chocolate per man, ice cream, and a box of cookies. This rationing program seems very sensible, since before the fellows were buying whole case of candy per man, and thus exhausting the candy supply.

March 9, 1943

One day at sea is little different from another. The memories of the last port and the anticipation of the next are the two main topics of discussion. Gambling such as craps, poker and bingo are still running riot, though some of the fellows are badly behind. One enterprising young gentleman appeared this morning on deck with a miniature slot machine, urging all to deposit their spare coins therein.

There are movies every morning in the mess hall, though they are usually pretty crowded, with no chairs or benches. We go to bed promptly at nine, so have little night life. Six sergeants and one corporal were promoted today to the next grade in Headquarters, and several of the squadrons had a few promotions come through.

March 10, 1943

Today began the first day of Lent, heralded forth a menu of putrefied salmon, a most revolting dish, to say the least. But aside from our continual distaste for our meals, we are really pretty well off. We are beginning to look forward to the heat of the equatorial sun again and the sultry, stifled air below decks.

We have not had "Abandon Ship" drill for the past few days, and have been perfectly at ease to enjoy whatever pass-time we can find. There has been entertainment above decks every evening lately, and it is quite good for impromptu acting on the part of enlisted men. The sea is fairly calm, and all is well.

March 11, 1943

This morning we had another death on the boat, and some hysteria was created by the possibilities of some communicable disease that might sweep the ship. It was rumored that the death might be caused from spinal meningitis. Several sections were quarantined, and all sections kept off the decks except at prescribed hours. Sick call is to be in the sections themselves, twice a day, at 9:00 A.M. and at 3:00 P.M. All sorts of rumors are running wild, and the possibility of death from your neighbor seemed probable. The crowded conditions and hot, unsanitary conditions seem ample breeding grounds, for almost anything.

March 12, 1943

The new schedule is in effect today, and it is growing much warmer. We are scheduled to get into Bombay about Tuesday, March 16. We were able to get Coca Cola, ice cream, candy, cookies, and toilet articles from the P.X. or ship store today. This relieved the situation considerably.

The bugle sounded today in mournful tone, and another corpse slipped over the rail into the briny deep. However, there have been no more deaths today, and it is believed that they have got the situation under control.

March 13, 1943

Happy day. The restriction was lifted today, and all were allowed to go out on decks. It is getting Hot as Hell again. They run us out of the compartment twice a day, and we spend this time above decks in the fresh air. We had to take everything off the floor today, and they swept the floors and disinfected them. Some men are foolishly leaving their shirts off to the punishing rays of the tropical sun, and will no doubt suffer. They had several boxing matches on deck this morning, that provided good entertainment.

S/Sgt. Marvin L. Rexford, former 488<sup>th</sup> Mess Sergeant, and now Headquarters cook, has long been a sore spot on the annals of the 340<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. Rexford shows no particular aptitude for getting along with people, nor for even trying to get along. In the 488<sup>th</sup>, he was thoroughly disliked, and proved inefficient. Now, we in Headquarters, await his downfall in our group.

The West Point ploughs on through a calm sea. We have developed something of a sentimental regard for our boat, and hope she gets through many future voyages without mishap.

March 14, 1943

A hot Sunday with a hot crew. It is reported that we barely avoided collision with an Allied ship during the night last night (0230 today). The boat veered sharply, and the other boat did like-wise, and both vessels passed safely. It was cloudy and black as pitch, and as neither vessel emits light nor sound, it was impossible to judge their whereabouts except by radar equipment.

We are scheduled to cross the equator tomorrow at 1730, and to cross the magnetic equator at 1300 on Tuesday, March 16<sup>th</sup>. The Magnetic equator is the true equator with relation to the magnetic pole, and

is that imaginary circle, where no downward magnetic force is exerted on a magnetic bar or compass. According to the "Pointer's Pup," our little Army newspaper aboard ship, the above information is correct.

We will probably be able to see land, next Wednesday, March 17<sup>th</sup>, and land in Bombay on Thursday about 5:00 P.M. (1700) As has been mentioned before, we have about 2500 men and 70 women aboard scheduled to depart at that port. According to reports, they have about a five day train awaiting them. Most of these men are Medics. Needless to say, the army is looking forward to another shore leave at Bombay. This would be heaven to get ashore again.

March 14, 1943 [sic. Date is repeated twice in the original]

Sunday passed comparatively uneventful until this evening, when in the darkness of a very cloudy night, we almost ran into another large ship, probably an English or other Allied vessel. The flash blinkers in recognition to our code, and the two ships veered sharply to miss each other.

"U.S.S. West Point, (Ex – U.S. America).

"Flagship of the U.S. Lines Fleet, the largest American -built liner, built at Newport News as Maritime Commission Hull Number One under the Merchant Marine Act of 1936 chartered for Navy use on June 6, 1941, she converted into a Transport at her builder's yard, entering service in July. She was renamed for the U.S. Military Academy's site. Her North Atlantic side-runners were acquired under charter, the Camden-built Washington and Manhattan.

Built in 1940, commissioned in 1941, 26,454 tons with an overall length of 663' 7", 93' 6" beam, 30' 5" mean draft, 34,000 horse power, 22 knots per hour.

March 15, 1943

Nothing unusual today. Extremely hot and uncomfortable, though they have air-conditioned many parts of the boat that before were unbearable.

March 16, 1943

Gunnery practice today. A target was let down into the water yesterday afternoon, but it turned over, and so they made a new one which they let down into the water at 0700. The 3" guns in front let loose first at a distance of about 15000 yards, while the boat circled the floating raft. Then the five inch guns let loose with a terrible thunder and filled the air with powder, wadding, smoke and fire. I don't believe they really intended to hit the target, as the shots usually fell to the left of it. Finally, at close range, the anti-aircraft guns let loose with red tracers which ricocheted wildly across the water. After circling the target for about two hours, we returned to our course and left it apparently none the less worse off for all the shooting.



March 17, 1943

Crazy? Insane? Well, that is what you might call it, but most things that happened today were really fairly rational. Amid the rumors of fumigation the boat at Bombay, shore leave, and other incredulous reports, came the sudden throb of the ship's engines as they reversed to stop the boat. A large whale, about 25-feet long had been struck by the prow of our boat, and was impeding our progress. When the boat stopped, the dead whale immediately fell to the bottom of the ocean.

We have seen many flying fish of late, and several school of large black, slow-moving mammals, undoubtedly porpoises. At times some have imagined seeing the sharp dorsal fin of a shark cutting the water, but this seems not too likely.

This afternoon we were in dangerous waters, and did a lot of zig-zagging. This evening a strong beam of light penetrated the darkness and picked the white sail of a fishing boat out. It was our own light. Tomorrow we arrive in Bombay, and everyone is excited.

March 18, 1943

About 1000 this morning we arrived in Bombay India, or at least into the harbor. It is a dirty stinking harbor too, with considerable traffic in the form of about three troop transports besides ourselves, a couple of destroyers, a host of cargo or merchant vessels, and almost hundreds of little white-sailed sloops used by the Indians for fishing. A host of dark-skinned men and boys paddled out to our boat as we dropped anchor, and begged for coins, cigarettes, and bottles. The sailors ran them away from the boat with fire hoses, and even shot on several of them, as most Indian beggars are infested with disease and vermin, and many of them have been accused of sabotage, as they are quite fanatical.

We watched the shipping come and go out of the harbor. A big water boat pulled alongside, and gave us fresh water. The sun set over the white sails of the fishing vessels mosque like doves on the buildings of Bombay, and all lay quiet over the bay.

March 19, 1943

Several of the officers went ashore today in the ship's motor launch, and the sailors also. However, they expect to dock tomorrow noon, and allow the EM to go ashore in two groups: one Saturday, and one Sunday. It is awfully hot and sticky sitting out here on the bay, and we hope that we will leave here soon. The water boat left us this morning, and another boat pulled alongside, which looked like a tanker, and designed to give us oil.

There seems to be a tremendous amount of shipping in the harbor. Troop transports, tankers, cargo vessels, destroyers, hospital ships, fishing boats and other native craft. The harbor is large enough, but there is not adequate docking facilities for so much shipping and there are numerous shallows and small islands. The British spend as little as necessary on such facilities, with their main objective to extract as much wealth as possible from the country.

March 20, 1943

The boat pulled into the dock about noon. The tide comes at approximately 10:40, and goes out 12 hours later (2240). We disembarked at two, and had our first taste of the city of Bombay. Believe, me, it was bitter. By this time, with the coming and going of so many soldiers and civilians, the Indians have become quite money conscious, and hold the average soldier up for all kinds of trinkets. "Haba, haba" let me shine your shoes, sell you a whip, or drive you around. The Indians are great barterers and will jew you down to the last penny. Most of their merchandise is of poor quality, and pretty well picked over.

Every soldier goes to town largely, to eat. However, we were quite disappointed in the Indian bill-of-fare. We ordered milk, something that none of us have tasted for two months, and received a glass of watery, greasy globules that I guess must have been goat's milk or asses milk in some state of disintegration. We ordered drinks, and the rot-gut they served was terrible, a few drinks giving you a head-ache. We ordered a full course dinner, at a very attractive price in American money, and received a little patty of hamburger steak (ala gristle) and a fried egg, with a postlude of yellowish, watery ice-cream. A Negro orchestra (fresh from Harlem) blared out in true coon style ("In the Mood"). A full moon bathed the dirty streets below where urchin beggars, horse drawn buggy taxis, and other vendors, plied their trade.

The gateway to India, a large stone structure similar to the victory arch of Paris, is a prominent landmark of the landing of George V in Bombay in 1911, built for his benefit. Taj Mahal, a huge building, houses the exclusive hotel of Bombay. The tower of Silence, the Hanging Gardens, Indian Art Museum and other sights are worth seeing.

Many of the officers, and a few enlisted men bought some jewels, including fire-opals, star-sapphires, rubies, and diamonds. Very few got any bargains, and the crafty merchants seemed well-acquainted with the American money. The Indians are very shrewd traders.

One thing that I could not help notice, was the stateliness and carriage of India women. Clothed in flowing Indian robes, very often white, and many having veils, the women were not conspicuous, and very little in evidence. However, when you did see one, they seemed to have very fine-chiseled features, and were on the whole pleasing to look at. There was one blind beggar woman however, with her baby clinging to her breast and nursing, that was quite pitiful.

The Indians seem to hate the English. Several English soldiers saved us paying exorbitant taxi fare, and the Indians always mumble discontentedly when they come around. "Just leave us alone to fleece the Americans" is their motto. Down in the slums of the town, dark-skinned women in open cages along the street, cast inviting glances at the passing men, and offer forth "Jig-jig," the first Indian word to enter the sailor or soldier's vocabulary. And if you prefer, a taxi-driver will take you to the Chinese, Russian and English prostitutes.

As the weary sight-seers of the 340<sup>th</sup> struggled up the cattle-ramp or gang-plank, after a thorough frisking by the guards for liquor, food, or disease-bearing animals, the day in Bombay was brought to a conclusion with the ribald songs of the drunks, and the medical officers administering prophylactics in the latrine.

March 21, 1943

Sunday was allotted to the other half of the men who didn't get ashore yesterday. However, many of our group managed to slip out with other groups and get a second crack at souvenir-hunting and foul liquor. Trinkets of ivory, jade, brass, and of every description, as well as large British sun-hats, web shirts, and shorts, and Indian sandals (Also Indian skull caps) whips, canes, and more damned junk than in a dime store, all came back to the boat. Monkeys, parrots, coconuts, and other commodities, forbidden aboard ship, were deposited ashore by the gang-plank. A heavy bombardment group, the 308<sup>th</sup> B.G., got off and clete-tracks, and several pursuit ships were unloaded out of the hold. Tomorrow they are going to rearrange the men on the ship, so that the bunking areas will not be so crowded.

The main attraction of the day was 250 British soldiers that got aboard. Everyone stood around them, eagerly listening to their accent, and tales of fighting abroad. A lot of them have been in the army as long as four or five years.

March 22, 1943

About noon today when the tide came in, we cast off the dock and dropped out into the bay. Two straining tugs kept the ship clear of the dock and islands, and pulled us out to a safe distance. An oil tanker pulled alongside, and remained with us all night. Sailors still had shore leave, and the little power launches plied back and forth from the West Point. There are still a large number of ships anchored out in the harbor and it is rumored that the West Point will go out tomorrow in convoy, though I doubt if this be true.

Captain Cover told the boys in the 488<sup>th</sup> that they were going to some point about 50 miles south of Cairo. We are all looking forward to a thrill at seeing the rest of our Group, or rather the Flight Echelon, Colonel Mills, Colonel Tokaz, Captain Bachrach and all the rest of the men. There will be much to talk about. The British soldiers are still providing a great source of amusing interest. Today, one British Sergeant told a U.S. Private to wash his mess kit. The Private told him to "Blow it out his \_\_\_." The Sgt. reported it to an officer, who in turn politely informed him that Sgts. cleaned their own mess kits here.

March 23, 1943

Yesterday, most of the personnel aboard the boat shifted quarters to get more space and freedom. Headquarters was assigned a 47-man compartment with two port holes, and with our 35 men promising to be much less crowded. A few foresighted members of our little group had taken over a few of the more desirable berthing spaces, and the usual "first-come, first-served" method was accepted in the allocation of the bunks

Here I digress from the usual type of things in this diary to maybe nurture some personal animosity, or maybe just to expose the human element that so often exposes itself in the men we select as leaders. At any rate please excuse me if I place too great an emphasis on the immaterial or the material.

Father McElroy strode into our new quarters with a possessive air and blinked his little eyes like a baby rhinoceros in the sunlight stream gazed through the open porthole. The sea breeze frolicked through his wiry, curling hair, and his little ears twitched almost automatically. Something was a-screw, if we may use the term, and the goodly father furrowed his troubled brow in recognition at the sight of the familiar baggage of some of the heretics, which was placed neatly, half defiantly on several of the "Porthole" bunks. Father McElroy could feel the stifling heat of the rest of the room at his back, and shrunk furtively from the idea of sleeping in the "caskets." After short deliberation, the good father crossed himself and shouted at a couple of nearby heretics, "The only fair way to distribute these bunks is to assign them. I'll seek the aid of an army officer, and they will be assigned according to rank. In the meantime, get this baggage off these porthole bunks."



*Sgt. McElroy*

The outcome was simple. Father Ryan [James T. Ryan] was assigned to former First Sergeant's bunk, not by rank but by favor, Father McElroy took the next best, and the little flock of not more than six or eight was distributed advantageously. The heretics were left the rack and the casket and other ingenious devices of the inquisition. Of course it is only for a week or two, and I have heard of men living through the inquisition for years.

But be not alarmed, my dear reader, for this is all. 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. McAvey has a much better running organization in the 489<sup>th</sup>, and has been collecting large tithes through his candy, cookie, and ice-cream racket. It is all explained by a cookie fund, to buy cookies for those unfortunate souls who are unable to pay for theirs. No one has ever seen any of those unfortunate souls yet benefit from the fund.

The West Point upped anchor about noon today, and turned her prow out into the Indian Ocean. She is following a west northwest course and doing considerable zig-zagging to avoid contact with tin fish, etc. This is considered very dangerous waters. I believe we are traveling without convoy, as I have seen no signs of such as yet. It is a great relief, to be back on the main again, and I think everyone aboard is glad to get out of the vile smelling harbor of Bombay. We enjoyed the visit, but please, Uncle Sam, don't leave us there.

March 24, 1943

The heat does not seem so depressing today, and it is almost pleasant, as we push steadily on through the indigo blue waters of the Indian Ocean. The waters in the lagoon of Bombay were a pearly gray, then as we pulled away from shore they gave way to a pale green and now the usual deep blue. We have had no rough seas this trip, the roughest being the Tasmanian sea which gave us no more than a little roll.

The British soldiers are still under minute scrutiny by our American crew, and they seem to employ this air of being brothers in arms. They consist of Scotch, Welsh and Irish and are all of fair skin and Nordic descent. They can't understand were we get all or our dark-skinned soldiers with hairy bodies, and in other words the mixing of French, Italian, Jew, Pollock, Swede, etc. [illegible]. They understand the southern accent the best and are amused at the careless slang of some of our New Yorkers. The topic of soldiers and officers, always ready to take up a new fad, have in any instance assumed the brief short and web shirt dress of the British and even the elephant hunter's hats which they bought in

Bombay.

The boat is still pursuing a zig-zag course, and there seems no doubt but what we are in a danger zone. We had abandon-ship drill today and the usual naval call of "Make ready your battle stations" at 0600 persists. Sailors were busy today chipping old paint and rust and applying new. Life aboard ship has become more tolerable. Investigation reveals that HQ will be stationed within the city limits of Cairo, with the squadrons within a radius of one-hundred miles. Captain Cover is acclaimed the source of this information.

March 25, 1943

[illegible] at sea, with the usual routine and abandon-ship drill this afternoon. The sun is hot and a lot of the boys are getting beautiful tans. We entered the Gulf of Aden this afternoon, and it is between [illegible] of land [illegible] a strait. We passed several boats today of cargo size, and this seems to be well-traveled waters. Everyone was reading books on Egypt including descriptions of the people, their habits and the language. I have the impression that these natives will be very similar to those of Bombay, and be quite spoiled by the Americans and British army.

March 26, 1943

Today we have been having entertainments on the deck, put on by a special services unit that are going with us to entertain us in the field. To the list were added several novelties to the entertainment with their dry humorous jokes. We find them quite entertaining.

March 27, 1943

Everyone is getting expectant and anxious to leave the West Point, with some regret of course, because by now we have been practically all acclimated to the life aboard ship. We know how to beat the chow lines, buy the sailors off for food from the P.X., slip past the guards on deck and sleep under a life boat on hot nights, and in other words get the best of everything. Soon we will be entering a new situation. The [illegible] slips through the water by the ship, and all is well, aboard the good ship West Point always on toward Egypt.

March 28, 1943

Sunday filled with planning and conjecture about our landing for tomorrow. Lt. Fowler was down, and told us to be all packed and ready to disembark at 0900 tomorrow. We can see land today, and are almost into the Suez Bay. Although we are supposedly in dangerous waters, there seems to be less tension on the part of the troops with regard to any kind of attack. We are mainly interested in getting off the boat now, so won't elaborate any more on sea travel so near the end of a successful voyage.

March 29, 1943

Lights went on this morning about 0600, and there was a definite rush as all the members of the 340<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group Ground Echelon prepared to disembark from the West Point at 0900. Packs were adjusted, barracks bags filled, and the final goodbyes were made to sailor friends and others aboard. At 1000 we filled out of the West Point into landing barges and ferried into Port Taufiq [Port Taofik], where we landed and boarded an Egyptian train. The service unit of the British army provided us with tea and crumpets at the station, and we stared inquiringly at the small train and the long robed Egyptians. The little train puffed out of the station and we rode for about one hour to the railway junction of Cineifa[?] where we were loaded into trucks and taken over to Kabrit, our temporary station. On the railroad trip, we passed by concentration camps containing Italians and Germans, and we stretched our necks out of the cars in order to give the inmates our thumb and nose.

Arriving at Kabrit, Egypt at about 0400, we were greeted by members of our flight echelon who were in the best of health and strictly on the ball. Lt. [illegible] had not yet arrived with our material, Lt. Wing[illegible] was in the hospital, and two ships from the 487<sup>th</sup> were landing with crews. The air echelon had encountered bad weather coming over, and a total of five planes had been lost, and about two and one-half crews. The 486<sup>th</sup> and 489<sup>th</sup> lost one each, the 488<sup>th</sup> arrived all intact, and the 487<sup>th</sup> lost three planes and two crews. The 489<sup>th</sup> lost [illegible] plane and half a crew, and [illegible] one planes. Six crews from the 486<sup>th</sup> are on the 487<sup>th</sup> North African front, at present, pilots including Captain Mac[?]oy, Captain [?]man, Lt. [illegible], Lts. O'Clock, [illegible] and Welch.

The flight echelon was to be [illegible] in the barracks and the ground echelon in tents. Out tenting area is directly on the Great Bitter Lake, and there is considerable shipping in view. We were greeted by the sight of our[illegible...]

[Three illegible paragraphs]

March 30, 1943

Today was our first full day at El Kabrit, and it was necessarily a busy one. Colonel Mills strode into Headquarters this morning, (HQ is a small frame building surrounded by a wall of sand-bags, nestled alongside a large hanger) and seemed glad to see the men in the flight echelon. Captain Bachrach who met us at the train yesterday in a jeep was also in evidence, as well as Lt. Colonel Tokaz who proffered his usual icy, distant attitude. 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Penney [Edgar G. Penny], Group bombing officer, gave us colorful tales of the flight Echelon's trip over the stormy Atlantic.

A Major shake up in the Executive department of the 340<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group occurred today, and one that had probably been carefully thought out by Colonel Mills before our arrival. The Colonel is a very astute observer of human capacity and results etc., and we cannot but reflect back upon the time when Lt. Fowler assumed the official capacity of Adjutant, relieving vice Major Paul, a remarkable jump for a new 2nd Lt. Now Major Paul is again shuffled around to the official capacity of Asst. Group Executive Officer, and Group administrative inspector, and is replaced by none other than Lt. Colonel Tokaz, who in turn is being replaced in the capacity of Operations officer by Captain Bachrach. Of course we can only guess that the two Colonels will run operations to the detail as always, and Lt. Colonel Tokaz in the meantime will be priming himself for something bigger, such as C.O. Of this

group or of another. At any rate it is comforting to feel the capable leadership of Colonel Tokaz in Colonel Mills's absence. (Colonel Mills and Captain Bachrach left for the front this morning.)

The British Eighth Army is playing Hell with Rommel's Afrika Corps today, and have them surrounded to a very small area on the Mediterranean coast around Tunis and Bizerte. This is most encouraging, and we know that some of our own planes and crews are helping in this major drive. (The six planes from the 486<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron.) To the best of my understanding our planes and crews are acting as replacements for the 12<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group.

Our field stoves arrived today, and the squadron mess is improving. Much of our matériel from the West Point is not here yet, and some believe that the baggage and equipment shipped from Newport News may not be here for as much as three or four months yet. The Colonel spoke of poor Lt. Hanger [John W. Hanger] traveling steerage with the equipment. Was told today that all code combinations and code procedures used in the States were passé over here, and that the R.A.F. initiated all message forms. We will have these British-trained code experts with our group. At present we have four Cryptographic experts assigned to Headquarters.

March 31, 1943

Under different conditions, our present environment might be almost pleasant; but this is war, and our second day at El Kabrit brings forth a volley of curses from the men, and solemn resignation from the officers. We are encamped on the shores of the Great Bitter lake, a body of salt water that forms part of the water route from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean. Cairo is about 90 miles to the west of us. There is no sign of vegetation at El Kabrit, and the gray brick buildings squat desolately upon the sand. The terrain around the lake is broken by brackish-red hills of rock and sand. It seems that the wind blows continually, carrying with it dust and sand. Dark-skinned Egyptians plod across the sand in long full robes or sheets with their head wrapped in the same material. They are commonly nick-named "rag-tops." In the midst of this desolate isolation P-40's and B-25s roar off of black-top run-ways into the clear blue, and give evidence of the constant drone of activity.