



War Diary of the 340th Bombardment Group August 1943

Transcribed from US Army microfilm and illustrations added by
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The Group on Corsica

Photo Credit: 57th Bomb Wing Association Archive

[No entries July 25, 1943 – August 4, 1943]

August 5, 1943

This account has necessarily been interrupted for the past few days because the organization has been in the process of moving to a new location. For the first time since we have entered combat we find ourselves occupying an airdrome in enemy territory, operating completely on our own, independent of any other organization. Our new home, at least for the time being, is Comiso, Sicily. We hope we have said goodbye to North Africa forever, and that we can continue to go forward until this war is won.

The advance party left Hergla on July 28. Upon arrival at the new location they discovered that the field was occupied by 100 Spitfires of the 324th Wing, although instructions were received at Hergla indicating that the entire field would be ready for our immediate use. After getting this situation straightened out the advance party proceeded to lay out the field and the dispersed areas in readiness for the arrival of the rest of the group. They had several interesting experiences in their week over there. Captain Garske [George C. Garske] became the personal pilot of General Montgomery when that individual arrived on the field unexpectedly in a B-17 that became grounded due to faulty brakes. The General had to get to Syracuse immediately and Captain Garske volunteered to fly him there. Each night Jerry planes were dropping flares, but no bombs were dropped in the vicinity of the airfield. Several areas around the field had been mined by the Germans and claimed several careless individuals who wandered through the vineyards. Bombs, flares, bullets kept buzzing and whining day and night. Most of the commotion was caused by the British when they moved out, possibly in celebration.

In the meantime the “A” party had arrived at 'Arizona' by convoy and were preparing to embark for Sicily. Trucks and equipment, baggage and personnel were loaded on barges and the voyage began. They arrived on the field on the morning of August 3, and proceeded to set up camp. While all this was going on the flight echelon and rear party were still carrying on operations at Hergla and were running missions daily. In all these operations one ship (Lt. Wilke and crew, 488th) [Lt. Erwin H. Wilke, Lt. George F. Noble, Lt. Matthew C. Morrison, T/Sgt. William J. Brown, Jr., Sgt. Harry S. Wilson] was lost. The flight echelon broke camp this morning and flew to Comiso.

Set down as it is above in black and white these operations and movements seem simple and inconsequential, however, each time this organization, with all its personnel and paraphernalia, moves a great deal of labor is expended by all concerned. On the whole it can be said that this movement was accomplished in an orderly and efficient manner. We are beginning to learn.

Possibly since we are starting a new phase of operations from this field it would be interesting to describe the setting. The field itself is located about three miles from the town of Comiso in Southern Sicily. Installations and buildings on the field itself are bleak reminders of the effectiveness of our



Damaged Building at Comiso Airdrome. 57th Bomb Wing Archive

bombing, for this was one of our recent targets when it was in enemy hands. The hangers have been demolished and former administration buildings are a total wreck. There is not one building on the field that has not been marked in some way by the bombs we dropped. The single runway on the field is now in serviceable condition and is in the process of being widened to permit our bombers to take off by threes. The field was evidently established by the enemy as a permanent one. The huge barracks, officers clubs, and administration buildings were erected some years past and it is believed that they were intended to be the last word. Naturally we will utilize as many of the serviceable features as possible. It is not know how long we will remain here but so far everyone has expressed complete satisfaction with the field and its facilities.

The personnel dispersal areas are located a mile from the field and are laid among heavy growth and trees. The surrounding countryside is green and verdant, a welcome change from the dust and dry heat of the Africa dessert. Grapes grow here by the billions, fruits and vegetables of all kinds, and even tobacco and cotton are in evidence. However, we will remain vigilant, as this is after all, in fact, enemy territory.

August 5 finds us ready and raring to go from Comiso, Sicily.

August 6, 1943

They are really cracking the whip over us now. We had six twelve-ship missions up today with mixed results. The targets were, for the most part, well covered and Army Headquarters actually sent a direct commendation down to us after the 487th did a swell job in plastering a target this afternoon. The last mission just landed and all ships returned safely although we had a little tough luck today when two ships taxied into parked trucks. Major Bachrach has been appointed Safety Officer and will work out a Safety Program. Operations will continue tomorrow with four missions already scheduled and possibly more to come. The field is being fixed up for night flying and we may have some night missions soon.

One of our targets for tomorrow is Randazzo. We have the word that they want the target absolutely devastated. As a result five hundred bombs with ten second delay fuses will be used. Our bomb problem here is a big one when we are running so many missions daily. The ordnance men have been working like Trojans to get the bombs unloaded from the trucks and loaded on the planes. We've requested that our Service Squadron give us a hand and at least help with the unloading. Later we shall try to make arrangements to have them take over the bomb dump completely.

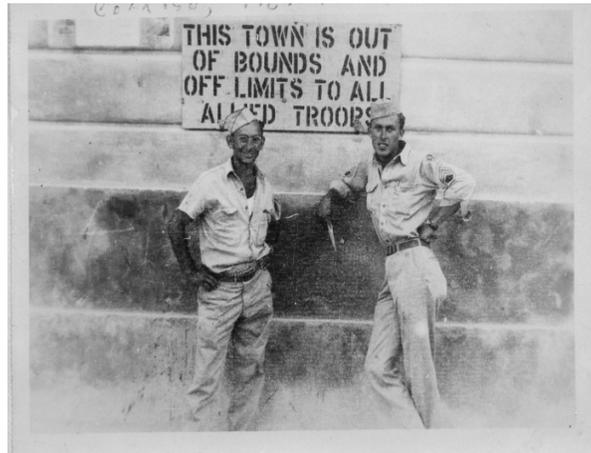
Brand new over here and naturally we are still having difficulties getting into high gear. Telephones and lighting facilities must be installed, headquarters set up, new slit trenches dug and a hundred million other things to make life more hectic. However, we are now in fair shape and in another couple of days we should be well established here. Everyone likes this setup very much. We are, for the first time since our arrival overseas, surrounded by green trees and lush growth. The population seems to be friendly and the weather not too warm. Headquarters officers and enlisted men are staying in barracks and the squadron personnel are well bivouacked in dispersal areas. The field is a good one and everyone breathes a silent thanks to have left the dust and "wogs" of North Africa behind.

At long last we are to have a Headquarters Mess. Furniture was "acquired" today and the tents should be up by tomorrow. Headquarters has never had its own mess and it is expected that it will be a success. Everyone is eager for it. We are also to have a Group Exchange in the near future. Lt. Howlett has been appointed Exchange Officer and will be in charge of the venture. Some articles have

already been purchased and every effort will be expended to make this latest innovation a big success. Movies will commence in a day or two and the Officers' Club should be in operation soon.

The latest news has been good but sparse. Orel has fallen as has Catania and Munda. Nothing new to report so far as the Italian situation is concerned. We are continuing to bomb their cities without letup and it is expected that Italy will “give up the ghost” soon. Speaking of mail brings up another point closely related to it as both subjects are close to all our hearts.....food, more and better food is always a goal with the members of this group. During the last two weeks at Hergla, the food situation had improved because the Quartermaster was supplying extra fruits, vegetables and meats occasionally. Over here that system is out for the present. Consequently the Group has arranged for the purchase of meat twice weekly and also for the purchase of eggs, fruits and vegetables at regular intervals. Right now the issued rations are scanty. We are supplementing the initial ration with purchases of our own.

All towns have been placed out of bounds by order of General Montgomery. The reasons for the action are not known but it is believed that soldiers of Allied armies are overrunning the towns and in addition are leaving their jobs for unofficial “flings” at the various “hot spots.” The rear party is still in Hergla and we presume they are getting ready to join us here. It will be nice when we are all together again.



From Sgt. Hymie Setzer's Collection

August 7, 1943

With hardly a pause from yesterday's operations we again took off on regular bombing of Randazzo and vicinity to help the Ground forces in their push Northward to the sea. Generally, good results are observed and the town of Randazzo was completely plastered on almost every run. The city of Randazzo is important to the enemy because all roads leading along their line of retreat intersect in and run through the city. By smacking these roads and the city itself, we should be able to effectively block their attempt for an orderly retreat. The final phase of the Battle for Sicily is on and we are proud to say that the 340th Bomb Group is in the thick of the battle.

Flak was exceptionally heavy today and quite accurate. T/Sgt. Berven [Allen C. Berven], gunner of the 489th Bomb Squadron, was unfortunately killed during a mission this morning. He was taken to Ponte Olivo and buried in the American Cemetery there this afternoon.

Hammering, bombing, building, organizing, still continue in an effort to get the organization completely set up for the intense operations we know are to come. The Group Exchange will be in operation shortly and so will the Headquarters Mess. Barbers and tailors have been hired and are operating for the convenience of the personnel, with their shops on the post.

The rear party is to join us soon, which is a good move, for we need their help badly. A recent citation from the Ninth Air Force on General Orders has given us a new incentive to increase every means in our command for efficient operations.

August 8, 1943

We are continuing to run a lot of missions. This morning we had four, all on the town of Randazzo. One ship in the 488th was lost after Lt. Walsh attempted a single-engine landing about noon. Coming back from the mission, still carrying his bombs, he approached the landing strip with just one good engine. He overshot and landed South of the runway. The ship almost immediately caught fire but fortunately and miraculously all members of the crew escaped without serious injury. A short time later the intense heat caused the bombs to detonate with a huge roar. The members of that crew [Lt. J.J. Walsh, Lt. E.J. Wasserman, S/Sgt. J. Hollis, T/Sgt. M.S. Hardin, S/Sgt. F. Pilon] are lucky to be walking around tonight. The ship is a total wreck but we consider ourselves fortunate in saving the crew.

The missions were very successful and the Army headquarters sent a commendation to Air Vice Marshal Sinclair as a result. The writer realizes that so many references to recent commendations may seem a little on the braggadocio side. However, the fact remains that the boys are really laying them in there where it counts and are receiving credit for their good work.

The barber and tailor shops are in operation and invitations were sent out to all Headquarters men to attend the formal opening of Headquarters Mess at 1600 on Tuesday. The menu has not been announced but it is expected that it will start things off in a fancy manner. Pay day tomorrow. We're late this month due to the move but will catch up again and get back in the regular pay channels. The pay this time is in American issue Lire. Thinking back on the different types of moneys the personnel have experienced since they left the States is interesting. In Australia we had our first contact with English-type exchange. In and around Cairo, the piastre was much in evidence. Coming into Tunisia we switched to the franc and now it's the lire.

The Hotel de Gink [A series of self-service hotels created by and for homeless men during the Depression. Also army slang for transient officer housing.] is up and ready for occupancy and the fly of another tent has been erected in back of headquarters for the benefit of Officers' siestas. The personnel in the Group are beginning to learn how to live in comfort overseas. Many of the boys have appropriated sinks for their rooms and have a regular plumbing system installed. Civilians have been hired for digging slit trenches and as regular K.P.'s. In contrast to the "Wogs" of North Africa, who, by the way, were as sharp at trading as a Yankee from Vermont, the natives over here are very reasonable about selling their merchandise. Chickens in Africa came at two bucks per; over here a nice big hen sells for fifty cents. Haircuts and shaves are very cheap and we are trying to keep prices down by posting standard purchase prices on almost all commodities. We know that the U.S. Soldier has plenty of money to spend and will do so freely if given the opportunity. For the benefit of all concerned we

are trying to regulate the market.

We are to share the field with a few Bostons and Baltimores of the 326th Wing. They move in tomorrow and part of the field has been allotted to them. It will be interesting to see how they operate. As far as our operations are concerned, here are a few interesting figures: Since entering combat the group has flown almost 100 missions. Most of the older crews have thirty missions or more and we have been awarded almost three hundred air medals. Quite a good record for three and a half months of combat activity. News is still scarce but the allies still seem to have the upper hand on all fronts.

August 9, 1943

Plans are being laid to observe Organization Day on August 25th. A committee has been chosen and they will meet tomorrow to discuss the celebration. The day should be marked in some way as it was just a year ago, on that date, that the organization was activated. Many problems stand in the way to make the affair a success but with the cooperation of all concerned something nice should work out.

Two twelve-ship missions set out late this afternoon to bomb a crossroads just west of Messina. Returning crews reported that the weather was hazy and a good deal of the time the cloud cover was 100%. It seems that late afternoon missions are sometimes marred by weather conditions. Cumulus clouds build up toward evening over the hills and the weather closes in. However, the boys went in and dropped their bombs. Results are not known at the moment. Crews reported the flak as heavy but inaccurate. Coming back a few bursts from allied batteries met them around Mt. Etna. Flying over the clouds, as they were, it must have been difficult to determine whether they were enemy or friendly planes. Evidently our ack-ack boys don't wait around to see they.....they just plug away. A direct hit through the wing of one of our planes at that point testifies to their accuracy at least.

The Headquarters Mess is stumbling, bouncing and struggling towards completion. It is anticipated that it will formally open tomorrow for the evening meal. Officers have been assured the sum of 5 dollars each to purchase furniture, silverware, and plates. All members of headquarters will contribute voluntarily to the purchase of extra food. The Commanding Officer of the 306th Service group paid us a visit today and brought good news. A system is being inaugurated whereby the Quartermaster will pay for most of the food we purchase locally. A nice deal if it materializes.

Not much else to report on this date.

August 10, 1943

The big deal comes off tonight. Invitations have been sent out to all personnel in Headquarters Section, and to several selected guests to attend the opening of the Headquarters Mess. Sergeant Voorhees [George R. Voorhees] typed out the menus this afternoon. There will be wine on the tables, candles for lighting, and it should be all in all quite a nice affair.

We are continuing with our bombing. We have reached a point where it is common to have three and four missions a day, and fortunately we are continuing with our marvelous record of accurate bombing. The bomb line continues to move forward and the Nazi and Italian forces will be forced to stand and

fight or attempt an evacuation. It begins to look like we shall have a Sicilian Dunkirk and consequently easy picking for the boys.

The Officers' Club also has its opening this evening in the long log building next to Headquarters. Colonel Tokaz has received word that there is a former German Officer's Club in town which can be appropriated for our use. We shall see tomorrow.

August 11, 1943

Early this morning Colonel Tokaz and Captain Pearlstein [William M. Pearlstein] went into Comiso to look over the former Officer's Club (German). They came back with excellent souvenirs and a complete German Luftwaffe uniform. They reported that the Germans evidently left in a hurry as many personal things remained behind. An interesting incident occurred when Captain Pearlstein dressed up in the uniform of the German pilot. Colonel Tokaz suggested that Major Kisselman [Carl Kisselman] be called and informed that we had captured a German flyer. Major Kisselman finally arrived and interrogated Captain Pearlstein for fully fifteen minutes and was under the impression all the time that he was interrogating a Prisoner of War. All of Headquarters was in on the farce and received a good deal of enjoyment when "the prisoner rose up and revealed his true identity."



Men of the 489th BS Clown Around with Captured German Uniforms. From left to right: Alexander H. Parrish, Isaac C. Wagner, Fields, Leonard Kaufman, Charles L. Furman

This afternoon a representative was again sent to the German Officers' Club to take an inventory of the household effects. We shall pick up some of the valuable things tomorrow.

The Headquarters Mess and Officers' Club both opened last evening and were a success in every sense of the word, and it is hoped that they continue to give enjoyment to all.

Three missions again today on roads and towns. All aircraft returned safely and again reported excellent results. A rumor was spread this morning to the effect that Italy had capitulated. At the moment there is no confirmation of that news.

August 12, 1943

The days seem to be flying by and it's almost six months now since we have left the States. Throughout this group and in almost every center of allied power confidence is beginning to mount that we have the Axis on the run. Day and night bombing from this field continues and we are doing our part in this campaign. The bombardiers are finding their targets with regular precision and it is now a rare occasion when one of our missions fails in its purpose.

This site is becoming more pleasant every day. The hot Sicilian summer is now giving way to a cooler autumn and the boys are beginning to learn how to live with all possible conveniences. The movies were shown last night and, whereas before we just had the screen on a large truck, our present out door setup has a regular screen between two proscenium arches and seats for the "customers." The dirty, dusty days of North Africa are over and Sicily has afforded us a very pleasant time so far.



Dougllass A-20 Boston with RAF Markings

Another couple of hundred oak leaf clusters came out on orders today. We have about four hundred awards that have been published but the formal presentation has not yet occurred. Plans are proceeding to get most of the fellows decorated during our celebration of Organization Day on the 25th. Beginning to have a little trouble with the local Sicilians. Evidently everyone has been so nice to them they have now started to take advantage of us. Two of them were caught stealing a valuable radio and were turned into the British authorities in town. Our guard detachment is doing the best it possibly can with the number of men we can afford to give to it; it may be possible later

to get a guard battalion in to guard this installation. The engineers are getting the field into shape and are widening the runway. We operate in the daylight and the British A-20's (Bostons) do the night raiding. We are turning the pressure on. Three missions again today and all ships returned safely after effectively bombing the target.

A new and serious problem now confronts us. Many of the combat crew members are rapidly approaching the time when their tour of combat duty will possibly be over. In the past two months we have received no new crews and ships. Colonel Tokaz wrote a personal letter to Colonel Smith, 9th Air Force, today inquiring into this serious problem. We have named our requirements and it is sincerely hoped that new crews and ships will be sent to the group.

A brand new shower is in operation for Headquarters today. Sgt. Hunn acted as construction engineer and managed to ingeniously rig up quite an arrangement. All things are pretty well set now. We have a club, headquarters mess, showers, barber shop, tailor shop, movies, exchange, post office and many other items that improve our situation. Morale has risen and things are going smoothly. Hitler----- here we come!

August 13, 1943

Friday, August 13th. News today that may be bad and may be good. T.B.F. is ordering another move to come off in the near future. It may be a week or ten days but it is best to start preparing now. Colonel Tokas and Major Murray went to Catania today to look over the new site. In many ways we shall all be sorry to leave this pleasant valley. The boys have well settled here already and have constructed many things for convenience and entertainment. Still on the other hand we must figure that every move forward is in itself a victory. It may be that our next field will be as nice or nicer than this one is.

Three mission in the late afternoon today but the clouds obscured targets on two occasions. The 488th had a toughie when they were sent out over the Messina straits to attack enemy shipping. At the moment the results of their raid are not known. Lt. Colonel Woods, Executive officer of the 12th Group, was our guest for lunch today and was amazed at the layout we have. The food continues to be excellent and there is no reason for it to change. We have drawn nothing but straight C rations since the the place has been open and consequently have been unable to build up a reserve. D rations are due soon.

A great many claims were presented at Headquarters here today in writing. Many of the Sicilians claim damages to property but we have no facilities to settle these claims here. The Adjutant took them in to the Officer of Civilian Affairs this afternoon. Many of these Sicilians are now seizing the opportunity to charge the American government for damages. They would be better off if they remained satisfied with what they now have.

A wire in from higher headquarters requests that we submit the names of those men whom we wish recommended for the Legion of Merit award. We have several candidates. The rear party arrived today and are tickled to be here. Things are always so much easier when all of us are together. It seems we are to be separated again. Ah, the rigors of war.

August 14, 1943

For the first time today we bombed Italy proper. The 489th went out the first thing this morning and gave the island the hot foot. We have been running into a lot of weather lately and results are not clear. Clouds have been obscuring targets and photographs reveal very little. Recommendations for promotion and awards go in again tomorrow and we have quite a list. Legion of Merit awards for enlisted men have been called for by 9th Air Force and we shall submit 13 names tomorrow.

Still having trouble with rising prices. The Sicilians are getting wise and are starting to ask more than they are entitled to. We have warned everyone not to exceed the published price. It seems a American soldier has enough money to buy almost anything he wants. We asked the Officer of Civilian Affairs to publish prices and when he does that we can arrest any one who asks more than the price called for.

Now that we have been here for some time it may be interesting to quickly describe our location. We are situated in a beautiful green valley. To the East high hills form a wall around us. It hasn't rained since we have been here yet the valley has remained green and fresh. The dispersal (personnel) areas are sitting in the midst of grape vineyards, almond and olive groves, fruit trees and other lush growth. The Sicilians seem friendly enough and a number of them have been employed by the group as K.P.'s and slit trench diggers. The picturesque town of Cosmio lies just four miles down the road with the traditional town square, fountain and monument. The breeze is usually brisk and pleasant but at times

it becomes real warm here. All in all it's an ideal place in which to fight the war; if one has to be overseas.

The Axis is hanging on to a corner of Sicily as best they can. Under constant pounding and bombardment by sea, land and air they can't hold up much longer. In a matter of days Sicily should be ours. Italy still is a stalemate. No one knows, or seems to know, the exact situation. If they battle they have no chance against our superior forces and they know it. Time will tell, and until that time comes we shall no doubt continue to bomb to the best of our ability and give her a taste of what's finally to come.

[No entry for August 15th]

August 16, 1943

We received warning today that we shall be moving soon although the exact date has not yet been announced. We have requested sixty trucks and 12 transports to help us move. Whether we get them or not is another question. This hop is going to be a difficult one as the roads are not good at all. Our big trailers and bowsers will have trouble in negotiating the hairpin curves on some of these mountain roads. We should be leaving here in another week or so and the boys are not too enthusiastic about it. We are so comfortably set up here in such nice surroundings and we don't know what the next place will be like. However, it is another move forward and that's what counts.

Two new majors in headquarters today. Captain Summers and Captain Parrish [Alexander H. Parrish] are now wearing the gold leaf and will no doubt celebrate tonight. Major Summers had had years of service in the army and certainly deserves a lot of credit. He is one of the hardest working and most efficient officers in the organization. Major Parrish joined the army by way of the RCAF [Royal Canadian Air Force] having received his flight training in Canada. As squadron commander of the 489th he has also done a swell job.



Alexander Parrish (seated in jeep). 57th Bomb Wing Archives

There were actually four missions today but only three of them dropped bombs. The 487th was recalled shortly after takeoff late this afternoon.

The other three squadrons all reported great success in plastering the beaches of the Sicilian "Dunkerque" of Messina. The Axis are racing to get off the island and to preserve as much as possible. A ceaseless bombardment by land, sea and air is making their task quite difficult. At last the shoe is on the other foot and our friend Hitler is beginning to feel the pinch.

Plans for the celebration of Organization Day are going ahead as scheduled although the committee is quite in the dark as to the impending move. If things go well they will have it set up so that it won't make much difference. If we can't hold it here we shall probably be able to do so at the next stop. Our

boys are doing a lot of flying and some of them are quite near to the completion of an operational tour of duty which is 50 missions and 150 combat hours. Normally there would be replacements for these men in the organization now but something has gone wrong for we haven't had any new crews for a long time. This situation is serious for breaking new crews into combat is no easy job.

Had a wonderful dinner at headquarters mess today and the boys are right in the groove. The rations have been greatly supplemented by local purchases and the cooks delight in pleasing the enormous appetites all the fellows bring with them. No mail today but it seems everyone had enough yesterday to hold them over. The struggle goes on and we are proud to say that we are right in the thick of it.

August 6, 1943 [sic]

[The incidents related below have been dated from other sources as occurring on August 16, 1943]

Our move is coming closer and closer. We are preparing to abandon the beautiful location to another more fortunate outfit. The staff held a meeting this morning to discuss all aspects of the coming move. We have moved often enough now to know what to expect in the way of problems that arise. However, the movement of 1400 men with all planes and equipment is a major action in itself and requires detailed planning. Major Murray left this afternoon to reconnoiter a new route for the trucks. It is anticipated that the trucks will be only half loaded for this move as the roads are very bad. The advance party leaves tomorrow morning and they have been especially warned against booby traps and mines in the Catania area. The "A" party will move as soon as we get the word with Major Paul as convoy commander. It is expected that a good deal of the key personnel will fly up in DC's as twelve have been allotted for our use on the day the flight echelon moves out. One can't help but leave this place with a feeling of great regret. All the boys have time and again expressed their unbound satisfaction as the camp has not only been comfortable but we have flown some of our most successful missions from here.

Must report today that one of our ships flown by Captain Flack [James L. Flack] of the 487th was lost over the Messina Straits [Also lost: Lt. Jonathan Leete and Lt. Sidney C. Ormsbee]. It is believed that all of the crew were able to parachute from the burning aircraft after it had been hit smack in the middle by large bursts of ack-ack. Returning crews reported that the anti-aircraft fire was greater than they have ever seen before. The enemy put up a vast screen of black, white and red ack-ack. The radio and papers have reported that the Messina area houses the greatest concentration of anti-aircraft pieces the world has ever seen. Crews report that the account is not exaggerated. The twelfth group also lost a ship over the same target but again parachutes were seen to open from the falling ship. It's about all over on the island now. German and Italian troops, hounded by ground forces, blasted by bombs and low flying planes across the narrow straits to the Italian mainland. Even when they arrive on the other side their troubles are not over for Sicilian based fighters and bombers of the Allied forces continue to pound them unceasingly. The fight against Italy goes on and if it continues in force much longer the damage done to that portion of the Axis empire will be great. It is expected that some kind of terms will be reached soon. Allied air power has rocketed to absolute mastery of the skies. The worm is turning.

We have received word that the Quartermaster will pay for local purchases up to a certain percentage of the ration drawn. This will prove a great help to all messes and the food problem should be diminished considerably due to this latest action. Over here foodstuffs are grown and we are able to supplement our C, H and U rations with purchases of fresh fruits, vegetables and meats. It may not be long before

the boys knock themselves out on some famous Italian spaghetti, cooked by Italians in Italy.

August 17, 1943

No missions today for a change and the boys get a well deserved rest. This has been our busiest month with some of the crews flying almost every day. We reached our peak early in the month when we put out 71 sorties in a single day. Last night's bombing by the A-20's continued where we left off yesterday afternoon. They were over the beaches and the toe of Italy all night. It's about over for Sicily with our forces occupying the town of Messina in the North. Possibly there may be a lull in operations for a while after this campaign is completed. However, now that we have the enemy on the run we may continue to push forward on his heels.

Big news from Italy today. Rome has been declared an open city. After two devastating raids by our bombers the high council over there decided to make the move. Nothing is official on it as yet for our government will have to decide all about it before anything is actually done. If Rome is declared an open city it will be a punishing stroke to the Axis cause in Italy. "All roads lead to Rome" is not just a statement of simile any more----actually it's a fact. Huge railroad center, crossroads for all traffic, lines of communication and war busy factories turning out tools, equipment, machinery and guns for the army, Rome is the center of all Italian activity. Cutting off Rome means practical isolation of all southern Italy. We may find ourselves there soon.

At last the word has arrived that we are to be transferred completely to the twelfth air force. For a while this will present several new problems. We must break away from one headquarters while learning the rules, regulations and idiosyncrasies of another. However, it is felt that we will be better off under one headquarters. Up till now we have been "bastard children." We have been under two headquarters and at times this has been difficult.

Colonel McAllister of the 9th Fighter command will be here tomorrow to present purple hearts to Lt. Touchstone [Leroy N. Touchstone] and Sgt. Ainsworth [Gordon R. Ainsworth] of the 488th. We shall have our first separate presentation formation. We have almost five hundred air medal and oak leaf clusters awards in addition to several silver stars and D.F.C.'s [Distinguished Flying Cross] yet to be awarded. It is hoped that General Brereton may be able to come down and do this in the near future.

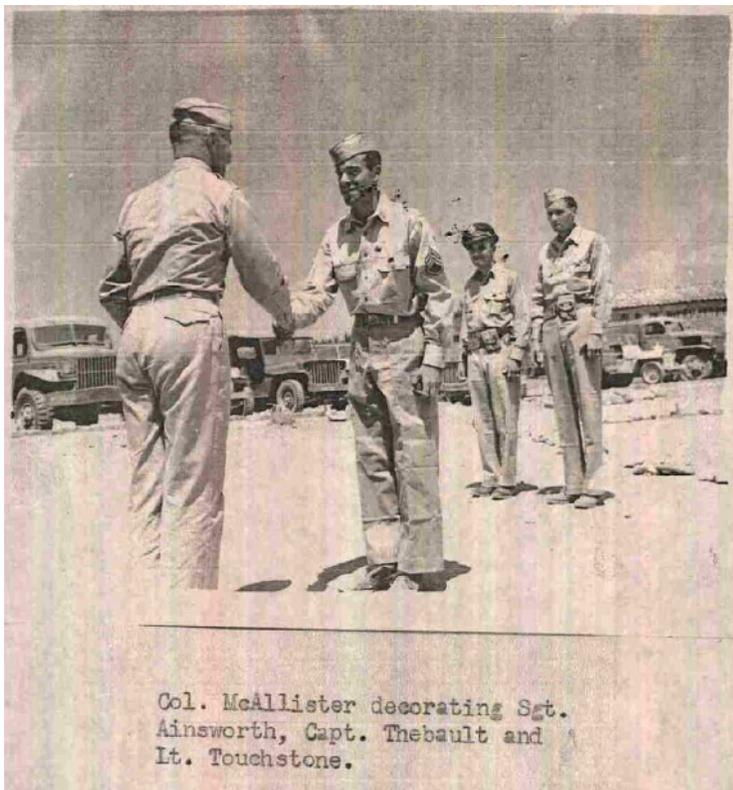
Quite a few new promotions today when the following officers made Captain: Lts. [William C.] Bramble, Moody, Hoffman, Hangar and Rodgers. All good boys and all well deserving of their promotions. In addition we have a few new first Lieutenants. Quite a difference from the old days. When the group was activated nearly a year ago a first lieutenant was a rarity and a high ranking officer. Now we are coming up on our T.O. and rank is more prevalent. And so it goes.

August 18, 1943

Each new date on top of the page means that another day of foreign duty is passed and that all of us are one day nearer to home. Each passing day also brings us closer and closer to our goal of total victory over the Axis powers. At last we have a lull in operations. There was a stand down all day today and it may last for a week or two. However, there is a meeting at T.A.F. Headquarters tomorrow and new and greater operations may be impending. The group is ready to go at any time.

It seems that we shall remain here another week at least. It has been reported that the field at Catania is not yet ready for occupancy. That doesn't hurt our feelings any as all of us love it here. What does bother us though is the fact that troops from the 8th Army are now camped on our proposed dispersal area. We shall try to legally evict them before we go up there. Captain Pearlstein traveled down to the other side of Gela this afternoon to contact the Adjutant of the 47th Bomb Group who are now under the 12th Air Force for administration. It may be that T.B.F. will be our next higher headquarters for administration too after the 22nd. Major Barnes, administrator at T.B.F. has called the group adjutant for a meeting tomorrow. If this be true then we will have no complaint as we do quite well with all the boys over there.

We now have a radio in headquarters and it comes in handy for incidental news, music and entertainment. It was picked up in town, the property of a German Officer who had to evacuate in a hurry and evidently could not take it with him. At the moment, Major Keller is buzzing around in a Messerschmitt. The boys found one in a field, put it in commission and Major Keller volunteered to go up. He has it up O.K. Now the question is, "Will he get it down O.K.?" He has stars painted on it with USA markings but some of the ack-ack boys may not believe him. There were a lot of planes on the field when we arrived here but the British picked most of them up. There is a new JU-88 on the field at Catania. Some of the boys will probably be flying that around soon.



Col. McAllister decorating Sgt. Ainsworth, Capt. Thebault and Lt. Touchstone.

57th Bomb Wing Archives

Colonel McAllister from the 9th Fighter Command buzzed in this morning and presented three Purple Heart Medals the recipients being Captain Thabault [George B. Thabault], Lt. Touchstone and Sgt. Ainsworth. The colonel had to get on for more presentations at the 12th Group so he could not stay long. He was invited to stay for lunch which he did, commenting on our headquarters mess most favorably. The mess is beginning to have value for the advertising angle. We invite high ranking officers to lunch and supper, they have a good meal in a swell mess and it puts the whole organization in a better light. None of these things hurt when it comes to wanting a favor from some of those guys.

[No entry for August 19th]

August 20, 1943

Late last night we received a call that made us cancel all leaves this morning. However, Colonel Tokaz had a meeting at T.B.F. and came back to report that leaves would still be granted up to the 23rd of the month. It seems impending operations against Italy are in the wind and that the Allies are going in in force soon. The move may have to be carried out in one day if we get sufficient help from the trucking

company. Captain Nash, who was on the advance party, returned last night with the report that the 8th Army is still sitting all around the field at Catania.

There seems to be some question today concerning our move. T.B.F. has not definitely decided the date and as a result the squadrons have no definite plans. Things will work out, as they always do and we shall get along. Organization Day is drawing closer and closer. The committee has just about completed the plans for the day and quite an interesting program has been drawn up. We shall have several important guests on that day and we want to show them a good time. Sgt. Goulding [Robert L. Goulding] has returned (of the 487th) after bailing out on the last raid over Messina [See August 16th loss of Captain Flack's ship 7H]. It seems he has had quite an interesting time of it and unfortunately does not know where the other members of the crew are. We are carrying them missing in action but it is hoped that they shall return also in the near future.

T.B.F. is moving out soon and communications will be more difficult with them. Major Barnes, S-1 of the American Administrative and his assistant, Lt. Martin, were guests for super last evening. They will be over us in administration and it may pay to be nice to them.

August 21, 1943

Still in a muddle over this move business. T.B.F. was contacted by Colonel Tokaz and told that we could not move into Gerbini number eight until the army vacated up there. Our advance party reports that the condition of the terrain is just like Africa----a tough break for us if we have to move up there and take over after being at this lovely spot. However, Colonel Tokaz flew up there with group Captain Huntley this morning to make the final decision.

We have been on stand down for the past few days and the boys are making leave trips to Algiers and Tripoli. After a hard fought campaign they deserve a rest. Everyone has worked hard over here since we entered combat and the organization has proved itself in a million different ways. In fact T.B.H. sent down a copy of a commendation they received from General Spaatz today wherein he complimented all of the units for their efforts.

Private Blass acted up again today and will be charged and probably tried. There are a few men in the organization who just can't seem to accept any responsibility. In this man's case he has gone too far. Possibly a long rest in some hospital would be good for him as he reached a stage of acute and chronic alcoholism, according to the medical officer. All in all we have been fortunate. With an organization this size and everyone under constant strain it is remarkable that we have had so few cases of violations.

Organization Day is just around the corner and the invitations have been sent out to surrounding organizations. It is planned to be quite an event and the boys are looking forward to it. Commodore Sinclair will be an honor guest and will be asked to say a few words. Colonel Tokaz is expected to give a brief history of the organization and how it has grown. Something like 700 litres of wine have been ordered and the food will be served on long tables in the open. For a time it was hoped that we could get Jack Benny here on that day but it is learned that he is not coming to the island at all. We shall have some kind of entertainment however.

It is expected that we shall be very busy against Italy soon. The Allies are concentrating supplies and troops in the north of this island and will probably move for the toe of Italy soon. When that happens

we will be called upon to help out. We're ready.

August 22, 1943

A very quiet day today with the stand down still in force. Today is actually an important one for us though as we are now officially assigned to the 12th Air Force. As mentioned before this move may cause a little trouble for us at first due to the varying system of administration between the two forces. After we become acquainted with the new methods we should be able to sail right along.

Many of the boys are off on leave and the rest spend their time traveling around the island here seeing some of the interesting sights. For many of us the army has afforded an opportunity for travel we shall never have again. If we would not be engaged in a war many of us would probably never get outside the continental limits of the United States. It is true that the army has afforded many of us a chance for travel that we shall never get again. Yet it is not an ideal way to go. Uncle Sam dictates the route and the method, and we must follow.

Plans are just about complete for our big celebration. Nice progress will be printed and distributed and a hamburger supper under the sky will be added features of the program. All of us are looking forward to a big day.

August 23, 1943

The organization has been on stand down for some time now and we have just about caught our breath again. This month has been a very busy one for us. In fact the first half of the month found us busier than we have ever been before. During the last stages of the Sicilian campaign we were called upon to perform on all manner of targets and as a result, our crews were flying just about every day. The boys need this rest and it has afforded them a great deal of relaxation and entertainment. They are coming back with glorious tales of Algiers and Alexandria. We face the biggest hump yet in Italy and the fireworks should be starting again soon.

Many oak leaf cluster and air medal recommendations were returned today from the 9th Fighter Command with the instructions to forward them through the 12th Air Force. That will necessitate the rewriting of all the recommendations which is quite a job in itself. However, when we came under the 12th we expected some extra work for a while. One of the boys brought back some circulars and memos from their headquarters yesterday and it can readily be seen that the methods of the two forces are quite different.

Some of the German fighter ships have been put in commission and the pilots are having one hell of a good time flying about in them. The 486th put one in commission and it was first flown by Major Keller. Then Colonel Tokaz, who is a former pursuit pilot (P-39's) took it up and really tested its performance. Flight Officer Blakely [Karl T. Blakeley?] was the next to take a crack at it but unfortunately the engine cut out on him and he had to make a forced landing in a vineyard near here. He was not badly injured but was nastily cut about the head and face. The 488th then managed to put another Messerschmitt in shape and Lt. Buckley [John A. Buckley] flew it around this evening. He got it into the air alright but had to make three passes at the field before he came down. Reports from the pilots indicate that the little fighter is a very good ship.

Colonel Tokaz took the day off today and leisurely toured around parts of the island. Had an interesting experience when he came across the graves of six American boys in the hills. On speaking with some of the natives he learned that the men were part of a Fortress crew who had bailed out and were shot by the Germans as they were coming down in their chutes. Such inhuman practice is just about the lowest form of warfare. Incidents like that just increase our hate for the enemy and make the boys more than ever determined to wipe all of them from the face of the earth.

The ribbons for the Middle East Theatre arrived today and we shall present them to all personnel on Organization Day. It was hoped that we might get Jack Benny up here also on that day but it is impossible. We shall have a movie instead. Our movie is just about the most popular thing in these parts. In fact the audiences have grown to such an extent that we are forced to make announcements each evening to govern the crowds. Visitors arrive early and take advantage of the seating arrangements thereby crowding out the boys of our own organization. We are glad and happy to have everyone in this area take advantage of any entertainment we have to offer but it has reached a point where the privilege is being badly abused.

Since we are leaving this spot soon and since no mention has been made of our fine Officer's Club it might be well to describe it quickly. Set in a low, rambling building, filled with tables, chairs, magazines, a radio and bar, the officers club is another popular place after the day's work is through. The management of it has improved and the service is excellent. Three Sicilians are employed to dispense the drinks and food is usually available in the form of tasty cakes and candies. Liquor is of course scarce and must be more or less rationed but wine is plentiful and popular. The club has really served a fine purpose since its organization. It is a place for sociality, friendship and fun. Rarely does anyone drink so much that he must be evicted, proving the point that the men appreciated this fine facility.

August 24, 1943



*Middle East
Campaign
Medal*

We await tomorrow with eager anticipation. The progress for the celebration came out today and the affair is ready to go. At least for tomorrow we shall try to forget about the war and enjoy ourselves. The Middle East Campaign ribbon will be presented to everyone tomorrow also. Many of us will be proud of that when we return to the States.

Still a stand down for the day and the camp is in a state of rest. The boys are just lying around taking it easy and the time hangs heavy. It won't be long before that situation will be changed and we shall all be up to our necks in work. We drew five days rations for the move on August 26th. Two mess halls will stay to take care of B party and two mess halls and headquarters mess will go forward with A party. The group will depart on the 27th. In five separate convoys with the 486th leading off.

Nothing else to report.

August 25, 1943

The date at the top of this page is an important one for this organization. It was just a year ago today that this group was born. There is no need to go into a lengthy history and recounting of events. Those of us who have been in the 340th any length of time at all know what has been accomplished and realize all the effort and struggle we have experienced. The day was celebrated by a fine rally this afternoon and this evening.

Festivities were started when Major Kisselman gave a fine, fiery opening speech commemorating the day. He in turn introduced our commanding officer Lt. Colonel Tokaz who gave an inspired talk on the history of the Group. The attention given to both these speeches by upwards of 1,500 men was wonderful. Sitting in the audience, and gazing around at some of the expressions on the faces of the men, it was easy to tell that a great majority of them were deeply affected by the solemnity of the occasion and the memory of what had gone before.

A band from Ragusa provided dinner music and a hamburger supper was served in the open with everyone getting enough to eat and drink. The A.O.C. arrived later and it was unfortunate that we could not have a few words from him. Before his arrival the following wire was received from him: "I, together with all the staff of T.B.F., would like to congratulate your group on the occasion of its first birthday for the outstanding manner in which it has operated during the Tunisian and Sicilian Campaigns, under such difficult circumstances. Such form in a year's campaigning should undoubtedly produce the Spartan winner."

In the evening a show was presented, attended by almost every member of the group. Colonel Tokaz was presented with a lovely picture just before the show started, a token of the esteem in which he is held by all members of this command. The painting depicted a B-25 in flight dropping bombs. Sgt. Moore [Gregory C. Moore] of the 487th who is a very talented artist, did a wonderful job if it and no doubt the Colonel will consider it one of his proudest possessions.

As we launch ourselves on the second year of life we dedicate all future efforts to the speedy conclusion of hostilities and with the hope that the Axis will be driven from the scene of history forever.

We move on the 27th.

[No entries for August 26th and 27th]

August 28, 1943

Once again there has been a lapse in this day-to-day account of the group's activities, and once again it has been due to the fact that the organization has been in the process of moving. The myriad details, the hectic rush, and finally the actual moving of equipment and men to a strange, new site always represents a great deal of labor. Yesterday morning the A party left Comiso and arrived here just after noon. In the meantime five DC-3's were employed to move some personnel and equipment forward by air. When the A party arrived everyone was immediately set to work unloading the vehicles and getting

comfortable for the night. The problem that faced the group was the 8th Army and its grabbing of our proposed campsite. We understood that we would be in complete possession of the field and surrounding areas when we moved in. However, that didn't prove to be the case as the Signal men, Engineers, R.A.F. and 8th Army were swarming over the place when our vehicles moved in. Consequently, the squadrons had to set up temporarily on the field and will move nearer the beach as soon as it is cleared of mines.

The boys were treated to a show their very first night here when the ack-ack opened up about ten o'clock last evening. The sirens sounded and everyone headed for the slit trenches and shelters. Again we may have been fortunate. In all our time overseas, most of it right behind the lines, we haven't had one serious air attack. This point however may prove [to be different] as the Jerries have been raiding the harbor here consistently. How long will the group remain here? The latest "dope" reveals that the Allies are moving against Italy soon. If so, we shall probably follow the ground forces straight through and set up our next camp in Southern Italy. Actually this place is not as nice to live in as Comiso was. There is the added danger of mines and less cover here and the foliage is not nearly as thick or beautiful as it was in our last stop. However, we are sheltered by towering Mt. Etna on one side and have the breeze from the sea on the other. All in all it's much better than almost any place in Africa and when we get settled here things will work out satisfactorily here.

Our headquarters setup is delightful. We are occupying a huge, modern building that has been left almost intact. Headquarters officers are on the ground floor as is the dining room and kitchen. Upstairs private rooms stretch the length of the entire building accommodating all Headquarters officers. The Italians had a huge practice field here with all the latest comforts. Millions have been spent on these installations, most of which are now useless.



One of the "...useless installations.." at Catania Airdrome.

From Sgt. Hymie Setzer's Collection

Getting set up is the main thing and we are doing it quickly and efficiently. The planes are, at the moment, flying into the field. One accident occurred when a ship from the 486th ran off the far end of the runway after landing down wind. The plane was quite badly damaged but fortunately none of the crew members was injured. Landing instructions to the pilots were that all should land down wind due to the high tension wire that is stretched right over the end of the runway on the upwind side.

We are sending home our first man tomorrow. Lt. Templeton [James R. Templeton] of the 488th has the distinction of being the first officer to go home from this organization since we have been overseas. He and four others (from different groups) will leave tomorrow and will no doubt be back in the States in

little more than a week. From time to time, as we are expecting a rush of new crews, combat crew members will probably be returned to the States. We are becoming old hands over here now and it is to be expected that some of the fellows will be able to return.

August 29, 1943

Now that we are getting set up and ready to go, T.B.F. has given us the word that we will start operating again tomorrow. It is expected that we shall be quite busy during this next phase and that most of our targets will be in southern Italy. We now have enough experience to go into this thing with fullest confidence and with the knowledge that we have what it takes in combat. It was hoped by all concerned that Italy would capitulate to our forces, thereby making an invasion on her soil unnecessary. Now that she has chosen to fight she will feel the full fury of our power. It may not be an easy victory but it will be a sure one. Italy can not hold us for long.

News is beginning to reach us concerning the huge raid on Berlin which took place last week. Thousands of persons were injured and killed in this last onslaught. Berliners will probably find it difficult to swallow the sugary propagandistic pills which Goebbels and Co. continue to toss their way. The Quebec conference has been concluded and big things are expected as a result of action taken there. We will probably know soon.

Word received today indicates that air mail from the States will not arrive as quickly as heretofore due to the large number of combat crews and great masses of material being shipped by air. The U.S. is really pouring men and material over here in great quantities and everything seems to be pointing to an attempt to get enough stuff over here to finish this thing off as quickly as possible.

The squadrons are still stymied on the field waiting for the sappers to clear the campsite of mines. We have had a big problem up here. Naturally we try to work as closely as possible with the British in a cooperative fashion but many times the organization is completely blocked by-----must interrupt the narrative of this account to mention that we have just had an attack from the air. Three dive bombers swooped down from the sky each dropping a bomb. The ack-ack opened up on them but they hit the deck and flew out to sea. Three members of our organization were hit by shrapnel, either from the ack-ack shells or anti-personnel bomb dropped from the planes. Actually, this raid was the closest call we have had since coming into combat. In a great many ways it's a good thing that it only happens once in a while. Too many of those visits are not healthy.

August 30, 1943

August is fading into September as we turn into the Autumn campaign. The road past headquarters is jammed all day long. They certainly are moving stuff up fast. The invasion of Italy is due and the air blows are falling thick and fast on her unfortunate territory. We started flying missions again this afternoon when 12 ships from the 486th and 12 from the 487th went out to bomb a target in Southern Italy. The object of the attack was a bridge and junction for three railroads. The target was obscured by heavy clouds and as a result the 486th was forced to bring their bombs back. The 487th who went in on the run, a short time later found a hole and bombed through it; clouds once again covered the target and full results are not known.

We have been used to perfect flying weather. Now with the rainy season coming on we can expect some off days. It usually clouds up in the afternoon and we actually had a good, old fashioned shower at noon today; the first rain we have seen for weeks. With hard runway and taxi strips the rain will not hamper our operations so much but navigation will have to be sharp due to cloud cover.

A load of mail in today by DC-3 and all the boys are happy. Received a letter stating that air mail would be held up somewhat in the future as they are loading all planes with new crews and war material. The big show is on the way and we are sweating out the news as a result of the Quebec conference. The squadrons are not completely settled yet as the sappers are still working on the camp site. Headquarters is in pretty good shape with but two or three little things yet to be taken care of. A Lt. Colonel from higher headquarters paid us a visit today and requested that Captain Hoffman and one other statistical officer be transferred to his headquarters to help set up their statistical control unit. That will make it tough on us, for although the T.O. calls for but two stat officers in group, our boys are working all the time on other things and we can't afford to let them go. Colonel Tokaz demanded administrative replacements for them before the transfer and also told Lt. Colonel Harness his opinion about high ranking officers in the rear who seem to have forgotten about the boys "in the Blue" who are really fighting and winning this war.

New crews are expected to boost the personnel and bring us up to something like full crew strength. However, we are still short something like two hundred ground members and as a result everyone has to work a little harder. We'll get the job done regardless.

August 31, 1943

The last day of August and with it has come another pay day. Most of us over here go on from day to day, not actually realizing the time or date of the week or month. However, when pay day rolls around we know that another month has come and gone. Time passes more quickly when one is busy. During our operative periods we do not have time to think too much about anything but getting the job done. As a result, when we look around, we discover that the time has raced by.

Back in the groove again with a very successful mission over a target in Southern Italy. Twenty-four ships up and the same number back but we had some tough luck when one of the ships from the 489th was struck by a burst of ack-ack wounding Major Parrish [Alexander H. Parrish], C.O. of the squadron and Lt. Kile [Allen E. Kile, Jr.]. After the ship was hit the pilot momentarily lost control. Sgt. Kish [George Kish] and Lt. Olsen of the crew, believing the ship was going down, bailed out over the target. However, the pilot regained control and brought the ship back safely. Both wounded men will recover. Later pictures show that the bombs fell in a beautiful pattern exactly where they were intended to go. It's good to be blasting away again.

Still in an administrative muddle and we don't know which way to turn. We are officially under the 12th Air Force for operations and Administration; however, we still don't know our next higher headquarters. Orders are expected at any time assigning us to the 12th Air Support Command for our paper work. The adjutant saw the Adjutant General at that headquarters yesterday and was unable to get any definite information from him. We are waiting.

At long last we have received some new crews. Sixteen crews roared in late this afternoon and will be assigned tonight and tomorrow morning. A hardy, intelligent looking bunch of men, we welcome them with open arms and with sighs of relief. Some of our old timers will be given a well needed rest when

the new boys begin to fly regular missions. Before that time they must be trained by the more experienced men as none of the new boys have any combat time. They will take their regular turn when the time comes.

The squadrons are beginning to move to the regular campsite and things should go smoothly from here on. The movie is being erected and the officers club is just about ready to go. After so many moves the organization is learning to streamline its efforts and get established in a hurry.