

War Diary of the 488th Bomb Squadron

January 1945

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January 1, 1945

Mission of twelve planes to Palazzolo rail bridge, Italy. All bombs dropped in target area for 100% bombing accuracy. New Years Eve was comparatively quiet although someone did try out the 50 caliber machine gun in the enlisted men's area. Most of the parties were tent affairs – small and with everyone hoping for the New Year to bring peace and – a chance to go home. The wind was raw and cold and strong and it blew the Rome trip plane all over the sky but they returned safely though a bit shook up.

2nd

Stand-down. Wind still rough – up to 50 mpg. Plane went to Naples in the afternoon with the challenging Group pingpong players. They were off to whip the PBS boys but the 340th lost. The highlight of the evening was when Wild Bill Hemmerling of the 488th Ops and Stevens of Group Ops took the doubles. No word from the Gibraltar plane which took off after Christmas Day. It was supposed to be back before the New Year. No mail.

3rd

Stand-down. Gibraltar plane back in the afternoon. The Crew; Capt. McElroy, M/Sgt Hanten, Lt. Duda (now capt), Lt. Hughes, T/Sgt Jordan, M/Sgt Ahonen, S/Sgt. Laseter, T/Sgt Harvey; had to change an engine at Oran. Lt. Stoszkus gave an E & E lecture to the last new crew; and the first I & E class, algebra, was held in the Group briefing room at 1900 hours. The Group today received a cluster to the Distinguished Unit Badge for the sinking of the Cruiser Taranto. That mission on 23 Sept 1944 was led by Capt. McElroy pilot, and Lt. Burger, bombardier (now captain and bombing officer).

4th

For a change a mission to San Margherita rail bridge, Italy. The assigned target was Ala but the formation got off course and bombed San Margherita instead. Got 94% bombing accuracy. In the afternoon the Enlisted Men's Red Cross Club was used for presentation of medals. The 488th was to have a party there at night and all the decorations had to be removed for the presentation and then put up again, but they were up in time so everything was all right. The girls, rounded up from Bastia and all points of the compass, were the Enlisted Men's guests for supper which was delicious southern fried chicken. Brig-Gen Knapp, Col Chapman, Lt. Col Ruebel, Maj Cassada (now Lt Col), and F/O Ozias stopped in for a few minutes. Everyone had a good time including the usual few who “had too much.”

5th

Stand-down. Rain. Navigation class started by Lt Duda in full swing. Gas chamber instruction and drill on the line in the morning. Some mail in.

6th

Stand-down. Ratings for combat men out again – this time ten new s/sgts. Rest camp at Cannes, France opened up for Officers. Prisoner Interrogation picture shown at Group briefing room for all crews.

7th

Stand-down. Weather again. Everyone is jumpy and jittery – flashes at night have been seen coming from the northern tip of the island and explosions have been felt, all with no explanation. Lt. Burger made Bombing Officer and Lt. Duda Navigation Officer.

8th

Eleven planes to Pontetidone rail bridge, Italy, but all bombs returned because of weather. A pure milk run – not many of these left in Northern Italy, and the Jerry gunners are getting even more expert if possible.

9th

Back to the same target as yesterday, this time with twelve aircraft and this time both boxes covered the bridge with their bombs for a bombing accuracy of 100%. All Rome trips to the 488th rest camp are canceled definitely so – all we can send are four men to the Official Rest Camp of the Air Force. The war is getting “ruffer” for the 488th. Compensation in though in the form of lots of mail.

10th

Stand-down – after everyone had gone to briefing of course. Rain late in the evening after a sunny day in Corsica. On a practice formation flight of five planes this afternoon led by Capt Aswad, a B-25 from one of the other groups fell in and flew along. Capt Aswad was debating about buzzing the 321st field but decided against it. He was really glad that he had because when he got down he found out that Brig-Gen Knapp and the Colonel who is CO of the Group were in the strange plane. Heaven really smiled on Capt Aswad today. Navigation practice flight for two new enlisted bombardiers. Enlisted Men's Club reopened tonight.

11th

Weather recce at 0530 hours. Stand-down after 0830 hours – after lead crews and phosphorous element had gone out to briefing. Our guard squadron has left us so there is much weeping and tearing of hair because now every man will pull guard for three, yes, three whole days.

12th

Stand-down. Cold. Rain, sleet and hale started down about noon. Quiet all day. No mail. In the morning a new crew was given emergency procedure on the school ship. Movie at ARC at 1900 hours. “Rhapsody in Blue.” Thunder and lightning tonight and more RAIN – RAIN – RAIN.

13th

Stand-down. Weather recce turned back at Levanto as the weather was impenetrable. S-2 briefed crews all afternoon on E & E map; Yugoslavia safe areas, partisans, etc; new material in Italy; and on Germany and Austria. Squadron meeting at 1630 hours at which Maj Cassada told the whole Squadron about the new guard system. USO show at ARC tonight, and of course rain all night.

14th

Stand-down. Rain until 1000 hours. Everyone overslept. The movie, “Hollywood Canteen” was shown at the Enlisted Men's Club in the evening.

15th

Weather recce off at 0710 hours. Twelve planes and three as an anti-flak element to Ala rail bridge, Italy. 95% bombing accuracy. More promotions of combat personnel.

16th

Stand-down. And more rain and more mud. Formation lecture by Capt Bachtell, Ops Officer, to pilots and co-pilots.

17th

Sixteen planes, three anti-flak element, to Calliano rail bridge, Italy. 84% bombing accuracy. Crew flying secret missions at Florence back today.

18th

Eleven planes to San Michele rail diversion bridge, Italy. 100% bombing accuracy. Lt. Rosenthal, who was on DS [Detached Service] with the 310th Group to learn about Shoran, back today. Two more officers to the Cannes, France rest camp.

19th

Stand-down – after all the crews were down at briefing. Expecting a 40 mph gale. S-2 got a new jeep. Steak for supper or rather what the mess hall boys call steak – makes one wonder about the rubber shortage.

20th

Twelve planes to Trento North marshaling yards, Italy. 100% bombing accuracy and a beautiful coverage of the target with all patterns.

Today is one of grief for the Squadron as 1st Lt. Clarence E. Haynes of the S-2 Section passed away. He was only in the hospital a short time. Lt. Haynes was friends with everyone and all regretted his passing away. He was buried in the Allied Military Cemetery South of Bastia.

21st

Mission with twelve planes to San Michele rail diversion bridge, Italy. 100% bombing accuracy. 8U with Lt. Simpson, pilot, Lt. Greenig, co-pilot, S/Sgt. J.C. Rice, bombardier, Sgt. Shipley, radio-gunner, Sgt. Hicks, turret-gunner, and Sgt. Jackson, tail-gunner crashed into 8P on the turn off the target knocking the tail gunner, Sgt. A.B. Porter (on his second tour) out of the plane. No one knows exactly how it happened and everyone had to write out his interpretation for Ops to give to Group. Sgt. Tafoya was scheduled to fly on 8U but was taken off to go with the band to Ille Russe and even then the plane in which he was flying, 8Y, made a crash landing.

22nd

Six planes to San Michele rail diversion bridge, Italy. A big miss. We now have Lt. Col. Cassada and Capt. Duda.

23rd

Stand-down – after crews had gone out to briefing. Weather poor here and over Italy. In the morning Maj-Gen Cannon presented a streamer representing our Distinguished Unit Badge for outstanding work in the Tunisian and Sicilian Campaigns. Also we now have two more battle stars – one for France and one for the Rome Arno Campaign. New crew in.

24th

Stand-down, but a sunny day here. New crew was briefed by S-2 on E & E. Rumors starting up again to the effect that we're moving. All leaves are canceled. Red Cross coffee and doughnuts in the mess hall. Evidence of unrest in the air by rumors of flying bomb sites being constructed up in the Northern part of Italy.

25th

Stand-down. The pilot on 8H couldn't get the nose wheel down so he made a nice landing with it up. Six men to Capri rest camp. Mail.

26th

Stand-down. Intermittent rain showers all day. Gunnery training to start up again – must be the move has been put off..

27th

Twelve planes to Calcinato rail bridge, Italy, but didn't bomb due to cloud coverage over the target. Cold upstairs and air very turbulent. 8H after dropping its delay bomb was tossed about by the wind and had another bomb crash through the bomb bay doors and had a third bomb hang by one shackle. 8A had a fire in the right engine and landed single engine with its full load of bombs. Two cases of whiskey and three cases of beer were stolen last night from the Officers' Club.

28th

Twelve planes to the Rovereto rail bridge, Italy. 43% bombing accuracy. None or rather scant ack-ack but very turbulent winds are the only excuses for the low percentage.

29th

Snow on the ground when we awoke this morning and thinking there would be a stand-down we were almost caught short. Twelve planes took off in a mist to bomb Calliano rail bridge #3, Italy. The first box bombed the primary target and got 84% bombing accuracy while the second box bombed the alternate, Marcarla rail bridge, Italy, with a score of only 50%.

30th

Thirteen planes to Lavis marshaling yards, Italy. This was an emergency target given at the last minute in order to try to stop two German Divisions from getting out of Italy. The marshaling yard was thoroughly hit and we again got our 100% bombing accuracy. New crew in.

Fifteen planes to Rovereto rail station and marshaling yards, Italy. 100% bombing accuracy. The 488th for the month of January had 17 missions with 188 sorties. It dropped 553,200 pounds of bombs. On the efficiency reports it ranked first, and the Guard Mount was the best in the Group.

Men mentioned in the January 1945 History, excluding crew lists:

I. Losses in action: Officers and men

(a) Missing in action

William Y. Simpson
Frederick C. Greenig
Fred B. Hicks
Robert J. Jackson
Aubrey B. Porter
James C. Rice
Doyle G. Shipley

j. Personnel who have distinguished themselves in action.

Clark J. Hagerman
John H. Hughes
Neil J. Hardin
Harland D. Burce
Robert NMI Bland
Stanley W. Opielowski
Herbert Barclay
George E. Otley

Special Orders

P 7

Joseph Kristof

P 8

Earle G. Thatcher, Jr.
William P. Mally
Michael Stevens
John E. Garland
Harold J. Buhrlage
Rito D. George
Robert F. Wilkins
Dale M. Evarts
James E. Conley
Kenneth G. Bryan
Donald Olsen
Joseph P. Duffy

P 9

Samuel A. Marbut
Orrin W. Matthews
Louis C. Masten
Blaine G. Thompson
Daniel L. Wise
Narciso Garcia

Squadron Orders

P 11

Lt. Benjamin L. Kanowsky, Jr. appointed flight commander, Clark R. Hagerman transferred.

Lt. John F. Turnbull appointed flight commander, Bernard C. Diekman, Jr. transferred.

Lt. Robert R. Burger, Jr. appointed squadron bombing officer, Peter Kok transferred.

Lt. William Duda appointed squadron navigation officer, Lt. Alexander S. Shafran transferred.

Photograph captions

P 23

Pontetidone R.R. Bridge

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Ala R.R. Bridge

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Calliano R.R. Bridge #1

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S. Michele R.R. Diversion

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Trento M/Y

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Ora – S. Michele R.R. Diversion

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Rovereto R.R. Bridge

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Calliano R.R. Bridge #3

P 52

Marcaria R.R. Bridge

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Lavis Rail Station Yard

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Rovereto Station Yard

[Many of these same events are also recounted in the War Diary of the 340th Bombardment Group HQ Squadron, though from a different perspective. The HQ diary can be found here:

http://57thbombwing.com/340th_History/340thGroupHistory.php

Transcription by Dan Setzer, son of Sgt. Hymie Setzer, 340th BG HQ Squadron. July 8, 2015]