

War Diary of the 488th Bomb Squadron

November 1943

Prepared by: Capt. Everett B. Thomas

November 1, 1943

Mission to shipping at Ancona, Italy. Good job from first reports. No A/A [Anti-Aircraft]. Jeep finally assigned to S-2 today.

2nd

Mission today to Aquila, Italy. No A/A. Routine. Check on photographs with 487th show that Krigbaum did make hits and near misses at Ancona as he claimed yesterday.

3rd

Routine.

4th

Stand-by from 0730 hours. No mission up to noon and stand-down thereafter.

5th

Mission to Ploca, Yugoslavia. Got over target, but ten-tenths cloud cover up to 15,000 feet. Long cold ride. Some members of various crews passed out through the lack of oxygen. No A/A or E a/c [Enemy Aircraft].

6th

Rain spelled R-A-I-N all day and evening. No skates nor skis necessary. A gooey, slippery, slimy mess.

7th

Mission to Ancona, Italy at 1015. Stand-down from 1400 hours. Ship 8B bogged down with minor damage. Lt. Street set an all-time record for speed in opening hatch and evacuating ship. His vapor trails were visible for half an hour. This post in fine weather gives us the best accommodations we've had yet in that practically everybody is housed in buildings, but the weather has been turning cool night and morning. When it rains, as it so often does, spirits plummet, consequently everybody is devoting

attention to construction stoves from cans and any sort of metal container up to the size of oil barrels. Some weird contraptions result, but so long as they put out heat nobody pays attention to the jibes of his friends. Stove pipes are also lacking and the ingenuity displayed in constructing the combination stove and stove pipes is typically American.

8th

Fair and cool. Two ships and crews plus stand-by to 486 for mission which was later called off on account of weather. Lecce, about 20 miles from here, is the mecca each day for anybody who can find transportation. The shops aren't much and the stocks are less, but one hotel offers chicken, an occasional omelet and good soup and one or two other attractions.

9th

Stand-down all day. Rain in the morning. Some Officers started for Naples for trial of one of the men for accidental shooting at Catania. Were to fly, but grounded on account of weather. Started out by jeeps and had a rather rough ride in the rain. Routine.

10th

Stand-down all day. Overcast and raining. Those who went to Naples for trial returned late this afternoon. Verdict not guilty. Everybody happy. Naples was bombed while they were there. Small raid and little damage. Lt. Adams a Capt. today.

11th

Stand-by for one ship. Stand-down for the rest of the squadron. Got Group Xmas cards today. Twenty-five years ago was celebrating in Dickinson, Texas.

12th

Mission to Tatoi (Athens), Greece. Did not drop bombs although some boxes of the other squadrons did bomb alternate targets. Heavy cloud cover. No mail since 7 Nov. Have designed a Xmas card for the staff to give to squadron members.

13th

Stand-down all day. Mail. Fire in '89th barracks tonight. Considerable damage to clothing of several officers. Rain all day. Mission to Sofia, Bulgaria called off on account of weather.

14th

Mission to Sofia. Biggest show we've seen. Saw three fighters shot down and numerous dog-fights. Hit target – marshaling yards, station, repair shops etc. 321st Group over at the same time.

15th

Same target (Tatoi) as on the 13th. Was changed at last minute to Kalamaki A/D [Aerodrome], Athens. Olson, Stauffer, Sanviti, Lester and Downham got their orders for home. Mission had a heavy headwind all the way back and we sweated out the ships at operations. Two just landed on the runway as the engines used the last of the gas and four ships of other squadrons did not get back. One believed in trouble, but the others thought to be in friendly territory.

16th

Target today Eleusis A/D, Athens. Clear and not too cool. Michalowski got a four inch hole in his ship. 321st Group failed to make the target although they were seen North of our formations.

17th

Mission to Kalamaki. Good pattern. 487th shot down three Me 109's and 486th claimed another. One 486th ship did not return. One ship had right aileron shot up and hydraulic system out. Ran off the runway without damage. Brakes locked on another in the middle of the runway.

18th

Stand-down all day. Lts. Street and Murphy as an advance detail to Foggia No 3 which is to be our next home since we are getting so nice and settled here. Seems to be the same SNAFU condition we usually run into in that we are being run off our field just as we get it nicely repaired and workable, but there's nothing ready for us at the next place. Is at present being used by fighters. A flock of B-24's came in last night and this morning are bogged down all over the place. Fifty B-17's came in this afternoon so that we have ships crowding every little spot that isn't ankle deep in mud. If Jerry only knew the chance he's missing. Some “first class mail” post marked May 28, 1943 came in tonight. Lt. Sorenson had accident in jeep. Lt. Harry Senecal of the 489th with him lost leg and arm.

19th

Stand-down all day. Rain.

20th

Capt. Thomas and Lt. Haynes left for Bari en route to Foggia. At Bari we saw local people go to the beach and gobble up as delicacies the most unwholesome looking small shell fish and three inch long sections of raw eels. A gourmet's delight seemed to be something that looked like sea urchins – black balls from two to four inches in diameter with sharp black spines protruding in all directions. These the vendor cut around the top, scooped out a slimy black mess with his finger or knife leaving, so far as the uninitiated could see, only a bit of liquid and an occasional minute piece of yellow or pinkish flesh. The customer grabbed these seemingly empty shells, broke off a piece of the gray-black bread, which is standard here, sopped the inside of the shell with it and inhaled with gusto. Another delicacy we ran into in Bari was some kind of a bird about the size of a robin or starling which was to be seen displayed in the windows of the “grocery stores” a dozen or so piled on a plate. Later these were unexpectedly put before us on the table, cooked, but completely intact including head, eyes, feet and entrails lacking only the feathers. Rain all night had made a lake of the area and vehicles were skidding helplessly in all directions generally ending up in the ditch.

21st to 23rd

Continued rain made plenty difficulties in getting the Group packed and on route to Foggia. Vehicles scattered all along the way. Confusion was added to confusion since there seemed to be a question about the occupation of the field. Due to mud the fighter group could not get off and already somebody from Tunis was wanting to know why the 340th wasn't off the field to make room for heavies. Some personnel made Bari and spent a couple of rainy days there, some camped along the road and a few struggled into Foggia No 3. Leaving the highway for the entrance to this new field was like stepping off the end of a dock with mud half way up the radiators of jeeps and water unexplored seas to which one hoped there was a bottom. What a mess. The Squadron area was some slight improvement having a bit of grass and being on a slight rise and even that was a welcome stopping place hopeless as it looked. Some lucky ones found spots in former farm buildings where the refuse and filth inside was nearly as bad as the natural conditions outside.

24th

Those who are here are either digging out or digging in to make new homes and the unlucky ones who did not bring their makeshift stoves are scrounging around for materials to make new ones.

25th

Thanksgiving. Good breakfast. Cereal AND hot cakes. How come? No noon meal, but turkey with all the fixings for supper. Our planes are scattered all over – none here yet and our crews and trucks likewise all over Italy. Field is a grass runway and no hard stands. Looks like it will be some time before we can operate safely if at all from here unless the ground is very absorbent and dries quickly. Wind is blowing a gale and sky is black tonight. Could it be more rain?

26th

Some planes in. Mission to Fossacesia, Italy. Once they got off the mud of the dispersal area, had no trouble in the runway. Milk run. Jerry recce over this afternoon. Could see his vapor trails. A couple of Spitfires went after him (a couple of days later we had a report from TBF [Tactical Bomber Force] that the Spitfires caught and destroyed the recce). Lt. Nelson and some others, monkeying with a German incendiary bomb, set it off. It burned fiercely for a while and that seemed to be all there was to it when it suddenly exploded with a tremendous boom. Lt. Anderson and others were standing within a radius of 20 to 25 feet of the burning bomb and scattered in all directions. Stones and pieces of metal scattered similarly, one piece hitting Lt. Anderson in the leg and others making slight hits as far away as 100 yards. Lt. Anderson was taken to the hospital.

27th

Mission to Sibanic, Yugoslavia for six ships. Also three with the 489th to Zara both in Yugoslavia. No excitement. Lt. Buckley finished his 50th.

28th

Mission to Port Gruz, Albania. No excitement.

29th

Mission to Giulianova, Italy. No excitement. Red cross girls served coffee and donuts after the mission. Sgts. Goranson and Hemmerling back from the hospital. Had to thumb their way. Have started a truck service twice a day to town for hot showers.

30th

Mission to Bgrade, capital of Yugoslavia, called off and a stand-down posted just before briefing time. Cold wind tonight. Thus endth November. One year ago tonight we were packing for movement from Columbia, S.C. To Walterboro in the same God-forsaken state.

[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. May 31, 2015]

Troop Assignments November 1943 History

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