

War Diary of the 489th Bomb Squadron March 1945

Prepared by Sgt. Walter F. Greve, Jr.

I. Losses in action

(1) On mission to Peri Rail Fill, Italy on 7 March

(a) Missing in action

John C. Daniels
William L. Rittenhouse
Harold G. Lynch
George H. Dunn, Jr.
Paul R. Wheeler
George N. Spencer
Joseph H. Gilmore

(2) On mission to Aldena RR Fill on 17 March 1945

(a) Missing in action

Charles C. Parker
Lawrence E. Proffitt
Howard R. Bradley, Jr.
William N. MacEachon
Kenneth E. Lower
James R. Ehram

k. Decorations and awards

<p>(1) Air Medal</p> <p>Earl C. Manley Francis Manns Otho D. Mower [correct spelling: Maurer] George T. Moore Oscar M. Morton Woodrow W. Neely Donald G. Porter James K. Puckett, Jr. George J. Reifert, Jr. Millard E. Rives Matthew H. Rolek Edwin F. Schaefer Raymond G. Schnick Orville G. Schoonover John W. Sharp</p>	<p>(4) 4th Oak Leaf Cluster</p> <p>Joe C. Sellers Robert A. Carruth Charles L. Cooper Carl F. Couchman William A. Devine Kermit W. Freeze Rudolph L. Kastelic</p> <p>(5) 5th Oak Leaf Cluster</p> <p>Abraham Salop Joe C. Sellers William A. Devine Kermit W. Freeze Andrew Gaudette</p>
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Michael Skandera
Joseph W. Smith
James E. Steele
Robert W. Stoner
Lewis E. Squires
Russell L. Ustorick
John H. Butler
Byron R. Cary
Perry C. Chapman
Nello J. Di Domenico
John C. Frisch, Jr.
Clarence Hauquitz, Jr.
James W. Holden
Jack M. Houston
Glenn F. Howerton
Charles R. Huber, Jr.
Frank Z. Kamer, Jr.
Arthur C. Kimber
Roman M. Lidy

(1) 1st Oak Leaf Cluster

Francis Manns
Charles L. Martin
Raymond O. Miller
Oscar M. Morton
George J. Reifert, Jr.
Walter S. Sawyer, Jr.
Orville G. Schoonover
Joseph W. Smith
Robert W. Stoner
Alden K. Benedict
Peter Caruk
Byron R. Cary
Perry C. Chapman
James A. Coyle
Robert Hunter Drenner
Henry B. Grant, Jr.
Jack M. Houston
Selmer C. Lundgren

(2) 2nd Oak Leaf Cluster

Charles L. Martin
Walter S. Sawyer, Jr.
Robert W. Stoner
Morris S. Trastman
Christopher L. Yates

John C. Hostetler
Edward Kilik
James N. King

(6) 6th Oak Leaf Cluster

Robert L. Wendell
Clarence J. Clarke, Jr.
William A. Devine
Paul K. Eller
John J. Franks
Robert D. Frazee
Edward B. Heilig
John C. Hostetler
James N. King

(7) 7th Oak Leaf Cluster

James R. Millikin
Maurice G. Sies
Lawrence J. Clarke, Jr.
John J. Franks
Robert D. Frazee
Edward B. Heilig
James N. King

(8) 8th Oak Leaf Cluster

James R. Millikin
Paul B. Neafus
William L. Rittenhouse
Philip Suskind
John J. Franks
Edward B. Heilig
James N. King

(9) 9th Oak Leaf Cluster

William L. Rittenhouse

(10) 10th Oak Leaf Cluster

William L. Rittenhouse

(11) Purple Heart

Alvin Strasburger

George J. Bauer
Ernest Paisley Boiston
Peter Caruk
Leven F. Chambers
Howard E. Counselman
Wesley M. Jones

(3) 3rd Oak Leaf Cluster

Roland D. Porter
Roy Stewart Jr.
Alvin Strasburger
Morris S. Trastman
Ernest Paisley Boiston
Carl F. Couchman
Howard E. Counselman
Kermit W. Freeze

(12) Distinguished Flying Cross

Herbert J. Bruegl
John J. Franks
Robert D. Frazee
James N. King

March 1, 1945

Weather caused the Group to be put on a stand-down shortly before briefing time. For the first time in weeks, the Corsican skies were threatening, but as yet no rain has fallen.

2nd

Weather again – stand-down.

The Group has instituted a courier service to Rome for all 340th personnel; one ship makes three trips per day. A similar service is being contemplated for Cairo, with necessary modifications. Cairo is approximately eight hours distant by air, and thus the flights would not be so often as the ones to Rome.

This morning a plane left for Tunis in order that fresh food can be purchased to supplement the G.I. diet.

Something about the war. The tremendous Russian winter offensive apparently has come to a halt. But in the west, the allies are grinding forward with renewed impetus after a number of stagnant weeks. The air offensive over Germany continues in full fury; Berlin last night was subjected to its tenth consecutive night of bombing. In Italy activity is confined to sharp patrolling. The war in the CBI Theatre is progressing rapidly in favor of the United Nations.

3rd

One of the men received a card just recently from Kirks S. White, formerly a captain, now Mr. White.

While the people in the Middle West and in the East are suffering from one of the most severe winters in the history of the nation, we “Corsicans” are enjoying fair weather. One could not ask for more perfect winter weather than is to be found here. Considering what is to be found in Southern Italy, such as we experienced around Foggio, this is a break for us. Everyone has a cozy tent, and although conditions are by no means ideal, we could be much worse off than we are. There are many others in this theatre who would be glad to trade places with us.

4th

Today we sent twelve airplanes to bomb the railroad overpass at San Ambrogio. This was the 399th squadron combat mission, which turned out to be a successful one.

5th

There is nothing unusual to report for today.

6th

The Enego R.R. bridge was attacked by twelve aircraft from this squadron. It was passable before bombing. On the first pass only four bombs were dropped, and they struck two hundred yards west of the bridge. On the second pass, the first pattern fell west of the bridge, very close to it and the second fell across the south approach, probably cratering the tracks and the highway.

7th

Twelve of our crews were briefed to bomb the Peri rail fill, but the mission was destined to be unsuccessful. On the bomb run the lead plane received a direct hit in the left engine, and shortly thereafter the left wing broke off and the plane spun, crashed, and exploded. Five parachutes were seen to open shortly after the plane was hit. Flying as co-pilot was Major Rittenhouse, Operations Officer. Lt. Daniels was piloting the plane, Lt. Lynch was flying as bombardier, Lt. Dunn as navigator, and Sgts. Wheeler, Spencer, and Gilmore as gunners.

8th

The target for today was the Ala R.R. bridge. It appeared to be passable to single track traffic prior to the attack. The only pattern dropped struck east of the south approach with two probable hits on the serviceable track. There was no apparent damage to the bridge.

9th

Again we struck at the Ala R.R. bridge with questionable results.

Life in camp goes on as usual with nothing of particular interest to report.

10th

We were scheduled for two missions today, but due to bad weather over the target areas, both missions were abortive.

11th

The Staz di Ceraino rail fill was the target. Neither the fill nor the trackage was damaged. Mission efficiency and mission accuracy were down to thirty-one per cent respectively.

12th

The mission carried our planes to the San Michele diversion bridge. There was no opposition whatsoever, mission efficiency and bombing accuracy both being one-hundred per cent.

13th

The Perca railroad bridge was hit by two patterns on the east span, two patterns hit over, one pattern cratered the track to the west, and the last pattern possibly cratered the east approach. The bridge and the trackage appeared passable prior to the attack, but after the bombing the photos show that the east span had been damaged although it is not down.

14th

This evening our outdoor moving picture was "A Song to Remember," which depicts the life of Frederic Chopin. With bomb stands as seats, coveralled airplane mechanics, pilots, bombardiers, gunners, administrative personnel, and many others necessary to keep our planes in the air gathered on the sloping mountain side for an evening of open air entertainment. Spread out before us was the quiet Tyrrhenian Sea. Occasionally one of our big bombers raced by overhead with its riding lights revealing its exact location. In the distance could be heard the steady drone of our mobile gasoline generators which supply the electric power. Here was a scene commonplace to us veterans, but one we shall never forget.

15th

Last night the officers of the squadron had a dance at a rest camp on the northeastern part of the island. In order to give the enlisted men a break, today was declared a holiday. The squadron was put on a stand-down, and everyone had the opportunity of resting.

The news of the war is heartening. One cannot be accused of over-optimism in expecting a sudden end to the European conflict. Jerry may fight on for a number of months, but even if that should happen, the end is appearing in sight.

16th

The squadron ran two six ship missions to Northern Italy. One box was dispatched to a powder filling plant. Using special equipment, highly secret and newly developed, the bombs were placed directly on the target. Huge fires were started, with smoke rising hundreds of feet into the air. The other box, using regular radio-release equipment, struck at a railroad bridge, but the mission was not completely successful.

This Group sustained its first loss on take-off since we were stationed at Catania. A 488th Squadron plane, loaded with bombs, just got its wheels up when both engines failed. It nosed into the sea and exploded. All afternoon an Air-Sea Rescue plane patrolled the waters adjacent to this area, but neither bodies nor survivors were found. The cause of this double engine failure is unknown, and will probably remain so. There is a possibility that the crash was due to pilot error.

17th

Another squadron jeep has been wrecked. We have sustained a number of jeep accidents since coming overseas, and a great many of them have been caused by flight personnel. Used to speed, they forget themselves when they get behind the wheels of an automobile. Fortunately, the driver in this particular instance was not even scratched.

Joe Perez, S/Sgt. In Operations was made a very happy man this morning. He received his orders returning him to the U.S.A. In just a few days he will complete his twenty-ninth month overseas, and it is on that basis that he is being sent back.

Another man, Sgt. Fuss, is leaving tomorrow with Perez. He is going back on the thirty-day rotation plan. His mother recently died, and he is being given the opportunity of going back to settle his affairs.

Slowly but surely the "old" men (in point of time in the overseas service) are being sent home for one reason or another. The squadron has undergone a great change in personnel during the past twenty-five months.

18th

This afternoon another Group plane went down. As the 486th planes were joining up over the island in soupy weather, one of their planes plunged earthward and crashed, the result of the formation of ice on the wings. The Group lately has sustained severe losses, not only from the enemy, but from other causes.

Today we ran two separate missions, one to a bridge on the Brenner Pass Line, the other for shipping in La Spezia Harbor. The first one was probably successful, the second one probably not.

19th

Twelve squadron planes were sent to Muhldorf in Austria to bomb a railroad bridge. This was our first mission to that country. Our planes flew with twelve planes of the 487th Squadron. The mission efficiency of this twenty-four ship formation was eighty-two per cent.

20th

Misfortune struck the Group again. An unofficial total of five aircraft are missing in action, with at least two crews going down over the target area, a rail bridge on the Brenner Pass Line.

As the war draws closer to an end, the Germans are fighting more fiercely than ever. And our Group losses are on the upgrade.

21st

A formation of twelve planes from this squadron and twelve from the 487th carried a load of thousand pounders to the Brennero Marshaling Yards on the Italian-Austrian border. Bombing accuracy was way off, and the mission was unsuccessful.

22nd

A change of locations for the Group is pending. It is believed, with good grounds for that belief, that we shall move shortly after the first of next month.

23rd

Today there was a presentation of awards to various members of the Group. General Ira Eaker presided.

24th

The Group continues to pile up missions. With good weather prevailing, we are flying every day. The great bulk of the mission are still of the rail and/or road interdiction type. By destroying the enemy's bridges, rail and road alike, as well as his marshaling yards, we are making it more difficult for him to hold his Italian Front.

War news all over the world is exceedingly good. Indications are that preparations are in progress for a final all-out assault on Germany from all sides.

Food is not as good as it used to be. We get more canned food, much less of the fresh stuff.

25th

We were out in force today, hitting a target in our favorite hunting ground in Northern Italy.

26th

For the first time in many weeks, there was rain. Steadily all day rain has been falling. For a change it is welcome.

This following article appeared here in the Stars and Stripes:

“High officials here (Washington) expect the German Army to begin to disintegrate soon, according to an Associated Press report issued today (March 24). This is the basis for the widely held belief that the next few weeks will see the European War won. The prospects as seen in Washington is that surrender of large forces may be expected.”

27th

Throughout last night and during most of today the rain continued to fall. Because of weather, we were on a stand-down.

The war news remains spectacular, particularly on the Western Front, where tremendous gains are being made. All of us are following the news closely, listening to the radio at every possible opportunity. As a result of the great progress, we are all experiencing high morale, for there are good grounds to believe that the end now may not be very far off.

Taking the place of Major Rittenhouse as Operations Officer is Captain P. B. Neafus, a man who is well-qualified to fill this important position. Lt. Ver Keljik is Assistant Operations Officer.

28th

The Group move to Italy is not far off now. This morning Operations and S-2, as well as the other sections, packed everything but minimum operating essentials. The enlisted men's mess hall has been torn down, and our Operations – S-2 building has been cleared preparatory to a similar action tomorrow.

29th

This has been an uneventful day with nothing worthy of record.

30th

The dismemberment of our camp continues systematically and surely. Practically everyone is doing his share willingly without complaint. All the buildings have been taken down, all wooden floors have been removed from the tents, much of our equipment has been loaded on trucks, and everything in general has been prepared for the move. All of this has been no small task, the result of our having been in this one spot almost a whole year.

31st

We are all prepared for the move. This will be another milestone on the way home, so let it come.

[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. October 18, 2015]