

War Diary of the 489th Bomb Squadron

January 1944

Prepared by S-2 personnel under the supervision of 1st Lt. Jack A. Casper

January 1, 1944

1944 was ushered in with a bang on this field. Small firearms and heavy anti-aircraft guns furnished the noise. Vino, cognac, and, it is suspected, some American liquor furnished the good cheer.

On this first day of the new year, many of us, possessing the inclination, pondered our fate. Not being clairvoyant, we dare to say what the future holds for us individually and as an Allied fighting force. And we cannot make predictions on the basis of what the past 318 days overseas have brought forth, for all phases of combat life are unpredictable. But apprising the future cautiously, we cannot be accused of over-optimism in firmly believing, first, that as a squadron our most difficult days are over and, second, that 1944 will find the Allied armies completely victorious in Europe. There still remain innumerable hardships to be endured and many battles to be fought and won before we can say our work is done. But the heartening fact on this first day of the year is that at last we look to the future confidently, knowing that from now on, in the broad sense of the term, we are the masters of our fate.

Capt. Kaufmann today assumed the important position of Squadron Commanding Officer. Knowing how well he performed his duties as squadron Operations Officer, we know what to expect of him in his new capacity. In his quiet but firm and forceful way, he has the admiration and respect of everyone. Possessed of a winning personality and real ability, he is a man well able to fill this high position.

Dammit today presented the squadron with three puppies. She accomplished the ordeal very well under most adverse circumstances. It is too early to make any comments about her brood, but considering their parentage, they will undoubtedly be some pups.

2nd

Rumors run rampant in the Army at all times. There are a variety of terms covering this G.I. pastime, most of which are not fit for print. One soon learns not to place any credence in this idle talk which so often represents wishful thinking or gross exaggeration of certain statements made just for effect. The most recent one to make the rounds of this squadron is that shortly this Group will be shipped to China. This could conceivably happen. It is not a remote impossibility. But is is worthy of note, because it is so characteristic of Army life.

3rd

Moving day tomorrow. Consequently today was devoted to all the multitudinous tasks which a move involves. Personal belongings had to be packed as well as squadron equipment. Tents had to be taken down and rolled up. Trucks had to be loaded. The weather was excellent, being sunny and almost warm, which fact made our job considerably less difficult.

We are very happy at the prospects of leaving this field and this part of Italy. The field itself is dismal and the town of Foggia has no inducements whatsoever for visiting it.

“Buzzing” a field just before we move has become a standard practice with our pilots. Today they did an exceptionally good job, thundering down to within a few feet of the ground. This is exceedingly dangerous both to those in the plane as well as to those on the ground, but the boys defy Group orders and death by continuing to do it.

Today Capt. Neese, Lts. Yeargin, David, Crawford, King, and Wubboolding, and Sgts. Bey, Abramcysk, Cerone and Glick left for the States. Most of our original fliers have now gone, and the squadron is no longer the same.

The majority of our planes and crews left for Pompeii, where we shall meet up with them tomorrow.

4th

On the move once more. We arose early while frost still covered the Foggia fields and snow blanketed the mountains. Last minute details were attended to and at 1130 hours our convoy began the long trek. After leaving the plains of Foggia, we began the difficult trip across the Sannio Mountains. We were subjected to customary hardships of a convoy trip in addition to rain and intense cold. But the sheer mountain beauty with its jagged precipices and deep, verdant valleys, through which tumbling streams rushed in headlong flight to the sea, made the trip seem less arduous. Very late this afternoon, we arrived at our destination, a small village on the outskirts of Poggiomarino.

5th

Well, the first day at our new locations has passed by. It is too early to make any remarks about the place, but here are a few facts. Naples is less than twenty-five miles away. Mt. Vesuvius with its smoke-bellowing top is within easy driving distance and the ruins of ancient Pompeii adjoin this immediate area.

The town we have taken over was just recently inhabited by Italians who were forcibly evicted from their homes. All of them have not yet completely moved out. It is a pitiful sight to see these poor people struggle with their few belongings, headed for they don't know where. But, nevertheless, we are happy that we do not have to set up personal and operational tents. It will be a pleasure to live and work in buildings.

6th

The whole Group has been put on a stand-down for a week in order to provide time for special courses and practice missions. Lt. Demas conducted a “refresher” in Navigation and Bomb Procedure.

How well “Public Relations” works is illustrated in a newspaper article appearing in the December 9th issue of the Charlotte News, entitled “Local Man Pours It On.” The dispatch quoted Lt. Alexander, on a raid to Aquilla, 55 miles northeast of Rome, as saying 'four or five big fires were started in that railroad town.' The opportunity of making the local paper is always available for the boys, but they

never utilize it. Thus the burden is upon "Public Relations" to pry the words from them, which often is no small task.

7th

Two practice missions were flown by this squadron. We briefed the crews and interrogated them on their return. The men feel that they can learn much from such missions and they have entered into the spirit of the thing with characteristic zest.

Today was one of those rare days about which poets so often eloquently sing. Large cumulus clouds, through which the sun played hide-and-seek, drifted lazily out to sea. The air had a stimulating touch that made you step lively. The mountains surrounding us, glistening in their garb of white, stood out in bold relief. On this bright, sunny, brisk day, a quickening sensation permeated the whole atmosphere and made you happy that you are alive.

Oranges and nuts are in season and all of us are eating prodigious quantities of them. Prices are still low, by American standards, and will continue to be so, providing we do not become reckless by paying more than we should.

8th

The squadron is not the same anymore. A glance at the latest combat crew roster shows just exactly how much the squadron has changed. Major Parrish, now temporarily associated with Group, Capt. Kaufmann, and Lts. Kemp, Dyer and Gaughan are the only officers of long standing who are still with us. Among the enlisted men who have grown up with the squadron, from a combat stand-point, are Sgts. Gahm, Johnson, Bagby, Salisbury, Jay and Gale.

9th

Bad weather kept our planes grounded. Had the weather permitted, another practice mission would have been flown.

Living under the present conditions with four or five men sharing a room is in many respects similar to the way boys live away from home while going through college. Many of the rooms are attractively outfitted with everything necessary to give that homey feeling, including spicy pictures or photographs of scantily clad women. At night and at various times during the day the boys sit around and read, or write, or just talk. The soldier's conversation is not much different from the student's, except that there is a dearth of academic discussion. Aside from this difference, the conversation runs along the same lines, though interspersed with more forceful figures of speech. Girls, home, past experiences, the future – these are topics regularly discussed. The progress of the war and when it may end come up often, but there is a general lack of information and comprehension concerning the more fundamental problems involved in vital world affairs. Men, who are nothing more than grown boys, act and think the same whether they are pursuing the sedentary task of acquiring the rudiments of an education or the more serious job of fighting a deadly war.

10th

Once again the weather has conspired against us, preventing the flying of the practice mission scheduled for today.

For the past fortnight there has been a definite absence of war news, so far as we are concerned. Great things are happening, insidiously but surely, and great things are about to happen, but we who are vitally and intimately interested therewith are poorly informed in that respect.

11th

More practice flying today. This afternoon a plane belonging to the 486th Squadron crashed in landing, killing the crew. The exact cause of the crash is not yet known.

12th

Communications has installed in Operations a speaker which is connected with the radio at the Message Center. Consequently we are in a position to get the latest news, to which the Avengers Group makes its contribution.

BBC reports that yesterday a great air battle took place over Germany. More than 700 Flying Fortresses and Liberators took part in this latest 8th Air Force raid. The targets were German airplane factories. A battle lasting four hours was fought and when the last bullet was fired, more than 100 German fighters had been downed to our loss of 59 bombers and 5 fighters.

In Italy the 5th Army has continued its slow advance and are now less than four miles from Cassino.

Heavy, highly protective-appearing flak suits were issued today. Protected with these new suits and carrying with them money purses and escape kits, our fliers are well able to cope with any exigencies which may arise on a routine combat mission.

13th

Here is what the Stars and Stripes had to say about today's mission over an airfield 15 miles northeast of the Italian capitol. "American heavy and medium bombers struck yesterday at the core of Luftwaffe strength in Italy with smashing raids on airfields in the Rome region Experimental buildings, workshops, and assembly plants were bomb-plastered at Guidoni A, officially described as the chief Nazi experimental station in Italy for testing new types of aircraft Shortly after the Forts had completed their run, B-25 Mitchells of the 12th AAF shot in through heavy flak and showered the air base with fragmentation bombs which exploded among hangars and parked aircraft."

S/Sgt. Waldroup was saved from possible injury when broken glass was stopped by his recently issued flak suit.

14th

The Avengers were out in force over Pontecorvo, Italy, with the town and an important bridge leading up to it as their objectives. Although this squadron, and the others, too, missed the bridge, a number of bombs were planted neatly in the town itself. But the mission was a costly one for the Group. The 486th Squadron lost two planes, one going down over the target area, the other crashing this side of the lines; the crew in the former were probably killed, while the crew in the latter successfully bailed out.

Our present base surpasses by far any other base we have been at since entering the overseas service. Living conditions as well as working conditions are actually more than can reasonably be expected in the combat zone. The presence of a friendly and numerous civilian populace in addition to variegated local color makes us less vulnerable to the monotony such as we were forced to endure in Africa. Thus on the basis of what we have become used to, our standard of living has risen considerably. May it never fall again! But even if it does, as it may, we shall have had a respite, a vacation, if you will.

Lt. Cook, who is president of the Officers' Club, has given unstintingly of his time and effort in preparing the club for the opening night. The liquid refreshments which will be available are conspicuous because of their quantity and variety.

S/Sgt. O'Connell reached the 50 mark today. The combat tour of duty no longer is set at 50 missions but now depends entirely upon physical conditions.

Returning from Capri, Capt. White and Lts. Hamilton and Jetter were enthusiastic in their praise of this island paradise. A visit to the Blue Grotto and a tour of a British mine sweeper, where they sipped tea and enhanced Allied good will, highlighted their leave.

15th

Except for a raid over the marshaling yards at Foligno, Italy, which appears to have been a successful one, today was typically unexciting.

16th

The choke points in the marshaling yards at Terni, Italy, were blasted expertly by our planes in this 116th squadron combat mission

Early this afternoon a red warning reminded us that the enemy still operates an air force in this theatre. But no planes appeared to bother us and thus our clear record of no enemy bombings of any field at which we have been stationed remains unchanged.

17th

Briefed to bomb Sulmona or Giulianova, Italy, we chose our own target en route and bombed Chiaravalle. There being complete cloud coverage over the primary and alternate targets, the lead bombardier picked out Chiaravalle through a break in the clouds and "let her have it." The target was well covered.

18th

The viaduct at Terni, Italy, was the objective for today. We did not accomplish the purpose of the mission but some important observations were made of enemy MT [Motor Transport] movements.

Life here goes on pretty much as usual. On days off our boys frequent the surrounding towns, where the Italians are reaping a rich harvest from us free-spending GI's. On sunny afternoons such as today, some of the boys play football in the street while others sun themselves.

The Enlisted Men's Club had its grand opening last night. With 1st Sgt. McAvoy, and S/Sgts. Lang and Miller mainly responsible as the instigators of this club, those of us who indulge were able to enjoy cognac, rum, cherry brandy, and bianco vino. Before 2000 hours many of the boys had sloughed off the war weariness and felt as free as the breeze.

Yesterday afternoon we were pleasantly surprised with the unexpected appearance of Sgt. Stankovich, whom we had assumed had been returned to the Zone of the Interior [USA]. After having spent many weeks hospitalized in Africa, he succeeded in rejoining the squadron. He had the choice of returning to 489 or being sent elsewhere, but he chose to continue his association with all of us dubious characters.

19th

The weather continues to be cold, but not quite as cold as it has been. The rainy season seems to be definitely on the way out. The days are longer and the sun is not so fleeting.

Our 119th squadron combat mission was flown, this one over Rieti A/D, Italy. The target area was well covered with bombs. No opposition whatsoever was encountered.

The food lately has been so poor that everyone is complaining again. Lt. Gaughan has started his own personal investigation in an effort to determine just why we are being fed so poorly. It is about time that this "food business" be settled once and for all.

20th

Avezzano, Italy, double track R.R. viaduct at G277889 was the target for our 120th mission. We missed the initial point by 15 miles and came in on the bomb run at 275° instead of 315°. The target was missed completely, but planes from another squadron of the same formation scored several hits.

This evening our Steak House opened for business with S/Sgt. Turpin at the fire. Handling this voluntary job expertly, Sgt. Turpin turned out a meal that we steak-starved soldiers devoured avidly. For a dollar officers or enlisted men can augment an unsatisfactory squadron supper.

21st

Two missions today. We concentrated again on marshaling yards, which lately has been our specialty. The yards at Foligno and Avezzano, Italy, came in for a heavy pounding today.

22nd

At early dawn today American forces of the 5th Army made large scale landings on the beaches only 28 miles south of Rome and have already established strong beachheads. This puts Allied men and equipment deep within enemy territory. And it threatens to put in a precarious position the German troops on the main 5th Army Front.

The bombing this Group has done in the past ten or twelve days has been a part of the softening up process preliminary to the invasion which took place today. The enemy's ability to resist was substantially lessened by the constant bombardment of aerodromes, landing grounds, marshaling yards, road junctions, and bridges. Our mission today was in close support of the invasion parties.

At 0730 hours Capt. White spoke to the men about the recent invasion just south of Rome. He have some detailed information concerning the operations involved. For a long time all of us have been anticipating just such a move and have wondered why it was not forthcoming sooner.

Yesterday's bombing over the marshaling yards at Foligno was carried out on ETA (Estimated Time of Arrival) because of complete cloud coverage over the target. Reconnaissance later revealed that we partially destroyed a road bridge, although at the time we were unaware of the results. Our boys can hit them even if they can't see them.

23rd

The road junction northwest of Avezzano bore the brunt of our bombing today. The boys laid down an excellent pattern which fact was verified by the photographs.

The Officers' Club and the Enlisted Men's Club are functioning well. For the first time since coming overseas we have been able to set up something having the semblance of a club.

24th

Every day since the 13th of the month we have flown at least one combat mission. But today we remained inactive from a combat standpoint.

Squadron Activity continues on about the same level with nothing of particular interest worthy of record.

25th

Shortly after 0900 hours six of our Mitchells, flying in the second flight, lead box, headed for the primary target they were briefed to bomb. Because of complete cloud coverage over the target, the formation returned with its bomb load intact. About five miles from our landing ground they were instructed return to the target and bomb it or the alternate one, Flying through forbidding clouds our Group headed for Valmontone, Italy, the alternate target, and dropped the bombs through the cloud cover. Results could not be determined but it appears that the purpose of the mission was accomplished; namely, to bomb the road leading into town. S/Sgt. Turley, turret gunner, was injured in the leg by flak

26th

Bad weather kept our planes grounded.

27th

The railroad junction east of Artena, Italy, was the “object of our affections” today. The pattern our squadron laid down was excellent, the range was perfect, but the deflection was off, causing most of the bombs, if not all of them, to fall several hundred feet to the south of the target.

Lt. Gaughan's efforts to improve the quantity and quality of feed available for us has produced tangible results. Today he located an huge warehouse about five miles north of Naples where there is an equally huge salvage dump. This warehouse serves the 5th Army and operates on such a scale that it cannot bother with cases of canned food which have broken open. Hence the salvage dump, to which we have been generously given access. Everyone is truly grateful to Lt. Gaughan for his perseverance in this delicate matter. He did more than just complain. Being a man of action, he produced results, the benefits of which all of us will enjoy.

28th

Today we ran a successful mission over the Orte marshaling yards, neatly planting 15,000 pounds of bombs on the target.

Major Parrish has returned to the squadron bearing his contagious smile and effuse enthusiasm. Now Operations and the Orderly Room resound to his ringing laughter. The Major is highly respected as a Commanding Officer and as a “friend of the men.” His rejoining us is most welcome.

As of now is it Capts. Hamilton, Dyer, Kemp, Scott, and Peterson. Each one of these officers is certainly deserving of the promotion.

29th

Briefed to bomb one of two targets in the Florence area, our planes missed the target completely and dropped the bombs into the sea. Bad weather was mainly responsible for this abortive mission.

The weather still remains very cold but now there is virtually no rain. The skies are most often clear and there is a trace of spring in the air.

Tonight a number of good music lovers attended the opera in Naples, where “Cavalleria Rusticana” and “Pagliacci” were presented. Similar performances are given regularly in the Air Corps Theatre, formerly the well-known San Carlos Theatre, as a Special Services feature. The cast, all Italian and professional, played to an enthusiastic audience. The rendition of both operas was second rate but highly entertaining.

30th

The road leading into Frascati, Italy, as well as the town itself, was bombed heavily by the Group. The pattern led right through town.

Today 2nd Lt. Paul R. Gale was assigned to the squadron. He was a navigator with the Air-Sea Rescue Detachment, which was recently deactivated. This detachment, using PBY Catalinas, was the only American outfit doing this kind of work. Lt. Gale was one of four unfortunate navigators who were assigned to this Group rather than returned to the States as were the rest of the detachment.

31st

The combat life of a soldier in the Air Corps is one of ease and luxury, comparatively speaking. We live under adverse conditions and according to a standard that is well below what we high living Americans are used to. But that we expect, this being war in the field. Mention is made of this fact to remind us who are prone to complain that conditions could be and are worse in some branches of the Service. Talk with a front line infantryman if you are not convinced.

[Signed]

Walter F. Greve, Jr.

Sgt., Air Corps

S-2

[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. August 11, 2015]