

War Diary of the 489th Bomb Squadron February 1944

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

I. Losses in Action

Near the Ruins of Pompeii plane #463 9K crashed for some unknown reason. It had been circling, waiting to fill in as a stand by plane. When it became evident that it would not be needed in such capacity, it started back and crashed shortly thereafter – this was on the 6th of February. The following men were killed: Lt. Capson, Lt. Karvel, Sgt. Luczak, Sgt. P.J. Miller, and Sgt. Wellington.

J. Former and Present Members Who Have Distinguished Themselves in Action

<p>Purple Heart:</p> <p>Alexander H. Parrish Fred W. Dyer Raymond A. Schmidt George (NMI) Demas Charles A. Hutchinson Gerald K. Wright William R. Culver Leland E. Duncan Arthur J. Turley</p> <p>Air Medal with seven clusters:</p> <p>Jack M. Hamilton George W. Kemp, Jr Wilbur E. Bagby</p> <p>Air Medal with six clusters:</p> <p>Fred W. Dyer George E. Samson</p> <p>Air Medal with five clusters:</p> <p>Leonard Kaufmann, Jr. Warren M. Wolfe George (NMI) Demas Gerald a. Stegink Donald L. O'Connell</p>	<p>Air Medal with two clusters:</p> <p>William L. Akers John F. Shuck Franklin J. Dobberteen John M. Jeter Ludwig J. Wiese William H. Cruise Carl V. Durrett Guy (NMI) Diana Vincent (NMI) Jereb Edward M. Lydon Walter M. Miller, Jr. Alex H. Hofmeister, Jr. Peter J. Cusintine, Jr. Jack M. Lang Peter J. Miller, Jr. William O. Spinks Arthur J. Turley Hugh H. Waldroup</p> <p>Air Medal with one cluster:</p> <p>William L. Rittenhouse Charles P. Barnett John R.Q. Brown Henry C. Fields George F. Roberts David J. Teare Louis E. Bulkeley</p>
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Air Medal with four clusters:

Alexander H. Parrish
James F. Gaughan
Raymond A. Schmidt
Claude H. Weaver

Air Medal with three clusters:

Louis L. Taylor
Glenn E. Gahm
Minot M. Johnson
J.W. Fowler
Joe P. Turpin
Cleo A. McIntosh
Ray W. Salisbury
James W. Jay
Thomas G. Bryan

Herbert C. Brugger
Edward W. Cook
Ansley Q. Alexander, Jr.
Stuart S. Shoulberg
Carl E. Watson
Elton C. Glos
James T. Proctor
Joseph W. Trumble
John (NMI) Charney
Joseph R. Mourey
Russell J. Callahan

Air Medal:

Carl O. Wellington (deceased)

February 1, 1944

Nervous tension invariably is built up just prior to a mission. It is not openly evident, but it can nevertheless be sensed. Early this morning the boys prepared themselves for flying, but they were destined not to get into the air. The weather closed in over the field and at 1200 hours a stand-down was declared.

Today was pay day. By early evening a number of card and crap games were in full swing and by midnight there had been a very considerable exchange of money. One "character" came out on top with \$1300.

Capt. Fields who has been adjutant of the squadron since its early days is no longer associated with us. He has gone to Group Headquarters where he will serve as Group Adjutant. Taking Capt. Fields' place is Lt. Nickerson, who will also have charge of mess. Lt. Cutler now has charge of supply and transportation.

2nd

A road junction at Marino, Italy, was the target for today. Our bombardiers laid a good pattern commencing in the SW part of town and extending right through it. The road running into town was well covered with bombs. The flak was intense and accurate, holing four planes. Plane 105 9J, piloted by Lt. Fields with Lt. Mair at the co-pilot's controls, had its hydraulic system damaged. When it came time to land, it was necessary to crank the wheels down. This they did, but they were unable to lock them into place. S/Sgt. F.A. Vaudry, engineer-gunner, poured hydraulic fluid into the system, thereby causing the locks to go into place. It was fortunate for everyone in the plane that an engineer was aboard, for only an engineer would have known what to do to lock the wheels.

For dinner we had delicious fresh ham. Quite often lately we have had meals that could be correctly classified as good.

3rd

Weather again was responsible for keeping our planes grounded. The crews were briefed to bomb Orte, Italy, but before they got to the planes, a stand-down was declared.

It has been weeks since we have had mail in any real quantity. On January 30 our APO was changed to 650. This is the 5th time it has changed within the past year. I suspect that the reason for the poor mail service lies in the fact that the ships and planes which ordinarily transport it to us have been sequestered for the forthcoming invasion.

About the invasion. The radio, the press, and everyone is speculating as to when it will occur. It is virtually assumed that it will come from across the English Channel. Feeling is mounting because it is suspected that it will come sometime next month.

4th

This evening the “Barber of Seville” was presented in Naples and a number of men from this squadron attended.

Station Hospital No. 262 was the rendezvous point for an Officers' Dance. From all indications those who were there enjoyed themselves immensely.

Here are the headlines appearing in today's Stars and Stripes: “Ten German Divisions Trapped in the Ukraine;” “Street Fighting Rages in Cassino;” “U.S. Forces Seize Two Strongholds in the Marshalls;” “Sofia Lies in Ruin;” “1,100 U.S. Planes Bomb Nazi Port” (Wilhemshaven); “Liberators Smash Nazi Rail Lines.”

5th

Although that it appeared that the weather would prevent our flying a mission today, twelve of our planes took off and succeeded in bomb-plastering the marshaling yards at Terni, Italy. We interrogated the crews at Group S-2, where three Red Cross girls who have been assigned to the Group served the flyers and S-2 personnel hot coffee and doughnuts.

Today our Operations Officer was ordered to send to the 12th Bombardment Group (M) one pilot or co-pilot with a low number of missions. There were three men who were in this category. Cards were drawn. The unlucky (?) man was 2nd Lt. Erbland. I use the term “unlucky” because it is rumored that the 12th Group will be sent to India or some other place in that part of the world. The 12th is now inoperative and very shortly will be on its way. Maybe we shall follow them. Time will tell.

6th

Today was one of those days which all of us would like to forget. A tragic accident killed five of our men. We furnished three stand-by ships and crews for the three other squadrons. As is customary, these planes took off and circled while the formation was being made up. Not having to fill in, our three planes started back. Near the Ruins of Pompeii plane 463 9K, piloted by Lt. Wiltshire, with Lt. Capson as co-pilot, Lt. Karvel, bombardier, Sgt. Inczak, radio operator, Sgt. P.J. Miller, turret gunner, and Sgt. Wellington, tail gunner, crashed. Witnesses revealed that the plane went into a dive and as it fell earthward, a wing came off. Shortly after it crashed, the 4 x 1000 pound bombs exploded. Lt. Wiltshire miraculously survived – how is not yet known – and will recover from the injuries he sustained. All the other crew members were instantly killed.

Fate worked in Sgt. Schmidt's favor and against Sgt. Wellington. The former had been originally scheduled but at the last minute was replaced by the latter.

Our 133rd squadron combat mission was a nickeling mission over Atina, Italy.

7th

Two missions were run today, both in the Rome area. The morning mission was over Cisterna, Italy, key to the Appian Way and Rome. The M/Y [Marshaling Yard] and the town were hit squarely and heavily. Our men are confident that this was one of the most successful missions we have run. The afternoon mission carried our planes to Viterbo, Italy, where they were to hit the north choke point of the south M/Y. This time they did not do so well, although they did hit a section of the tracks and the southeast part of town. On the way back from the target, our formation ran into some enemy ME 109's and FW 190's. They did not attack.

8th

We were out in force over Cisterna again. This mission today was every bit as successful as yesterday's mission over the same target.

A few more combat crew members were transferred to this squadron from the 12th Group. Where that Group is going is still a matter of pure speculation. Since it has been overseas longer than we have, where it goes will give us some indication of where we are likely to go eventually – either to another theatre or back to the States. Thus we await anxiously word of their disposition.

9th

Appearing in the February 8th issue of the Stars and Stripes, daily newspaper of the U.S. Armed Forces for troops in Italy, are two interesting news items, which I make note of now in order later to see how the predictions contained therein work out.

One item stated that an Allied victory in Europe this year was predicted last week by a panel of four military experts speaking on one program, with the consensus being that the Germans would collapse within three to six months after the Allies invade the west. The experts held no quick prospects for the war in the Far East.

The other item stated that American Army troops overseas will become soldier-students within 48 hours after hostilities end in Europe under tentative plans already drawn up by Army officials. Study and training to prepare soldiers for the return to peacetime jobs will help span the period between the armistice and demobilization.

10th

Our squadron was stood down all day. It had been intended that we fly a mission in the afternoon, but late in the morning inclement weather necessitated the declaration of a stand-down. As a result of this status, Operations – S-2 has been virtually deserted.

Decorations were awarded this morning by Col. Jones to a number of our men (See “Photographs” and “Outline History”). The ceremony was colorful and impressive even though it was necessarily simple.

11th

Again a steady downpour of rain kept our planes grounded.

12th

At 1153 hours our bombardiers toggled out 46,000 pounds of concentrated destruction in the vicinity of Campoleone, Italy. Battling their way through a veritable barrage of flak, our airmen struck a telling blow at the enemy whose position is steadily worsening. This mission was intended to give close support to Allied troops in the Anzio beachhead area, where a ring of steel is inexorably closing around desperately fighting Jerry precariously situated between the main 5th Army Front and this new front just south of Rome. Col. Jones telephoned congratulations to Major Parrish for the excellent results obtained in the 138th squadron combat mission.

13th

Its top completely screened from view by low-hung clouds, Mt. Vesuvius appeared this morning in a garb of snow reaching from the lower slopes to where it imperceptibly merged with the white cloud cover. The Lattar Mountains which rise out of the sea at Sorrento were equally beautiful in their winter dress. At frequent intervals during the entire day, our Mitchells, A-20 Bostons and B-26 Marauders droned gracefully through the cold skies like giant birds. Momentarily forgetting that these were terrible instruments of destruction, one seemed to feel that they were a part of all this natural beauty.

Today we struck at the enemy not with bombs but rather with a weapon more subtle and just as explosive. Three of our planes rained down upon him 600,000 leaflets exhorting him to give up rather than prolong what is rapidly becoming a hopeless situation.

More decorations were awarded, this time to men who were unable to attend the first ceremony.

14th

The M/Y at Perugia, Italy, was the target for today. Capt. Hamilton, flying his 60th mission, led the Group over this dangerous target.

We eagerly await the passage of each day. Time seems to be skidding by at a very rapid pace, but it cannot pass too quickly to suit us. Some day in the distant future when our youth and war time days will be things of the past, we shall be wishing that we could slow up the inexorable scythe of time. In one sense time right now is running in our favor, for it is bringing us closer to that inevitable day when we can look at all of this in retrospect.

The anticipation of big things to come on the international scene continues to be very engrossing. Because we are so vitally affected by what happens all over the world, all of us are following the ever-changing world drama with great personal interest. From day to day we await new developments, following closely the slow but certain defeat of Germany and her nominal ally, Japan. What can be more interesting than history in the making?

15th

Today marks the completion of one year in the overseas service. At approximately 1730 hours a year ago today the U.S.S. West Point steamed out of San Francisco's Golden Gate headed for a destination that was to remain unknown to us for many days to come. Standing at the stem of this once palatial luxury liner, scores of us silently watched the gray skyline of San Francisco recede into the distance. Twilight changed to darkness and many of us still stood there alone with our thoughts. We pondered our fate as we slipped away from this land of ours, which even then was taking on a new meaning for us. One year has passed by. Much has happened to us within that period of time. As we begin another year overseas, we are prone to speculate about the ethereal future just as we did that momentous day a year ago. What does it hold for us?

16th

An army regulation requires that at periodic intervals a sex lecture be given to all enlisted men. Even in the combat zone this requirement is fulfilled. Today Chaplain Cooper gave a short talk about sex morality, after which was shown a moving picture depicting the grave dangers of illicit intercourse. All of this advice is timely in view of the amazing ease with which a woman may be acquired. They infest not only the surrounding towns and villages but even the camp area itself.

Enemy concentrations in the vicinity of Campoleone, Italy, constituted the target for today. Exceedingly bad weather caused this squadron to miss the area intended to have been bombed. Major Garske, flying with the 488th Squadron, went down in flames over the target area, his plane having been hit and knocked out of control. He was associated with Group Operations in the capacity of Assistant Operations Officer.

It is now Major Kaufmann and Major Fields.

17th

The Allies struck Berlin in the mightiest air blow in history last night as 1,000 British aircraft unleashed well over 2,500 tons of high explosives and incendiaries in a 20-minute raid on the Nazi capitol. This was the 15th major assault since the "Battle of Berlin" began last November.

Our efforts were directed against an important supply dump and MT concentration in the Anzio area.

18th

Today was unusually uneventful. The mission was abortive because of bad weather over the target area.

Writing letters is a really difficult task. Censorship regulations are very rigid – of necessity – and consequently one's style is cramped considerably. Sitting down to write our daily letters sometimes – often – is a real ordeal. That will be a happy day when it will not be necessary to correspond.

19th

Twice today we struck heavy blows at the enemy in the Anzio beachhead area, giving close support to our forces fighting fierce German counter-attacks. The 321st Bombardment Group (M) preceded us over the target. They ran into difficulties and lost a total of eight planes either from flak or fighters.

This afternoon radio-gunners and S-2 personnel attended the first of a series of lectures dealing with airplane identification. It is important that those who fly be thoroughly indoctrinated in the identification of friendly and enemy aircraft.

The boys are piling up missions fast. As the weather improves and the days become longer, we are flying more often. The enemy is fighting a losing fight in this theatre (and elsewhere, too), but he is fighting well and with great vigor. He is a master of defensive warfare as well as at offensive fighting. But he is not quite as good as we are.

20th

Two missions again today in the Anzio beachhead area. The morning mission was probably successful but the afternoon mission was a complete failure because of bad weather which prevented the bombardiers from dropping any bombs.

For about the past month we have been fed better than usual – on the basis of our former standards. As a result there are very few complaints about food.

The other day two more men left for the States; namely, Lt. Schmidt and T/O Stegink, both having completed 51 combat missions.

21st

Stand-down.

Last night Verdi's "Aida" was presented in Naples as a regular Special Services feature. About thirty men from the Group helped make up a capacity audience. For four short hours war-weary soldiers thousands of miles from home were able to project themselves out of the present and into a realm of fantasy.

22nd

During the morning our planes were over the M/Y at Foligno and in the afternoon we dropped leaflets over Atina and Pontecorvo.

Prime Minister Churchill in an hour and a quarter speech to the House of Commons gave a concise review of the war up to the present time. He said that he would give no assurances that victory in Europe would or would not be ours this year, but that it may not be far away.

For the first time great fleets of American bombers based in Italy and in Britain launched a coordinated attack on important German targets. For the past four days the Allied aerial bombardment has been the greatest yet. Churchill promised in his speech that the bombing of Germany will be even greater and more terrible in the months to come.

Capt. Dyer has gone to Group Operations to take the late Major Ganske's place as Assistant Operations Officer.

23rd

The weather kept our planes on the ground all day. A mission had been scheduled but the crews were called back just before they were briefed.

Rumors are still running rampant. The latest rumor, backed up by the customary "facts," is that we shall eventually be moved to England. Actually the only certain thing is that sometime we shall move.

24th

Our target today was a secret landing ground in the Rome area. From all indications the mission was a successful one.

More new combat crew members were assigned to the squadron. They are fresh from the States.

For dinner we had fresh pork chops along with fresh butter. This was a real treat for us. Complaints about the food we are fed are practically non-existent now. Of course, the meals are nothing to enthuse about, but compared with what we were getting for some ten or eleven months, they are not bad. And if we do not get enough to eat at the mess hall, we can always buy nuts or fruit, which are still very plentiful.

25th

Stand-down because of bad flying weather.

26th

Another day of combat inactivity due to inclement weather. For approximately twenty-four hours steady it has rained.

27th

All day rain has fallen in torrents. Rainy days such as this one cause us to realize how fortunate we are to be living and working in buildings. Soon we shall have been here for two months. Even if we do not remain much longer than that, we shall have had some respite from the more primitive life to which we have become used to since arriving overseas more than a year ago.

Today Lt. Ziegler, squadron censor, left for Algiers where he will assume new duties with another outfit.

28th

Three planes of this squadron flew a nickeling mission in the Anzio area, dropping a total of 1,160,000 leaflets which were intended to inform the German soldiers of certain military and political facts about which they might not be aware.

For a short time this evening many of us thought that we were in for a heavy enemy raid. Heavy anti-aircraft guns all around the field set up a thunderous noise and red tracer bullets streaked high up into the sky. This was all reminiscent of evenings at Hergla. But we soon found out that this was just practice. It is easy to imagine just how the civilians must have felt, not knowing the real facts.

29th

It seemed that bad weather would keep our planes grounded. However, late in the afternoon our crews were called down to Group for briefing. The target was troop concentrations in the Anzio area, where the Germans are fighting desperately, launching one counter-attack after another. The situation has not yet become bad for the Allies.

Pay day. Gambling is always heavy on pay day and for a few days thereafter. Already a few of the men are not only broke but they are deeply indebted to others.

[signed]

Walter f. Greve, Jr.

Sgt., Air Corps

S-2.

SPECIAL ACCOUNTS

ABBEY ATTACK

Briefed to destroy the Benedictine Abbey at Cassino (see diary for 15 February), the Avengers Group in routine fashion carried out an unfortunate necessity of war that has made worldwide headlines. The Germans had made this abbey an impregnable stronghold which our ground forces could not crack. This the Air Corps was called upon. Heavies and mediums were used. The bombing was devastating in more than one sense of the word and the repercussions were far-reaching. The following excerpts from a dispatch issued in Washington appeared in the February 17 issue of "The Stars and Stripes:"

"Condoning the attack on the German-held home of the Benedictine Order were President Roosevelt and Archbishop Michael J. Curley, Roman Catholic prelate of Baltimore and Washington . . . 'The Germans evidently took advantage of the American attitude toward such a monument and they took possession of that place in order to carry out their nefarious warfare,' the Archbishop said."

In London the newspapers featured the bombing as the day's biggest story. And from the XII Bomber Command came this message of congratulations:

"Ground observers witnessing attack on Monte Cassino today unanimously agree that of all attacks, including four (4) B-17 Groups, the mediums stole the show. Congratulations to all concerned."

[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 20, 2015]