

# War Diary of the 489<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron

## March 1944

Prepared by Sgt. Walter F. Greve, Jr.

### I. Losses in action

(1) Mission to R.R. bridge over Tiber River ESE of Perugia, Italy on 28 March.

(a) Killed

S/Sgt. H.H. Waldroup

(b) Wounded

S/Sgt. F.D. Erling

S/Sgt. J.R. Stone

T/Sgt. B.M. Gale

S/Sgt. J.L. Romo

March 1, 1944

This first day of the month was especially uneventful. In the morning when we arose it was raining, and it appeared that there would be no mission. However, briefing time was set for 0745 hours and at that time six of our crews appeared at Group Operations for that purpose. They were briefed, and then they returned to the squadron area to await the call for take-off, which was dependent upon a favorable change in the weather. But instead of becoming better, the weather worsened and finally at 1500 hours a stand-down was declared. Waiting to be called for a mission is almost as trying as flying it. The crews must stay close to Operations in order to be able to leave on a moment's notice.

2<sup>nd</sup>

Our mission today was in close support of troops in the Anzio area. It was a rough mission with one slight casualty, T/Sgt. Glos being injured in the thighs from flak.

This afternoon there was considerable excitement. Captain Dyer (pilot) and Lt. Rittenhouse (co-pilot) took up 9N on a transition flight. When they prepared to land, they were unable to get the wheels down. They made every possible effort, but without success, and finally they brought the plane in on its belly. The plane "belongs" to Lt. Gaugnan, "A" Flight Leader. He was speechless as he approached his plane lying there on its belly in the middle of the runway. The pilots are fondly attached to the planes they fly and always refer to them in the possessive case.

3<sup>rd</sup>

A mission had been planned for early this morning, but the bad weather prevented any combat flying.

Today the following men, having completed their tour of duty, left for the States: Captain Kemp, Lts. Demas and Weaver, and Sgts. Bagby and Johnson.

This morning James Gaughan appeared at Operations sporting a set of captain's bars.

4<sup>th</sup>

As has happened so often recently, the weather kept our planes on the ground. Nevertheless, we were on an available status until the middle of the afternoon. Thus the men had to remain close to Operations and “sweat it out.” Doing this seems to be about as tiring and nerve-racking as flying the mission itself.

Rations were given out this afternoon. Costing \$1.75 they consisted of 3 cigars, 14 packs of cigarettes, 2 bars of candy, 3 packs of gum, and – most startling of all – 3 bottles of Coca-Cola. For the first time in well over a year we have the opportunity of enjoying this rare treat.

Last night one complete new crew fresh from the States was assigned to the squadron. Since so many old members have been returned home recently, we have been near the critical point so far as crews go. We have been unable to put up a twelve-ship formation for a long time.

5<sup>th</sup>

Again no mission today.

I would not be amiss from time to time to interpolate into this war diary “reliable” information as to the course of the war. The following statements and predictions are from the recent issues of the Foreign Letter and What's Happening in Washington, two publications catering to big business.

“The war's 1943 climax, the collapse of Fascist Italy, will be overshadowed by the war's 1944 climax, the collapse of Nazi Germany, an event that will occur during the first half of the year. Internal crises, which Hitler has mastered only with increasing difficulty in the past, the terrific Allied air blows, against which the Luftwaffe can put up no adequate defense, together with Allied land attacks on Fortress Europe will precipitate collapse of the Nazi Reich.”

“The Far Eastern Campaign will make much more rapid progress than generally expected. Before the end of the year, mass bombing of Japan proper will be under way. Victory over Japan will come in less than 12 months after German surrender – easier than expected.”

6<sup>th</sup>

All day the sky has been overcast and rain fell intermittently from dawn to dusk. Although we were scheduled for a mission, none of our planes got off the ground. However, late in the afternoon, four planes took off for practice formation flying. Even here in the combat zone practice flying and bombing takes place regularly.

7<sup>th</sup>

For the first time since the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the month we were able to strike at the enemy. Six of our planes, consisting of the second box, unloaded 25,680 pounds of bombs on the Littorio M/Y at Rome. The pattern for the whole Group was compact and excellent. This was about the neatest bit of bombing that the Avengers have done. A newsreel cameraman flew in one of our planes and took pictures of the formation and the target.

8<sup>th</sup>

The M/Y at Orte were heavily raided by this Group. Little opposition in the form of ack-ack was encountered. Our squadron alone dropped twelve tons of bombs. We have struck hard at Orte before, evidence of which was observed by our flyers today. They saw scores of burned and derailed freight cars, twisted rails, and gaping bomb craters.

9<sup>th</sup>

Regularly the boys go into the various towns which infest this section of southern Italy. They leave early in the morning and return late in the evening. Visit any one of these towns and you will see what is characteristic of all Italian towns. There are narrow and winding streets where the stench of decaying vegetables and human dung leaves nothing to the imagination. Many of these streets or ways are not more than seven or eight yards wide, the two or three story stone buildings standing at the very edge of the street itself. Next to the flagrantly filthy odors which seem to permeate everything, children of all sizes are annoyingly conspicuous – they think that we Yanks are walking stores – well, as a matter of fact, some of us are. Brothels are as numerous as drug stores or gasoline stations in the States and all the girls are “bella signorina,” so they say.

All of us have been in Italian towns and cities so often that we [will] never be able to forget the local color thus acquired. Sights such as described above are as familiar to us as are our own American environment.

10<sup>th</sup>

The Avengers Group re-visited the Littorio M/Y at Rome, which we so successfully bombed on Tuesday. This mission, too, from a bombing stand-point, was probably successful. But a virtual calamity struck the Group – our popular and esteemed CO, Colonel Jones, was shot down. Flying with the 486<sup>th</sup> Squadron, his plane was hit by flak on the bomb run. It was kept on a level course for a number of minutes after it was hit – long enough for eight men to get out. Then it nosed over and plunged to the ground in a mass of flames. Why the other two men in the plane failed to get out is unknown. It will probably be a long time before we find out if the colonel was among the five who jumped. [There was a crew of five men. Two died, three bailed out including Colonel Jones.]

The loss of Colonel Jones has stunned all of us. He was well-liked by everyone. We admired him, because of his affable personality, and because he seemed to possess the qualities of leadership which are expected of a man in his position, but which so often are wanting.

Yesterday Lt. Casper returned from Africa, where he has been attending an airplane identification school.

11<sup>th</sup>

Today has been one of those days of little activity. The weather affects life anywhere in the world; but this is particularly true of the soldier overseas.

12<sup>th</sup>

We had to shoot Dammit. Yesterday she appeared to be all right; today she could hardly walk and was foaming at the mouth. What could have caused such a change over night is not known. For about a year she was with us. Now that she is gone, she will be sorely missed. We still have her three puppies, which are hale and hearty.

We were scheduled to run a mission early this morning. But bad weather closed in and made it necessary to declare a stand-down.

13<sup>th</sup>

Six of our planes were over the Perugia M/Y, dropping 1000 pounders. The mission went off in routine fashion and probably was successful.

The Deutsches Reich radio recently reported that a B-25, shot down near Rome the other day, contained a 32 year old colonel who was taken prisoner. This was undoubtedly Colonel Jones. In the absence of more definite information, I believe that it is safe to assume that the colonel is alive.

14<sup>th</sup>

Planes of this Group re-visited the M/Y at Terni early this afternoon. Our bombs missed the yards, landing in town where they caused a number of explosions. At least one of the other squadrons peppered the target area.

A move is in the offing. Today Operations and S-2 received orders to itemize and to give the total cubic content of all equipment to be moved. Yesterday afternoon Captain Nestor talked to the combat crew members about malaria in the area to which we shall move. He warned that the incidence of malaria there is extremely high and that everyone will have to avail himself of all precautionary measures provided for preventing the disease.

Again the question on everyone's lips is, "Where next?" And then, "How soon?" In due time those questions will be answered. Meanwhile all we can do is speculate. Corsica? England? India? China?

15<sup>th</sup>

At 0120 this morning we were awakened by the ear-splitting explosions of heavy ack-ack guns. The northwestern sky this side of Vesuvius was streaked with red tracers and soon after the attack started the heavy drone of friendly fighters could be heard passing overhead. It was evident that Naples, just a short distance away, was intended to receive the brunt of this attack. It turned out to be a very heavy

one, lasting about forty minutes. This afternoon some of our men, returning from Naples, reported that there were some casualties and considerable damage. At least two German planes were shot down.

Today the heat was turned on Cassino. We ran two missions over this bloody target, where fighting has raged unabated for weeks. Allied troops had been removed from the immediate vicinity of the town in anticipation of a concerted aerial bombardment aimed at completely obliterating it.

16<sup>th</sup>

Our planes were over Cassino again. It is difficult to believe that there can be much left of that town after the devastating raids of yesterday during which over 1400 tons of bombs were dropped within an area of less than a square mile. Heavy, medium, light, and dive bombers were concentrated on this historic town which has blocked our way to Rome for so long. At 1900 hours last night the regular BBC broadcast from London reported the details of this heavy bombardment. Our squadron took the honors by leading this Group, which was the first over the target.

17<sup>th</sup>

The Avengers Group has a new commanding officer, Colonel Chapman. Today he appeared in the squadron area to give it the once over.

Roccasecca, Italy, was visited during the morning. We plastered the town with 250 and 500 pounders. Not only was the mission highly successful, but it was a milk run for the boys.

18<sup>th</sup>

This morning our planes paid a visit to Foligno, Italy, hitting the city with 1000 pounders. This afternoon we were over Avezzano, but with leaflets rather than with bombs.

Lt. Nickerson, who has been adjutant since Major Fields went to Group Headquarters, has left for another outfit to serve in some other capacity. As yet he has not been replaced.

Tonight Mt. Vesuvius presented one of the most beautiful sights I have ever witnessed. A mass of wild fire poured from its open top and fingered the somber sky with savage strokes. Vividly outlining the western slope which runs down to the sea was a continuous line of dancing fire. And drifting away to the southwest were huge clouds of smoke. Here was nature in its most awe-inspiring garb.

19<sup>th</sup>

Briefed to bomb the M/Y at Orte, Italy, the boys blew up an important bridge instead. This bridge was situated just outside the yards.

Mt. Vesuvius continues to pour out fire and smoke and lava in huge quantities. The sky above the eastern slopes of the mountain are an azure hue, and the western sky is screened as far as one can see by an ominous cloud cover of smoke.

20<sup>th</sup>

Briefed to bomb Perugia M/Y, our boys were unable to unload there because of cloud cover. So they wheeled their planes around and headed south for the M/Y at Terni, where they dropped the 1000 pounders through clouds.

Here is what the Stars and Stripes has to say today about Mt. Vesuvius, which continues to erupt with great ferocity.

“Three great streams of molten lava poured down the sides of Mt. Vesuvius today, marking the volcano's greatest activity in 15 years. The column of lava which Neapolitans could see was described as a mile and a half long and appeared like a great river of fire by night while smoke from burning vegetation revealed its path by day...The last heavy eruption of Vesuvius was in 1906....A number of houses are within a mile of the creeping avalanche and may have to be abandoned before Tuesday afternoon, it was feared”

21<sup>st</sup>

The following excerpt from a letter written by one of the boys to the people back home throws an interesting light on the difficulties attendant upon correspondence.

“I must confess that I am completely at a loss as to what to write about. If only I could tell you about day to day events – then I would have something of interest for you. For me it would merely be the statement of an endless monotony. I am positive that you can have no conception of how we live, what we do, for actually this life is not as it is pictured in newsreels, in magazines, and in papers. Movies, pictures, and articles show the highlights, dress everything up, but fail, of necessity, to catch the real substance of combat life over seas. Were it possible for you to spend a full twenty-four hours with me, you would be very much surprised. And that is exactly what you would have to do to catch the intangibles which neither pictures nor words can convey. Writers like Ernie Pyle, whom we all read, are doing an outstanding job, within the limitations of words, of enabling the people at home to experience, vicariously, a bit of our daily life. But they don't tell you about oppressive monotony, headaches, infection, upset stomachs, fleas and bedbugs, and the innumerable other physical and mental discomforts. That doesn't make interesting reading, it isn't unusual because it is something we contend with day in and day out – everyday....”

22<sup>nd</sup> - 31<sup>st</sup>

During this period much has happened to us. Mt. Vesuvius “blew its top;” we evacuated the base in great haste, moving to an airfield southeast of Salerno, from which field we have already flown four missions.

The volcanic disturbance became steadily worse with more molten fire overflowing the top and running down the mountain sides. Shortly after midnight of March 23, we were awakened by the noisy fall of cinders on our flat-topped stone roof and on the pavement at our front door. By 0700 hours there was a steady downpour of cinders – exactly that. Big chunks the size of a man's head crashed to the ground, cutting communication wires, smashing through jeep and truck windshields, ripping through the canvas tents on the line, and destroying our precious airplanes. This frightening downfall continued unabated

throughout the entire day. Protected by steel helmets, none of us were injured. But civilian casualties were high, causing Doc Nestor and his medics to be very busy. By noon it was evident that all the planes of the Group would never be flown again. The weight of tons of cinders on the wings created a destructive stress. The Plexiglas in the upper turrets and pilots' and bombardiers' compartments were shattered.

Early in the afternoon of the 23<sup>rd</sup>, the first evacuating party left, most of the transportation being furnished by the 306<sup>th</sup> Service Group, which was called upon to help out during the emergency. The men carried only bare essentials, for there was neither time nor room for more than that. The prime objective was to clear out of this dangerous area as quickly as possible. Throughout the entire afternoon more men left, and by early evening the squadron had been completely evacuated, except for a few men who remained behind to guard all the squadron equipment and personal belongings. The Italians were everywhere like parasites, which is precisely what they have been around the camp.

For miles on end the main roads were choked with fleeing trucks, jeeps, and other vehicles. It was necessary to pull the deep bed of cinders and dust in low gear. The roads were crowded with stalled passenger cars belonging to evacuating Italians and British trucks; we commented that American G.I. equipment in characteristic fashion always gets through. Shortly after midnight we arrived at Guado Airdrome, twenty-two miles southeast of Salerno. Exhausted we set up our cots in a large, stone-constructed tobacco warehouse from whose ceiling still hung drying tobacco leaves.

The 24<sup>th</sup> and the 25<sup>th</sup> were miserably cold and rainy days during which time we did nothing whatsoever. We messed with a squadron of the 321<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Group (M), which is situated on this field. The food was both poor and scarce. We all suffered from colds, headaches, and upset stomachs.

All of us had expected that the Group would be in-operational for at least a few weeks. Thus we were surprised when we were assigned six ships and were alerted for a mission on the 27<sup>th</sup>. That mission took us to a railroad bridge east of Perugia. We knocked out the west approach.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> we struck at the same target near Perugia, this time completely demolishing the bridge, but at a terrible cost to us: five of our flyers, radio-operators and gunners, were hit by flak over the bomb run and were seriously injured. One of the casualties, young and popular S/Sgt. H.H. Waldroup, died the next day.

On the 29<sup>th</sup> five of our Mitchells staged an uneventful raid on the airdrome at Viterbo, Italy. Bad weather prevented any bombing on the 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>.

Sgt. Jack R. August has been evicted from the S-2 Section for inefficiency. He has been consistently lax ever since joining the section about fifteen months ago. His removal is justified and at the same time welcome.

S-2 and Operations are now located in separate tents. This is the first time in the history of the squadron that the two sections have been separated.

[Signed]  
Walter F. Greve, Jr.  
Sgt., Air Corps  
S-2

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

[http://57thbombwing.com/340th\\_History/340thGroupHistory.php](http://57thbombwing.com/340th_History/340thGroupHistory.php)

Transcription by Dan Setzer, son of Sgt. Hymie Setzer, 340<sup>th</sup> BG HQ Squadron. August 31, 2015]