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Sa. Bomb. 428-41
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AUG 5 1975

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Squadron History 428th Bombardment Squadron (M)

O.H. - Dec. 43
59- BOMB-A 28-H1
December 1-31, 1944.

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OUTLINE HISTORY

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S.E. BOMB-428-H1
DEC 1943

The first few days of December, 1943 were strange ones for the 428th just as were those a year ago when the unit was learning the technique of combat the hard way. Now the situation was reversed. The unit had proven itself one of the most successful and efficient air corps outfits in the theater. There were 353 officers and men together once again (no mean achievement considering the story of the previous four months), learning how to relax now that they were on non-combat status. It was strange trying to fill a routine on the line, in the office, and in the air whose end result was not "36 sorties against' _____'. Somehow or other we were apart, a detached fringe from this corner of the tapestry of global war.

To be stationed near the comforts and "opportunities" of Phillipville added to a strange and pleasant picture. The food improved, there was a permanent runway, and fuel for heating could be filched from a cork pile out in back of the area. Though few thought of it for long, it was a tremendous step away from Berteaux, King's Cross, and most of all, Menzel Temime. That it wouldn't last long for some of us was to be expected.

Already there was a furious forming of echelons, alerts, transposition of alerts, and the usual shuffling of echelons. The 428th and 380th, bolstered by "G" crews from the 379th and 381st who had been transferred were Corsica bound. The 381st was to remain to obtain and train a full squadron's complement of "G" crews who were soon to arrive with their airplanes. Subsequently cadres of both the 381st and 428th remained behind to train "G" crews. Apparently each squadron was to be refitted with the cannon-bearing airplanes. Oh, India, here we come!

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On the morning of December 7th, the ground echelon of 6 officers and 148 enlisted men departed with 48 vehicles Eastward bound for the staging area at Bizerte. The chopping up of the unit started once again in earnest. We left before dawn, uprooted again--the same being by now a semi-normal state of affairs. It seemed but yesterday that we had spent a night at the barren staging area near Souk El Arba, toward which we were headed to spend the night. As we drove through the Medjerda chain, a few of us wondered whether we'd ever see these hills again. Ain Drahan, a picturesque French village perched atop these mountains, had been a cool haven from heat-bound King's cross last summer.

On the afternoon of the eighth we drove through bomb-torn Bizerte. The streets were cleared now, and military personnel were everywhere about, but it was still a shell of a city, as badly cracked as it had been last Spring. One look at our assigned spot in the staging area and we knew we'd "had it". It was a place with a beautiful view and more beautiful prospects for a nice mess of mud when a drizzle came. And it came--by the bucketsfull. Though we were scheduled to drive right on to a vessel for shipment as soon as we arrived, we didn't take it too seriously. We prepared to hole in until we were accepted by some Corsica-bound water express.

Perhaps the most redeeming feature the staging area had to offer to counterbalance the quality of the muck was the excellent quality and quantity of the food. It only proved to the cynics that too much of the best rations are shortstopped at port areas. A year in little, out-of-the-way wastelands was hard to forget. Our Christmas menu was to that date one of the high points of the war. That meal and the mail call Christmas Eve fanned the flagging enthusiasm. After almost three weeks of silence it was just what the doctor ordered.

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On the 23rd we planned to embark once again, but the preparation went overboard on the old dry run gangplank. With the outfit conveniently scattered at 1100 on the morning of the 26th, the order came through for half our number to be ready to embark by 1400. At 1530, 3 officers, 70 enlisted men and 16 vehicles started to load on HMS LST No. 425. The remainder were left behind to catch another the "next day", which by this time was a threadbare brushoff.

HMLST 425 was an American-built LST Manned by the British Navy. Many of the men slept on the decks. Some preferred to do so--the jitters if you like. The food was as bad as we had expected. This time we couldn't object--we had brought our own. Many a man envied their friends in the Navy just for the food he saw accorded the ship's crew. They were a hardworking lot for the ship was undermanned. But in light-fingeredness they far outstripped our boys. The flotilla commander was aboard but the less said of him, the better. We weighed anchor at 2100 on the evening of the 27th and were on our way, four LST's and a Liberty Ship preceded by two mine sweepers.

That afternoon, one of the LST's and a Liberty Ship slipped into Cagliari and 3 LST's went what seemed their lonely way. Somehow or other the two tiny mine sweepers up ahead didn't seem too formidable an escort. On widely spaced occasions a single fighter plane would come into view. On the evening of the 29th, we pulled into the island harbor of beautiful Maddelena. In the distance we could see Capraia, the little island where it is reported that Mussolini had been taken and dramatically rescued by the Germans with the aid of bribed Italian Officers., into whose custody he was placed.

The next morning we pulled anchor at 0700, Ajaccio bound. This time we left a mine sweeper and the 3rd LST behind. The next day she proceeded towards Bastia on an ill-fated run. She was blown in two by a mine some distance SW of Borgo with a loss of one half her human cargo of 300 QM personnel. The

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latter had been bivouaced next to us at Bizerte. Such is the stuff of fate.

All things considered, the trip was uneventful--perfect, from the official point of view. We dropped anchor in the beautiful harbor of Ajaccio at 1400 hours. By 1700 hours, the first motor convoy headed for the staging area at Mezzouvia perhaps 7 miles Northwest of the town.

The 31st day found us busily engaged, both setting up after the hasty camp preparations of the night before, and trying to find out if we were to shove off the next day. As usual the end purposes were diverse. The personnel moved to Ajaccio almost enmasse New Year's Eve. The evening was surprisingly quiet. At 10:30 we were back at the base, all of us sound, and most of us sober. Thus was the passing of Anno Domini 1943. Nor were there any tears over its passing.

As a unit, we had been lucky during the past year in many ways. Our losses were lower than any of the other squadrons in the group, and we had a larger number of enemy kills. Since the beginning of the year, when we first started into combat, the feeling had grown in the squadron that our unit was something more than just another squadron; in fact, sentiment could be found quite prevalent that the 428th Squadron was, in a large part, the 310th Group. Of course, it was always difficult to get members of the other three squadrons to admit this, but occasionally, in a confidential mood, or perhaps when not quite sober, and therefore not inhibited, they would sigh and confess that yes, the 428th was probably, all in all, the best squadron in the group.

Though we had been fortunate as a unit, there are very few, if any, among the squadron's personnel that regret that 1943 is over. We have come through some of the roughest living conditions any of us have ever seen, which probably reached their worst at King's Cross, where for two weeks the wind blew at 25 miles per hour, and it was 120 degrees in the shade. Surely 1944 will be better.