

## March 29, 1943 – August 31, 1943

[Transcriber's note: Some entries are truncated. Please see the original document for the full details.]

War Diary, 487<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron, 340<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group

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Period covered: March 29, 1943, date of debarkation, to August 31, 1943 date of beginning of day-to-day currently written account. This part of the history was not written currently with the facts reported. It was written in September and October, 1943, and sources were memory, personal diaries, and various official and semi-official reports. Consequently, matters chronicled here are only approximately accurate.

March 29, 1943

On the morning of March 29<sup>th</sup> the troops were ready to debark from the U.S.S. West Point. The 487<sup>th</sup> was among the first to unload from the side doors of the ship to the barges. The barge we were on was quite crowded with men and barracks bags, and since there were no sides, there was some fear that someone might fall off. Perrone for a moment seemed to have gone that way, but he showed up after a little while, late. He had got on the wrong barge. There was a crowd of ragged natives lugging Yank baggage down the gangplank. When the barge was filled, we pulled away from the old West Point, and noted again how enormous she appeared there in the water.....The harbor was littered with sunken hulls, and speculation and interest was high. We were new to such sights.....We unloaded at the docks at Port Taufiq and prepared to board a peculiar little train for Geneifa, Egypt. The noisy little narrow gage trains were a novelty – quite different from the Pullmans we took across the States.....It took perhaps an hour to reach Geneifa, a tiny station stuck out in the middle of hot sand. After unloading, we waited in this barren place for an hour or so until Major Whittington, our Squadron Commander, drove up. After greeting the men he hadn't seen for several months, he told us briefly of the air echelon's trip. We were saddened to hear that two crews had been lost on the way over.....The air echelon had left for Kellogg Field, Michigan, on January 30<sup>th</sup>. Their train service was none too good, and they rode in cars dating back to the gaslight era. They arrived at Kellogg on February 3<sup>rd</sup> and accepted 14 B-25's. On February 12<sup>th</sup> or thereabouts they began taking off for Morrison Field, West Palm Beach, Florida, for dispatch to Cairo, Egypt and service with the 9<sup>th</sup> Air Force. They began leaving Morrison Field for their destination on February 18. On that day, not long after take-off, Operations Officer Frances X. Tehan, leading a flight of six airplanes, was observed flying into a dangerous weather mass. He ordered the other pilots over the command set to avoid the area but apparently was unable to do so himself. He and his crew were reported missing and presumed lost. Included in the number were F/O Robert Lytle, co-pilot; 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Robert Crowell, navigator; M/Sgt. Jess Brazell, aerial engineer; T/Sgt. James Hughbanks, radio operator; S/Sgt. Russell Hinchman, gunner; and M/Sgt. Richard Hanson, passenger.....At Cayenne, French Guiana, on February 26<sup>th</sup>, authorities reported to Major Whittington that wreckage of a B-25 airplane believed to be that piloted by F/O Lester Long was found near Cayenne with one unidentified body. Permission to conduct a search was denied to Major Whittington. Little hope was held for the other occupants of the plane. Missing and

also presumed lost were F/O Long's crew and a passenger: F/O Edwin Welcome, co-pilot; 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Jo Davidson, navigator; S/Sgt. John Roth, aerial engineer; T/Sgt. George Cummings, radio operator; S/Sgt. Athel Pate, gunner; and T/Sgt. Carleton Budd, passenger.....At Natal, Brazil, on March 5, the plane piloted by 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Claude Garrett crashed in takeoff with no injuries to crew and although the damage was not extensive the plane was left there with the Air Transport Command. The crew and one passenger of the wrecked plane were flown to Cairo by transport planes and B-25's clearing for Cairo. The other eleven planes of the Squadron were strung out along the lengthy air route to Cairo, some ahead of the accidents, and some behind. Hopping to Ascension Island in the middle of the South Atlantic and on to Accra on the African mainland, they proceeded to their destination at Cairo. The first ship to come in was that piloted by Lt. Johnson, who arrived March 10<sup>th</sup>. Lt. Lambert, assistant operations officer, brought in the last ship of the Squadron on March 29<sup>th</sup>, and arrived at El Kabrit a few hours after the Ground Echelon.....

March 30<sup>th</sup> to April 11<sup>th</sup>

El Kabrit seemed at first quite forbidding. Food was a novel helter-skelter mess of mess kits and long wash lines. The flat stretches of sand were white and hot except for one Sunday when they blew up into a magnificent sandstorm that canceled church services and put the mess hall tables under an eighth of an inch of dirt. Buildings were sandbagged and looked like Beau Geste forts. Hangar roofs were pierced ominously with machine-gun holes. Story had it that a man was killed while sitting on a toilet seat. Nights were cold as kraut. It even rained one evening.....But Kabrit was not all bad. It was there that we received our first mail since February, and some men received thirty and forty letters the first day. A British NAFFI and a tiny PX sold canned fruit and Palestine chocolate. There was a movie, showing very old pictures, under whose grass ceiling the birds flew in the daytime and the bats flew at night (Captain Meriwether was bombed by a feathered friend). The YMCA, overlooking blue Great Bitter Lake, was a pleasant place to write a letter and have a cup of tea and a cookie. The Officers Club sold big cold bottles of powerful Canadian Ale. But pleasantest of all was the sense of impending excitement. Major Whittington was as eager as any boy to get into the "blue," and could not hide his anticipation. He seemed far younger than he had seemed in Walterboro, as if worries of preparation had fallen from his shoulders once that period of preparation had ended.....Officers of the well-known 12<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group were on hand to prepare us for combat. Captain Marcan counseled in operations – Captain Sewell gave advice to the S-2 section.....Many of the Squadron had a chance to visit surrounding cities. There were flights to Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, trips to Suez and Ishmalia. And Cairo.....Opinions on Cairo were bound to vary, depending on whether one looked in his sightseeing for differences from or similarities to the good old United States. Most of our men, when traveling, search for the latter. That's the reason they often find "nothing there" when visiting famous places. To some, Cairo was full of flies and street peddlers, beggars and dirt. To others, it was a colorful slice of the orient – Cleopatra's exotic city – ancient birthplace of the world. Definitely, it was a hard place to find a good cup of coffee.....Many will remember Groppi's for excellent pastry, Sheppard's hotel for good liquor, and the pyramids for an energetic camel ride. The Grand Hotel was an appreciated gift to Service men from the American Red Cross.....Alexandria – as several put it - "That was the town." Renowned as having cleaner streets than neighboring Cairo, Alexandria was more Westernized, its swank beach hotels reminding one of similar establishments in the States. Mixed in with these was a large complement of dives where a cup of tea for the Egyptian ladies brought a handsome fee. The crescent beach, bordered with clean modern buildings and here and there a pointed minaret, had a misty sparkling quality that must have caught Cleopatra's eye when she barged in there with Anthony.....A highlight of the layover at El Kabrit was the first overseas pay call. Because no one had been paid in several months, the total amount was enormous – about \$40,000 dollars. It was all

paid in "Wallpaper" money – big vari-colored sheets of distinctly inferior paper -- "Wog money." Nearly everyone experienced difficulty with the coins, since some were of equal size and unequal value while others – with or without holes – were of unequal size and equal value. Nobody was fond of "pissasters.".....The squadron spent several days in training, chiefly skip-bombing. Then on April 8, two crews struck out for the "Blue." Pilots were Lts. Flack and Johnson. Two cooks – McCarter and Tetrault – really had the honor of being the first of the squadron to go up. They preceded the combat crews in a DC-3.....Kalaponidas also went by transport plane, on the same day the Ground Echelon departed. He carved his niche in history when he held up the wheels of war and ATC to look for his rifle.....On April 8, Lts. Flack and Johnson flew from Kabrit to Castel Benito, a final maintenance check point for aircraft entering forward operational areas. Following inspection of their planes they proceeded to Medenine, then a forward operational field, where other planes of the 340<sup>th</sup> Group were based, as well as ships of the 12<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group. On April 16, both Groups moved up to El Maou airdrome, Sfax, evacuated by the Axis a few hours earlier. Four days earlier, Lts. Flack and Johnson, riding as co-pilots in planes of the 83<sup>rd</sup> Squadron (12<sup>th</sup> Group), participated in a 12<sup>th</sup> - 340<sup>th</sup> bombing mission and were thus the first pilots of the squadron to see combat service. On April 19, Lt. Flack participated in another combat mission, this time with his entire crew: 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. John T. Hollis, Jr., co-pilot; 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Syndey C. Ormsbee, bombardier; T/Sgt. Robert Goulding, radioman; and S/Sgt. Eugene Hobart, gunner.....On Good Friday, April 23, Lts. Flack and Johnson and their respective crews participated in a 12<sup>th</sup> - 340<sup>th</sup> attack on an enemy airdrome at Soliman, at dusk, after turning back from the same target earlier in the day because of failure of the fighter escort to meet them. In the evening, however, the required fighters were on hand to meet the bombers from El Maou, and accompanied by A-30's (Baltimores) and A-20's (Bostons) the raiders went through heavy flak to smash their target. Lt. Johnson's plane was shot down in flames and he and his crew were recorded "Missing in Action." With him were 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. William B. Hille, co-pilot; 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Joseph F. Schooley, bombardier; T/Sgt. George B. French, and S/Sgt. Spencer Bomberger. No enemy aircraft were encountered.....Two days later, on Easter Sunday, Major Whittington, riding as pilot in a plane of the 489<sup>th</sup> Squadron with Lt. Deel, operations officer of that organization, as co-pilot, and a 489<sup>th</sup> crew, took off to participate in another mission. In the assembly maneuvers around the field his ship and another crashed and dove to earth with armed bomb loads. Major Whittington and the other victims – all personnel were lost – were given military burial in a cemetery outside of Sfax where German, Italian, and British soldiers were buried. It was the Major's third combat mission in the Middle East Theatre.....Captain Donald J. Marcan, a veteran 12<sup>th</sup> Group pilot, who had been assigned to the Squadron April 5<sup>th</sup> while in an attached capacity at El Kabrit, was appointed Commanding Officer on April 25 to succeed Major Whittington, and ordered to proceed to the front. He left the following day with 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Arthur R. Warnock, leaving Lt. Warnock and his crew at Castel Benito and continuing to Sfax by Air Transport.....The nine airplanes of the Squadron remaining at El Kabrit, as well as six ships of the 489<sup>th</sup>, had in the meanwhile been flown to the Deversoir depot for modification of a significant nature. Five fixed .50 calibre machine guns were mounted in the nose in such a manner that the pilots could fire them simultaneously.. It was the belief of General Brereton, at whose command the modifications were effected, that the ships thus changed were rendered particularly effective for skip bombing against defended boats and ships, especially troop-carrying barges. Three of the Squadron's modified ships, piloted respectively by 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Henry J. Schreiner, operations officer, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Horace L Henderson, and 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Harold H. Wilkerson, and their crews, were dispatched to Sfax via Castel Benito (April 26-30).....The five airplanes of the Squadron remaining at El Kabrit flew to Castel Benito April 30<sup>th</sup>, remaining there until May 3, when they proceeded to Sfax. They were piloted respectively by 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Louis F. Parsons, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Homer H. Willhite, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Ray I. Sherbourne, F/O John Simenitzky, and F/O Harley H. Anderson, and their crews.....Meanwhile, 135 officers and men of the Squadron of the Ground Echelon piled into a bunch of trucks and headed for Tunisia.....

April 12<sup>th</sup>

Somewhere around dawn the Squadron was ready to take off, but evidently the trucks were not. Headquarters used up a bunch of trucks. All the other Squadrons loaded their men. And by the time the 487<sup>th</sup> was ready to pile in, there wasn't enough transportation. Major Whittington stood by, calm but infuriated. Major Paul bounced from truck to truck, and eventually into Major Whittington. When the convoy pulled out of the gates, the 487<sup>th</sup> was mixed up with everybody else in the 340<sup>th</sup>, and trucks were busting at the seams.....The first day was definitely the hardest. There was no lunch, and the evening meal was served between 10 and 11 at night. We almost starved, but when we finally did eat, the "C" rations really did taste good.....We lost several trucks on the first day, some catching up with us days later. They began dropping out as we entered Cairo, and continued to drop out until we halted. It was a hectic day. Sgt. Preswich, in charge of keeping the wheels rolling, was very cheerful during the ordeal.....It may be recorded that a few lucky people rushed back to a roadside café, after we had parked for the night, and bought great quantities of things to eat.

13<sup>th</sup>

The battlefields through which we passed were seven months old, but they were, to us, thrilling evidences of past struggle. The convoy traveled almost 200 miles today, and much of that distance was covered with wreckage and graves. The graves probably impressed us most. At least 50 miles of today's roads were very bad. Late in the afternoon we arrived at our camp site, and area near a NAAFI called "Noah's Ark." It was a very pleasant place to stop, selling eggs, sausages, and canned fruit. We liked the EPIP dining salon, with flowers in bright shiny shell cases, and linen on the tables. "How nice of the British," we thought, "and so typical. A tea shop in the desert."

14<sup>th</sup>

We left Noah's Ark at 0630 hours, stopped outside Matrun at noon and again hit the NAAFI. This one also had a fancy name of some sort. It served tea, but it was impossible to keep the green-girted tative waiter from pouring milk into it. The NAAFI, in a building this time, was well stocked with canned peaches, pears, pickles, etc, and most of it was transferred shortly to our trucks. We didn't mean to starve, even if there were to be no stops for a noon meal. Our camp site was at Bug Bug, or Buq Buq. Most of us were intrigued by the name.

15<sup>th</sup>

Left Bug Bug at 0630 hours and arrived at Solum at 1030. The convoy wound up one side of a 2000 foot hill, and wound down the other. The burning question was : Will the gas trucks make it? They did, but it must have put gray hairs in the heads of the drivers. We traveled 145 miles, mostly up and down, and pitched camp at El Adem.

16<sup>th</sup>

A rest day. Trucks were checked and oiled and greased. nearly every one visited El Adem airport nearby and gossiped with the Limeys there. One young fellow working in armament liked P-40's but he figured American designers hadn't built such complicated machines for repair at fields like El Adem. Tobruk was not far distant, and attracted everyone because of its recent history. There were 8 ships sunk in the harbor, and the town, very much out of bounds, was blown up considerably. The grave yard, quite neat and simple, attracted many visitors. It was laid out in sections for the various

nationalities. There were three or four Americans among the many British, Italians, and others. Sgt. Walter N. Jung found one German grave with the name "Walter N. Jung" on the black head cross. M/Sgt. Lynch was among those impressed by the inscription in the cemetery: "At the setting of the sun and in the morning we shall remember them."

17<sup>th</sup>

Left El Adem at 0700 hours and passed Tobruk at 1000. The country was flat and sandy covered with cactus and sparse bushes. The convoy traveled 112 miles and stopped at Matruba for the night.

18<sup>th</sup>

Left Matruba at 0630 hours, came down a terrifically steep hill to Derna, on the sea. The road followed the sea for a while after leaving the pleasant, pretty town, and then went into the hills again. It had been blown out in places, and the convoy had to crawl through a number of detours, or "diversions" as the British called them. Senagalese were working on the roads. For 20 miles or so, the hills reminded one of Western Maryland. The valley on the other side gave us our first glimpse of enormous half-finished Italian colonial program. The fertile valley was checked with small plots of ground, each with its stucco home with "Colonization Libia" inscribed on the front. For a given number of homes, there was a community center, with a church and shops. Occupants of the project were gone, or so it seemed. From the hills overlooking the valley, the land was green all the way to the sea, which could be seen miles away.....Our camp for the night was outside Barce. Communications finally got its radio to functioning, and we got the news by short wave from England for the first time. Then night was characterized by a heavy dew.....Several officers went into the officers club at Barce, where they had a well-served but skimpy meal of something that could have been camel meat. There was beer and whiskey (Canadian Club) in limited quantities.

19<sup>th</sup>

Traveled from 75 to 80 miles, through tree-covered plateau to the dry coastal flats. A great deal of equipment scattered along the roads. The convoy went through Bengasi and camped at Kilo 18, a rather rocky area. We marveled at the great number of Liberator bombers we saw.

20<sup>th</sup>

Stayed at Kilo 18 all day, everybody cutting everybody else's hair. In the afternoon several trucks, loaded with soldiers, drove into Bengasi for the first hot bath since leaving the States (unless you might have got on in Cairo). It was wonderful. There were four separate baths, and none particularly crowded. While we were there, tow truck loads of shouting singing, hand-clapping Negroes drove up for their baths. They popped out of the lorries, fell into a quick formation, stomped their feet in several brisk facings, and fell out again. They were British pioneer troops, and didn't speak a word of English. They were certainly black.....The communications men led a song-fest at night after chow. The old songs sounded very nice.

21<sup>st</sup>

Left Kilo 18 at 0630, passed Agidabia noon. Plenty hot. Went 120 miles, camped West of Agidabia. Mosquitoes bit like hell.

22<sup>nd</sup>

Departed camp at 0700 hours. Passed El Agheila at 1100. We expected a town of considerable proportions, considering its fame, and were surprised to find only 2 buildings. From there the road meandered over a stretch of flat land to a distant border of hills. "Colonel" Blume rode up and down the convoy spreading the news that an explosion on the other side of the hills might prove interesting. He thought a supply dump had been attacked by German planes. It turned out to be a British truck, burning at the side of the road. A load of mines, saved for use in demonstrations, had exploded. One man was burned to death, and was buried by the smoldering lorry at the side of the highway. Another severely injured man was taken to a hospital in one of our ambulances.....We stopped at Marble Arch at 1400 hours, and everyone promptly went in swimming in the Mediterranean. The water was cool and very clear.

23<sup>rd</sup>

Good Friday. Traveled 120 miles through sage desert. Passed Nufilia at noon and camped about 1700 hours. Chaplain Cooper held services at 1830 in front of dispersed trucks on the side of a hill. Catholic services were held by T/Sgt. Buller, who read the Stations of the Cross.

24<sup>th</sup>

Passed Sirte at 0830 and Bureta at 1100. The roads were good except where blown out. Camped at an isolated place by the side of the road.

25<sup>th</sup>

Left camp at 0730 and passed Misurata at 1000. Camped between Homs and Tripoli, after traveling about 120 miles. Major Paul went on into Tripoli for further orders. He returned to say that Sfax, rather than Medennine, would be our destination. Easter Services were held by Chaplain Cooper after the evening meal. All were impressed by the simplicity and solemnity of the occasion. T/Sgt. Buller again held Catholic devotions. Mail was taken up for posting in Tripoli.

26<sup>th</sup>

About 0100 hours in the morning a fire broke out in the chow trucks and every guard in the convoy fired his rifle. The convoy passed through Tripoli at 0900 hours and became entangled in a mass of motor transport going to the front, was held up for a couple of hours. We camped in a grove of tall palm trees about 30 miles outside of Tripoli.....PX supplies were distributed. That mobile PX we had heard so much about had finally caught up with us.....About dark a guard (probably Brown, on the gas trucks) got news from a passing soldier that a flying Major had been killed in an airplane crash at Sfax on Easter Sunday, and that a plane of the 340<sup>th</sup> had been shot down. There was no other news, but the "flying Major" could be none other but Major Whittington.....There was an air raid over Tripoli at night.....

27<sup>th</sup>

Roughest roads of the entire trip. Drove 143 miles to Medennine, stopping there at 1600 hours. The country was little more than a wasteland.

28<sup>th</sup>

Left Medennine at 0900 hours and passed the famous Mareth Line (or what we thought was the Mareth Line) at 1100 hours. Lots of tank traps and barbed wire. The country was greener, with many lush orchards and vineyards. At 1800 hours the 1900 miles journey was completed when we skirted Sfax and drove into El Maou airport..... We were greeted by Lts. Ormsbee and Flack, who told us briefly of what had happened – that Major Whittington had been killed in a field crash on Easter Sunday, and that Lt. Johnson's ship had gone down over the target. They themselves had been on missions and had already learned to crawl up into their helmets. Captain Meriwether, who had served as Group Executive officer with the advance echelon, told us that Major Whittington and others killed in the crash had been buried with military honors in the cemetery at Sfax..... So ended the second separation of the various elements of the Squadron.

29<sup>th</sup>

The Sfax area was very pleasant. We had been told when we left Egypt that “you'll like it up there.” And we did. There were almond trees (we thought they were peaches), fruit trees, and olive trees. There were even rose bushes in bloom. The weather was pleasant – not very hot in the daytime, and cool enough for two or three blankets at night..... Digging slit trenches was something new for us. Most dug them wide and deep. Sgt. Kosack's was one of the very best..... A great deal of time and energy was spent in making tent life comfortable.

30<sup>th</sup>

The job of digging in the tents was real work. The soil, being soft, presented no real difficulty. But the shoveling did..... Most of the squadron had chow at the 489<sup>th</sup> mess and the rest ate with the 486<sup>th</sup>, our own mess hall having remained in Kabrit to serve those staying there. Mess tents had not yet been put up, and we ate on benches in the open (if you could find a bench). The “C” rations had not yet grown so very monotonous. Kalaponidas began to bake some good white bread, and there was plenty of peanut butter and jelly. Maybe our appetites were being built up by the digging, but our four good friends – chili con carne, corned beef, meat and vegetable hash, and spam – didn't taste bad at all..... Trouble was had keeping wash water hot enough.

May 1, 1943

Captain Marcan was becoming known as a good guy and showed promise of being a swell commanding officer. He was trying to bring to the 487<sup>th</sup> some of the improvised comforts of the 12<sup>th</sup> Group. A shower bath was being constructed (Sgt. King appeared to be in charge, or something). The ready room was being converted into a pleasant reading room.

2<sup>nd</sup>

The war to the North was drawing to a close. Sgt. James Johnson made a bet with Cpl Lewis Lloyd that it would be over by May 15<sup>th</sup>. We saw a few evidences of it – Sfax was raided – the guns around the harbor made a pretty barrage, like the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. And being tenderfeet we hit slit trenches on double time. After all, we could very well have been an alternate target.

3<sup>rd</sup>

In Sfax we had our first chance to examine a bombed city and talk to the residents. In the dock area and the business section adjacent the damage was great. Some bombs had hit in the old Arab section of town, and some citizens were saddened and somewhat angered by this bombing of non-military objects. Some blamed the Americans, and some said it might have been the Germans. Most shrugged "C'est la guerre." They liked us and asked us to their homes and to their dances. We did not like to eat their food because there was great scarcity of food in the town.....The fields of grain were ripe and yellow around the airport. An agreement was being worked out with the Arab governor whereby the workers could come in and cut their crop.

4<sup>th</sup>

Combat crews and partial combat crews of the squadron participated with personnel and airplanes of the 489<sup>th</sup> Squadron in a 36-ship raid on Zagonan on the shrinking Tunisian front. Although all aircraft of the 340<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Groups returned, the raid was not an unqualified success, since one of the two groups – it is difficult to determine which – dropped its bombs behind the allied line, causing material damage. In the mission, which went over the target about 0815, Lt Schreiner flew as co-pilot, his first combat assignment, with Lt. Flack and his crew. Other 487<sup>th</sup> pilots who flew as co-pilots were 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Wilkerson, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Henderson, and 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Warnock.....It is worth pointing out in connections with this operational activity in Tunisia that many of the raids were made in accompaniment with Baltimores and Boston bombers of the R.A.F. under cover of American P-40's and British Spitfires. Owing to the marked aerial inferiority of the Axis in this theatre following the push from Alamein, our bombers were wont to encounter little fighter opposition on their raids, although the opposition by anti-aircraft fire was disastrously powerful.

5<sup>th</sup>

The camels bouncing placidly across the familiar GI scene offered a continuous source of amusement. Their incongruity ("they look like they were made from different parts of several animals," someone said) never failed to bring a laugh, and their enormous loads of junk – like the great piles heaped on the little jackasses – made them even more comical. The "Wogs" (as the native Arabs were called) did not appeal to the American soldier. He could not forgive them their dirt, their laziness, and their penchant for overcharging for their eggs and vino.....The Yacht Club boys, the indefatigable team who had entertained us on the West Point, appeared again with their vigorous vulgarity.

6<sup>th</sup>

One airplane and two crews of the 487<sup>th</sup> Squadron participated in a 36-ship bombing mission against supply dumps and troop concentrations at Furna and Massicault. In addition, several first pilots, inexperienced in combat, rode co-pilot with pilots of the 489<sup>th</sup> Squadron. The 36 ships in the mission were from the 12<sup>th</sup> and 340<sup>th</sup> Bomb Groups and were covered by Spitfires and P-40's. Leading the formation in "El Senor," a 487<sup>th</sup> plane, was Col. William C. Milla, Commanding Officer of the 340<sup>th</sup> Group. Captain Donald Marcan was his co-pilot. Other crew members were 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Edgar C. Penney, Group Bombing Officer; T/Sgt. Gordon Warren, radio man; and Sgt. Russell E. McGuire, gunner, the latter two of whom were making their first combat missions. Take-off was at 0615.....The formation encountered very heavy flak after entering enemy territory and the leading ship with Colonel Mills and Capt. Marcan was hit and seen to to down in flames. Reports that three parachutes were seen to stream out of the falling ship were unconfirmed.....The formation went over the target at 0746 and placed their

bombs with excellent results in the target area, where the 69<sup>th</sup> and 86<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadiers were known to be retreating. As a result of Allied raids on this target and on St. Cyprien, about 10 miles closer to Tunis, Allied forces were able to advance beyond St. Cyprien by evening. Many 80 mm guns were abandoned in the retreat.....Two of the returning 25 planes made belly landings and one bailed out its crew over the field before crashing with a bomb load. Major Bachrach, co-pilot, brought in a ship whose pilot, Lt. Bennett, had been killed.....In the afternoon at 1401 hours, 18 ships of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 340<sup>th</sup> Groups took off for the St. Cyprien target. This time the raiders encountered much less intense flak and all planes returned safely. On the raid from the 487<sup>th</sup> Squadron were Lt. D. Scott, pilot of the 489<sup>th</sup> Squadron; Lt. Arthur R. Warnock riding as co-pilot; Lt. Robert N. Peterson, Navigator-Bombardier; T/Sgt. Edgar L. Kinsinger, radio man; and S/Sgt. Fred L. Hall, gunner. Lt. Kile of the 489<sup>th</sup> Squadron piloted ship #42-32246, assigned to the 487<sup>th</sup>, with 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Homer H. Willhite acting as co-pilot.

7<sup>th</sup>

No missions. 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Lewis F. Parsons assumed command of the Squadron, succeeding Captain Donald J. Marcan.....The fall of Tunis was cause for great rejoicing, but it was anticipated that the siege in Cap Bon would be rather long. We felt that the Germans would be difficult to pry loose from the rugged terrain of the peninsula.

8<sup>th</sup>

Four of the squadron's crews flew in a 36-ship formation of the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 340<sup>th</sup> Groups against Pantelleria landing ground. Attacking the same target where five large formations of A-30's and A-20's. All of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 340<sup>th</sup> Group's airplanes returned without mishap. Over the target the ack-ack was of moderate intensity and poor accuracy. It was said of the Italian A/A gunners that they shot before and after bombs away, but took to their holes when the bombs began to fall. Only one lone gunner, to whom the squadron felt it should drop a medal in a bottle, kept popping away while the bombs landed well on the field and runways.....The participants were: Lts. Marshall E. Lambert, Benjamin S. Howle, and Robert N. Peterson; T/Sgt. Joseph Wynne, and S/Sgt. Herbert Birkley. Lts. Harold Wilkerson, Harold H. Hague, and Robert J. Sather; T/Sgt. Dominic Grillo, and S/Sgt. William Durie. Lts Don W. Scott (489<sup>th</sup>), Arthur R. Warnock, Henry F. Wrede; T/Sgt. Edgar I. Kinsinger, and S/Sgt. Frederick Hall.....Lt. Parsons flew his first combat mission, as co-pilot for Lt. Wagner of the 489<sup>th</sup> Squadron.

9<sup>th</sup>

Mothers Day. Arrangements were made for telegrams to be sent, somewhat late.....The airfields and landing ground on Pantelleria Island were again the target for allied bombers. 36 B-25's from the 12<sup>th</sup> and 340<sup>th</sup> Groups, including five ships and 3 crews from the 487<sup>th</sup> unloaded on the target. The 340<sup>th</sup> element of 18 ships took off at 0702, crossing the target at 0814 with a fighter escort waiting there, and dropped all bombs in the target area, starting a number of fires. There were no casualties or damage to our aircraft. The participants were: Lts. Warnock, Sherbourne, and Sullivan; T/Sgt. Kinsinger, and S/Sgt. Hall....F/O Bell, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Willhite, and 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Cunningham, Sgt. Reilly, and S/Sgt. Hickman....Lts. Henderson, Howle, and White, T/Sgt. Furey and S/Sgt. Bilodeau.

10<sup>th</sup>

In the morning the airfield and dispersal area at Pantelleria Island were bombed once more, as well as the barracks there. In the afternoon the attack was shifted to the harbor area.....The first attack was at 0835 and started four fires. The general comment of those participating in the raid was that it was the most effective raid staged on this target by our planes. Participants: Lts. Flack, Schreiner, Ormsbee; T/Sgt. Goulding, S/Sgt. Hobart.....Lts. Sherbourne, McCabe, Wrede, S/Sgt. Bernstein, S/Sgt. Berry.....Lts. Willhite, Emslie, Cunningham; T/Sgt. Pitonyak, S/Sgt. Dzialo.....When the raiders went over the harbor in the afternoon, many of the bombs fell in the water, but some fell on the town and docks and started fires. Participants: Lts. Henderson, Brophy, White; T/Sgt. Furey, S/Sgt. Bilodeau.....F/O's Anderson and Lewis, Lt. Sather; T/Sgt. Berninger, S/Sgt. Crane.....Lts. Warnock, Fonda, Sullivan; T/Sgt. Kinsinger, S/Sgt. Hall.....F/O's Bell and Simenitzky, Lt. Loera; Sgt. Reilly, S/Sgt. Hickman.....Lts. Wilkerson, Hague, Loysen; T/Sgt. Grillo, S/Sgt. Durie.

11<sup>th</sup>

While the 6<sup>th</sup> Armored Division of the British 8<sup>th</sup> Army were cutting through from Tunis southeast to Hammamet to slice off the entire Cap Bon peninsula, and elements of the 19<sup>th</sup> French Corps were driving Northeast through Zagouan, the 487<sup>th</sup> Squadron participated in an allied bombing smash aimed almost at the center of the considerable pocket of troops who were thus surrounded above the Enfidaville Line. Three crews from the 487<sup>th</sup> and 33 other crews from the 340<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Groups battered gun emplacements at Djebel El Krera, about 10 miles Northwest of Enfidaville. Crews reported they hit the target 24 times with a good pattern. Participants: Lts. Flack, Hollis, Ormsbee, T/Sgt. Goulding, S/Sgt. Hobart.....Lts. Howle, Parsons, Peterson; T/Sgt. Furey, S/Sgt. Bilodeau.....F/O's Bell and Simenitzky, Lt. Loera; Sgt. Reilly, S/Sgt. Hickman.

12<sup>th</sup>

Organized Axis resistance in North Africa virtually ceased about 1800 hours May 12, 1943, after three and a half years of violent struggle on battlefields from Tunis to the gates of Alexandria and back. Only one strong pocket of axis resistance located in the hills behind Enfidaville, still rejected German General Freyberg's order to surrender. General Von Arnim, who had succeeded as actual supreme commander of the Axis forces in Africa when Rommel left, had been captured about noon on Cap Bon peninsula, trying to escape.....On this last day of resistance an 18-ship formation of Mitchells from the 12<sup>th</sup> and 340<sup>th</sup> Groups bombed enemy gun installations and troops in the pocket of resistance above Enfidaville. Three combat crews and airplanes of the 487<sup>th</sup> Squadron participated in the mission. they were over the target at 1530 and started three fires and apparently silenced some light A/A guns firing below. Friendly troops outlined the target area with white smoke. Participants: Lts. Lambert, Garrett, and Brown; T/Sgt. Wynne, S/Sgt. Birkley.....Lts. Warnock, Fonda, Sullivan; T/Sgt. Kinsinger, S/Sgt. Hall.....Lts. Wilderson, Leete, Loysen; T/Agt. Grillo, S/Sgt. Durie.....An English Air Liaison Officer at El Maou reported news from Tunis that Captain Donald J. Marcan was discovered in a Tunis hospital. His condition was unknown and the fate of the other occupants of "El Senor" was still a matter of conjecture.....Col. A. E. Tokaz, 340<sup>th</sup> Group Commander, reported that 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Frances X. Tehan, the squadron's operations officer when the 487<sup>th</sup> left the States, was said to be safe in West Palm Beach with 4 others of his crew after living for 21 days on "K" rations on a Caribbean Island. With Lt. Tehan when his plane disappeared Feb. 18 into a turbulent weather area between Florida and Porto Rico were F/O Robert Lytle, co-pilot; 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Robert Crowell, navigator; M/Sgt. Jess W. Brazell, aerial engineer; T/Sgt. James Hughbanks, radio operator; S/Sgt. Fussell Hinchman, gunner; and M/Sgt. Richard Hanson, passenger.

Thus ended the North African campaign, just one month after Lts. Flack and Johnson rode as co-pilots to become the first men of the 487<sup>th</sup> to see combat. There were still 33 officers and enlisted men remaining in Kabrit, and 3 crews and planes were yet to arrive. The squadron had not yet flown a full squadron formation, but nearly all the crew members had been checked out in combat on at least one mission, and they definitely knew what it was like. And they were to carry on without stopping, just as if a great campaign had not come to an abrupt and very decisive end.

Cairo, Egypt  
31 July 1943

General Orders

### EXTRACT

Commendation of Organizations for Distinguished Service. The following-named organizations of the 9<sup>th</sup> U.S. Air Force are commended for their distinguished service in the Middle East campaign hereinafter described:

The 340<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group (M), Desert Air Task Force, Ninth United States Air Force. For outstanding performance of duty in action against the enemy in direct tactical support of the British 8<sup>th</sup> Army in the Tunisian campaign in the Middle East Theatre from march, 1943, to the capitulation of the Axis forces in Africa. Living under conditions of great personal hardship and danger in the desert directly behind the advanced echelons of the ground forces and operating through all types of weather and despite frequent enemy attacks, the flying and ground personnel of this organization at all times exhibited the greatest courage, resourcefulness, initiative, efficiency, and devotion to duty. By the successful execution of devastating bombing attacks on enemy airdromes, supply lines, troops, and installations in which were encountered intensive anti-aircraft fire and repeated attacks by enemy fighter planes, numbers of which were destroyed, this organization contributed directly to the destruction of enemy forces and the expulsion of the Axis forces from the continent of Africa. The meritorious performance of missions and devotion to duty demonstrated by this organization in action against the enemy are worthy of the highest degree of emulation.

By Command of Major General Brereton:

V.H. Strahm  
Acting Chief of Staff

H. H. Wild,  
Lt. Col, A.G.D.

On September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1943, a Foreward was written by General Brereton as a preface for pamphlets entitled "Twenty-Four Hours of Hell" written by S/Sgt. James Q. House and illustrated by Sgt. Gregory C. Moore, describing the activities of the 340<sup>th</sup> Group on May 6, 1943: "The Avengers have fought valiantly. In their brief but active career as a medium bombardment group of the Ninth Air Force they

established an enviable record. It is a record of long and arduous missions; of operations under pioneering difficulties in the early part of their existence. It is a record not unattended by misfortune, including the loss of a gallant commander in action over Tunisia.

“They began independent operations as the 340<sup>th</sup> Group precipitately in the midst of a desert and in the midst of a campaign with begged, borrowed, and improvised equipment. Early struggles and misfortunes undoubtedly did much to create the fine esprit d'corps which is so marked in this Group. Their career as an independent group in the Ninth from April 19 to the fall of Sicily spanned the most active period in the history of the air force. It is an outfit of which any commanding general may well be proud.

“No fairly reported story of this group could lack for interest. Theirs is a record which needs no embellishment. I heartily commend their good works and endorse any written account of them.

Signed Lewis F. Brereton

Transcribed by Dan Setzer  
Son of Sgt. Hymie Setzer, 487<sup>th</sup> BS  
<http://home.comcast.net/~dhsetzer>  
June 6, 2009