340th BOMBARDMENT GROUP (Medium)

ACTIVATED25 August, 1942

ENTERED COMBAT

April, 1942

DEACTIVATED

4 October, 1945



486th SQ.



487th SQ.



340th Group



488th SQ.



489th SQ.

SAGA OF THE 340TH

From material submitted by LEONARD KAUFMANN Jr. 489

August 25. 1942 saw the birth of another infant in Uncle Sam's prolific Air Force family. No announcements were sent to Hermann Goering, but chances are that if he did learn of it, his ponderous paunch merely rippled a bit . . . this puling infant not even meriting a good healthy belly-laugh of distain.

As a matter of fact, no particular attention was paid to the event at Columbia, S.C., the birthplace. The birth certificate, CAAB General Order #19 was filed, Colonel William C. Mills appointed guardian, and the 340th was on its way.

At Columbia, the original cadre was quickly brought to practically T/O strength. Officers with shiny bars and popping chests non-chalantly showed the ropes to new arrivals . . . "newer" only by a few hours. Enlisted men popped in from all over but squadron First Sergeants were not too busy to drop their sewing (they got a new stripe every other day) and help the new boys pick out the best tents, and make sure they were supplied with all home comforts. Things hummed from morning to late at night . well, the Officers Club was open until midnight.

Squadron S-2's were busy planning mock missions in the best Harrisburg style and detail . . . Squadron operations were racing each other up and down the efficiency charts. September merged with October, October with November, and then Thanksgiving was history.

Came November 30 with orders to move to Walterboro, South Carolina for third phase training. The first day of December dawned at 0400 for the 340th . . . cold . . . overcast. The barracks were all scrubbed, men and baggage loaded on trucks for an early start . . . and six hours later the convoy snaked its way down the white sand road, headed for another part of South Carolina. Late that afternoon we stretched legs Walterboro. The ships and the Flight echelon did not arrive on schedule since the night before we left. Columbia was visited by a violent hail storm which did more damage in ten minutes than our flying cowboys would have accomplished in many weeks. The Group lost in all, fourteen planes.

It was the first of three occasions on which the 340th would be been practically stripped of ships through no fault of its own. In the later disasters, we had the coordinated help of the smooth-functioning 12th Air Force to make quick replacements, but this time we were on our own. That "our own" was not too bad is evidenced by the fact that while first estimates of damage repair were up to a couple of months, actually the group was operating in a relatively few days, thanks to the unstinting labor of the loyal ground crews. Maybe we did wage keen rivalry between individual squadrons (with everybody taking a sock at Group) but let anything or anybody tackle this GROUP ... watchout!

With a shortage of planes, Group thought it advisable to intensify the school schedule and institute a bit of infantry drill to occupy our minds and muscles. Classes were held, and usually the instructor at least was there. We hiked and marched sometimes almost as much as six miles a day and all of five minutes with gas mask on. Group also formed the habit of calling imaginary air raids, alerts and missions at the most ungodly hours. The latter were the delight of our Jeep jockeys . . . total blackout, the windshields opaque with frost but a good excuse for doing better than the official "15 miles an hour on the post."

They loaded us down with equipment, pumped us full of bugs at the Group Dispensary and the smart boys filled us with rumors . . . positive information, we were going to China . . . Burma . . . India . . . England even "Skowhegan"

One afternoon the Flight crews took off into the "Wild Blue Yonder" via truck. It would be two full months . . . months full of sights, strange people and strange smells,



COL. WILLIAM C. MILLS 340th Group Commanding Officer Sept., 1942 -- 6 May 1943

We know little of Colonel Mill'sbackground except that he was married, and had a son, and was a full Colonel when he was assigned to command the 340th Bombardment Group when it was activated on 20 August 1942. Prior to that date Colonel Mills served as a temporary commander of the newly activated 321st Bombardment Group.

Most of the men who were assigned to the new group were inexperienced in both flying and military skills, and of course none had combat experience. With skill, Colonel Mills selected the men who seemed best suited for leadership, and with patience, molded them into a combat unit, preparing them for the rigors ahead. When they were needed, ready or not, the 340th moved from the United States to the combat zone during January - March 1943. This, too, was handled with his usual skill and competence.

The 340th arrived and began combat operations on April 1943. His life was to be short lived. On 6 May, 1943 while leading a formation over Furnay, Algeria the aircraft he was flying in received a direct hit of enemy anti-aircraft fire and went down. He perished in the subsequent crash. His death was later confirmed by Captain Marcan, who was flying as pilot in the plane

The name

COLONEL WILLIAM C. MILLS

appears on the "Memorial Wall of the Missing" in the Carthage National Cemetery, Carthage, Tunisia.

prepared by George Wells

before the Flight and the Ground echelon would join up, after circling the globe between them.

On 29 January, the Ground Echelon climbed into waiting trucks headed for a very secret destination which everybody knew was Pittsburg, California.

Camp Stoneman was a beautifully laid out, equipped and operated post with everything from commissary stores to movie houses. followed by some days of stiff tests of physical fitness and endurance what with calisthenics in cold dark dawns, nurses, debarkation nets, an obstacle course and the never-to-be-forgotten twelve-mile hike. The enlisted men were warned to put everything they would need for several weeks into their "A"

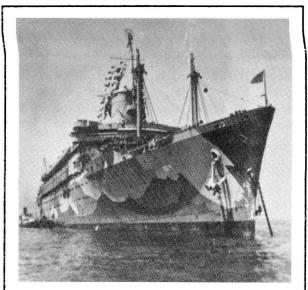
bags. Each man sorted out his half acre or so of belongings and found to his surprise that the Army hadn't made "A" bags anywhere large enough, but the "B" bags were far too large for just a gas mask and helmet.

On St. Valentine's Day, every GI and his "A" bag, and officers with his hand luggage marched aboard the GI ferry boat, sailed down the bay to San Francisco, there to board the U.S.S. West Point former luxury liner "America". and converted to a troop ship.

Late in the evening, the last man staggered on board under a load of bags and blankets, rifle, overcoat, mask and helmet. Finally the good ship West Point quieted down as tired men dropped off to sleep in the various compartments, and in all stages of undress.

For the next forty-two days the men of the 340th "enjoyed" an all expenses tour of the southern hemisphere. All alone on a vast expanse of empty sea where the nearest land was straight down and nobody was in a hurry to get there. The nights were particularly beautiful. It seemed that we had more than our share of moon light under which the music of volunteer orchestras and singing groups took on a nostalgic sweetness.

We touched briefly at Wellington, New



U.S.S. WEST POINT
The former Luxury liner U.S.S. AMERICA

Zealand, then on south around the island through the Tasman Sea across to Australia where we were given the hospitality townspeople. We headed next for Bombay, India where we smelled the smells and saw the sights. On the third day we pulled out and started a dizzy zig-zagging course across the Indian Ocean into the Gulf of Aden, towards the Straights of Bab el Mandab. The latest rumor that we were doomed to patrol the Red Sea was seemingly confirmed, they gave us pocket guides to Egypt and phonograph records of the Arabic language. The hospital filled up with the first victims of a run of GI's. Much progress was made in learning the new language for among numerous other things, the guide book said that "FAYN-ma-ra-HEED" meant where is the toilet?"



First Class Lower Deck

29 March, 1943 . . . SUEZ! End of the route, all out! We anchored in the stream at 1000 hours and went ashore in the rickety native boats about the size of harbor tugs, held together as far as we could see by bailing wire and grass rope. The engineers crowded on all steam the rusty boilers would carry and, amid the hoots and jeers of the winners, the boats raced for shore. Here we were herded onto a dinky, narrow-gauge train for a ride to the field . . El Kabrit on Little Bitter Lake beside the Suez Canal.

Our new home was a vast expanse of sand which made pitching our tents no easy task, but by supper time the camp was pretty well shaken down, and we took our first look around. We saw our first evidence of war in the gaping roofs, and shrapnel-perforated walls of the hangars, and were suitably impressed when the Flight echelon . . . old timers who had been there a week or so . . . casually mentioned that Jerry raids were a daily occurrence. They further pointed out that the prisoner-of-war camps across the lake were brightly lighted at night and served to guide the Stukas to our location.

We heard the saga of the Flight echelon, ... how they traveled by train in accommodations to which they were not accustomed ,nor expected, as " The Cream of the Crop". . .

how Captain Bailey practically tore to shreds an engineering officer who had ideas about the kind of planes he was going to turn over to the crews for the long ocean hop. Naturally, they snowed us under with their tales of difficult navigation, beautiful gals and wild parties, and the final mad dash to Cairo with thirsty engines consuming gallons of oil.

Most of the boys made it, but to the grief and sorrow of their comrades in some of the squadrons: there had been a few losses . . . boys who had left the States with high endeavor in their hearts, and while they had not seen actual combat, had in fact sacrificed their lives to the cause in which they believed. Can any of us do more?

EI KABRIT, EGYPT

Kabrit was an immense camp with many buildings housing the Post Office, PX, the combat crews and of course the Group. There was a movie theater where "Mr.Shifty Shafto" sold Ballantyne's for 63 cents a can. The walls and roof were well ventilated with shrapnel holes, and with the place being equipped with wide rafters, it did double duty as a bird These birds, although without benefit of schooling in the theory of bombing, still did mighty well in practice.

There was sand everywhere, and not a tree in sight. But we had air conditioned latrines and washrooms with the most invigorating cold water assisted by the ice-cold breezes blowing right off the lake.

We had our first "mail call" . . . one that made a lot of us fathers, and from the way some folks acted, you'd think that it had never been done before. Those who didn't rate babies began to adopt Egyptian chow hounds.

A shave and a haircut cost all of 12 cents, and took two minutes for the haircut and fifteen seconds for the shave. It was asserted, but never proven, that we bought back the skin in the form of leather souvenirs.

On 4 April we had a rip roaring sand storm, the wind blowing a howling gale, the visibility about 25 feet and powder fine sand seeping



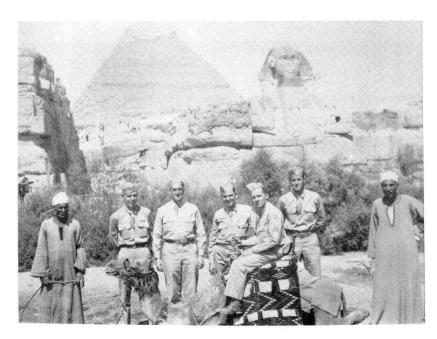
BLOW, BLOW, BLOW!!

into everything no matter how tightly it was closed. Many tents pulled their stakes and ambled off across the desert followed by the belongings of their occupants, the latter bringing up a cursing rear.

Life at El Kabrit was mostly routine relieved by swimming in the lake or baseball and by trips to Ismalia, Cairo, Televiv and Palestine Then one morning the Group told us that there would be parties for all . . A, B, C and D. The combat crews were "A Party" and flew off to Medenine, Tunisia. Some of the elite of the ground personnel were "B Party" and, in C-47s, waddled along above the desert in the prop wash of "A" party.

Some of the men stayed behind to play baseball, swim in the lake and take three day passes to establish the custom, which is still followed of throwing water on the heads of Gheri drivers from the windows of the Grand Hotel. Others had their pictures taken on camels in front of the Pyramids

By far the largest party however was that which threw its baggage into an assortment of war-weary Canadian and British trucks and pursued Rommel across the desert from Alemein to Sfax while the British Army got all Fifteen days after leaving of the credit. Kabrit, the convoy unloaded at Sfax and the combat crews more or less reluctantly, returned to them the priveleges of guard duty and KP details and other odd jobs.



340th GUYS'S and "FRIENDS"

L-R: John Gilliam, 489yj Crew Chief; Cliff Williams, 489th Line Chief; John Paariberg, 489th Crew Chief (John was killed in the air raid on Corsica) Orville Estil, 489th Crew Chief.

MEDENINE, TUNISIA

Meanwhile the Flight echelon and the DC-3 boys covered the distance to Medenine in a few hours, and were nicely settled into that dusty hole. They had pulled off several missions under the tutelage of the 12th Bomb Group and felt like veterans.

At Medenine we dug a long series of slit trenches and tent "cellars" but never afterward, with the possible exception of Hergla, did we find harder ground. This being our first experience and knowing that this was a cleared (?) minefield did not add any enthusiasm to our shovels.

After getting nicely settled, the next thing was, of course, to move on. In the early dark of 16 April camp was struck. It was a bright and sunny day and fairly warm, except for occasional thick dust, we enjoyed a Cook's Tour of the so recently contested battle ground. There was evidence all around in the form of wrecked equipment, vehicles, fieldpieces, piles of land mines, etc. We hustled by the piles of mines beside the road but hoped the sappers had left none for our

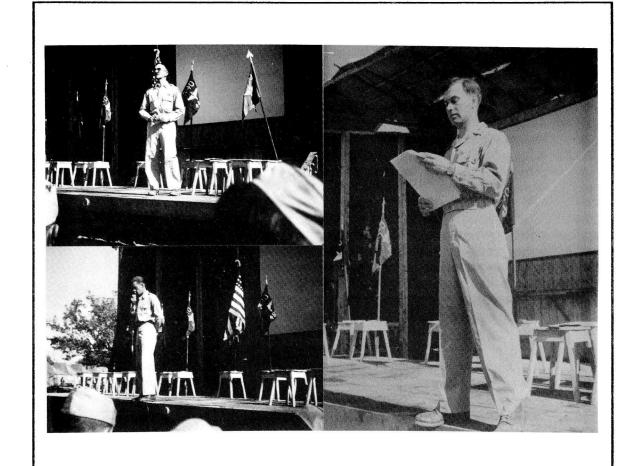
truck wheels to find as Limey road-hogs forced us over.

SFAX, TUNISIA

Our new home was in the midst of an orchard of almond, peach, olive and apricot trees as well as some whose fruits we did not recognize. We found lima beans, giant peas, scallions and wheat all ripe and ready for picking.

The dirt and grass landing field was in pretty good shape although there were craters and unexploded bombs over the whole area. Wrecked Me-109s and Italian planes were plentiful, evidence of the efficiency of the raids by some of our boys not so many days before. Souvenir hunters had a field day.

While the group was credited with seven missions flown with the 12th Group at Medenine, it was at Sfax that we really began to function, but briefing was still done by the 12th who were located only about a mile or so away, but using the same field.



Photos from Tokaz collection

Easter Sunday 1943 was a black day for the 340th. It dawned bright and fair with no hint of the tragedy to come. Church was held in a field of bright red Poppies under the wings of the planes. Just after noon we were briefed for a run to Soliman South, the planes took off an hour later. While they were circling to join up two of the ships collided, plummeted to the ground and burned, killing both crews... eleven men in all.

6 May. Another bad day! On an early morning mission, the plane flown by Colonel Mills took a direct hit over the enemy lines. There seemed to be no hope for any of the crew. Later, after Tunis fell, it was learned that Captain Marcan was found convalescing in a former German hospital and vacuated to the States. Eventually word was received that Lt. Zarega, Group Navigator, survived also.

In another plane, also a lead plane, the pilot was killed. Major Bachrach, Group Operatons Officer, brought the plane back, with bombs hung and no landing gear, to a crash landing. Another ship came back with no hydraulics and the crew bailed out, the plane crashing about a mile from the field.

Upon the death of Colonel Mills, Lt. Colonel A.E. Tokaz assumed command of the 340th. Things at Sfax settled down to the business of war, although we chafed at the policy which kept us tied to the apron strings of the 12th Bomb group. We dug slit trenches in the orchards and wheat fields just as the ack-ack started.

On 9 May, having driven the enemy into the Cap Bon Peninsula, we left the mopping up to the infantry and turned our attention to the island of Pantelleria, the stepping stone to Italy. The reduction of their vaunted island



LT. COL ADOLPH E. TOKAZ 340th

Group Commanding Officer
7 May 1943 to 8 January 1944

Adolph E. Tokaz, was born in Walpole, Massachusetts in 1913. His wife is the former Frances Jones of Saluda S.C. They have two sons and a daughter. Tik received his B.S. degree from Massachusetts State College (Now the University of Massachusetts} furthered and education with a Masters Degree at Duke University. He has since completed post graduate studies at University of South Carolina, Iowa State and Florida State Universities.

He received a commission as 2nd. Lieutenant in the Cavalry Reserve in 1936, After completing flight school in June, he was commissioned in Army Air Corps in 1938.

When the 340th Bomb Group was being formed Maj. Tokaz was assigned as Group Executive Officer, as primary duty, and Group Operations Officer as additional duty. On 2 November 1942 he was assigned as Group Operations Officer and promoted to Lt. Colonel.

Col. Tokaz was serving as Operation Officer on 6 May 1943 when Colonel Mills was shot down. He immediately took command of the devastated unit, reassigned people to fill the slots that were vacated by loss, and continued operations.

On 8 January 1944 Lieut. Colonel Adolph "Tik" Tokaz left the 340th Bomb Group being assigned as Assistant Operations Officer at TBF (Tactical Bomber Force). And on 15 January 1944 he was assigned to XII Bomber Command as Assistant A-3. His next assignment was with the 57th Bomb Wing Operations Officer under Brigadier General Knapp. When Colonel Charles Olmsted was moved to 57th Wing Headquarters as Operations Officer, Tokaz served as assistant until 11 May 1944 when he returned to the ZI. Upon his return to the United States he was assigned to the Columbia. S.C. AAB as Deputy Commanding Officer, and on 6 October he became Director Of Training.

Adolph E. "Tik" Tokaz retired from the USAF in 1961 as a full Colonel. He and his wife now reside in Columbia, S.C.

Prepared by George Wells

fortress was entirely a matter of pinpoint destruction . . . coastal defenses on the island perimeter while the airfield and harbor were practically ignored. One after another the coastal batteries were destroyed in the smothering crescendo of falling bombs. The bombing destroyed practically all defenses. After this, the first all out aerial offensive, white crosses of surrender were displayed on the ground and out ground forces were able to occupy the island in a matter of minutes.

When we transferred the pressure to Pantelleria from Cap Bon, the German 90th Light took heart and continue to give trouble around Enfidaville. They were warned that unless they agreed to surrender, the "Golden 18's" (their name for our B-25's) would be over in twenty minutes. They didn't . . . we did . . . and the Battle of Africa was over! The newspapers didn't play it up exactly that way, but you'll note that in six weeks after the 340th, as a unit, went into action, the Axis folded up in Tunisia. The bloomin' British Eighth Army did, but we didn't mind.

13 May became a memorable day for the men of the 340th. A bountiful breakfast was served . . . grapefruit juice . . . cream of wheat . . . hot cakes, with syrup, bacon and jam.

hot cakes, with syrup, bacon and jam. What did we do to deserve this?

The rest of the stay at Sfax was practically a social affair, except that everybody was at this time busily catering to that horror of war known as the GI's. Two elements in this sport are speed and accuracy. Some made it, some didn't and some simply gave up trying and bought new underwear and pyjamas. The net result was a more frequent relocationing of targets and a general loss of twenty pounds.

The remnants of the 340th which had been left at El Kabrit showed up at the end of May 1943, and as soon as they got their tents up, somebody discovered that the war wasn't over after all. The orderly rooms were rolled up, the latrines knocked down and it was moving day again. The new stomping ground would be at a place called Hergla, Tunsia.

HERGLA, TUNISIA

Hergla was and probably still is barren expanse of sand and thistles. It was near the sea, and in the background, we had a mountain at the foot of which lies Enfidaville, the last hold out of the 90th Light which we would like to think we had a hand in blasting out. There were nice cool breezes from the sea, when they weren't hot breezes from the desert.

Life at Hergla wasn't too dull. In the mornings there were the gnats that drove us crazy; during the day the flies, lizzards, giant grasshoppers, scorpions and mice contested for every inch of space; in the night, malaria laden mosquitos gave close support to desert rats on patrol.

After supper one night, the Group softened Lampedusa and the next day the Navy swam in and took over. With some help from the RAF and the rest of the AAF, we had cleaned up Africa and Pantelleria right on the button, and now Lampedusa. It was time for a breather, For the next three weeks, we worked hard at eating watermelons at a buck a throw, putting in sack time and listening to rumors of the great concentration of ships and men all up and down the coast.

On 2 July, TBF let us in in the secret .. we were to start working again, with Sicily as the target. So on the third, we inaugurated the Sicilian Shuttle Service and on successive days, staged a Roman Holiday over Comiso airdrome, making hideous skeletons of the buildings and plowing up the runways. Nobody told us that a month later, we'd have to clean up the mess, or we might have been less enthusiastic.

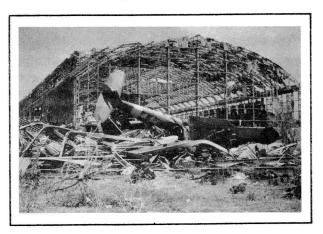
While we rustled eggs and melons and cursed the blowing sand and lack of mail, the bomb line was creeping across Sicily and promising another Cap Bon at Messina. So to be nearer out targets as well as to the foods, which we heard were plentiful in Sicily, we packed up and moved again.

COMISO, SICLIY

Comiso had been a regular field for the Italians, and was well equiped with permanent buildings, that had been designed as permanent when Mare Nostrum was still the fond dream of Mussolini. When we moved in they were mere shells of their former grandeur . . a bit of destruction we'd had hand in.

We found more than a score of Me 109s in perfect condition and plenty more Italian and German planes which had made their last landings. The boys had a field day stripping souvenirs and collected so darned many parts they decided it would be easier to fly them than to cart them around.

After sweeping up the "crowsfeet" we had





DIGGING POST HOLES

July 3, 1943 Comiso Airdrome, Sicily

dropped some time before, clearing a few mines and filling a few holes, we settled down to enjoy Sicily. Our areas were plumb in the middle of tremendous grape orchards where Concord type blue grapes and luscious big white Malagas were just getting to their best. There were almonds and peaches just ready for picking, but it was a continuous race with the owner who also had the wish for the fruits of his labor.

Between missions to such familiar spots as Randazzo, Adrano and the unforgettable Messina, which at that time was the most heavily defended spot in the world, the flak happy combat crews and the sand happy ground personnel relaxed in the grape arbors while native labor dug in the tents, hacked out slit trenches. After the dust and "C" rations of Hergla, the free fruit and clear air of Sicily, made Comiso seem like a GI paradise. And the good people of Sicily were

fairly friendly inspite of our rather rough treatment of their town.

Came 25th August and Group staged a birthday party. There were the usual ho-hum speeches and the usual absence of timed brass hats. Music was furnished by a 10-piece native orchestra which was really good. A picnic supper was served and was followed by a magician, some talent from the squadrons and in the evening, a movie. The affair went off in grand style and was all to the good from both the entertainment and moral-building standpoints.

We knew what to expect when things came to such a pass that they were giving us free entertainment and eats . . and sure enough the next day came the orders to move. The scouting party came back with harrowing details of dead bodies tied to booby traps, mines so thick that only the skinniest sappers



FRIENDLY ???
A Captured and Converted-109

were sent in to locate them, and similar comforting information. We just knew that we'd enjoy this new spot... Catania, A/D

CATANIA, SICILY

At Catania we found everything SNAFU. The British Eighth Army was camped all over the place. Having found the field practically one continuous crater and all the buildings mere shells from our bombing, they had decided nobody in his senses would try to use this place for an airfield. They just didn't know our experience and ability with a pick and shovel. After considerable urging, we nudged them over to give elbow room for our people and planes.

We were going to miss the orchards and vinyards, but figured that this loss was offset by a nearby sandy beach.

Jerry welcomed us with a raid just as we sat down to supper. Nobody spilled his coffee, but the guns on the line, and all around the area, in spots we didn't know about, opened up. We hit the ditch as one man. Supper was "meat and vegetable stew" again anyhow. Little damage was done although some of the folks up at Group headquarters were chased around a shelter by fragments.

We had frequent Jerry visits but on only one was there any real excitement... the afternoon the ack-ack got one Jerry, the Spitfires another and one of our barrage ballons was sent down in flames, all in a space of a few minutes.

Through September and into October, the missions to Italy were mostly milk runs and we had stand downs for days on end. The frequent trips to nearby towns began to pall, heavy rain and frequent showers dampened our spirits. Every oody was bored and restless, the only bright spot being the receipt of orders for the first boys to go

home.

Again came orders to move and the "A" Party" left taking most of the tents and equipment with them. For three days the rest of us huddled into the little shelter we could find, because, as soon as the tents were gone, the heavens opened up and unloosed a veritable flood.

SAN PANCRAZIO, ITALY

Except for the fact that it was a bit blacker, we simply exchanged one mud hole for another by our move. Some people contended that San Pancrazio mud had better sliding qualities.

San Pan came to be famous for its fine plumbing, hot showers, inexhaustible lumber piles, yellow jaundice and MUD.

The really good point scored was the fact that for the first time we were out of tents and into buildings. It was true that some had no roofs, some no floors, others no walls but we patched and plugged. The weather was definitely on the coolish side and cans of every kind were converted to use as stoves and stove-pipes and some weird designs were there.

We ganged up with the 321st Group for raids on Sofia and Kalamaki and struck a hot one on the second raid to the second place. four Me-109s were claimed, while losing one of ours The mission had bucked strong headwinds and everyone being low on gas and some mechanical problems, the landing became a rat race

The first Christmas packages began arriving, but so did our orders to move again. We were on our way to Foggia, Italy

FOGGIA, ITALY

For a week, the 340th was scattered all over southern Italy. Rain and more rain grounded the air echelon and greased the roads. Trucks with flooded ignition systems stalled along the roads, other skidded into the ditches. Nobody wanted to feed us or bed us down. We truly were orphans of the storm.

With the first sunshine, a few hardy souls straggled into Foggia. Leaving the highway was like stepping off a dock at low tide. Mud came halfway up the radiators of heavily loaded Jeeps, and acres of water were unexplored seas to which one hoped there was a bottom.

Some lucky ones found quarters in former farm buildings where the refuse was nearly as bad as the mud out side. For the next few days everybody was either digging out, or digging in.

The front looked a long way off on the map, but at night the booming of the guns on the Adriatic sector still sounded too close for comfort.

Our planes finally got in after some days and the boys went sight-seeing over Sibenik, Jugoslavia; Port Gruz, Albania and Guilianova, Italy.

Christmas packages came piling in. Thanksgiving came and went. An epidemic of fires broke out as makeshift stoves belched flame in Foggia winds.

New Years Eve . . Yup, you guessed it, it rained. At midnight every gun and rifle let

loose in honor of 1944 but plenty of folks didn't hear them. We siphoned them out of the trenches next morning. And what a morning! Few gasoline stoves were safe in the gale that swept in off the sea. Our tents were down or on the way as the swearing occupants wallowed in the mud fighting playful canvas. Mess tents threatened to take off momentarily and might as well have since the water and mud inside wouldn't have been much deeper. But 1630 hours found the chow lines a quarter of a mile long as usual and ankle deep in mud.

In a few days good weather set in, the absorbent ground quickly dried out, the various clubs were doing a thriving business and we were more or less comfortably settled for the winter, S-o-o, we got orders to move.

Next stop Pompeii L/G

POMPEII, ITALY

Pompeii Landing Ground was a brand new field cut into the grape orchards and vegetable farms of Terzigno at the base of Vesuvius and completely surrounded by hills. Eighteen feet high. Most of them were probably built by their occupants, or ancesters, all had the usual individualistic designs and elaborate designs in colorful motifs.

On 8 January, 1944 Lt. Col. Tokaz was transferred to Tactical Bomber Force Headquarters. He was replaced by Colonel Charles D. Jones who became known as "CD"

Wherever you lived, you had but to step outside your door to view old Vesuvius, the worlds most publicized volcano. There was always a halo of smoke over it, and at night the bubbling lava sent orange spurts skyward smoke. But we felt much safer from Vesuvius than from the threat of the German bombs which several times fell in Naples, twenty miles away.

Then the Fifth Army opened up on the Anzio beachead None of the combat crews will ever forget the "heavy, intense and accurate" flak over the "wooded area", or practically any area of the sector a plane ventured to visit. At this period of operations,



340th Bomb Group Commander 8 January 1944 ---- 16 March 1944

Colonel. Jones landed on the beach at bailed Casablanca in the invasion of North Africa. He was assigned to organize and command the Fighter Training Center which was responsible for operational training of fighter pilots before assignment to combat units.

On 8 January 1944 Colonel Charles D. Jones ("C.D." to everyone who knew him) was assigned to command the 340th Bombardment Group upon the reassignment of Lt. Col. Tokaz. It is told that he made an excellent impression on the personnel of all the units of the 340th, and that he visited every unit on the base, asking questions about conditions supplies etc.,

always making the interests of the men his top priority.

His tour with the 340th was short lived, for on 10 March 1944 Colonel Jones was shot down while leading a mission over Vitorio, Italy. He bailed out successfully, and was captured by the Germans. He remained a POW for the duration of the war.

A story is related by Joe Reubel, (340th Group Operations Officer) as was told to him by a fellow POW of Colonel Jones. Oddly enough the man also was named Jones. He was Col. David Jones, a B-26 pilot who was shot down over North Africa. He told Joe Reubel that during the terrible march of American POW's from Germany to Poland which was made in the dead of winter in sub-freezing weather. He said that after the short rest periods some of the starving and nearly frozen prisoners would just give up and not get to their feet. Then "C.D." would walk up and down the column pleading, cajoling, prodding and in some cases beating them, doing whatever it took to get them to their feet. Col. David Jones spoke in awe of "CD" because he was as emaciated and frozen as all of the rest. Without a doubt many lives were saved because of C.D. Jones.

After his repatriation Colonel C.D. Jones was assigned, in 1951 to Langley AFB, VA, paradoxically replacing Colonel Chapman who had replaced him when he was shot down. Colonel Charles D. Jones was killed in the crash of a B-57 at Bolling AFB. Virginia in the mid 1950's

Prepared by George Wells

the Group as a whole lost better than a dozen planes on the Anzio beachead operation After much hesitation, because of political and religious complications, Monte Cassino Abby was then given as a target because the Germans entrenched there. It was causing the loss of too many American lives. We went at it with the heavies and the 26's. The boys on the ground at the front were most enthusiastic and word was passed later to us that the B-25's had stolen the show. But as usual in the publicity the heavies got all of the credit.

"Rainy weather continued to force standdown during much of February and early March. But on the 10th we got a mission to Littorio marshalling yards. It was one of those days... the formation ran into flak... two of the ships of the 340th collided, but got back to the field... one of the ships in the following box dove to duck the collision, two of his bombs broke loose and went through the bomb bay doors... Colonel Jones, riding as co-pilot with the 487th, went down. That was a real loss, Colonel Jones had earned everyone's

respect and liking and had raised the our morale to its then highest peak.

On 15 March the Allies must have really gotten mad at the Germans who, in spite of bombs and shell fire, were still holding out in Cassino making it tough for our slogging infantry. We were told to level the damned place. Four other medium groups and eleven heavies were sent along to help us. That must have made the Germans mad in turn because that night some thirty five of their bombers scooted low over our heads to bomb Naples. Under cover of this excitement, our new C.O., COLONEL WILLIS F. CHAPMAN slipped in without fuss or fan fare.

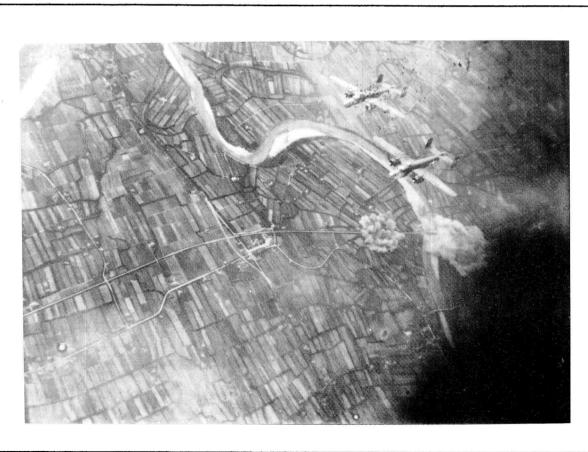
For several days Vesuvius had been acting up a bit more than usual and in the morning of 22 March it woke ups up with its rumbling and roaring. It was snowing cinders about the size of BB shot with a sprinkling of tennis balls, which by mid-morning were helped out by other sometimes as big as melons. Many

of the latter, while crusted with ice on the outside, showed a white-hot core when open. It was impossible to move the planes and early in the afternoon, when roofs of building were going down under the weight of the stuff. Preparations for evacuating were hurried and most of the personnel got out from under.

Axis Sally and her boy friends gleefully announced that the 340th was Finito. And so it must have seemed, but she did not know the 12th Air Force. In three days we were back fighting that much harder as "The Best Damn Group There Is."

PAESTUM, ITALY.

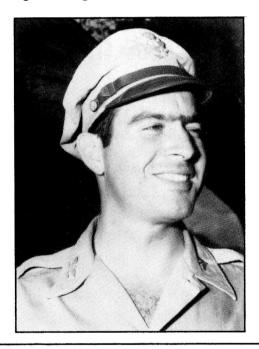
With our move to Paestum, it seems that we changed the weather as well as location. Instead of the continual rain and cold, we now had balmy, spring days, plenty of sunshine. and compared to the wet cold days at Foggia seemed idyllic by comparison.



COLONEL WILLIS F. CHAPMAN

340th Group Commander
15 March 1944 7 November 1945

Colonel Bill Chapman, born 15 November 1912 in Jackson Michigan, grduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York June 1935. After graduation he married the former Charlotte Chapel, also of Jackson. They have two daughters, four grandsons, and one great-granddaughter.



After two years in the 72nd Bombardment Squadron at Luke Field in Hawaii; three years as a flying instructor at the Advanced Flying School at Kelly Field, Texas, he was transferred to Midland AAB, Texas as Director of Flying for the Bombardier School in January 1942.

Bill departed the U.S. on Thanksgiving Day 1942 flying a B-25 leading 6 A-30's destined for the British, via the South Atlantic. He arrived in Algiers on 9 December, 1942 and was assigned to the staff of the Director of Operations Lauris Intelligence, Col./Gen and Norstadt, of the Northwest African Air This Headquarters moved to Constantine in April, La Marsa, Tunis in June, and then on to Caserta, Italy, in The name of this December 1943. changed to The command was Mediterranean Allied Air Force (MAAF) on 1 January 1944. In addition to being a Senior Pilot at that time, Bill was also a rated Navigator and a rated Bombardier.

Bill was promoted to Colonel in December 1943, to Brigadier General in February 1961. He retired from the USAF in July 1965.

prepared by George Wells

Baseball teams sprouted. . . sacks were dragged outdoors and sunbathers conditioned their hides.

Based on previous experience in getting ordinary supplies, we figured on several weeks vacation before our lost planes could be replaced. But in three days, we were operating again on full scale and very shortly we had more and better planes than ever before, and. in addition, new crews were assigned.

Under Colonel Chapman's guidance we switched from the British Mark IX to the American Norden bomb sight. The crews put in long hours of practice with it resulting in formations tightened up and our already excellent record began to climb to higher levels.

From close support work we switched to transportation and communications targets and went in for a weary round of tunnel, railroad and highway blasting. The crews felt like commuters on the same old route to the same old targets which we socked as fast as Jerry could repair them, or even if he didn't. Interrogations brought out such gossip as what day Mrs. Pomiglian hung her wash out and the state of Mr. Ficcule's vegetable patch.

An impressive ceremony was held in the ruins of the ancient Greek Temple of Hera, wife of Zeus. It is probably the best preserved Greek ruins in the world today.

We finally had found "Sunny Italy." The sunshine was good for the frazzled, war weary

nerves. The food was looking up, eggs were plentiful, and we seemed to have the best combat location we'd ever had.

Group was probably literally correct when on the 14th, they told us we'd stay put indefinitely but on the 15th, it became definite and on the 16th, after a 0430 breakfast, everybody except a few of the ground personnel and the combat crews left for Naples to catch the 2 o'clock LST for Corsica.

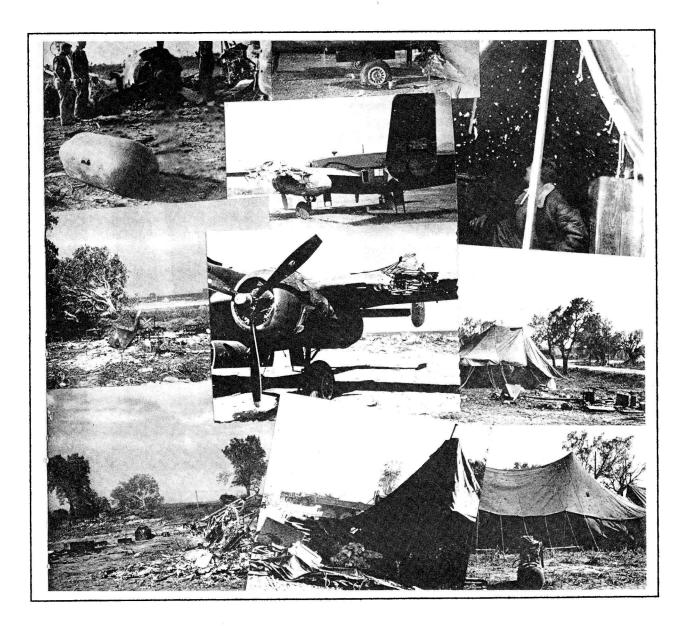
ALESAN, CORSICA.

For fourteen months we had looked for it and here it was . . the next best thing to

home. Everything you find in the travel books from warm ocean bathing on a clean sandy beach to mountain scenery, hunting and fishing. When the Colonel comes back with some farmer's fattened sow he's still been "hunting wild boar."

The low level volunteers who started their legalized buzzing at Paestum, have inoculated the whole group. Now when a beautifully perfect echelon, or even the whole damn formation, comes over low enough to blow the sugar off the American Red Cross donuts, we know without listening to the radio that they're saying, "Mission completed, bridge finito."





And while we're on the subject, let's give the Red Cross a great big hand. We got our first regular installation at Pompeii and it has been a permanent institution ever since.

With bombs away, it's "So long, flak; hello donuts and coffee". And were they life savers after those long, paralyzingly cold rides of last spring! And the generous portions of smiles, conversation and wise-cracks served along with the coffee and sinkers, by three dainty bits of femininity (American) to pep up the moral no end.

If we seem to be more or less content with our lot at present, don't get the idea that it has has been the balm of Gilead here. Jerry welcomed us after our first few days with an all out raid that set even the combat crews to emulating the mole. Picks and shovels were at a premium and many were the designs of shelters.

Once again we were practically wiped out of ships and other equipment as well as heavily hit on tentage. But, by energetic patching and scraping, by mid-afternoon we had a mission in the air and the grim desire for revenge simply gave added accuracy to the bombardier's aim.

Sadly, here were personnel losses too. Again the 12th Air Force came through fast and handsomely, and before the Jerry Todt battalions could patch a bridge, we were back over the bomb line in full force.

Early in August saw the beginning of maximum effort missions on targets in Southern France. These missions reached a peak on 15 August when the Allies invaded Southern France. On the 15th two missions of 18 aircraft from each squadron Southern France. History records that the invasion was very successful, and proceeded very rapidly During that time it was indicated that the 340th might be moving to France after the invasion was secured. It would appear that because of the rapid pace of the Allies that it would be unnecessary for the 340th to move. Instead the 42nd Bomb Wing of B-26 Marauders, which was Sardinia, moved. The 340th stayed on Corsica.

Missions shifted back to the interdiction role in Northern Italy, the Po River and the

Brenner Pass. It was unusual for the 340th to stay at one location for an extended period of time. Prior to coming to Corsica our stay had been brief, one or two months at the most. As we stayed on in Corsica there were more and more indications of permanence in our area. The Group Officer's club and the Group Service club were of frame construction, with slab siding. Some of the squadron facilities were of similar construction.

After the disastrous German air raid in May, improved dispersal was pushed for the aircraft. Before the raid the planes were lined up in a row because the area for wider dispersal of the aircraft was not completed. Another result of that raid was that we were almost completely re-equipped with new B-25-J aircraft.

Note....

Vesuvius, the move to Corsica, and the air raid in May, together with an intensive training program plus the developments of tactics for the use of chaff phosphorous bombs against AA positions to reduce the losses served to tighten the 340th as a fighting unit. From unspectacular bombing with the British bomb sight before the Vesuvius eruption, bombing results rapidly improved until July which was a perfect month - 30 missions - 30 strikes - no misses. Aug. '44 saw continuing successive blistering strikes in support of the invasion of southern France which included this unique mission. The 340th was assigned 16 separate gun positions well hidden in a wooded area to be hit before the invasion. Since the targets could not be seen, only latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates

were given. Each squadron was given 4 gun positions and put a flight of six aircraft on each position using off- set bombing. When all the smoke cleared and the post strike intelligence was received, 13 of the gun positions were knocked out completely, and the other 3 badly damaged. September saw the attack on the Italian cruiser Taranto, in La Spezia harbor which is aptly described in the Distinguished Unit Citation on the next page. This was followed by a long unbroken series of bridge strikes, 62 was mentioned in General Eaker's letter to me (attached), but this series eventually extended to 77 consecutive bridge strikes, almost exclusively on the Po river and Brenner Pass.

Bill Chapman.

Weather was a constant factor in our missions, both at the base and over the target areas. In spite of the weather there was no let up in activity. Our Group Commander Colonel Chapman kept a level high of activity on projects to improve efficiency in accuracy.

Two innovations are worthy of note here:

FIRST, the commencement of the use of

RADIO RELEASE BOMBING. Previously, for a formation of six aircraft to bomb on the lead bombardier's release, the other bombardier's had to wait until they saw the bombs drop from the lead, causing a split second delay between the lead aircraft and the



VAR RIVER ROAD BRIDGE #3 SOUTHERN FRANCE 2 August, 1944

VAR RIVER ROAD BRIDGE #4, SOUTHERN FRANCE, 2 August, 1944



HEADQUARTERS MEDITERRANEAN ALLIED AIR FORCE

3 October 1944

SUBJECT: Commendation

TO:

Colonel Willis F. Chapman, A.C.

Commanding Officer 340th Bombardment group (Medium)

- 1. The sinking of the Italian cruiser, Taranto, was the culmination of a long and unbroken series of successful attacks on pin-point targets. General Cannon has advised me that your group has attacked sixty-two successive pin-point targets without a single miss. I know of no achievement in this war which exceeds this record. I have recently advised the Commanding General, Army Air Forces of your outstanding accomplishment and am recommending that your Group be individually cited therefor.
- 2. I wish you would say to your staff, and your Squadron Commanders, and your hard working and courageous crews that I have observed their operations with the greatest admiration and enthusiasm. I am well aware that such marked success is not accidental. It shows the high state of training and the individual hard work prevalent in your whole organization.
- 3. I wish you would extend my congratulations to all members of your organization who have contributed to this superior performance and say I wish them continued success against the enemy in their future operations.
- 4. A copy of this commendation will be filed with your official record.

/a/Ira C. Eaker /t/Ira C. Eaker Lieutenant General, U.S.A. Commanding.

2nd Ind. A-RDK-rfg

201- Chapman, Willis F. (O)

HQ. 57TH BOMBARDMENT WING, APO 650, US ARMY, 20 October, 1944

TO: Colonel Willis F. Chapman, Air Corps, Commanding Officer 340th Bombardment Group (M), APO 650, US Army.

It is with extreme pleasure that I forward this Letter of Commendation.

The Officers and men of the 340th Bomb group have every reason to be proud of this unbroken record of successful strikes on enemy installations.

/s/ROBERT D. KNAPP /T/ROBERT D. KNAPP Brigadier General, USA Commanding

RESTRICTED

HEADQUARTERS TWELFTH AIR FORCE APO 650

GENERAL ORDERS) : NUMBER 281)

27 December, 1944

Under the provision of Circular 333, War Department, 143, and circular 89, North African Theater of Operations, 10 July 1944, the 340th Bombardment Group (M) is cited for outstanding performance of duty in action against the enemy in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations on 23 September 1944

Culminating a long and unbroken series of flawlessly executed bombing attacks on pinpoint and area targets, the 340th Bombardment group (M), in sinking the enemy light cruiser Taranto on 23 September 1944, distinguished itself by such extraordinary heroism and professional competence in the face of vigorous enemy opposition as to set itself above and apart from other units participating in similar operations. On 22 September 1944, when aerial reconnaissance disclosed an enemy plan to scuttle the Taranto at the entrance of La Spezia Harbor in Italy, the 340th Bombardment Group was ordered to destroy this warship with all speed before it could be moved into position. Acting swiftly and with utmost thoroughness, the Group's operations, intelligence and maintenance personnel skilfully planned the attack, briefed the crews, and readied their planes for the assault. At 0300 hours on 23 September, 24 B-25's of the 340th Bombardment Group took off from bases in Corsica for the heavily defended La Spezia area. Despite heavy anti-aircraft barrage from the ring of powerful enemy batteries which encircles the harbor, gallant pilots, displaying outstanding courage and flying ability, resolutely held their aircraft in tight formation throughout the attack. Highly trained bombardiers, undeterred by the hostile fire, expertly synchronized their instruments and released their thousand-pound bombs with unerring precision, scoring numerous direct hits on the target. Compact patterns from the first three flights covered the bow and stern of the cruiser with devastating effect, capsizing it before the last flight could release its bombs. This outstanding achievement, made possible by unsurpassed teamwork which combined exceptional planning with indomitable courage, flying skill and precision bombing, completely frustrated the enemy in his attempt to block the entrance of this strategic harbor and naval base. The heroism and extraordinary professional skill displayed by the 340th Bombardment Group in this action reflect highest credit upon themselves and the Military Service of the United States.

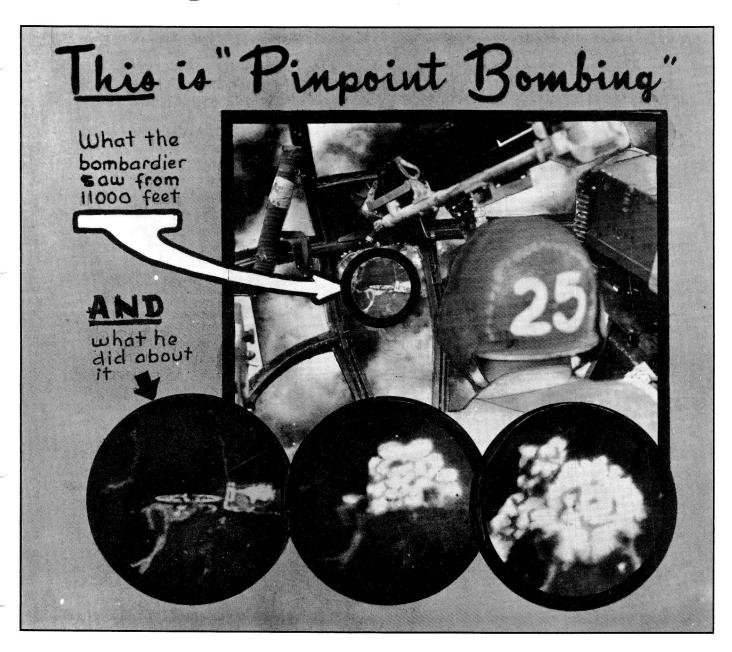
By command of Major General Cannon

CHARLES T. MYERS Brigadier General, USA, Chief of Staff

OFFICIAL
/s/ William W. Dick
William W. Dick
Colonel, AGD
Adjutant General

/s/ THOMAS B. MYER
Captain, Air Corps.

23 September 1944 La SPEZIA ITALY Target Cruiser Taranto



The RADIO RELEASE technique provided for a radio signal from the lead aircraft to release bombs from all aircraft simultaneously. provided for a much more compact pattern of bombs on impact with greater destructive capability. The equipment Radio Release was designed and developed by two airmen in the 340th under the supervision of the Group Signal Officer. They cleverly utilized some unused circuitry already in the B-25. It worked properly the first bomb run and ever after.

Bill Chapman

The SECOND innovation was the introduction of SHORAN (Short Range Aid To Navigation) This involved equipment in the lead aircraft which would interpret radio signals from two ground stations which allowed precise distance measurement to the bomb release point. It was possible to do accurate bombing when the target was obscured from the aircraft by a layer of clouds below the aircraft.

As the targets became more and more distant from Corsica the need for another base location became evident. The 321st had already moved to the east coast of Italy, so the chances of the 340th moving somewhere along the same coast was a good possibility.

RIMINI, ITALY

The long awaited move for the 340th to Italy began in early April 1945. We began moving, by increments, to the town of Rimini. Since the airfield is just outside of the village of Riccioni arrangement were made to house our personnel in the village of Riccioni. They found the arrangements a great improvement over their previously accomodations. They were in living buildings! After all those years in tents!

Once established in Rimini, routine combat missions were resumed. being closer to the combat areas made our missions shorter in duration. Most of the missions were in close support of the British 8th Army during their push northward.

Note ...

We couldn't resist one more nose-thumbing mission at the Jerries just before V-E Day. The target was close support anti-personnel in front of the British 8th Army. We flew a closely timed pattern of 72 B-25's, in trail, toward Yugoslavia from Rimini. Each ship was timed to make one 180 degree turn and fall into place in the returning formation with the group leader at 1,000 feet. As this large formation returned over Rimini the last B-25 off pulled up into formation, and the formation headed north. In 18 minutes at a 45 the left degree turn to by squadrons placed all the squadrons on a parallel course so that all bombs hit in a parallel drop zone at the same time. A beautiful piece of precision flying which I am sure jarred a lot of Jerrie's teeth.

Bill Chapman

V-E Day, on 8 May, 1945 effectively halted all combat missions. We soon learned that we were were scheduled to deploy to the United States for a re-training period, and then deploy to the Far East. It was indicated that we would re-train with the Douglas A-26 Invader aircraft. The hitch came when we couldn't move until early July because of This delay resulted in movement schedules. a fairly elaborate program to keep us occupied. Morning were allocated for flying training, and afternoon athletics, ground school programs consisted of rather extensive educational schedules. Qualified instructors were selected squadron level and classes were set up on a wide variety of subjects. Athletics were no problem since a near perfect beach was within sight of the squadron areas. A-26 aircraft was made available for each squadron and all pilots were scheduled for a one hour check out.

This relaxed schedule after V-J day allowed for a well deserved rest and relaxation period. None deserved it more than our hard working ground crews, most of whom had been with the group since activation. They worked a most strenuous schedule for two and a half years or more. Recreation facilities were highly developed. Officer's clubs and Enlisted Men's clubs were available throughtout the Group, and most were very fine facilities.

DESTINATION U.S.A.

Departure for the U.S.A. finally approached. The Group flight echelon was scheduled for departure on 3 - 6 July 1945, with one squadron leaving each day. departure procedure was known as the "Green Project" and aircraft were routed back home on the southern route. Stops were made at; Marrakech, Dakar, Roberts Field Tunis, (Liberia), Ascension Island, Natal, Belem. Atkinson Field, Borenquin, finally Morrison or Savannah, Georgia.

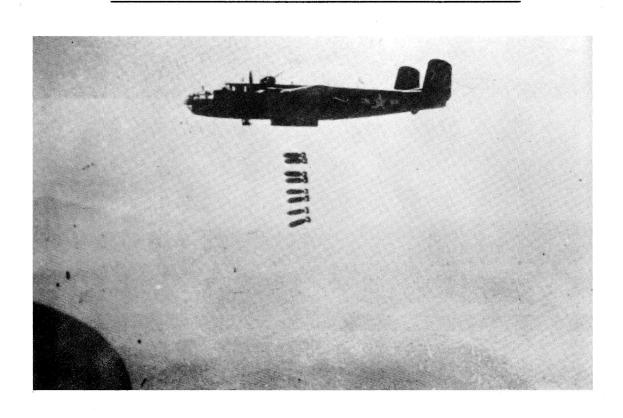
Our final squadron, the 489th arrived at Savannah on 19 July. All of our aircraft were left at Savannah.

The ground eschelon boarded ship and sailed for the Virginia Capes on 27 July.

Both flight and ground eschelons were sent to various processing centers. Some with high

point scores were discharged at an early date. Others were sent home on leave with orders to report later to Seymoure Johnson Army Air Base, South Carolina. After arriving at Seymour Johnson, having enjoyed a 30 day leave, we found that the whole picture had changed because of V-J Day. Plans to deploy us to the Far East were cancelled. The 340th was transferred to Columbia, South Carolina for eventual inactivation. The period at both Seymour Johnson and Columbia was one of uncertainty. Many more were discharged and some were transferred to other stateside bases. It was also a period of re-orientation to stateside duties. It came as a shock to many of our men that they owed for U.S. Income Tax, some as far back as 1942.

The inactivation proceedure was carried out at Columbia Army Air Base, and was completed on 7 NOVEMBER, 1945.





HIGHER COMMANDS

MEDITERRANEAN ALLIED AIR FORCE M.A.A.F.

TWELFTH AIR FORCE XII A.F.

57th BOMBARDMENT WING (Medium)

MEDITERRANEN ALLIED AIR FORCE M.A.A.F

In late 1943 the strategic forces, B-17's, B-24's and appropriate fighter, et al were split off from the 12th Air Force. These formed the 15th Air Force, with headquarters in Bari, Italy

The headquarters Mediterranean Allied Air Forces was formed to assume overall

command and direction, of all Allied Air Forces in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations.

Lt. General Ira Eaker was designated Commander, with a British Officer, Sir John Slessor, Deputy Commander



Lieutenant General Ira Eaker Commanding Officer M.A.A.F.

12th AIR FORCE

Bompendium "B"

Submitted by JOHN J. SUTAY 486
Historian 57th Bomb Wing



The 12th Air Force, which from D-Day in North Africa until V-Day in Italy, provided Allied ground forces with strategic and tactical support, was America's first invasion air force and the first to help attain a final victory.

From the onset the keynote of the 12th's support was its versatility. At the height of the North African campaign it was the world's largest single Air Force and remained that way until its heavy bombers were separated and grouped under what became the 15th Air Force.

After that fighters, fighter-bombers and night fighters, light and medium bombers of the 12th were used to blast the Luftwaff from the Mediterranean skies, isolate the enemy by severing his lines of communication, and provide Allied ground units with close co-operation to carry out the three-fold purpose of a tactical air force.

In the 905 days the 12th Ait Force was in combat, its planes flew 408,343 combat sorties and dropped more than 218,000 tons of bombs. It's fighters and bombers destroyed and damaged amost 5,000 enemy planes. Its C-47s hauled tons of supplies, thousands of paratroopers and evacuated almost 200,000 wounded to rear hospitals. In the last year of

fighting alone, it destroyed and damaged almost 35,000 enemy motor vehicles, more than 25,000 railroad cars and 2,100 bridges.

It sunk 263 enemy ships and boats damaging 650 others. Its photo reconnaissance squadrons turned out millions of prints for ground and air intelligence. Its Catalina flying boats rescued scores of Allied airmen forced down at sea.

4 The 12th became the first air force in the world to be given full credit for the surrender of ground objectives when the Mediterranean island of Pantelleria was occupied in June 1943, after terrific aerial attacks had resulted in its surrender.

Types of aircraft employed by the 12th Air Force were as diversified as were the types of of combat work that it was called upon to perform. Its fighters included P-40 Warhawks, P-39 Airacobras, British Spitfires, A-36 dive bombers, P-38 Lightnings and P-47 Thunderbolts.

After losing the B-17 Flying Fortresses and B-24 Liberators with the organization of the 15th Air Force, The 12th struck blow after blow at enemy forces and installations with B-25 Mitchell and B-26 Marauder medium bombers, and A-20 Havoc and A-26 Invader

2light bombers. The Mitchells and Marauders were employed for their pin-point" precision, while the Havocs and Invaders were used as night intruders that permitted the enemy no respite even when darkness cloaked his movements. To this night venging force was added the fighter punch of the British Beaufighter and Mosquito, and the potent American P-61 Black Widow. This destructive

force was augmented by the C-47 "Goony Bird" transport which played their utilitarian roles, while the OA-10 Catalinas served as "mercy" air sea rescue planes. Small unarmed aircraft such as the Piper Cub, Aeronca, C-61 Fairchild. C-45 Beachcraft and Lockheed were used as couriers in this versatile amalgum of aerial might.



General Carl A. Spaatz



General John C. Cannon





General James H. Doolittle

We have no suitable photograph available

General Benjamin W. Chidlaw

The principal components of the Mediterranean Allied Tactical Air Force were made up of American, British, Brazilian, Canadian, South African, Polish and French airmen. The 12th Air Force was commanded by some of the most famous air tacticians in military history:

Throughout Americas far-flung air fronts, before the fall of Germany and Japan, tactics developed by America's first invasion air force, the 12th, were employeed to subdue enemy forces, knock out his installations, block his lines of supply and seal off his lines of escape.

57th BOMBARDMENT WING

(Medium)

Editor's Note:

Due to the difficulty in tracing the background of the command unit we knew as the 57th Bombardment Wing before it became operational we are condensing the materia. that we have found, into a simple diary form. We have divided the narrative into three sections which we have labeled "The PAPER STATUS: **ADMINISTRATIVE** STATUS. OPERATIONAL STATUS. The first and second portions will have few deatils. Only the most important known facts are included for the period up to 1 March 1944, when the Wing became operational.

PAPER STATUS

It should be noted here that recorded histories of the various commands to which the 57th Bombardment Wing was assigned, during its paper-status years, provide very few details about the activities of the unit we knew as the 57th Bombardment Wing.

During this period the "Wing", controled no subordinate components and consisted of few personnel. The only Commander known during the period 1942- 1943 was Colonel Thomas C. Darcy who seems to have been in command by at least March 1943, but for an unknown tenure. The unit had been assigned to many various commands such as: 8th Pursuit Wing; III Air Force; IX Fighter Command; IX Air Force; etc.

6 April, 1943,

While the Wing was assigned to IX Air Force, IX Fighter command, it was re-designated "57th Bombardment Wing" by War Department authority.

15 May 1943:

Ninth Air Force implemented the change. It was here that "Medium" designation was tacked on without War Depart ment authority (there-fore illegally).

15 June 1943:

The Wing was moved to Deversoir, Egypt.

23 August, 1943:

Ninth Air Force ordered the WING to move to Tunis, Tunisia, with assignment to the Twelfth Air Force upon arrival there. It did so with only two people assigned ... A Captain John J. Darmody and an unnamed enlisted man.

31 August 1943.

Twelfth Air Force assigned this "Paper Unit" to it's XII Air Support Command.

4 September, 1943:

The WING was moved to Lentini, Sicily. It was there that personnel began to arrive for assignment. The Wing remained at Lentini until,

4 October, 1943

Boarded a ship bound for Naples, Italy, reaching there on the 7th.

5 October, 1943:

Colonel William S.Gravely assumed command from Captain Darmody.

6 October, 1943

The 47th Bombardment Group (L) and the 308th Signal Wing Company were assigned to the 57th Wing for administrative purposes, operational control remaining elsewhere.

19 October, 1943

The Wing was moved to Foggia, Italy.

ADMINISTRATIVE STATUS

1 November, 1943

A number of operational units were assigned to the 57th Wing, but again only for administrative purposes. Once more operational control remained with the Tactical Bomber Force. The additional units assigned

included the following:

2th Bombardment Group (M)

57th Fighter Group

79th Fighter group, with the 99th Fighter

Squadron attached.

340th Bombardment Group

4 November, 1943

The 321st Bombardment Group (M) was assigned to the 57th Wing under the same conditions as the other components.

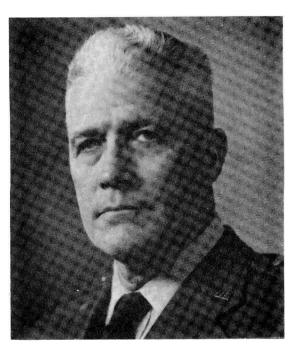
10 December, 1943.

The 47th Bomber group (L) left the Wing and returned to the Tactical Bomber Force.

1 January, 1944,

Approximately 1 January, 1944, Colonel Robert D. Knapp replaced Col. William S. Gravely as Commander of the 57th Bombardment Wing.

The XII Bomber Command was reactivated



Brig. Gen. Robert D. Knapp Commanding Officer 57th 1 Jan. 1944 to 23 June 1945

General Knapp dates back to World War I with his enlistment in the Army Flying Corps. He completed his flight training and pinned on his wings, and 2nd Lt. Bars, on 18 March, 1918. He was immediately ordered to England to fly Handley-Page Bombers over France. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, the aircraft had no propellers and could not be flown.

Returning to the United States, Lt. Knapp chose to remain in the service. Duty was not always choice, so he had many different assignements ranging from flying border patrol on the Mexican

border, to flight instructor. He was a pioneer in flying the United States Mail.

At the outbreak of World War II Knapp was stationed at Langley Field, Va. as Executive Officer of the 1st Bomber Command. With much insistance, on his part, that he was going to fly in combat, and with some reluctance of his superiors, he was given command of the new 321st Bomb group.

Taking command in September 1942 he directed its training, lead the group overseas and through the first eleven months of combat operations.

On 5 December, 1943 Col. Knapp was reassigned to the Tactical Bomber Command (TBF), and on 1 January, 1945 he assumed command of the new 57th Bombardment Wing. At this time he received his Star of a Brigadier General. General Knapp commanderd the 57th throughout the remaining part of the War in Europe.

During his long career Gen. Knapp earned several decorations from the United States among which there was a Silver Star, Distinguished Flying Cross and from the British he was awarded the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, and from the French the Croix de Guerre.

Gen. Knapp retired from the USAF in 1951 after 33 years of service. He now makes his home in Auburn, Alabama, (the home of his youth). He devotes his time to the community. At the age of 94 he still drives his own car, works on his farm raising cattle. His daughter Dorothy Spain makes her home with her father.

as an administrative headquarters, consisting of the personnel of the 57th Bomb Wing, which once more was reduced to a retaining cadre. Assigned to the XII Bomber Command were the 42nd Bomb Wing and its groups . . the 57th Bomb Wing, with the 12th, 321st, and 340th Bomb groups. The 57th Wing and the three groups were all located in the Foggia, Italy area.

All six of these medium bomber groups, the B-26's of the 42nd Wing and the B-25's which had been under the 57th Wing, were attached to the Tactical Bomber Force for operational control. Tactical Bomber Force was a combined headquarters, almost entirely British in personnel, which operated under the higher operational control of Mediterranean Allied Tactical Air Force.

1 March, 1944

OPERATIONAL

Note:

From this point in the narrative we will drop the diary format and tell it as a story of the operational history of the 57th Bombardment Wing as we knew it.

The Bombardment Wing was an intermediate level administrative unit. It, as a unit, flew no combat missions. It provided the intelligence, both pre- mission and post mission, for the targets. It also maintained liason with the ground forces so that close support missions could be provided by the combat units within the jurisdiction of the Wing. Missions were received from higher headquarters and then the Wing assigned them to the various combat Groups

In this narrative whenever the statement is made regarding flying sorties, or the tons of weapone expended, and the damage inflicted by the Wing, it is in reference to the combat units within the Wing.

Editor:

On 1 March, 1944, the XII Bomber Command was reduced to paper status and all of its resources were assigned to the 57th Bombardment Wing (Medium), bringing it to Operational Status for the first time in it's history. When 12th Bomb Group was transferred to the China Burman India Theater, the 57th Wing was left with only two operational bomb groups.

321st Bomb Group, with four squadrons 340th Bomb group with four squadrons

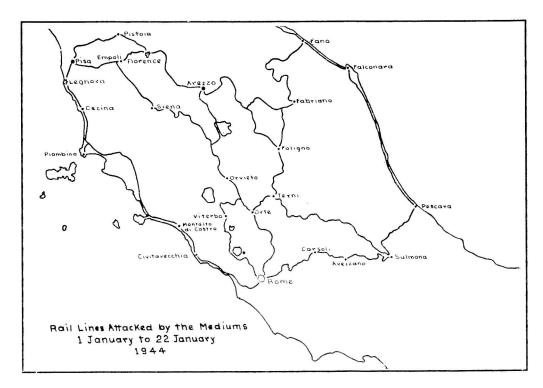
On 15 March, 1944, the 310th Bomb Group which had been assigned to XII Fighter Command, was operating under and Mediterranean Allied Coastal Air Force was assigned to the 57th. Wing. The 310th, at that time was located at Ghisonaccia, Corsica, and remained there. This placed all of the Twelfth Air Force B-25s under one command. All of these units were combat experienced before being assigned to the During its paper-unit inactive period the 57th Wing had moved from Foggia to Troccia, on the slope of Mount Vesuvius (not far from Naples), and it was there that it became operational under the command of Brig. Gen. Robert D. Knapp, who was destined to head the 57th Bomb Wing for the remainder of its World War II combat period.

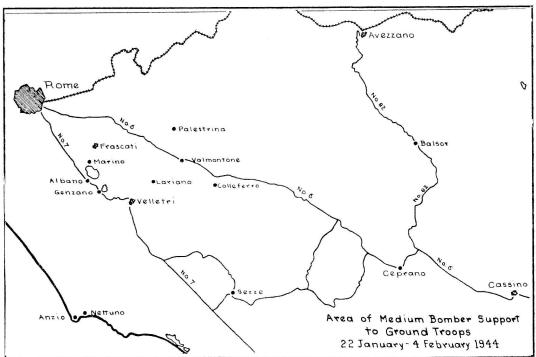
By 1 March, 1944, when the 57th Wing finally commenced operations, ground operations in Italy had reached a stalemate roughly along a line between Cassino and the Anzio beachhead. Allied forces were trying desperately to secure control of lines of communication in the area south of Rome in order to facilitate the capture of that strategic city.

All of the combat units that had been assigned to the 57th Bomb Wing had been working under OPERATION" SHINGLE". A plan to cut railroad transportation lines north of Rome to reduce the supply efforts of the German Army. This operation had extended over the period from 1 January, 1944 through 4 February, 1944. Targets that were under attack during "Shingle" are shown on the next page.

The 57th's initial combat mission, flown 2 March, 1944, was a close support action aimed against enemy troops and gun emplacement in the Anzio area, particularly at Citerno.

An operation called "STRANGLE" was implemented over the period 19 March, to 11 May, 1944. It not only involved the B-25s of

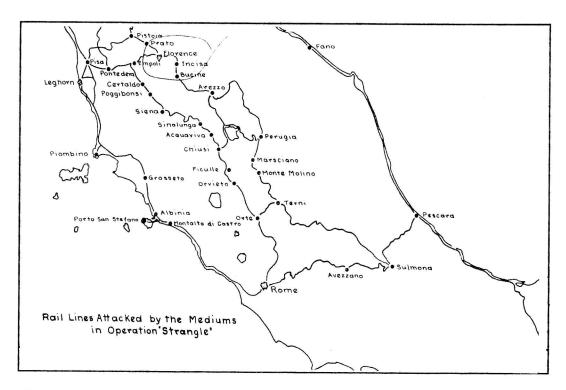




the 57th Wing, but the B-26's of the 42nd Wing, and Fighter - Bomber aircraft from the XII Air Support Command. The Medium Bombers were charged with creating, and maintaining major blocks in the railway system. The primary task of the 57th Bomb Wing was to destroy active marshalling yards, railroad repair facilities and other rail targets which would effectively disrupt rail movement south of Pisa- Florence- Pontassive line.

Emphasis was to be on bombardment of railway bridges, tunnels and viaducts.

There were only 13 non-operational days during Operation Strangle. During the 40 operational days the Wing's tactical squadrons flew 132 missions (2,540 effective sorties) and dropped 4,517 tons of bombs. 92 of these missions, and 2,070 tons of bombs expended on rail targets. The efforts of the



57th. Wing coupled with those of the other wings involved resulted in effectively blocking practically all of the rail traffic into Rome

In addition to the efforts expended on Operation Strangle, units of the 57th Wing flew 9 missions against harbors and shipping, at Leghorn, Piombino, Porto Ferraio (on the island of Elba) and San Stefano 4 missions against Viterbo airdrome, 7 missions to drop leaflets, 2 mission on fuel dumps west of Lake Trasimeno and a supply area at Piedmont.

Enemy fighters had been no partucular threat during Operation Strangle. Flak proved to be more dangerous, particularly after the operation began blocking the rail lines, and more flak guns were moved in to provide added protection.

On 15 March 1944 an all-out effort had been made by Allied ground forces to break out at Cassino, but the effort failed. The stalemate continued while preparations were made for a second effort.

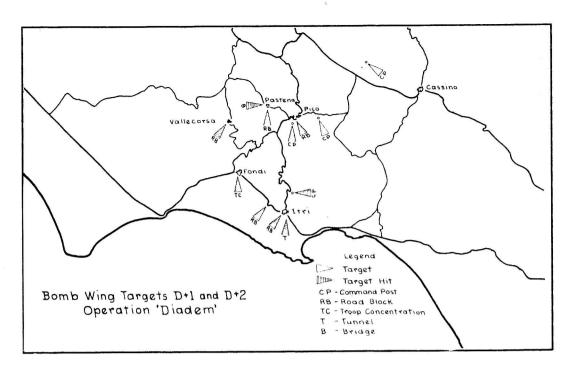
Between 19 and 29 April, 1944, 57th Wing Headquarters and the 321st and 340th Bomb Groups all moved to Corsica. The Wing to Prunelli, the 321st to Solenzara, and the

340th to Alesan. With the 310th already stationed at Ghisonaccia all of the units of the 57th Wing were on Corsica.

On 11 May, 1944 a major offensive was opened along the Rapido and Garigliano Rivers with the objective of establishing union with the forces in the Anzio beachhead and of effecting the capture of Rome. Operation Diadem was implemented to give aerial support to the ground forces.

On D-Day +1 the 57th Wing was called on for 13 missions against 6 different targets, ten of which were actually flown. The 310th Group flew 4 missions: Three for the purpose of creating road blocks at Pastena, the fourth created road blosks at Pico. Three missions were flown by the 321st; Two to create roadblocks at Vallecorsa, the third flown with forty-four sorties flown against command post at G-638167. The 340th Group flew three missions: two against the 94th Division Command Post at G-638027, the third mission created road blocks at ITRI.

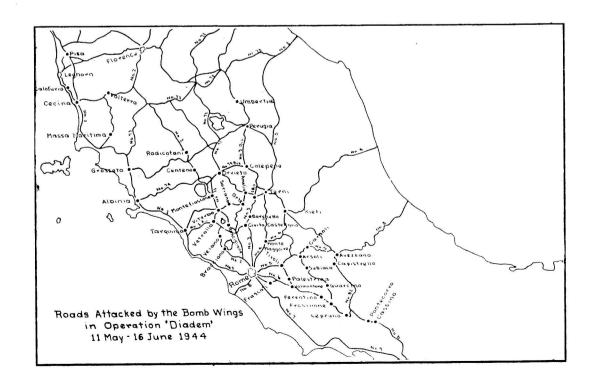
On D+2 the 57th continued its close support activities of the day before, being called upon for six missions against five named targets; road block at Pastena; road blocks at Pico; block a rail tunnel at ITRI; road blocks at

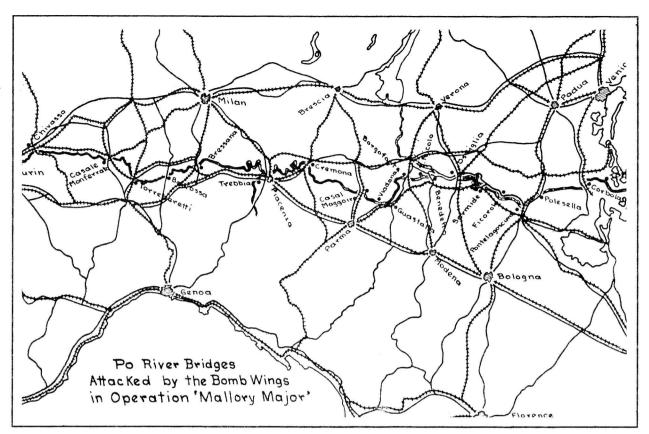


ITRI; road blocks at VALLECORSE. The 57th Wing was able to fulfill it's obligations in spite The 57th Wing was called upon for three additional missions on D+2, but only one was carried out. That being an attack on the mouth of the tunnel at ITRI.

During the period of 11 May to 23 June the tactical units of the 57th Wing flew 129

missions (2,529 effective sories) against all assigned targets, and dropped over 5,000 tons of bombs. Interdiction missions accounted for 55% of the Wing's missions, with 61% of the sorties and 62% of the weight of the bombs dropped during operation Diadem. Rail targets included those attacked during Operation Strangle, but also a number of lines running north for Spezia - Rimini dividing line





June to August 1944, saw the Po river valley opened to Allied attack, and the weight of the medium bomber was turned further northward. The responsibility for the interdiction in the north central part of Italy below the Spezia- Remini line fell largely to the Fighter Bombers of the Tactical Air Force. Their base locations along peninsula were more favorable for short range operations that could be mounted as needed sometimes on very short notice.

During the last week of June and the first week of July the combat operations of the 57th Bomb Wing's tactical squadrons were almost entirely concentrated in the Po River Valley. There the operatons took two distinct phases. There were interdiction missions against stock targets on 19 different railroad lines in the general area.

Then came Operation MALLORY (12 to 30 July). The 57th and the 42nd Wings joined in an all out effort to destroy all rail, road, and pontoon bridges, across the Po River itself. The 57th's assignment included 14 specific structures, against which the tactical Groups flew a total of 34 missions. As a result of this concerted combined effort all

bridges across the Po were either destroyed or rendered temporarily impassable

During August 1944 the 57th Bomb Wing's tactical squadrons began working on targets in southern France with raids on 2, 3, and 4 August flying 34 effective sorties dropping 64.5 tons of bombs on a Var River highway bridge in southern France, 38 effective sorties on a rail bridge at Nice, and 11 sorties on a rail bridge at Fanton, France. These attacks started the interdiction of communication part of the total invasion plan. The Wing flew no missions on 5 August, the first day of the invasion due to poor weather, but the remaining four days of Phase I of DRAGOON saw 15 missions flown during which 319 sorties dropped 569.92 tons of bombs on communications targets (all except one were rail bridges) which would prevent the movement of enemy supplies and reinforcements from other areas. The greatest weight was directed against bridges on the rail lines in the Rhone valley; at Avignon, La Voulte, Livron and St. Espirite. The rail bridge over the Var river was attacked twice and bridges at Nice, France, and Ventimiglia, Italy, were each attacked only once.

The participation by the 57th Wing in Phase III ("Yokum") of the DRAGOON operaton was brief indeed, lasting from 0350 hours to 0730 hours on D-Day, 15 August. During that brief time the squadrons of the 57th Wing flew 6 missions with 137 sorties and dropped 108.8 tons of bombs on the Antheor beaches, plus 12 missions on coastal gun defenses at Point des Issambres, St Tropitz, Agay and Cap Roux. Phase IV ("DUCROT") the assault landing commenced about 0800 hours on 15 August.

After completing it's "Yokum" attacks the 57th's bombers returned to the invasion area to make three attacks on bridges at Avignon. There were 58 sorties flown dropping 91.67 tons of bombs.

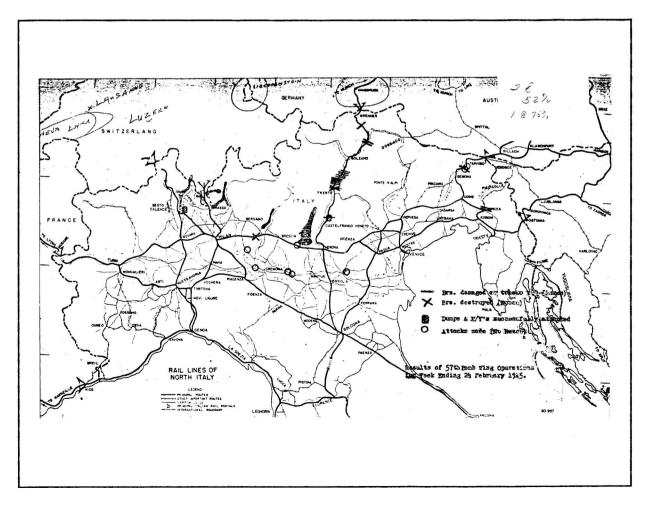
Following D-Day the 57th continued to support the invasion until 28 August, with interdiction bombing in the inland area of France, with bridges across the Rhone Rover and its tributaries as principal targets. This

served to hamper the retreat of the Germans, and helped cut off their reinforcements and supplies.

The work load performed by the tactical units of the Wing during the post invasion period involved the following: 74 missions (994 effective sorties) dropping 1,856.12 tons of explosives on 18 different French rail bridges, 4 Italian rail bridges, 9 different French road bridges; additional targets included gun positions, harbor facilities, Valence airfield, and naval installations at Toulon, where a battleship, cruiser and a submarine were sunk.

The targets attacked on 28 August were the last in France for the 57th Wing's tactical units since no targets remained withing range of the B-25s.

The Wing could now give it's full attention to the Italian campaign. The Allies had established a more or less stable battle line



that ran from Leghorn to Pisa to Florence to the Adriatic coast. So interdiction, once more, became the primary mission for the Wing's B-25 medium bombers. The ground forces still required some close support. The weather was seldom good from 29 August 1944 to 15 November. Of those 78 days effective

missions were only flown on 37. In spite of the short number of days the tactical units of the Wing completed 251 mission (4,558 sorties) dropping about 8,290.87 tons of bombs. About 24% of the missions and 25% of the sorties were expended upon close support.

Close support missions supporting the ground forces who were trying to push through the German Gothic Line and into the Po valley. Gun positions and defense positions were the principal targets, especially to the north and east of Florence. There troop were concentrations. ammunition dumps and supply depots, including the Bologna area.

During later September, all of October and well into November the Wing's tactical squadrons were kept busy with attacks on railroads leading into Italy from the north, including those in the lower reaches of the Brenner Pass Line. Those running generally east and west within Italy, between large cities, and those running north and south over which supplies were being transported to the battle areas.

On 6 November, 1944 a one day schedule of bombing was set up to reduce the flow of supplies into the destroying country by electrified railway system of the Brenner Pass Line. The three tactical groups, of the Wing, each assigned transformer a station, which were located at Trento, Ala and Domegliara, All three were destroyed.

The 57th Wing gained another tactical group during early November. The 319th Bomb Group had been converted from B-26 type aircraft to the B-25. For a short time the Wing would operate with four tactical groups. Late in December the 319th Group was ordered back to the United States for



retraining before moving to the Pacific Theater. The 319th's assignment to the 57th Wing terminated on 10 January, 1945.

During the final months of 1944 the efforts of the 57th Wing were devoted to interdiction bombing attack, concentrating on the Brenner Pass Line. Mission after mission of it's B-25s took off in an all out effort to destroy that vital link in the transportation system that linked the enemy's homeland and their forces that were engaged in the Italian campaign.

On several different days, notably during November and December, well over 200 B-25s, from the Wing, were dispatched on missions. Targets in Yugoslavia were also pounded on 18, 19 and 20 November, 1944. On 10 December the Wing's Groups began using Shoran-precision Radar which greatly helped bombing accuracy.

February 1945 was a banner month for the Wing. The Wing's bombers destroyed 17 bridges, and damaged 13 additional, cut or blocked another 42. During this month, for the first time, the B-25s penetrated beyond Bolzano in northern Italy. During March the toll of bridges destroyed totaled 40, and the attacks continued during April.

From November 1944 until late April, 1945 the Wing's bombers flew about 6,850 sorties, most involving the Brenner Pass area, and dropped a total of over 10,250 tons of bombs. As a result of these attacks (combined with those of other units) the line was cut in January, 1945 and remained closed to through traffic to the end of the war.

Between 1 April to about 10 April the Wing and all of it's tactical Groups, moved from

Corsica to the east coast of Italy....

The 321st. group moved from Solenzara, Corsica to Falconera, Italy.

The 310th group moved from Ghisonaccia, Corsica to Fano, Italy.

The 340th Group moved from Alesan, Corsica to Rimini, Italy.

Wing Headquarters moved from Prunelli, Corsica to Fano, Italy.

The 308th Signal Wing Company moved from Migliacharo, Corsica, to Futa Pass, Italy,

The last wartime missions flown by the Wing's tactical squadrons were flown 3 May, 1945. These were leaflet drops in areas where isolated pockets of German resistance still existed in northern Italy, advising the garrisons about the surrender of their leaders and ordering them to lay down their arms.

Brigadier Robert D. Knapp, who had commanded the Wing since it became operational on 1 March, 1944, left on 23 May 1945. He was succeeded by Colonel Anthony Hunter, who continued in command until at least early July, perhaps longer.

On 15 August 1945 the 57th Wing headquarters, now reduced to two Officers and one enlisted man, was reassigned from the 12th Air Force to Army Service Command, MTO. And on 20 August the 57th Wing was attached to the Air Force Staging Area No. 2, Pomigliano, a separation and processing center of the Service Command, and was there inactivated on 12 September 1945.

The 57th Bombardment Wing had completed its World War II mission, it's last wartime mission flown by the Wing's tactical squadron was flown on 3 May, 1945.