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Lamar Timmons

441st Squadron

320th Group

Monday, April 12, 1943, Tafaourui, Algeria North Africa

We are waiting for logistics to catch up with the 320th Bomb Group's eagerness to move operations some 300 miles closer to our targeted areas of Tunisia Sicily and Italy. My last flying mission was April 1, and most of our ground personnel have already moved up via trucks. nevertheless, there is considerable flying in order to check out newly serviced planes. Group has a total of 48 planes, and it is considered adequate ground maintenance if 36 are combat ready at the same time for a single mission. This explains why test flying goes on continuously. daily

After checking in with the operations officer / in order to determine ground or flight activity scheduled or not, if free, permission was usually granted for a jeep ride to visit Oran. Thus Lts. Owen, Riley, Church and myself drive happily into town in the late morning, even tho this is the fourth day in a row we have taken advantage of such a delightful occurrence. Our reasoning is very logical because we are moving up close to fighting, and it would be healthy psychologically to have had our fill of city life, with many people bustling about, places crowded with friendly folk that helps one forget war, the comforts of the American Red Cross lounges, and even the smoke and unhealthy atmosphere of the many active night clubs

Oran is an attractive city, beautifully situated against a large natural harbor" and was once the headquarters of the French ,Mediterranean fleet. from a military and naval stand-point, it is strategically essential for the North African campaign.

I insisted on a short good-bye visit to the general hospital of Oran in order to express my gratitude to the doctors and nurses who had tended me so well during my 25 day stay for a severe brain concussion. It was worth it to see who I saw and thanked.

We don't know how Lt. Owen almost instinctively knows how to pick such places, but we ate mid-day dinner in a very dirty restaurant described by him as having local atmosphere - It was as crowded as the service was poor. Even the silverware did not measure up, and we had to take turns eating with each other's fork and used Owen's hunting knife for cutting. Such a small place seated no more than 30 patrons and of course we were served lastly after the food was running low. The appetizer of fried eggs along with bread, olives and wine were devoured triumphantly, and the eggs were good.

**Any person** who is the least sensitive to delicate gradations in cooking would smack their lips in appreciation of how many delectable ways a French chef can prepare an egg. An art of cooking and eating that is far removed from our personal likes and dislikes that have been almost ingrained in our palate, shall I say s"oiled by "Momism" beginning at the cradle.

The main course was ravioli followed by a plate of dates for dessert. I found a worm in one, but still ate my share of them. I've noticed that many diners were served artichokes which was followed by fish and green peas, apparently the noon dinner special. We must have been talked out of that selection without knowing what the talking was all about. My command of the language could not compete with hungry Frenchmen. Had the shortage of eating utensils been a message of discouragement that we did not understand in the first place? "Hell anyway, it was an eating experience that shall be long remembered.

After the noon luncheon, all businesses, shops and offices have a siesta and drawn shutters are not opened up until 3 o'clock. So one observes many soldiers and sailors from many lands walking idly about or loafing on a park bench these lovely Spring days. About 4:00 we found ourselves in the American Red Cross lounge enjoying ourselves talking with other men and the hostesses, and especially the buffet. "heir food set very well with us because it was from back home: American cheese, ham, tongue, sardines, butter, mustard, good local breads, tomato and grapefruit juice and coffee.

Late in the afternoon we were caught up in a tremendous crowd of people standing around in Sebastopol Square. This was retreat time. first the brilliantly colorful **Zouave French band** marched onto the square, and even for a man in uniform, overseas and in the combat zone there is a tingling of the scalp and spine completely down to the toes. Second, a squad of American GI's marched quietly and efficiently onto the scene, followed shortly by the Irish Guards dressed in a distinctive green uniform and loudly in impressive cadence with their hobnail boots. The Irish Guards are most impressive anywhere for all are chosen for **being 6'** or more tall. Lastly, the free French marched forward, trimly neat and very proud.

The Zouave band played the national anthem of all three nations, followed by bugling of "Taps" and the roll of **muted drums**. Everyone's attention was concentrated on that impressive scene, not a distracting sound, which made it a most beautiful and stirring act of war that I have ever witnessed, and the lump in my throat lingered on.

Wednesday, April 14, 1943, Tafaourui

Scheduled for a test hop of our airplane this morning but flying had been called off because of the bad weather, and we were ordered to pack our baggage and load up the plane in preparation of moving to the combat zone. This Spring weather is unusually slow moving and several men speculated that the fighting in North Africa would be over before our bomber Group would be set up to operate. Here at Tafaourui-Oran we have flown only anti-submarine patrols off the North African coast.

After supper Capt. Holt, Lts. McVay, Patterson and myself drove into Oran for one last night out on the town. Instead of a usual late night snack of peanut-butter and jelly sandwiches in our tent, the consensus was the desirability of one last super "Dagwood sandwich" at the American Red cross snack bar followed by a huge dish of ice cream.

In addition, we had stolen two army cots from the lobby of a hotel last night while the

clerk was not looking, and decided on a repeat performance tonight. We had not been issued an army cot or an air mattress by squadron supply and would be sleeping in tents. Our intentions were thwarted by an alert desk clerk, and we even tried to bribe him with 20 chocolate bars. So back to the airfield early and we were in the sack by 11:00 o'clock.

Thursday, April 15, 1943, Tafaourui

Last night we had a terrific wind storm but it did no damage to the airplanes or field. Not much sleeping for anyone because of the continual banging of windows and doors and the gas alarm was set off.

Another dry run for flying today as the weather remain very bad. The weather officer reported that we would not leave for the front for several days because ugly weather is piled up back and to the west of us and is moving over slowly. The wind storm should hurry it along.

Friday, April 16, 1943, Tafaourui

The Group commanding officer, Col. Flint Garrison, flew in this morning from our advanced air base located in the mountains around Montesquieu and was on his high horse as usual, wondering just why in the goddamn hell all "lanes were not taking off and moving up to the new location. After a hurried meeting with all the squadron commanders and operation officers, and at 14:00 hours the whole group packed frantically and rushed out to the Planes.

Take-off was delayed an hour because of a vicious spring thunderstorm over the airfield, but after it had cleared quite a few planes departed. Lt. McVay and I finally taxied out to take-off position, but since it was 10 minutes after deadline of 16:30 hours we were denied permission to leave and returned to the flight line.

As a farewell gesture to Tafaourui Air Base that had been our station for the past 3 months, the 441st officers assembled our best volleyball team. "e challenged the enlisted men of the anti-aircraft artillery" crew and finally beat them in a grudge match. In fact we won all 5 games played, which was a first.

3214 words, titled "Montesquieu"

Saturday, April 17, 1943, Montesquieu, North Africa

everyone was up bright and early and all the remaining airplanes of the 320th Bomber Group took-off smartly for the long anticipated move to our new home. We joined our flight leader in formation, but 1/2 hour en route his plane developed a bad oil leak and our little 3 ship formation escorted him back to the airfield. The crew chiefs and flight engineers soon had it fixed and the plane flyable again.

Checking in for noon dinner before take-off again, we were surprised' "Kings Row"

mess hall for permanent base personnel had purposeful" waited until final departure of the 320th Bomb Group in order to celebrate with a steak dinner. "hank goodness, their hoarding included enough for our additional 20 men that made up our flight crews. Along with the steak and mashed potatoes were creamed peas, fried onions, bread, butter, peanut butter, jelly, coffee and peach "read pudding for dessert. "hat was a real banquet for us.

With nothing more to delay us we departed immediately after the dinner and with two hours of rugged flying through extreme turbulence and skirting around storm clouds, we landed at our new air base that had been hacked out of the mountains around Montesquieu. Mountains denuded of trees and fit only for sparse grazing, but having a certain beauty, wild and lonesome surrounding" everywhere one looked and miles from town.

Sleeping in tents for the first time and the 8 officers in each tent are solely responsible for its furnishings. However our happiness at stealing 2 army cots back in Oran was changed to a slight feeling of shame because squadron supply furnished everyone with cots and blankets, mess kits and drinking cups but no sheets or pillows. long ago we had learned to shave out of our steel helmets each morning. Clear, crisp and very cold and a brilliant moonlit night.

Thursday, April 22, 1943 Montesquieu, Algeria

Today was the 320th bomb group's first air raid mission over enemy territory to drop bombs on the seaport town of Carteforte, Sardinia and aerial reconnaissance photos showed that the target was hit with accuracy. We were snugly proud.

It has been exactly 9 months and 17 days since the 441st was one of 4 squadrons activated at MacDill field, Tampa, Florida in July 1942 that we finally achieved the purpose for which we had been intended. This has been a long and painful time of training, however it must be remembered that historically the Air Corps was the youngest of all the major branches of the military Much had to be learned from experience, rather than completely thought out by the military brass.

The first air raid seemed so matter-of-fact and so mechanically worked out that we could hardly tell the difference from our many practice bombing missions over the desert.while stationed at Tafaraoui. But there was a noticeable tension and nervous atmosphere as we gathered in the briefing room. It was a thoro brief, we ate a hearty meal and nonchalantly walked out to our airplanes to "wait take-off. Everyone was so eager that we took off 5 minutes early and were over the target 13 minutes ahead of schedule.

An 18 ship formation and we had to sweat-out the "tail-end Charlie" position on our first mission! As the co-pilot, whenever I began to think about the possibilities of danger that lay ahead I would take over the controls and fly the plane in order to take my mind off such things. We flew a very tight formation pattern. Visibility from 8,500' was ideal and the bomb run was on target as we saturated the harbor area in which was anchored many small patrol and fishing boats. I counted only 5 bursts of flak and there was no evidence of enemy fighters. A milk run and everyone back home safely and on time"e.

Friday, April 23, 1943 Montesquieu

Today was the first bombing raid for the second half of the flight crews that make up each Squadron, while the other half of the crews flew their first mission yesterday. Each squadron has 12 airplanes of which 6 to 10 may be serviceable at any one time, and it is planned a crew will fly every other mission.

Another air raid on Sardinia, farther up north on the island to bomb a large airfield and projected to be dangerous. In contrast to such an easy raid yesterday, several of the planes were badly shot up! "here was no P-38 fighter escort-of the formation close-in, and the" were jumped by 6 German Me-109's! Of the 441st squadron, Lt. Carl Hoy's plane was badly damaged with a large chunk ripped off the tail and left wing and many machine gun bullet holes punctured the fuselage. Evidence that the Martin B-26 bomber has a rugged build. Capt. Gordon Friday, commanding officer of the 442nd Squadron was so badly shot-up that he had to crash land his Plane. No one in the Group was severely injured but there was evidence of minor wounds to crew members. "he mission claimed the probable shooting down of one enemy fighter.

The experience of the English Bomber Command flying out of Britain against the Germans had revealed that no bomber formation or no single bomber was ever a match against the fighters! "he British have been forced to night bombing to prevent such frightening losses. As well-protected as the armament of the B-26 affords with 5 gunners manning 7 .~50 caliber machine guns, we are no match for an aggressive enemy in a one-on-one confrontation Our daylight bombing is only possible because of a tight, almost wing-tip to wing-tip formation over enemy territory and a fighter escort for maximum protection.

High above the formation over Sardinia, a huge "dog fight' raged between some 30 German Me-109's and American P-38's. We do not know the results of that fight except that our fighters saved the day for the bombers "hen one imagines what would have happened if 30 enemy fighters had attacked 18 medium bombers! Many thanks to our fighter pilots and we pray for the best to them.

Easter Sunday. April 25, 1943, Montesquieu, Algeria

### North African Campaign, World War II

The god of war is no respecter of persons, places or things, and the haphazard sequence of many events frustrates the planning of the best intentioned people primarily because war dictates its own warped way. Let me illustrate by describing for you the events that happened to us on Easter, the most sacred Sunday in all Christendom for no matter what type of uniform the believer wears.

Our bomber group was aroused well before daybreak **for an** early morning air raid mission at low altitude on an air field in central Sardinia, Oristano, where aerial photos had

revealed a concentration of enemy aircraft. The bomb load consisted of a first time use of parachute fragmentation bombs to be dropped from an altitude of 1,000'. This operation was ordered despite a low ceiling of 1,800' with heavy broken cloud cover, and using our rather unwieldy B-26 airplanes flying in tight formation.

Lt. John McVay the first pilot of our crew made a good take-off and after some fancy maneuvering dictated by the low cloud cover and mountainous terrain, the flight straightened out in a reasonable 21 ship formation. We headed north out over the Mediterranean Sea at 1,000'. However as "tail-end Charlies," we found ourselves pushed down to a very uncomfortable and vulnerable low altitude of some 500' because of the stair-step down effect of the formation.

On board our plane was Capt. James Macia as an observer and at present the group S-2 officer. He had been one of the navigators on Jimmy Doolittle's famous Tokyo raid. Another man of our crew was Sgt. Thatcher, gunner, who was also with Doolittle. A comment might be in order here. As commanding general of our Wing, General Doolittle visited the 320th Bomb Group headquarters, and during a question and answer time McVay asked the general why it was that new flying officers coming over from the States had had promotion. in ran " whereas officers who had been overseas since the north African' invasion and flown combat missions had not. This irritation was corrected shortly thereafter.

Of equal importance is every airman and the other members of our crew is proudly listed as follows: Sgt. C. Pagel, flight engineer; S/Sgt. Rinaldi, engineer-gunner; T/Sgt. G. Greenlee, radio-gunner and S/Sgt. B. Curlee, gunner. In addition to these men, each airplane has non flying personnel and our crew chief was S/Sgt. Liss in charge of the ground crew that kept the plane airworthy.

Half way to the target, Lt. Snyder our bombardier and Capt. Macia started taking the lock pins out of the bombs" so that they would be armed and would explode as set after the drop. A slip-up occurred and one fragmentation bomb became fully armed and ready to explode in a matter of seconds! Snyder crawled back to the tail and Macia hurried forward yelling for us to salvo the bomb load immediately. The emergency salvo did not work, so McVay salvoed normally. And none too soon because the live bomb exploded as soon as it cleared the bomb bay, riddling our Plane with shrapnel from one end to the other.

Snyder was hit by a shell fragment on the heel of his boot which caused him to limp for several days. The terrible damage was to the plane; a large jagged hole was torn in the right engine nacelle and many holes in the right wing and aileron, fuselage, bomb bay doors and left engine nacelle. fortunately these hits did not effect engine performance, but we shuttered to think what might have happened if the bomb had exploded in the bomb bay.

We dropped out of the formation and became lost returning to the airfield, but after doubling back along the African coastline we finally found our way home. And the worst was yet to come" "he hydraulic "system had been shot up and was **inoperable so we had** to manually crank down the landing gear and flaps. Without flaps to slow down the plane, a high speed landing of 120 to 140 mph becomes necessary and is dangerous. However McVay did a superb job of landing our monster **safely despite The unknown but obvious horror** of a flat

tire. I somewhere recall that both of us ended up desperately over controlling the wheel, rudder and brakes to prevent a possible ground loop.

Rather an exasperating and very tense day for us on an Easter Sunday morning. eventually the entire mission was scrubbed, no bombs dropped. In my diary, I ended up recounting this day with a rather trite comment that revealed our youthful naivete because I had written: all I can say about today is that all of us are more than glad to be back safely. Thank goodness. Whew!

Wednesday, May 19, 1943 Montesquieu

In retrospect to this air raid over Villacidro, Sardinia and the concern shown by our 320th Bomb group Commanding Officer, Lt. Col. Fordyce, I can personally testify to the loss and grief of all the officers and enlisted men who knew him when he was killed in a plane crash just 4 days from this day.

The Group was schedule for a mission in the afternoon on a long and dangerous raid to the airbase at Villacidro, but that did not prevent us from morning housekeeping chores because "e all expected to live and fight another day. The boys in our tent had made the acquaintance of a nice Italian family from whom we bought eggs and who did our laundry. It was a dry run since she had no eggs and no soap.

Lt. John McVay, first pilot and myself as co-pilot flew the afternoon mission in the B-26 named "Shootin' Arn", and even tho our Group Commanding Officer, Lt. Col. Fordyce, went along in our plane as an observer we were assigned "Tail-end Charlie" and brought up the rear of the 24 ship formation. Col. Fordyce declined the offer to fly as first pilot and busied himself inspecting the plane from fore to aft and talking to each of the crew members. He is well respected by everyone and has been on more missions than anyone in Group.

The whole island of Sardinia was shrouded in a thick cloud cover that topped out at 9,000' so the mission dropped no bombs. We had quite a scare because we were jumped by enemy fighters and because we were in the most vulnerable position in the formation and had the commanding officer aboard. Our escort of P-40's put up a tremendous defense against the German Me-109's and were credited with shooting down nine of them.' Who claimed that the P-40 is no match for the Me-109 if flown by an experienced and aggressive pilot Our boys certainly saved us from being badly shot up.'

On our way back across the Mediterranean Sea, because of our tail-end position in the formation we noticed one of the P-40 planes in trouble and sending out smoke from its engine. Col. Fordyce insisted that we drop out of formation and escort him back to North Africa, and in case he ditch.in the sea we could drop him a life raft. He made it back OK.

And four days later, Lt. Col. Fordyce was killed in a plane crash within sight of our tent. I observed the whole tragic accident caused by power failure on take-off and spinning in at 200",crashing in a tremendous explosion and fire ball.' needless to say, I did not get to sleep for a long time that night after the lights were turned off. It was a sad but a splendid honor to be

asked to serve as pall bearer at Col. Fordyce's funeral.

Friday, May 28, 1943 Montesquieu, Algeria

No flying today so Lt. Leonard Fisher our bombardier, myself and driver, Sgt. Linson, took off in a jeep for Tunis some 180 miles away. Nice trip, good macadam road thru beautiful desert scenery altho evidence of war was everywhere to be seen. Many bomb craters and numerous holes dug in the road for land mines. Passed thru the war-wrecked towns of Medjez-el-Bab and Massicault, and further on counted over 30 light and medium tanks wrecked and rusted in a large area where a great battle must have been fought.

We stopped here and over on a rocky slope investigated a large well camouflaged German bunker still guarded by two dead soldiers. They were blackened and bloated from the hot desert sun and have remained unburied for at least 3 weeks, the odor terrific! The sappers had been here after the battle to clear a narrow path of safety thru the mine field. One German was sprawled by the door of the dugout steps—his flight to safety cut short. Picked up a Mauser rifle and bayonet. Aside from a few odds and ends, everything had been ransacked. Each of the dead had had their ring finger severed and boots missing.

Tunis is a lovely town with beautiful modern homes and apartment buildings in soft pastel colors, mostly untouched by war. A few wild bombs had caused minor damage, in contrast to the dock area that was in shambles. Visited El Alema airdrome, former great German airbase and examined many wrecked planes of all types. The air field "as usable and buildings in fair condition, English occupied. Ate supper at R.A.F. headquarters. enjoyable. Purchased 2 rifles and bayonets, a quart of Irish whiskey and I should have swiped that unguarded 4 lb. box of chocolates'

Daylight hours noticeably longer so left Tunis at 18:00 hours in order to return before midnight, however events lengthened our trip. On the way, picked up 2 French women who were going to Constantine to visit sick husband in hospital. They shared the long, bumpy, blacked-out and miserably cold jeep ride to Souk Aharas, which was in the midst of a midnight air raid. No shelter, so watched the fireworks from the jeep. We woke up the town major, who was surprisingly unperturbed by the bombing, and left our two passengers with him. On the outskirts of town, a half dozen hysterical women stopped us screaming that 4 escaped German prisoners were seen in their neighborhood. How we understood their French I'll never know. None of us were armed but we felt brave enough to stick around until the military police showed up and hoping that the mere presence of American soldiers would frighten off the escapees.

Sweating out our gas supply, finally arrived back at the airfield at 2:30 a.m. safe and sound after a rather eventful day. Our many thanks to Sgt. Linson for the adventure and not getting us lost and in trouble.

Wednesday, June 2, 1943 Montesquieu

What does one do when he has an airplane that does want to take-off without a strenuous objection? or that is seemingly too lazy to fly? and hates to be loaded down with a maximum gas and bomb load and crew and machine gun bullets? and is that possible? Well, it just might be, and here is the story that may authenticate a belief that an airplane can have a personality all of its Own

As we roared down the dirt runway for a take-off on a raid to the Italian island of Pantelleria, McVay and I ' the plane would lift off the ground. 'With maximum load of 8 300 lb. bombs and 7 men aboard we barely cleared the end of the runway, and off we buzzed down the valley at 150 mph. skimming over the sage brush, and praying as we slowly gained altitude. It would have been curtains if we had to crash land.

Our assigned position in the formation was lead ship of the last 6 plane flight, "tail-end Charlie" of the 36 airplanes on this mission. Half way to the target at 7,000' altitude our air speed was not sufficient to keep up so we put both engines in high blower, with 45" Hg. of manifold pressure and 2,400 rpm which was maximum power. This final effort was not sufficient, and the 30 airplanes flying in formation in front of us continued to slowly pull away and leave us behind. It seemed as if we almost stood still in the sky and were being laughed at in our embarrassment and the plan"s in our flight passed us by in order to take up new positions in the formation.

It was at this point that Mac and I decided to return home by ourselves. Both of us were mad and after landing back at the air field we stomped into the operations office where Mac proceeded to blow his top to the officer in charge. The idea of sending such a lazy airplane'- into~~combat, etc. When the occasion called for it, he was no respecter of superior rank! So back it went to maintenance for two new engines and to make it a combat ready airplane once again.

—1—

Saturday, July 10, 1943, Massicault Tunisia North Africa

The allied invasion of Sicily was started this morning, preceded immediately by a parachute drop' Capt. "Sparky" Malsbury had returned from Wing headquarters at midnight and told us beforehand. My prediction that only Sicily would be invaded was on target. Strategically it is a much more important island than Sardinia. I still have a 500 franc bet with McVay that the continent will not be invaded this year. Italy will be next.

Our bomb group was sent on a mission late this afternoon to do tactical bombing support of the invasion which had run into difficulty from defending German and Italian troops and tanks. McVay and I flew in "Lady Halitosis" which is our favorite airplane and has two new 2,000 hp engines installed. The mission was **scrubbed for** us *because on* take-off the front nose wheel hub cap came off and sheared hydraulic lines in the wheel well. e circled the air field for an hour and then landed. A bomber is almost useless without hydraulic fluid because it operates the ailerons, landing gear, flaps and bomb bay doors. These appendages all have back-up manually controlled mechanism that is effective but only in an emergency. There is

always danger of fire from leaking fluid.

The debriefing session after the mission was interesting as the boys recounted what a wonderful sight it was flying over the hundreds of invasion ships that stretched for 40 miles along the coast line. Mac and I would like to have been there to get a bird's eye view of the invasion in its initial stages. Since our planes are primarily used for strategic bombing, this opportunity might not present itself again.

—2—

#### Monday, July 12, 1943 Massicault

Were routed out of the sack at 4:30 a.m. for a sunrise take-off and an air raid mission to Sicily to aid the Allied invasion forces. The campaign is only 3 days old and at this critical stage of ground fighting all elements of the war machine are needed for early success. It is awfully cold in the desert before daylight but as soon as we were airborne and flying east into a rising sun, at 10,000' I had to pull off my flight jacket.

This was my 16th sortie and one of the few times that I have flown as first pilot in Africa. The reason was that it is against regulations for a pilot who has had a severe brain concussion as I had 3 months ago at Tafarouri, Algeria to be a first pilot again, and especially in combat. The regulations were waived after much argument, and it felt very comfortable driving from the left hand side again.

To go back in time a bit, I was a charter member of the 441st Squadron when the 320th Bomber Group was activated in June 1942 at MacDill Field, Tampa, Florida, Col. Flint Garrison commandant. We flew transition in the old short-winged B-26-E planes with 1850 hp engines, and the Group lost 48 crew members during the month of August learning to fly the bastard plane that flew like a bumble bee' At that time, Group headquarters issued a directive that it would be a courts martial offense for any officer or enlisted man to discuss the chilling performance of the B-26 airplane off the airbase' Quite an obstacle course of apprehension to jump over in front of so many new brides. I had my own plane and crew and many of us flew this dangerous old type plane to Africa, and it was over here that the new B-26's were supplied us, with 6' more of wing span and 2,000 hp engines. Slower, more maneuverable and much safer.

We either helped or hindered the Allied invading forces far below us because 18 or our 24 ship formation dropped their bombs on a town that had been captured by our troops as of 5:00 o'clock this morning And we had been briefed on the battle ground action. Lt. Paul Karlowitz our flight leader and his bombardier-navigator Lt. Joe Shevelson recognized the mistake at the last minute of our bomb run, and after some wild formation flying and tough jockeying to maintain a flight pattern, during an eternity of time that lasted only about two minutes , we managed to drop on the railways yards in the right town, Caltanissetta.

—3—

#### Tuesday, July 13, 1943

Each flight crew is scheduled for a mission on alternate dates usually, so I doctored my aching back by staying in bed most of today after yesterday's long flight. Either something that I had eaten and combined with a touch of dysentery did me in. 13 letters from home cheered me, including 10 from my wife Louise

In the afternoon finally got up and walked down to the flight line and saw our old airplane named "Lady Halitosis" all cleaned up, shined and painted up. This plane has been selected to be flown back to the states and visit major cities on a publicity and good will tour. On the front of the fuselage has been painted symbols of how many accredited missions flown, 43; also 6 German Me-109 fighters shot down 3 submarines and one enemy vessel sunk. Of course as one bomber, The Lady did not accomplish all of that by herself, but it is representative of what bomber command has done during the past 3 months of combat.

The name of the airplane was selected by Lt. Thomas "Whispering Tom" Memory, and I remember teasing him that the name was lifted from the comic strip "Smiling' Jack" but he maintained that it was original with him. It will make good publicity anyway Actually Lt. John McVay and I flew almost all the bombing missions that she went on. One of the pilots will be chosen from our 441st Squadron, either John McVay or Robert Patterson. Lt. Joe Shevelson is the definite choice for bombardier. Each bomb group, the 17th, 319th and 320th, will send an airplane: Hell Cat Coughin' Coffin and Lady Halitosis.

—4—

Wednesday, July 14, 1943 Massicault, Tunisia

Were not scheduled for a mission today, so after dilly-dallying away most of the morning a jeep load of us drove into Tunis as a diversionary tactic. Several bars and restaurants in all large towns as this are set aside for officers only and are expensive because of shortages and inflation. The enlisted men have a wider choice of places to go than we do. An apertif and table wine is served with each meal and no drinking water or milk available. Our casual drinking usually consisted mainly of iced fruit juices: peach, apricot, prune, orange and lemon. Because flight duties were so demanding, our lives were usually well ordered and with apparently little alcoholism.

Most of our visits into town found us returning to the air field about 10:00 p.m. with a few notable inebriate exceptions It was each man's duty to check operations office for the next day schedule of flying, etc. Then with your tentmates, the last air raid is discussed and one is fed the latest rumors and scuttlebutt. What would the GI do without such nourishment that has plagued every military maneuver since the beginning of history.

The good news tonight is that It. John 'Noisy" McVay pilot and Lt. Joe Shevelson, Bombardier, are definite crew members from the 441st Squadron scheduled to fly "Lady Halitosis" back to the states, and they are leaving tomorrow. It is to be a composite crew, 2 men from each of the 4 squadrons. Everyone was happy for them.

—5—

Thursday, July 15, 1943 Massicault

McVay did not come by his nickname "noisy" because he is mild mannered or because it was a take-off on his middle name, Noyse. So with his bellowing, all 8 tentmates were up bright and early and helped Mac and Joe pack their gear and tote it out to the plane. After much delay, picture taking, back slapping and hand shaking, "Lady Halitosis" took off, buzzed the field at a forbidden ground level altitude, and headed our west for the states via the northern route. For sheer sleek good looks, it is hard to rival the B-26 Martin Marauder. A classic of design and engineering.

Their planned itinerary called for the first stop at Telergma, Algeria; then Casablanca, over to Gibraltar and up to England. In this beautiful summer weather it will be easy flying with further stops at Iceland, Greenland, Labrador, Nova Scotia and finally Washington, D.C.

Mac and Joe were two of the best boys in the 441st Squadron. Mac was a 1940 graduate of Ohio State University and a variety baseball player, 3rd base. He was graded as a man's man, who enjoyed an occasional drink, cigar and his favorite obscene expression that would easily echo up and down the flight line. These were all holdovers from his college days. But it is only mentioned to contrast his most distinctive ability. He had the faculty of instant recall, an almost photographic memory, and remembered anyone's name when once introduced. He was also an avid baseball fan and could tell you which team won the world series in any particular year, the managers, pitchers and outstanding players. He once stopped a friendly argument cold that we were having when he made the certain pronouncement that he knew that his facts were correct, period' It was entertaining for us to throw unrelated questions at him on any subject at night after lights were out just to test his encyclopedic mind.

Of course Joe Shevelson from Chicago, was much respected when it was learned that he had graduated from Yale University with a Phi Beta Kappa key. He had no unfriendly friends because he was a born diplomat, a sincere person and an intelligent conversationalist. For a pint sized guy, Little Joe was our best softball pitcher and a natural athlete.

Yes, Mac and Joe were two of the best boys in the Squadron, indispensable? no; replaceable? yes; but as friends, never' There was a lump in my throat at the last hand clasp.

Sunday, July 18, 1943

I shaved early enough after breakfast to appear proper and go to Protestant church service. The scripture was taken from the Old Testament, Isaiah 9: 5-6, and is quoted:

"For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born." \* ...if all were only to believe in the Messiah, one day the world would be at friendship, one with the other. No more wars because our fighting generation will guarantee it. But who can believe it? "The price of freedom is eternal...is still, eternal vigilance." And Eternity is of God!...when the devil is at peace.

The worship service was well attended and profitable. Since grade school days in Geor-

gia, my grandmother and her sister had been my benevolent and rather strict guardians. My late grandfather was a Methodist minister, so attendance at church two or three times on Sunday was expected of my younger brother and myself. It is strange how this habit has stuck to my ribs, and now I enjoy going'

Several of us had planned a trip to the beach this afternoon for a swim in the Mediterranean but all transportation was tied up. After supper, Flight Officer Bill Cartwright and I took a B-26 bomber for a test hop. First, we ferried 7 men over to the 17th Bomb Group, as they were to fly back two new airplanes for our Group I let Cartwright sit on the left side, and for two hours Fill practiced landings and take-offs in order to eventually qualify as a first pilot. He has had over 300 hours flying as a co-pilot and is long over due to have his own crew and plane. Several more practice sessions in formation flying and he will be ready.

\* RSV

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Monday, July 19, 1943

Here it is Monday again and these hot desert summer days drag by in slow, dusty-hot monotony. It has been only 5 days since McVay and Shevelson left for the States in "Lady Halitosis", but it feels like more than a month has crept by. Have flown only one sortie within the past week and that was the terrible, never-to-be-forgotten air raid on Naples

Lt. Foy, our squadron mess officer, invited me to go into Tunis with him on a special mission. He had the address of an old fellow named, George, who had been guaranteed by someone that Foy knew, to get us 70 gallons of beer at the Stella Brewery in Tunis. We did find old George, who was a seedy character, and altho he did not quite live up to his promise, he did procure for us 40 gals. for the Squadron beer bust. George is an English man of indeterminate age who has lived all over the world and claimed a conversational skill in many languages: Arabic, German Spanish, Greek Italian and Japanese

Today our 320th Bomb Group was part of some 500 bombers that raided Rome, Italy for the first time. Targeted the airfield and railway marshaling yards with accuracy and it was confirmed by aerial photos. Anti- aircraft flak was inaccurate and no Italian or German fighters were sighted by our Group which made the mission easy after so much pre-flight apprehension.

The great tragedy to our 441st Squadron was that Lt. Patterson and F.O. Cartwright airplane did not return. It was observed to break formation and to spin in and crash into the Mediterranean Sea 47 minutes after leaving the target. 3 parachutes were sighted, life rafts were dropped and one man was seen climbing aboard. Among Patterson's crew members was S/Sgt. Edwin Bain, the turret gunner. He had the distinction of having flown on the Doolittle Tokyo raid. He had already been in 3 plane crashes, once in the B-25 bomber over China and twice he had bailed out from B-26's. We trust that air-sea rescue will be on hand for survivors.

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Tuesday, July 20, 1943, Massicault

Inquired at operations office but they had had no further information on Patterson's lost plane, and there was gloom on the flight line because this crew was one of the best. The most plausible explanation was that a control cable had been partly sheared by a piece of flak over the target and had eventually snapped in two.

In our training, all of us come to accept accidents and death as a part of learning to fly as well as being shot at in combat. We also learn to suppress our nagging fear of them, but the closer they strike to us the more apprehensive and resentful we become and the more careful we are to cover up and be callous. A sad shake of the head and the shrug of the shoulders are only indicators of deep feelings that are hard to put into words, after everything else has been said. Good bye, Pat and Dill and the crew, you have been swell fellows to know. Pat had been married less than a month before leaving the States and his wife had written that she was expecting a baby.

Lts. Arlo Koontz, pilot and Jim McGeever navigator, moved into our tent today and took the places of Pat and Bill. Our tent personnel has changed during the past 3 months since starting flying combat out of Montesquieu. Capt. Barclay "Sparky" Malsbury, navigator, and myself are the only ones left of the original 8 men. And sparky is in the hospital at present.

Since we were not scheduled for an air raid today and for a much needed change of pace, we requisitioned a jeep and went into Tunis for dinner at the officers club. Our favorite American Bar, French owned, was located nearby and we bent an elbow there before enjoying a steak dinner. After a long walk around the city in the cool of the evening, we went to a night club and were entertained by a live stage show spoken and sung in French. Armandel, a well-known Parisian comedian, was the headline attraction and the club was jammed mostly with local people who gave his show an attentive and wild response.

Friday, August 13, 1943 El Bathan, Tunisia

We were all elated when aerial photos showed that the 320th Bomb Group had scored with great accuracy today when we bombed the Littorio railway marshaling yards on the outskirts of Rome, Italy. There is great apprehension that the Vatican may be accidentally hit and other historical landmarks and we wished that Rome would be declared an open city!

Rousted out of bed at 5:00 a.m. for an air raid on Rome, Italy today. I had always wanted to visit Rome, but only as a tourist! Intelligence briefed us of greatly increased fighter strength and anti-aircraft defense all up and down the Italian coastline. For evidence, the 320th yesterday on an air raid over Naples got credit for shooting down 4 Me-109's which was quite a score when jumped by some 30 enemy fighters. Our training and air discipline of not breaking formation and pulling in tight almost wing-tip to wing-tip when attacked by fighters is proving very effective.

So with a large feeling of apprehension, the 36 ships of our Group set sail to Italy with

72 other B-26 bombers from the 17th and 319th Bomb Groups. We were flying "tail-end Charlie", and the view from where we sat made a gorgeously powerful sight' It is hard to believe that over 100 B-26's bomb Rome within a space of 10 minutes time' The crew chief of our plane told me la-ter that he had counted over 450 bombers of all types in the area, and how terrible and awesome it must have been on the ground.

To be in constant anti-aircraft fire and simultaneously under enemy fighter attack for one-half an hour is a very long timed It was here that I literally pulled my steel helmet down around my ankles and experienced all Hell breaking loose as we were jumped by some 30 odd Ne-109's and Macci 202's. And the anti-aircraft boys on the ground threw up quite a thick black cloud of flak all around us. Thank goodness for their inaccuracy, and for the splendid fighters protection by the P-38's and the gunners of our bombers. It is apparent that Jerry respects the B-26's because there were no kills and all of returned safely!

Sunday, August 29, 1943 E1 Bathan, Tunisia

I think that I have claimed and perhaps bragged a little that I have been on many rough air raids during my 8 months of combat duty in the North African campaign—and one or two in particular always stand out. But today's mission to~Naples seems to take the prize. This was a raid on the railway marshalling yards of Naples, Italy, and the area is regarded as one of the "hottest" spots in air defense by the Germans on the Italian peninsula right now. And that includes Rome.

And it lived up to its nasty reputation today. We flew in intermittent light and heavy flak for 15 minutes over the target area, and had a 25 minute running dog fight with some 18 Me-109's The gunners on board my plane claimed to have shot doom 4 boggles, 2 kills were confirmed and 2 probables. So you can judge Naple's reputation for yourself.

One might ask why our plane was in so much action against the enemy fighters and the answer was that for 11 times out of the last 25 missions flown we were again "tail- end Charlie" of the 320th Bomb Group formation of 24 ships! Because of the extreme enemy defensive pressure, our Group after coming off target pulled up behind the 24 ship formation of the 17th Bomb Group. chat a rather terrifying feeling and an exhilarating sight to be in the last element of a 48 plane formation that is tucked up real tight and see thousands of tracer .50 caliber bullets being fired over our heads and backwards into the attacking enemy fighters'

We had our engines at maximum power: in high blower, 2,800 rpm and 50" Hg. of manifold pressure to keep us tucked up safely in formation. Enemy fighters tactics are to attempt to separate one or two bombers from the formation and move in for the kill. And that is an almost certainty if one engine looses power or blows a cylinder.

That was the hardest bit of flying I have ever done in my life and it was a matter of life or death. Were we a happy crew coming on home to Tunis with no damage to our plane or to personnel. Some of the other boys were not so fortunate, but I had no stomach to make detail inquires as to how many and to whom.

Friday, September 24, 1943 E1 Bathan, Tunisia

How do- veteran combat airmen react, what do they say about the pent up emotions of fear and exhilaration in response to a newspaper reporter who has the Job of recording an interview with a crew who has just returned from a terrifying air raid over Italy. Is everyone deadly serious? Cool and nonchalant? Do several chain smoke or have a nervous twitch?

Stammer and stutter, blurting our disconnected phrases to asinine questions? Sweating, does someone throw up?

Perhaps a little bit of each could be revealed during a conversation between the crew and reporter. As a result of such an interview the following article was printed in the Walton Tribune newspaper, Monroe Georgia about a month later for the benefit of the home town folks:

"1st Lt. Lamar S. Timmons, a USAAF B-26 Marauder pilot from Monroe, Georgia, feels he knows all there is to know about German anti aircraft fire. During a recent mission against German supply lines north of Naples, Lt. Timmons' Marauder "Little Lu" was punctured with 108 flak holes and still flew home to North Africa without any of the 7 man crew being injured.

"The Marauder formation began catching flak as soon as they crossed the Italian coast. During the approach to the target and for the next 15 minutes, anti-aircraft shells were bursting all around the formation and 2nd Lt. William R. Hubbard, co-pilot from Sheridan, Arkansas, could see the black bursts from the German 88mm cannon blossoming everywhere.

"Bombardier 2nd Lt. Harold F. Konvalinka of Peoria, Illinois lined up the target in the Norden bombsight and opened the bomb-bay doors. The flak was getting thicker as the batteries inland found the Marauders coming into range. Just as Lt. Konvalinka called on the inter-coin "bombs away", S/Sgt. Edgar Fendrick the tail gunner from Nutley, New Jersey, said he looked out behind the formation and could see so many puffs of flak it looked like rows of trees lining a road.

The formation of 48 B-26 bombers turned sharply to the right and headed south for home. Altho we were aware that other planes were catching it, suddenly "little Lu's" luck changed and anti-aircraft fire suddenly began to bracket the bomber. One burst under the left engine tore a foot long gap in it. T/Sgt. Luther W. Greenlee, waist gunner from Bonham, Texas, called the pilot on inter-coin and reported, "Black smoke is pouring out behind our left engine. No fire, but are the instruments okay?" Fifteen

seconds later a burst of flak riddled the right engine nacelle, cutting the retracted tire to pieces but the crew didn't know it. The hydraulic and electrical system were shot up and badly damaged.

"Then a direct explosion under the tail bounced the plane in an almost vertical position and it seemed that only a miracle prevented us from being blown out of the sky. The tail gunner, Sgt. Fendrick was kneeling on a piece of armor plating and that gratefully stopped him from being riddled by shrapnel, but both .50 caliber tail guns were knocked out of commission.

Flak hit the ammunition tracks and set off ten 50 caliber machine gun bullets, destroying the track.

“A piece of flak logged in the tail gunner’s flying jacket but the thick leather prevented injury. “Flack, glass and bits of the fuselage were flying around the compartment like hail”, Fendrich said, “but I didn’t get hit. The noise was worse than anything else.” After they had landed, the crew counted 47 holes in the tail section alone.

“There was another hit that tore up and under the center of the fuselage, but S/Sgt. Billie S. Curlee, turret gunner from Houston, Texas and M/Sgt. Robert A. Morco, an observer from St. Petersburg, Florida, but said their steel helmets shed flak like water off a duck’s back. The electrical system was also damaged, knocking out the regulators and one generator.

“Now “little Lu” was tucked safely back into the formation and flying over the Tyrrheanian Sea back home to safety. Lt. Timmons had Lt. Hubbard go back through the plane checking to see that everyone was all right and inspecting the plane for damage. The smoke from the left engine due to leaking hydraulic fluid had stopped when all the fluid was gone and both engines were running remarkably well. It was Lt. Hubbard’s first combat mission and as he inspected the plane and counting all the flak holes, he decided it was quite a start. Timmons remarked that he was glad for himself that all new pilots were not indoctrinated this way’

“The pilot was able to maintain place in formation during the hour flight back to Tunis for protection against enemy fighters and the possibility of having to ditch in the sea. Lt. Timmons realized he could not use the hydraulic system to lower the landing gear, open the flaps or apply the brakes. With that gaping hole in the left engine housing, he expected to have a left tire flat. The control tower at the airbase was alerted for an emergency landing and he circled the field waiting for all the other planes to land.

Sgt. Fendrich gathered all the parachutes and seat cushions and with them he padded the navigator compartment and everyone except the pilot and co-pilot had a cushioned spot to lie on in event of a crash landing. Timmons ordered the landing gear cranked down while at 4,000' to determine if it would lock into place and visually inspect the tires and every thing looked OK. As they began a long approach to landing starting at 2,000' and 5 miles away, Fendrich went back to the rear bomb bay and mechanically “cracked” the flaps to slow the bomber down to its normal landing speed.

“Coming in for landing and squared away straight down the runway at 130 mph, Lt. Timmons expected the plane to veer left as it touched down and was all set to compensate with the controls. However, the right tire was the offender and the plane swerved sharply to the right. “If Lt. Timmons hadn’t been on the ball and straightened us out right away”, Sgt. Greenlee said, “we would have ground looped for certain. As it was, we went down the runway with no brakes and as soon as the engines were killed we went off to the right and through a wheat field, stopping almost in front of the service squadron. They could start patching “little Lu” right away’ “

Well, the reporter certainly wrote an article that should interest the home town folks for at least a day. And the story was accurate in detail. This was one of so many accounts of war-time danger, heroism, courage and skill that they became common place and to be expected. In time of strife it is classified as propaganda, in time of peace it is referred to as human interest. courage and valor.

Friday,            October 22, 1943    E1 Bathan

Today we cheated death three times within the space of six hours flying time on my 32nd mission to bomb a railway trestle bridge located in the mountains outside of Orvieta, Italy. In retrospect, I have just taken a special time-out before going to bed tonight to breathe a sigh of relief and feel glad that once more I can "...lay me down to sleep, I pray..." .

It all started out early this morning immediately after take-off and while our 24 bombers were going thru the complicated and exacting maneuvers of alignment into a manageable and effective bombing formation. Heavy broken cloud cover is always a hazzard, and the flight leader led our formation thru the clouds during a tight 180° turn. Here we were, literally hanging by the propeller tips at full throttle, climbing at 160 mph. with an ascent rate of 1,000' per minute and maximum loading. Even tho we were flying almost wing-tip to wing-tip, the flight leader was out of sight a portion of the time. I had to go on instruments for almost five minutes while the co-pilot Lt. Hubbard desperately tried to keep visual contact with the leader and shout verbal instructions. It was a miracle that no one stalled out or spun in (which occurred on another occassion), or worse yet have a mid-air collision which we almost did coming within a hair's breath of the lead plane! A full gas load, 2 tons of bombs and 7 men aboard were in double jeopardy all the time. That was the first one of three narrow escapes with death.

En route to the target on a highly strategic railway river bridge located in central Italy, a recurring thought ran thru my head because of the warning during briefing that Marshall Hermann Goering had dispatched his own veteran "Yellow Nose" Squadron to Italy in an effort to halt the effectiveness of Allied strategic bombing on interdicting supplies to German troops fighting desperately alone on the peninsula. They had a fierce and bloody reputation, and we were warned to maintain a tight and protective formation at all times.

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These German fighter pilots were responsible for our second close brush with death. The bomb run over the target area was uncontested followed by our usual rapid departure after bomb drop. Just two minutes from the coast line of Italy where we would feel the sanctuary of the Mediterranean Sea and a rendezvous with the P-38 fighter escort, we were brutally jumped by the "Yellow Nose" Squadron of Me-109's and Folke-Wolfe 190's. They struck us swift and fearless, and came right down between and in thru our 24 ship formation in the hope of scattering it. minis was their favorite tactic, and then go for the single kill of one unprotected bomber.

As “tail-end Charlie”, our flight element received the worst blow of the attack. The FW-190's are armed the 20 mm cannons and I thought all hell had broken loose when a cannon shell exploded inside our cockpit and luckily hit against the the back of the armor plating that protected the co-pilot. The noise was deafening and the explosion filled the compartment with flying debris and shrapnel and white acrid smoke.

The co-pilot was knocked unconscious and as a result he slumped over the wheel and I had to untangle him in order to fly the plane. At the same time, another cannon shell tore a long ugly gash in the left engine nacelle. Later we were to learn the two of the 18 cylinders were shot out, but our splendid Pratt & Whitney engine did not lose power which probably saved our necks' A third hit blew open the sliding safety glass window on the co-pilot's side and another shell entered the right wing and did unanticipated but deadly damage to the landing flaps.

After this split second of Hell, the plane was shaking and vibrating frightenly from the impact of the cannon shell, desperate flying technic and two engines growling angrily out of synchronization. The sky outside and around us was literally filled with tracer bullets coming and going as the 100 machine guns of our bomber formation responded to the attack. As a result of one hit, the left engine had been knocked out of synchronization some 300 rpms. and added to the terrible noise and confusion.

I desperately tried to hold in close to the protection of the other ships and at the same time to examine our co-pilot, Hubbard, for bleeding and possible injuries. He groaned and after shaking him several times, he suddenly sat up as straight and alive as any one could ever hope for, and he grabbed at the controls yelling out repeatedly: “Do you want me to fly it? Do you want me to fly?” Relieved to have him apparently OK, I yelled back at him: “No, dummy, but see if you can get those damn props into synchronization again!”

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After this was accomplished, I kept up as close to and practically under the belly of the plane in front of us for added protection. Hubbard's brain finally cleared and he called on inter-coin to find out the extent of injuries to our crew and all reported well.

Our flight leader was Lt. Carl Hoy and his ship had received damage of a nightmarish nature' The top turret gunner of his ship had been killed by the explosion of a 20 mm cannon shell and he was practically decapitated. Blood ran back all along the outside of the fuselage to the tail as he bled to death. What a horrible and maddening sight, and I shouted over the inter-coin: “Shoot those damn sons-of- bitches, shoot them down” We had sat in the devil's front parlor while he worked at his blazing forge. We had paid for it, but we had cheated death'

Whether the enemy fighters had gone as suddenly as they had appeared or were slyly maneuvering for another pass at our formation we could not tell, but we kept tucked up tightly for mutual protection which was jokingly called the 320th “Ball” formation. Out over the Mediterranean now, Sardinia could be seen thru beautiful fleecy clouds and everyone breathed a sigh of relief for we were in our sanctuary and out of the range of the Germans and

hopefully under the protection of our P-38 fighter escort.

We were all relaxed now and the flight back was uneventful except for the frightening appearance of Hoy's ship which was completely blooded red from turret to the tail. The extent of damage to our plane appeared nominal, except that what damage had been done led to our cheating death for a third time within those eventful six hours'

The "tail-end Charlie" plane is always the last to land, and precautionary measures were taken with a thoro inspection of our shot-up machine, which was negative. Even the instruments guaging left engine function were all normal. Since this was a strange field landing, my final approach was a higher altitude than normal. On the down wind leg around the airfield, we cracked the flaps one quarter down to help reduce air speed and give more lift to the wings, and then the landing gear locked into place.

On the final approach, our altitude of 1,500' was excessive so I signaled full flaps for rapid descent and decrease air speed to 120 mph. which was normal landing speed so as not to over-shoot the end of the runway. Immediately, the airplane peeled off sharply to the right and started into an uncontrollable vertical spin. I pushed full right throttle and left maximum aeleron and rudder control. It was useless, we were headed for a crash. The flight training books don't go any further than that, and this was the last page!

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But just as suddenly as we went into this deadly spin, just as suddenly we pulled out of it at 300' altitude, aligned the plane with the runway, landed at a screaming 180 mph. and hell-bent for a crack-up at the end of the landing strip if the brakes did not hold. They did, and death was cheated again for a third time within the past 6 hours'

Why the frightening behaviour of our airplane? First of all, the reason for the spin was that the right wing flap had been unknown to us damaged during our shoot-out with the enemy fighter because the markmanship of the FW 190 pilot had resulted in a 20 mm cannon shell destroying the flap mechanism at the base of the wing, a spot that could not be examined by the crew. The right wing flap had failed to function at the same time as the left flap and aerodynamically this would cause the plane to flip over in an uncontrollable spin.

The almost miraculous recovery from our near fatal crash was explained afterwards by our co-pilot, Lt. Hubbard. When he lowered the flaps on the final approach he did not take his hand off the lever, and when the plane went into its death spiral he automatically raised the flap control and saved the day for us. He said that he did not even think about the flaps during the spin, but it seemed that part of his brain had regained in his hand while on the flap lever and its relex action had resulted in a life saving motion'

This mission illustrated skill...vs luck, discipline vs coincidence, experience...vs good fortune; and perhaps the hand of God', as well as man.

Sunday, October 24, 1943 Djedeida, Tunisia

I was awakened at dawn to fly a mission as substitute pilot for It. Blake who was taken sick yesterday. Sunday, and I had planned on going to church service this morning but instead survived a most devilish and deadly fight with a dozen German Me 109's. Goering's famed "Yellow Nose" Squadron was out gunning for us as it had been just two days ago.

Once again our three plane element was "tail-end Charlie" of a 48 ship formation of B-26's, and our assigned mission was a railway river bridge in the mountains of central Italy near the town of Todi. A running battle with a dozen Me 109's that lasted 45 minutes is no Sunday picnic, and especially if the enemy fighter flies in close enough for the tail gunner to call me on the inter-coin with the important information that: "Hey, lieutenant, that Kraut is wearing a mustache!" My screaming reply was: "Mustache, hell, shoot the bastard down!" He did.

For the record, the rear 6 ship flight was awarded credit for shooting down 5 Me 109's confirmed. Three of those kills were credited to the gunners aboard our ship: the turret and tail gunners with one kill each and the nose gunner with one confirmed and one probable. With the enemy flying in at such close range of 50 to 100 feet, we were fortunate to come thru the scrap undamaged. Lt. Kapstein, my dear Jewish friend, was not so lucky, and his plane kept losing air speed and dropped way back out from under the protection of the formation.

Thank goodness, about this time our lumbering bomber formation crossed the Italian coastline and the enemy fighters broke off combat which was their usual habit because of limited fuel supply and the presence of American P-38 fighters circling above to provide safe escort home. I had already reduced power and broke formation to escort Kapstein as added protection in case of renewed enemy fighter attack and also to be on hand if he had to ditch in the sea. As it turned out we all landed safely at Decimomannu Airbase in Sardinia which was our refueling stop on the way back to North Africa. That evening I commented in my diary that the air raid today was to be long remembered as one of the roughest and most nerve-racking combat flying yet experienced!

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With Kapstein's crippled airplane on my wing tip, we carefully lowered down thru a gathering overcast surrounding the island with a ceiling of 500' and touched down with only 40 gallons of gas in each wing tank and the red blinker nervously reminding us of the situation. Kappy made it in good after everyone else had landed. He is a skilled pilot which was proven while flying on a tactical mission to Salerno, Italy September 14, at the time when the 5th Army was having difficulty maintaining its beach head during the first week of the invasion of the Italian peninsula. German flak was very intense and accurate, and five P-26's out of the twelve flown by the 441st Squadron on that raid were so badly shot up that all had to make emergency landings in Sicily. Flak had shot away one rudder control of Kapstein's plane and he flew it back and landed safely in Sicily. I recall that he was later awarded a Silver Star

medal because this accomplishment was an almost unheard of feat and demonstrated his unusual flying ability under the most adverse circumstances!

After refuel, everyone happy to be home again in E1 Bathan, Tunisia which was a quick 45 minute flight. My 33rd combat mission was completed, but quite frankly it will be difficult for me to survive seven more missions if all of them turn out to be similar to the last two hairy ones. These experiences are what causes war nerves and combat fatigue. The fastest rumor of the day is that we are moving to Sardinia in several weeks because we are out of range for medium bombers of the lucrative targets in Italy and southern France.

Tuesday, November 16, 1943 Decimomannu, Sardinia

The purpose of tactical aerial bombing is the day-to-day support of military action on the ground as needed, in contrast to strategic bombing in which we fly hundreds of miles over enemy territory to destroy such impersonal targets as railway bridges and marshalling yards, air fields, factories, military installations and harbors. Of course in taking the war directly to the home front, it is probable that as many civilians are the recipient of our efforts as is the military. The air raid today on southern France was a classical example of strategic bombing as intended and illustrated how effective and necessary it may be.

This story is told thru my experience as one airman who flew this mission and had no part in the decision of Strategic Air Command who ordered it, but all airman who participated understood its purpose.

It rained all last night and on thru the early morning so our daily air raid was cancelled for this reason. Despite the inclement weather the orderlies woke us up at 5:30 a.m. for breakfast and we were promptly dismissed at briefing, so all of us returned to the sack by 7:00 a.m. to get out of the rain and cold. As yet few tents have a stove and the only warm places on the base are headquarters, the mess hall and one's bed. This was understandable because it has been only 8 days since we moved to Sardinia from North Africa.

By 8:00 o'clock we were awakened a second time and ordered to Slit up for flying and report to briefing immediately. Wing Headquarters had called off the mission because of dirty weather, but was over-ruled by 12th Air Force Command, the briefing officer informed us. This was a "must" air raid because a large Allied convoy of ships sailing east in the Mediterranean off the coast of North Africa had been attacked repeatedly by German Junker 88 bombers using radio controlled bombs. They had already sunk 6 ships, and it was the assigned task of Strategic Air Command to stop these raids at all costs. The 320th Bomb Group stationed in Sardinia was the closest to the German air fields located in southern France and were ordered to carry out the mission.

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The briefing session was long and involved as there was to be a drastic change in our flight tactics, dictated as much by the heavy cloud formations as by enemy radar. Weather

reconnaissance planes should be cited for the accurate information and prediction that contributed to the success of such an important mission. And our Group Commanding Officer should receive an accolade for the highly successful flight tactics employed.

This was the innovative course that was used. After a wet and sloppy take-off from the island, our 48 ship formation came under tight control and radio black-out. During the first half of the flight to the target we held an absolute minimum altitude of 2,000' under the heavy cloud cover. For such a large formation of medium bombers flying under these circumstances it was obviously very dangerous because of such a flattened air space in which to maneuver however it revealed the skill, training and discipline of the flight leaders and each individual pilot.

After 45 minutes, it was an exhilarating feeling to suddenly break out from under the gloom of the dirty weather and into clear blue sky and brilliant sunshine. Then I quote from my diary: "there followed a mad scramble and climb up to 12,500' for the assigned bombing altitude before we crossed the coast line". This altitude was as high as the B-26 airplane could go fully loaded and the plane respon very sluggishly to the controls. Also we were not equipped with oxygen for high altitudes.

When a combat airman is flying for an hour or more toward an assigned target he may become preoccupied with the anguish of the upcoming dangers and as a defense mechanism he might search for an unrelated object to help take his mind off the anticipated trouble in order to relieve the tension. As an illustration, here we were flying a most dangerous mission into the under-belly of "Fortress Europe" to raid southern France. Everything about the airplane was maximum, including our nerves: engine power on high blower with both throttles almost wide open, full gas load, 4,000 lbs. of bombs, 7 crew members and high altitude. The reliability of our plane working at maximum effort plus the possibility of enemy action becomes a personal responsibility of the pilot and almost overpowering to one's sanity.

In spite of it all, it was at this moment that I took time out to relax and admire the magnificent scenery, because away off to the east was a first-time look at the snow covered Alps, a beauty magnetic in its grandeur. At the same time, we were crossing over the blue-blue Mediterranean and the beaches of Nice and the Cote d'azur, and flew right up the beautiful Phone River valley as we skirted the dangerous air space around Toulon and Marseilles. There are sights that speak more loudly to my mind and heart than the eloquent spoken word. What a sight'

—3—

Photos reconnainsance revealed that the mission was on target despite the debilitating effect of bad weather, accurate flak fired at us by the versatile and dreaded 88 mm artillery and enemy fighters. And for many months afterwards, the complex of air fields around Istres Salon was bombed periodically to neutralize them. Our bombing altitude of 12,500' was calculated to out of the range of the 88 mm antiaircraft guns but the Germans must have long-ranged heavy cannon installed. 1st. It. Robins had one of his engines shot out by flak, and got tangled up with a Me 109 enemy fighter which his gunners shot down' They made it back home on only

one engine and landed safely; an outstanding accomplishment by all his crew. He deserves a Distinguish Flying Cross.

Thus an important strategic objective was carried out. In my one year as a pilot flying in combat, there was only one mission proposed in which we were briefed to bomb indiscriminately a city which was located in Sicily. There was voiced objection to such a raid by many of our flying officers, and so compromise bombing targets were suggested such as a warehouse, a factory, the railway station and roads leading into and out of the town. As a part of Strategic Air Command, we were never sent in to destroy an entire city, per se.

It all seemed such a short time, then we are back to the airbase, safely flying thru two nasty, occluded cold fronts and landing wet end sloppy in a rain storm. My right foot feels almost frost bitten from the extreme cold of high altitude and no boots.