

## WE LICK OUR WOUNDS

Back in England Ray Marner wrote on August 2nd:

The Rumanian oil fields were raided by Libs. Our planes were among them. They were practicing low-level bombing here some time ago for this operation.

Then on August 4th he wrote:

I found out today that we lost two planes in the oil fields raid. I don't know which ones though.

Edward R. Wilson and his crew must have looked on these days of August with feelings of triumph. After joining the 506th in mid-June, they found that there were not enough aircraft to go around. They were left behind when the Group left for Africa. Wilson made a pest of himself until he got a ship and permission to rejoin the Group. He arrived in Benghazi around the 5th of August.

Most of the 506th aircraft suffered some damage on the Ploesti raid. The Old Crow was once again extremely lucky. There were only a couple of holes. The fortunes of war had taken a wing man and a ship slightly ahead and to the right. Other ships around Old Crow had received greater damage. It didn't take long to repair any of the 506th ships that were in Africa. Other ships in the Group took a good deal longer.

While the repair work was being carried out, some Group ships returned from the emergency landing fields they had used on the way home. In some cases only the crews returned.

On Cyprus, Don Chase reported:

Our fuel transfer and oil problems were remedied by engineer Holtz and RAF personnel in two days. But then pilot Whitlock came down with an intestinal disorder and we couldn't leave.

British infantrymen befriended we five sergeants and provided lorry transportation to their mountain rest camp. There we met scores of Gurkha soldiers. Born in the foothills of the Himalayas and fighting for the Crown, they, with their sword-like KuKri knives--preferring them to guns--had created panic among German Afrika Korpsmen, beheading rather than shooting, as they stealthily

penetrated the Axis battle lines. They were barrel chested, short, somber and visually impressive as combatants.

Each morning the Gurkhas would serve us tea before we got out of our cots. Naturally, as they served, we thanked them for the extra service. After two or three mornings they returned our signs of respect with tight smiles and, retreating, bowed to us. We were glad they were fighting with the Allies.

Whitlock regained his strength and our week long hiatus ended as we flew over the British encampment at low altitude and rocked our wings in salute to our kind hosts who had been at war for nearly four years. Just before we left Cyprus the U.K. troops presented us with a ceremonial Kukri. Somehow I became custodian of the curved ten-inch blade set in a beautifully wooden engraved, silver banded handle.

We landed at Devasoir Air Base in Egypt. For two days we toured Cairo, checking back at our hotel late in the morning and again in the afternoon awaiting word from Group HQ as to our disposition. Orders received, we boarded a C-47 and flew back to our Libyan base, never to see our ship, *Heaven Can Wait*, again.

One day Mike Davis, of the *Old Crow* crew, went to Benghazi to spend the afternoon. When he returned he was more than slightly inebriated. He staggered through the tent entrance with a long roll under his arm. He had purchased a large grass-woven mat. He informed us that he was sick and tired of the desert sand floor of our tent. From now on, when he got up in the morning, his bare feet would land on the mat, not the sand. He proceeded to spread the mat out. It was about six feet long and about four feet wide. He slipped one edge of the six feet side under the cot legs and rolled the remainder out. He then sat on the cot, took off his shoes and gloried in the feel of the mat, which he had and we did not.

The mat was not the only purchase that Mike had made in town. He also brought two bottles of wine back with him. He opened one bottle and proceeded to see to it that he would have a good hangover in the morning.

At one point in the evening Mike let out a scream and jumped up. He ran away from his bed saying that a snake had just

gone across his foot. While babbling, he grabbed a machete and started looking for the snake. He held his arms out to show us how long it was.

Someone ventured the thought that the snake was a figment of Mike's drunken imagination. We tried to calm him and get him to lie down and go to sleep. Mike would have no part of that. He moved his cot outside, then his clothes and lastly his grass mat. All the while he held the machete, ready to swing. There was no snake! We helped him reassemble his gear and got him into bed. After a while he fell into a drunken slumber.

In the morning, A.G. Kerns got up and looked with envy at Mike who was still snoring. That grass mat did look pretty good. A.G. reached under his bed for his helmet so that he could go outside to wash his face. His helmet seemed very heavy. Then he looked and curled up in the helmet was a snake. The two of them parted company very quickly. A.G. said that as it went slithering under the tent wall that it was about three feet long. That is just about what Mike had said the night before!

On August 11th the rumors and guessing regarding Ploesti were put to rest for the ground personnel that remained behind in England. Ray Marner wrote:

General Hodges was here with some Colonel who told about the boys in Africa. They completed 10 raids in 17 days and also the Rumanian oil fields raid. The 44th had two targets. They completely demolished one and 80% of the other. Our planes were outstanding in the raid. They went 1,100 miles and bombed from 50 feet. After they left here they went to Africa and 48 hours later they were on their first raid. The planes are supposed to return very soon. He didn't say what we lost. The raid on the oil fields is the most important mission ever performed in the war.

After the Ploesti raid we spent a lot of time on the ground. There were no local practice missions. All the efforts were concentrated in getting the aircraft back into flying condition. The ground crews did all of the work. However, they did not seem to be in a big hurry to remove the bomb bay gasoline tanks from the ships.

We found out why on the morning of August 13th when Mike was told to put his feet on the grass mat at 3:00 A.M. There was

a mission and it was to be a long one. The bomb bay gas tanks had been filled. We were going to Wiener Neustadt in Austria. That is close to Vienna. The target was the Air Frame Works.

Taking off that morning were A/C #282, Y, Ruth Less, flown by Austin (The remainder of the crew ordinarily flew with Slough.); A/C #283, Z, Old Crow, flown by McAtee; A/C #013, Bar D, Trouble, flown by Larson; A/C #606, X, Timba-A-Ah, flown by Bunce; A/C #201, Bar O, Baldy and His Brood, flown by Strong; A/C 778, Bar B, flown by Stevens; and A/C #172, Bar N, Lynn Bari II, flown by Anderson.

Along the way, our seven ships joined with 19 other 44th ships on a longer trip than was the Ploesti raid. Norm Kiefer:

Believes that our course was across the Mediterranean and the southern boot of Italy; up the Adriatic and into northern Yugoslavia, thence into Austria. I think that it was this mission that a Tito underground unit was to take control of an airfield at Trieste (a seaport between Italy and Yugoslavia) and hold it long enough for any aircraft in trouble to land.

The abortion rate for the Group was high, but all of the 506th ships made it to the target. In the target area there was some cloud cover. Antiaircraft fire was slight from heavy guns, but inaccurate.

Aboard Ruth Less, the crew observed seven Me-109's in the target area. There was one pass made by a single enemy aircraft with no claims and no damage to the ship. The crew observed their bombs hit the first of three large buildings. The second building was on fire.

The Lynn Bari II, flown by Anderson, came under numerous attacks while in the target area. However, they made no claims and there was no damage. They also saw fighters while over Italy on the way back.

Fighters in the target area and over Italy were observed by the Stevens, Bunce, Larson and Strong crews. However, none of them came under attack.

Aboard the Old Crow there were problems. The #3 and #4 engines were not acting properly and we were experiencing difficulty in keeping up with the formation. The enemy

fighters picked this aircraft for special attention. About five Me-109's made 12-to-15 attacks, coming in from the nose, tail and sides.

One enemy aircraft came in from 7 O'clock. The tail turret gunner, Jack Edwards, fired and saw tracers enter the fighter which went down smoking. The top turret gunner, Mike Davis, observed this aircraft disappear in the clouds in flames.

The author remembers:

I had just come up from the bomb bay when the fighters started to come in. I was standing between the two pieces of armor plating that protects the backs of the pilot and copilot. The fighters were approaching us from different directions. Suddenly, there was a noise right behind my head. I turned to see a part of the top of the ship had disappeared just aft of the top turret. Since he was still firing, Davis seemed to be all right. I turned back to the front and McAtee was looking at me. I winked and he returned to the more important job of keeping up with the formation.

This task was accomplished only at the expense of high gas and oil consumption. While we were over Italy the decision was made that we would not be able to make it back to Africa. McCash plotted a course to Palermo in Sicily. In the briefing that morning we had been told that they believed that this airfield was under Allied control. We were about to find out. We left the formation and set a new course.

The rest of the 506th ships proceeded to Tunis as briefed in the morning.

Mark Morris wrote in his diary:

The Me-109 plant at Wiener Neustadt, Austria, was the target. Attacking Me-109 G's came in very close. Our was radio out and two engines were smoking so we landed at Palermo, Sicily. Engine #3 quit on touchdown. We were out of gas. It was a very short runway. The approach was surrounded by mountains. I was called to stand behind "Mac". and call out the airspeed for landing. Mike Davis was trying to get the last drop of gas and Norm Kiefer was working on radio which had been hit by gun fire. Good job landing.

**Dave McCash recalls:**

The first time that we went into Palermo we weren't certain that our side was in control of the field.

**Norm Kiefer remembers:**

When we stopped rolling we were almost in the yard of a church which sat at the very end of a runway. This was a fighter field that was never intended to accept large bombers.

The size of the aircraft attracted a lot of attention. There was an army tank unit occupying the field. The tank men flocked around the ship that evening. They wanted to know how much the craft weighed. They compared its weight with that of a tank and marveled at how it could get off the ground.

One of the tank men turned out to be my former barracks-mate at Scott Field Radio School. Somehow, he had been transferred from the Air Force into the Army Tank Corps.

This tank unit was a part of Patton's army. We were dressed in light sun tan uniforms. They were wearing the heavy winter uniform that we wore up in England. They told me that Patton insisted that this was the uniform of the day, even when they were in Africa. His only concession was that they did not have to wear a tie.

My former barracks-mate was working the base radio. He gave me the frequency and call name that they were using. He didn't know how long they would be there, but didn't think a change would be made when they left. The information was of no use to us since our radio was out and there were no spares or repair facilities on the field.

Neither was there any repair facilities for the *Old Crow's* engines. We were able to get some aircraft gasoline and a new supply of oil. We would have to fly it back as it was. While looking the ship over, it was determined that the shell that hit the top of the craft had also punctured the life raft that was stored there.

The local military personnel seemed to want us to get out of there as quickly as possible. They believed our ship

was an attractive target for the German Air Force.

I believe that the enlisted men slept that night in the Old Crow.

Dave McCash remembers:

There was an outside mess line and some of us slept that night in the airport control building on stretchers laid out in the lobby.

In the morning McAtee went to check the weather and file a flight report. He discovered that there was another B-24 down in Sicily. Lt. Lehnhausen had crashed landed A/C #211 somewhere on the island. No one could tell him where, but the report indicated that the crew was all right. It was decided not to wait for them.

He also found another bit of news. A small group of Army Nurses (I believe that it was three) wanted to get from Sicily back to Africa. We were their most immediate prospect of making the trip. McAtee agreed.

Mark Morris wrote:

Aug. 14--When we left Palermo, McAtee placed the tail of the ship almost in the church yard. All personnel were up on the flight deck. We headed down hill and down wind. Mountains were on both sides and Palermo Bay could be seen through the pass ahead of us. McAtee rode the brakes and revved up the engines in order to achieve maximum take off speed. The tail went up in the air and nose down. McCash's chute went out the nose wheel door as the ship vibrated on take off.

Norm Kiefer remembers one other thing about that flight back to Benina Main:

While we were over water, one of the nurses felt the call of nature and asked one of the men in the waist where the rest room was. This caused quite a chuckle and the nurse was aghast when the relief tube was pointed out to her. She felt somewhat better when told that there was another one up in the nose of the ship. This area would be more private when the two men up there moved back to the waist.

We were happy to learn upon our return that the Group had only lost one aircraft. McAtee told them that Lehnhausen had

crashed landed in Sicily, but the crew was safe. Thus we had not lost any crews. The luck of the 506th was still holding. We had now been on 22 raids and only lost two crews.

McAtee reported to intelligence that the landing field at Palermo is west of the city. It has a north/south runway that is 3,000 feet long. In the future, it will be expanded to 4,000 feet. Aircraft landing there should approach from the north because of an obstruction at the south end. It is a good dirt strip. He also gave them the frequency and call that we had received from the tank men.

The *Flint Journal* reported the raid as follows:

#### YANKEES BOMB AUSTRIAN PLANE PLANT

#### HEAVY RAID HITS 30 MILES FROM VIENNA

#### Big Force of U.S. Liberators Assaults Wiener Neustadt

American Liberator bombers, striking deep into Hitler's hitherto almost unreachable Southeastern European war industries, Friday, attacked Wiener Neustadt, 30 miles south of Vienna in former Austria, a Middle East communique disclosed today.

It was the first time since September, 1942, when Russian planes bombed Vienna, that Allied bombs had fallen on Austria.

An important aircraft production factory and assembly plant was the target for more than a third of a million pounds of high explosives, said a United States headquarters bulletin, and "scores of bursts were seen among some 400 fighter aircraft" on the ground.

The bulletin said direct hits were scored upon factory buildings and large columns of smoke were seen rising throughout the target area.

The raiding force was officially described as large and the enemy defenses as weak.

The announcement from Cairo did not reveal the base from which the heavy assault was made, but the long-range planes could have dealt the blows from Cap Bon, 800 miles from Wiener Neustadt, or from airfields of Cirenaica, 1,100 miles away.



A Swiss radio report said Friday that an American four-engine bomber had landed in Swiss territory and the crew members had been interned after they set fire to their plane. The radio report did not indicate, however, whether the plane was a straggler from the Austrian raid.

Another account was as follows:

#### STRATEGIC AIR FORCE

And now in flaming letters is written the name Wiener Neustadt across a darkening Nazi sky. Wiener Neustadt, near Vienna, is in the center of Hitler's European fortress. He had imagined that the aircraft factories there were beyond the range of Allied bombers, which had played hell with his plants to the north.

But the amazing Liberators of the Ninth U.S. Air Force gave the unsuspecting Nazi a smack in the rear and proved once more that the so-called European fortress is just a maze of overripe targets.

Though first honors naturally go to the pilots and crews of the Libs, every soldier in this area who wears the Air Corps patch on his sleeve can claim a share in the Ninth's recent exploits. All the way up the ladder, from grease monkey to commanding general, morale is perked up by realization that the Ninth is doing more than flying tactical missions. It is operating as a strategic air force and getting results that have an important bearing on the whole course of the war.

This was proved last spring at Cape Bon, when the famous 57th brought a drastic change in German plans for evacuating Tunisia; again in the raid last month on Rome, with its swift sequel of Fascist collapse; over Ploesti in a dramatic stab at Germany's oil supply; and now at Wiener Neustadt, which showed that no part of the Nazi domain is beyond bombing range.

While wondering what the Ninth will think up next, we just want to say we're mighty proud of the job that it has done already.

Another brief article related:

----for instance, as recently as June 17th the official German News Agency announced: "German enterprises are dispersed all over the Reich. They are placed in areas out of the reach of Allied bombs." That was the official German opinion in June, but by August 15th, Hitler's own journal, the Volkischer Beobachter, stated that "Bombs on Vienna's doorstep proved that any town in the Reich may become a threatened and endangered town since every one of them lies within reach of enemy aircraft."

**Robert Mundell remembers:**

We arrived at Benina Main late in the day Saturday, August 14th. The men we found there weren't the ones we remembered from Shipdham. The Ploesti raid had shaken them all up and they didn't act the same. I remember seeing a pilot, I think his name was Larson, walking in the distance. I thought, "That's too fast for him." But it was him and he was walking a lot faster than he used to.

**Marion Paciorek reports:**

It was about this time that Stevens and his crew were scheduled to take their aircraft, #787, B up for an engine check. On take off, while traveling at 90 miles an hour, they blew a tire and totaled the ship. None of the crew was injured.

**John Huber recalls:**

It was a vulcanized tire failure which we experienced while taking off at 100 miles per hour with a maximum load of four 2,000 pound bombs. Just after the crack up, Colonel Johnson kept me from slugging the Lt. Col who was responsible for maintenance. Everybody from the ground crew to the crew chief and pilot had asked for a new tire that was available. Each time the request was refused.

It was also about this time that two 506th crews and ships were transferred out of the Squadron. Bunker and Earthquake McGoon were transferred to the 67th. Rebich and Mister Five by Five were transferred to the 66th. These moves reflect the dire straits of the Group. There had been so many losses that most of the Group's experienced combat personnel were assigned to the 506th. Our loss ratio was smaller than the other squadrons. The transfers provided leadership in the other squadrons.

Back in England, Ray Marner wrote:

August 13--Captain Eddie Rickenbacker was here a while back. I didn't get to see him.

August 14--As I was sorting the mail today I ran across a letter for Capt. Clark Gable. He's in the 508th B.S., 351st Group. The letter was mixed into ours.

August 15--I saw in the paper that our planes raided a Luftwaffe factory in Austria, from Africa. They destroyed about 400 Me-109's. We lost no planes.

It was also August 15th when Nick Garza transferred into the 506th Ordnance Section. He recalls:

Lt. Ned H. Brisendine was an Ordnance Officer. With him were Sgts. Nick Barone, Louis F. Neillen and Carl A. Lund. He also recalls that Joseph Bortus was in Photography. The Ordnance Section was responsible for loading bombs. The two Nicks (Barone and Garza) fused the planes that carried time-delayed bombs. Graza also checked returning planes to assure that all bombs were gone.

Ray Whitby reports:

Lt. Maynor's crew was shipped overseas on August 1st. After a couple of weeks of schooling in London they were shipped to Benghazi and joined the 506th on August 15th. It is assumed that with Lt. William M. Maynor were Lts. John E. Gunnell, and Arnold L. Gray. The enlisted personnel were Sgts. James L. Corrigan, Ray Whitby, Walter J. Scanlon, Glenn C. Stoffel, Joseph M. Coonelly, and Joel Parker Jr.

It was about this time the Air Force decided that there is just so much excitement that you can have before you have to take a break. The best place to do this was not Cairo, but further to the east in Tel Aviv.

Anderson and his crew were the first to arrive in Tel Aviv. Ron Allen remembers:

I was able to contact my brother in Cairo and arrange for a get together. The night of his brother's arrival, they joined a party composed of Ron's fellow officers who had found an accommodating drinking establishment. Ron remembers that "one more round" was ordered, but no one

could get it down. It is reported that a number of them got skunk drunk. It is also reported that, later that night in the hotel, at least one of them ended up in a bath tub with his head in the "John" burping.

When it came time to return to Benghazi, the crew of Lynn Bari II experienced some difficulties. Bunker was flying as copilot. It had been a long time since he had flown that position. He forgot that you are suppose to put down the flaps. Anderson let up on the brakes and pushed the power controls forward. The plane lurched down the runway. Bunker was reading off the airspeed, but the ship did not seem to be gaining any lift. At the end of the runway was a big round tube. Ron Allen in the nose of the ship started to holler "Jump it Andy, jump it!" It is a good thing that he shouted. It may have helped to clear the tube. After they were airborne they discovered that they would have to go back and do it all over again. Goodson had forgotten to fasten down the gas tank caps. The second take off was smoother than the first.

Robert Mundell and his crew mates got in a little recreation on August 15th. Mundell relates:

We went swimming in the Mediterranean on Sunday afternoon. When we returned we checked the bulletin board, and four members of our crew were listed for a mission to Foggia on Monday, August 16th. Our pilot, Ed Wilson, would be copilot; John Waite the bombardier; Emil Kosch a waist gunner and I was to be the radio operator. We were to fly with the Charles Whitlock crew.

Anderson and crew were back from Tel Aviv in time for the raid on Foggia. However, on this raid Anderson's copilot would fly combat with his own crew. Olsen had been promoted to first pilot status. In all, the 506th would put up six aircraft. Also, that morning Bunker and Rebich were flying their first missions as lead crews in their newly assigned squadrons.

Flying that morning with the 506th were A/C #283, Z, flown by Stevens; A/C #172, Bar N, flown by Anderson; A/C #013, Bar D, flown by Olsen; A/C #606, X, flown by Whitlock; A/C #778, T, flown by Austin; and A/C #201, Bar O, flown by Strong. Bunker, flying in A/C 235, C, aborted.

On the way to the target they joined with 19 other 44th aircraft to bomb the dispersal areas at the north end of the

fighter field. The target area was clear of clouds. The flak was moderately heavy, aimed and accurate. There were swarms of fighters that rose to challenge the attack.

Aboard the *Old Crow*, Stevens' crew fought off about 10 attacks that came mostly from high and at the rear. Vincent the tail gunner destroyed one Me-109 coming in at 6 o'clock. The fighter was at about 50 yards when it dove away with flames coming from under the engine cowling. Denley, the top turret gunner of *Trouble*, saw this ship go down. In the waist of the ship, Rodriguez, at the right window, nailed one Me-109 attacking from 4 o'clock. When the aircraft broke off the attack it had flame and smoke in the engine area. OGara, the hatch gunner, saw this ship heading downward toward the ground. At the other waist gun, Fritz caught another Me-109 as it was attacking friendly aircraft in another formation. He fired when the fighter was in the 8 o'clock position and the left wing fell off. This was observed by a number of aircraft in the formation. Fry in the top turret, fired at one Me-109 approaching from 5 o'clock. He saw tracers enter the enemy ship and then the aircraft was lost from sight. He believed that he damaged it.

John Huber recalls:

Larry Vincent, our tail gunner, was shot out of his turret, but got back in and continued to keep enemy aircraft off our tail. He had to move the turret and guns by using hand cranks and all firing of the guns was controlled by his feet.

Things were going a little better aboard *Lynn Bari II*, flown by Anderson. They only sustained three attacks from 6, 7 and 8 o'clock below. Ferkauff probably destroyed one Me-109 which he set afire as it passed by.

Olson, flying in *Trouble*, got his first look at fighters from the pilot's seat. They attacked about four times from the rear. Denley, the top turret gunner fired on one Me-109 as it passed over from the rear. The ship took considerable flak damage. The top turret was damaged by shell fire. The left waist gunner, Orr, was slightly wounded by a 20-mm shell.

*Baldy and His Brood*, flown by Strong, was having a hard time. Attacking singly and in pairs the fighters came after them about 20 times. Germann first shot down one Me-109 which attacked from 6 o'clock. It went into a spin and burst into

flames. I believe that he was wounded in this encounter. Shortly thereafter, he was still at his station when another fighter approached. Again he fired and the enemy aircraft went down in flames. These actions were confirmed by Hamel. Haas at the left waist gun caught another Me-109 breaking off from an attack on the rear. It burst into flames and dove out of sight. Ackerman verified that this happened just before he and Haas were wounded. Ackerman took over a waist gun and Haas went to the tail to take Germann from the turret. After climbing into the turret, Haas saw the Me-109 that Ackerman caught coming in at 3 o'clock. At 200 yards it broke off in flames and dove past the tail. By now Bill Strong's ship had hits in the #2 engine, the oxygen system, the tail turret, the radio compass, numerous holes in the wings and fuselage, and the control cables were shredded.

Bill Strong recalls:

We saw our wing man on the left go down and we knew that we were next. I still think the fighters just ran out of ammunition.

Things were even worse aboard *Timb-A-A-ah*. These events are best described in materials developed by Will Lundy. In them S/Sgt Ralph B. Knox relates:

We had only six of the regular crew with us as the other four men were very sick (from dysentery). The flak started the minute we hit the coast and followed us all the way into the target, which was 25-to-30 miles inland. There was plenty of flak and it was well aimed. In fact, it was bursting right outside of our waist windows. We hit the target at 1315 hours and got our bombs away without much trouble.

We were away from the target about 5-to-10 minutes when it happened. The group flying off to our left was hit by about 20-to-30 fighters and a few seconds later we were jumped by about the same number and all hell broke loose. We were flying "Tail end Charley" and caught everything they had to throw at us. Their first pass didn't cause any damage and I don't think that we got any of them. The second time it was different! A 20-mm shell came in and set my ammunition cans on fire and nicked me in a couple of places, but not badly. I got the burning cans out before they exploded. One of our waist gunners had been hit also, but he managed to stick to his guns.

In the meantime, I had seen the plane flying on our left wing catch fire and then go out of control. I saw six chutes come out of this plane, but things got so hot again that I didn't have time to watch it any longer. The fighters were coming in on their third pass and it proved disastrous for us. Two more 20-mm shells came into the back and blew up. Many flying flak fragments got me behind the right knee and above the left ankle and that laid me out over the hatch door. This burst also killed the already wounded waist gunner (Dunajecz).

The other waist gunner (Kosch) didn't look wounded as far as I could see, but he did seem to be having a problem. I finally got to my feet and got Kosch to the waist window and practically threw him out of the ship. I watched him until he disappeared from sight, but I didn't see him open his chute. Unfortunately, he did not survive.

I took one long last look around and saw that the tail gunner was slumped over his guns and his turret was swung completely around to the side. I couldn't have gotten back to him if I tried. The waist gunner was dead, the two left engines were on fire, the area over the wing and above the bomb bay was a mass of flames, and there was not a single gun on the ship firing, so I figured it was time that I left. It was quite a struggle to get out of the window as my legs were practically paralyzed by then and it took all of the strength in my arms to pull myself up, over and out.

I estimate that we were about 18,000 feet when I jumped. I delayed my opening of the chute until I could almost see the leaves on the trees below. When I pulled the cord on my chute it came loose so easily that I thought that maybe the line had been shot through and it wasn't going to open. But in a few seconds I felt a gentle tug and when I looked up, I was very relieved to see that the white umbrella was opening as it should.

It was only about 30 seconds between the time that my chute opened and the time that I hit the ground. Luckily, I came down through some tree branches, which broke my fall and I didn't hit the ground very hard. It was only a matter of a few seconds until I had my chute off and had destroyed all papers that I had in my possession. I couldn't walk, so I crawled and rolled down the mountain until I reached the bottom. I started crawling again up the next hill a few feet at a time. It was quite a job

and I quickly tired. When I was about half way up the hill I spotted a chute on the side of another hill and I called over there. I found out that my navigator, Robert Ricks, and bombardier, John Waite, were there. They weren't hurt, but had been captured by Italian soldiers. It wasn't very long after that that I was picked up and carried to a farm house where I met our other two men, Sgt. Mundell and Lt. Whitlock.

When they finally got me to the hospital they pulled out most of the shell fragments without any anesthetic, which was really rough to take. Then they put me to bed without any food, and I was very hungry.

Robert Mundell recalls that fateful day:

We took off early Monday morning. The crew chief seemed to sense that I was a little nervous. He assured me that it would be a "milk run".

It was a long flight and as we neared the target, "Airdrome at Foggia", the flak was heavy. Thinking the tough part was over, we made our run and were headed back. Whitlock even asked me to see if I could find some music on the radio. About that time a voice over the intercom announced they had spotted some German fighters.

A wave of them came in and raked us pretty good, but we were still flying and I thought they might leave. That was not to be. There was only one burst from our tail gunner, Bonham. Evidently he was killed early in the fight. That left the rear end a good target.

They came in again, plenty of them, and shot up the plane badly. There were bullets whistling by all over the place. I stood directly behind the pilots during the fight and Whitlock later told me that he didn't know why I wasn't hit. He said he could feel bullets hitting the back of his armor plating.

A big fire had broken out in the bomb bay. I emptied a fire extinguisher on it, but it didn't make a dent on the fire.

The engineer, Stewart, came down from his turret and was standing there. We didn't say anything to each other, but I noticed that he had opened the top hatch. I stepped up behind the pilot and he said it was time to get out



because he was losing control.

I started out the top hatch, but was having a hard time getting out. Whitlock gave me a shove and out I went. I hit something and ended up with a skinned knee. I really don't know if I went down behind the wing and in front of the tail or straight back above the tail and between the two vertical stabilizers. Whitlock later told me that he came out right behind me and didn't have any trouble. He dropped down right behind the wing.

The bombardier, Waite and the navigator Ricks got out through the door in the nose. I don't know what happened to Stewart and Wilson, but they never got out. There was no way to go out through the bomb bay; it was a roaring inferno.

I don't remember pulling the rip cord, but my chute opened right away. I remember that it took a long time to get down (we had jumped at 18,000 feet) and I had a front seat to an air battle for quite a while. At one point I saw a German fighter heading my way, and remember the stories we had heard about some of our men getting strafed in their chutes. Talk about a sitting duck! There's probably not a more helpless feeling in the world. However, as the enemy aircraft drew closer, he banked his wings and went on by.

I hit the ground pretty hard, but wasn't hurt. I had landed next to some trees on a small farm. A farmer and a bunch of kids came running up and started examining my parachute. They looked thrilled with it and started jabbering in Italian and pointing to a donkey under a shed. I thought they might want to make a trade and I could get on the donkey to get the hell out of there.

About then an Italian policeman came up and put a pistol to the back of my head. Another farmer leveled a shotgun at me from about 30 feet away. The trade was off!! They marched me down the road a short distance to where they had captured Whitlock. He was surrounded by a bunch of people that were giving him a hard time.

They then marched both of us down the road. In about a quarter of a mile we went past the wreckage of a German fighter. The pilot must have bailed out OK. At least I didn't see anyone in the plane.

It was another quarter of a mile when we saw the body of Emil Kosch, one of the waist gunners. It appeared that he was still wearing his unopened chute.

Our B-24 was about 200 yards away, still burning. The tail gunner was still in his turret. Some of our captors took a morbid delight in taunting us and pointing to his badly charred remains. One of the policemen spoke good English and asked us a couple of questions about the plane. We acted like we didn't know the answers and he didn't persist.

They then marched us to a barn, took us inside, and closed the doors. They got into a pretty heated discussion and a large crowd had gathered outside. I didn't know what to think; Whitlock thought they were going to hang us.

Before long an Italian army truck showed up to take us into the nearby town of Potenza. A little later they brought in Ricks, Waite, and some others. Ricks had talked to Knox, who was injured. Knox had told him that Kosch, Dunajecz and Bonham had all been killed. We had lost five of our ten member crew.

They put me in a small dungeon by myself that night. I tried to sleep on a concrete slab about a foot off the floor, but it had a slope to it. I could hardly stay on it, much less sleep. There was a hole in the center of the floor full of excrement and there were brown finger marks all over the walls. Fortunately, we stayed only one night.

The next day they put us on some trucks and took us to Bari, where we met the other downed airmen from the same raid. There were about thirty of us. The living conditions were decent and we ate the same as the Italians did; macaroni and bread. They interrogated us and kept us there eight-or-nine days.

On Thursday, August 26, we were taken down to the train station and split up. The enlisted men were put on a train to Sulmona and I never knew where the officers were sent. Lt. Ricks came over and shook hands and said good-by.

Events on the flight deck of *Timb-A-A-Ah* were recorded by Will Lundy as described in a letter to Knox from Whitlock.

After we caught fire I sent the copilot (Edward Wilson) back with Stewart (engineer) to try to put it out. As you probably know, the intercom and alarm systems burned out immediately as well as the controls. Since the bomb bay doors would not open, the copilot jumped into the bomb bay on to one door. Although he succeeded in knocking a door off, he was burned to death and his chute did not open. Stewart went back to his turret and kept right on shooting. Then the fire got so bad I couldn't see a thing in the cockpit. The radio man, Mundell, left by the top hatch, and then I could see enough to find that the flames were coming through the radio compartment and up into the top turret. Stewart stayed with his guns and was burned to death. After that, I also got out by the top hatch, as the plane had no controls and was going down fast.

I want to apologize to you and the others that are living for our formation that was too erratic to allow good marksmanship for the gunners. However, I do know that you boys shot down several enemy fighters.

On *Timb-A-A-Ah* were Lts. Charles A. Whitlock Jr. (POW), Edward R. Wilson (KIA), Robert A. Ricks (POW), and John K. Waite (POW). The enlisted men were Sgts. Edwin M. Stewart (KIA), Robert F. Mundell (POW/escapee/returned), Ralph B. Knox (POW escapee/returned), Emil M. Kosch (KIA), Hugo Dunajecz Jr. (KIA), and Robert W. Bonham (KIA).

The aircraft that Knox saw on fire off to his right was *Southern Comfort*. Joe Warth, flying as hatch gunner, gave the following description:

The enemy flak guns were well aimed and accurate and several B-24D's suffered minor damage. Light scattered clouds over the target area afforded no protection at all and upwards of fifty enemy aircraft, using the unlimited visibility to good advantage, tore into the *Flying Eightballs*. *Southern Comfort* took an uncountable number of direct hits from the German fighters, which came at us from every direction. I know that we shot down at least three of them when we heard the bailout klaxon sound; three of our engines were shut off and on fire and the bomb bay was a blazing inferno. In the rear of the aircraft we were completely cut off from the rest of the crew. I made it to the camera hatch, turning round to see the door to the bomb bay vaporize in the flames. The four of us in the rear wasted no time in getting out, S/Sgts. Lee and Purcell going out of their waist windows.

I was sure the parachute would not open so I tried to knock myself out so that when I hit the ground I would be unconscious. But after what seemed minutes my chute filled. First the drone, then the main chute. When I was on my way down I looked about and saw that the sky for many miles around was a mass of burning and still fighting aircraft and a patch of white parachutes. Some aircraft were on fire while others were pressing home their attacks. Others tried to fight them off.

*Southern Comfort* was a mass of flame as she spun down, crashing into an Italian hillside. There was a final blast of flame and noise as if she had but one desire left, to return to the earth as the ore from which she came.

I hit the ground and rolled over. There was only a nick on my leg. I rolled up my parachute and tried to walk away. I got down a hillside and was met by two German motorcyclists who had seen me land. They were on the scene within about two minutes. They searched me and although I couldn't understand German, I knew what a machine gun pointing at me meant. I held up my hands while my money and other articles were taken from me. They took me down the hillside. I was more scared now than when I had bailed out of my airplane. I was put on a motorbike behind one of the Germans in front who did the driving. The other sat at the back with his machine gun in my ribs. We drove down the hill and met up with some more Germans and their American prisoners from the raid. All ten men aboard *Southern Comfort* bailed out, but Lts. Singer, the navigator, and Finder, the bombardier, never reached the ground alive. Both their bodies were later found by the Germans who reported that their parachutes were bullet ridden and had failed to work properly.

About half a dozen of us were taken to a small holding area surrounded by a mix of German and Italian soldiers. We sat there a long time before being loaded into a heavily-guarded truck and taken to a small compound about twenty miles away. We were given a brief interrogation from a German who had lived in St. Louis for a time. He spoke English fluently.

That night we met our radio operator, S/Sgt. Ray Whitby, in jail. He had only arrived at Benghazi the day before, on Sunday the 15th of August. Our regular radio operator, Edgar L. Shaw, had taken sick on the way to the plane and

Whitby had replaced him. Next day we were moved to Bari, a coastal town on the "heel" of Italy, for more thorough interrogation at Gestapo headquarters. Despite our unwillingness to talk they produced details of our Group and knew everything about us.

Austin and our copilot Fabiny, were sent away to an officers camp. Hickerson, the tail gunner, Jett, the top turret gunner, Lee, Purcell and I were sent north to Sulmona, an old prison camp at Aquilla ("Valley of the Eagle") which had been used during the First World War to hold German prisoners. It was next to a concentration camp used by Mussolini for housing political prisoners. We were the only Americans at Sulmona, but there were 3,000 British troops, some of whom had been captured in the North African desert. We were given complete British uniforms and food rations and met the Senior British Officer of the camp. An Australian named "Blackjack" ran the camp and had a private army to do it. Our guards issued orders through him.

**Ray Whitby recalls:**

The morning after I arrived in Africa and was assigned to the 506th, I was put on Austin's crew for the trip to Foggia. I was very glad to be on this crew as they had 13 or 14 missions including the trip to Rumania. To me they were old hands. I was told by the engineer, Joe Jett, that I should have brought along a book to read because this one would be a "milk run".

We arrived at our target about 11 o'clock and soon after we dropped our bombs. Then all hell broke loose! We were hit in a gas tank by one of the many fighters that descended on us. There was a hole in the wing. The bomb bay looked like a blast furnace.

I heard Austin on the intercom telling us to bail out. I don't think that the men in the tail section heard that order as their intercom was burned out. Tail gunner Glen Hickerson was the last man to jump.

While I was coming down two Me-109's came straight at me and I thought it was the end for me. However, when they got real close they turned a little and went on by. Then I was concerned that they would dump my chute.

When I hit the ground there were some rocks that screwed

up my right leg and back. I was taken to a hospital in Potenza. George Temple, another man from the 44th, was there. About a week later they took us to Bari and later to Sulmona.

Dale Lee recalls:

The Foggia mission was as successful a mission as you could want. It was well-planned. There were three groups that participated in the raid that day. The airfield was divided into three areas. The first attacking group struck the first area. The second group picked up where the first left off and we had the last third of the field all to ourselves. Mission accomplished!

On our way out we could see flashes of the Ack-Ack guns and just knew that a "beast" was on its way.

Approximately 15-minutes after releasing our bombs our Group was covered by 50-to-150 fighters from "Goering's Pet Squadron". We had a bomb hang-up and I was frantically trying to pry it loose. About that time our ship gave a big shudder. I then managed to release the bomb by disconnecting the whole damned shackle. The bomb bay doors would then close.

When I got back to my station I looked out of my window. I saw a hole about three feet wide in the top side of the wing in the outboard #1 engine area. It looked like a giant blow torch. I marvelled then as I do now that the wing did not fold. The fire was following the transfer hose into the airplane. It was one big inferno.

The left rudder was completely shot off. Holes appeared everywhere in the fuselage. The skin of the ship looked like a newspaper with holes poked through with a pencil.

One thing puzzled me. On the curvature over my head there was a split that was approximately half an inch wide and about a foot and a half long. I could see that the stringer was split also. At some point the thought crossed my mind, "Now how can they shoot like that"?

My clothes were burning, our communications system was gone, we didn't know what was happening in the front of the ship, but I knew it was time to do something. I poked Joe Warth and pointed to Hickerson in the tail. I bailed out the left waist window.

We were at approximately 25,000 feet and the cold air felt good on my burns. I free fell as far as I thought I should when suddenly I realized that I was going through a flight of German fighters. I remembered the image of the two airmen shot in their chutes on the Ploesti raid so I further delayed pulling my rip cord. I remember floating on my back in what seemed a slow turn. I could see our burning plane on its way to earth. Though it still seemed a long way to the ground, I finally opened my chute. Right after that there were two sudden jolts and I was on the ground. I was immediately surrounded by Italian civilians with guns and various other forms of weapons.

I was taken to a civilian jail. It had a beautiful tiled floor. However, there was at least six inches of human excrement in the entire two-cell jail.

There was one other soldier there. He had a broken right arm. The bones protruded through the flesh; it seemed like 6-to-8 inches. He was in extreme pain and shock. However, he couldn't lie down in all that filth. I managed to take off the door between the two cells and leaned it against the wall at a slight angle so he could at least lie down. He soon passed out. He was still breathing the next morning when guards came to get me.

I was taken to Beri for interrogation by the Nazi. We were paraded through the streets. There was no compassion shown for the guys with broken bones, severe burns or wounds. Some had eyes so badly swollen and bruised they couldn't see. All the while civilians were throwing stones, spitting on us and shouting jeers of contempt.

From Beri, I was moved by train to Concentration Camp 17 at Selmonia, Italy.

In the camp were 20 Americans and 2,500 British prisoners. Many of the British soldiers showed the result of long imprisonment, both physical and mental. I soon learned that these were the result of abuse and inadequate diet. They had also been subjected to large doses of propaganda.

We knew then that we had to watch for a chance to escape since the war would likely go on for a long time. We had no desire to be like some of these British prisoners.

The Camp was surrounded by a cement and block wall that was eight feet tall. The top of the wall had broken glass

embedded in it. Beyond the wall was a twenty-foot-wide road. Beyond the road were electric high tension wires which were followed by a large area containing barbed wire entanglements. Overseeing this complex were the inevitable guard towers that were manned 24 hours a day. Escape would be no easy thing.

Aboard *Southern Comfort* were Lts. Horace W. Austin (POW, escapee, returned); Andrew T. Fabiny (POW); Paul S. Singer (KIA); and Sheldon Finder (KIA). The enlisted men were Sgts. Joseph W. B. Jett (POW, escapee, returned); Ray L. Whitby (POW, escapee, returned); Dale V. Lee (POW, escapee, returned); Thomas O. Purcell (POW, escapee, returned); Charles J. Warth (POW, escapee, returned); and Glenn C. Hickerson (POW, escapee, returned).

When the 44th started to regroup over the Mediterranean they had left seven ships in Italy.

Almost immediately after leaving the target area, Bill Strong, flying in *Baldy and His Brood*, knew that he would not try to return to Benghazi. The three men in the back of the ship had serious wounds. His navigator, Flaherty, set a course for Malta, and they left the formation of returning aircraft.

Upon landing in Malta the wounded men were taken to the hospital. Examination of his aircraft showed holes left by large caliber armor piercing shells. When he was debriefed, Strong reported that in the target area there was an unidentified B-24 with rather indistinct or no markings. This craft seemed to tag along behind the formation. This might account for the accuracy of the enemy flak guns.

Strong returned to Benina Main on the 18th of August. He left behind his three gunners. They remained in the hospital for a period of time and then returned to England. A newspaper article told of the return of two of them:

OFFICERS "WORKING IN SHIFTS" PIN  
SEVEN MEDALS ON GUNNER HERO

S/Sgt. Oliver R. Germann, 25 year-old ex-farmhand and truck driver from Moran, Wyo., and now an aerial gunner, today received seven separate awards for heroism, so many that a colonel and a brigadier general worked in relays pinning the medals on his chest.



Still limping slightly from wounds which hospitalized him for five months in Malta and North Africa, Germann received the Silver Star, Distinguished Flying Cross and cluster and Air Medal and three clusters from Col. Frederick R. Dent Jr., his group commander, and Brig. Gen. Leon W. Johnson, combat wing chief.

Never before have we presented one man with so many decorations at one time," said Gen. Johnson, Ploesti raider who recently was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Germann, B-24 tail gunner with 17 missions to his credit, including raids on Ploesti and Rome, also was to have received the Purple Heart, but he was given that award before he left Africa to rejoin his group in Britain.

He will be going back to the States soon along with a fellow crew member, S/Sgt. Lonnie L. Ackerman, of Fox, Ark., who was wounded at the same time and wears all of the decorations awarded Germann except one cluster to the Distinguished Flying Cross.

The Silver Star citation said that Germann, despite a bullet wound below his knee, shot down two enemy aircraft while operating from the Middle East Theater and "only after his turret was put out of commission did he ask for help."

The other awards were for "extraordinary achievement in the attack on Ploesti, for courage, coolness and skill in action against the enemy and for the destruction of enemy aircraft."

The other crew member that was wounded, Dale Haas, recently wrote:

We sustained over 200 holes in our plane. Strong left us in the hospital in Malta. I was in the hospital in Malta for a month and then taken to Benghazi. From Benghazi I was shipped back to hospitals in the States. In all, I spent about a year in hospitals. (Note: he made no mention of decorations which he received.)

Bill Strong was to remember:

This Foggia raid as the one on which he was more scared

than he was at Floesti.

The bitterness and frustration which a combat man experiences over the loss of his crewmates is well expressed in the writings of Donald Chase:

Only six of our crew flew the Foggia mission. Copilot Phipps, bombardier Schwab, engineer Holtz and I were grounded by respiratory and ear infections.

We four waited for our six fellow crewmen and our four replacements to return in a ship named *Timb-A-A-Ah*. Long after the last ships returned and the sun had set, we two enlisted men, as did the two officers, mournfully trekked back to our tent area. It was a night of anguish. Eight of our Group's A/C, including *Timb-A-A-Ah*, failed to return.

If I had been older, instead of 22, perhaps I might not have searched for symbolic reason which governs fateful events. But regardless, I picked up the Gurkha Kukri, walked into the desert and threw the knife across the sand into the darkness. It had brought only bad luck. More than half my crew were gone, probably dead. I cried.

Norm remembers thinking how unfair it was to send these inexperienced crews into combat. They should have had more seasoning before so many went out together.

On August 17th Mark Morris wrote:

We visited Tel Aviv, Palestine. We took the *Old Crow*, but this time we were passengers. There was no need to man the guns. We had some of our ground crew along.

When we arrived, there was a mix-up between McAtee and the control tower. We landed downwind. I was in the nose and we used absolutely every foot of runway. The brakes were smoking when we stopped. Our ground crew chief, Jackson, stayed temporarily at the field with *Old Crow* to examine and repair the brakes, if needed.

Norm Kiefer remembers that along the way we flew over the Nile River, the Suez Canal and the Pyramids in Egypt.

Palestine was a strange country of marked contrasts. The new, as exemplified by Tel Aviv, existed along side of ancient ways and equipment that went back into time long ago.

That first night in Tel Aviv Kerns and I stayed together. This was my first experience with Vodka and I learned the way that it can "sneak" up on you. We learned of a feud that was breaking out in fights all over town. A large contingent of paratroopers were on leave and some naval craft were in port. Paratroopers and sailors were really mixing it up.

It all started on the morning of the invasion of Sicily. That morning we had flown out of our way to avoid crossing the invasion fleet that stood just off shore. The paratroopers aircraft were briefed to fly across the fleet. Everyone knew that they were coming.

Just before the arrival of the paratrooper's aircraft, enemy aircraft came out to attack the fleet. When the paratroopers went across, some of the navy gunners were still a little nervous and opened fire. A large number of paratroopers were lost at sea that morning. The paratroopers were looking for every navy man that they could find in order to pay them back.

We didn't want to get in the middle of anything so we went back to the hotel early. Besides, Vodka was taking its effect.

That night McAtee and some of the other officers found an eating establishment near the beach. They were told that the house specialty was steak. They had not seen steak for some time, so they ordered it. It was good! The waiter was concerned when they ordered a second round. They ate it. When they ordered the third round they were refused. The establishment manager just did not understand how long it had been since they had tasted meat of this type. The diet had been Vienna Sausage for a long time.

Mark Morris remembers that first night:

I went with Jack Edwards and Charley Loftus for the night club scene. We drank quite a lot of Vodka. Loftus got very ill as we returned to the hotel. He was in such bad shape that the MPs became interested. We told them that Charley had apparently been slipped a bad drink. They wanted to know where and more details. We could not be very cooperative on that score of course. Anyway, an ambulance was called, but it was very slow coming. The Irish in Jack answered the Vodka and he became an obnoxious pugilistic drunk. He gave the M.P.'s trouble and finally started a brawl. The M.P.'s weren't too mad

after the first go-around and offered to release us advising Jack and I to leave. About then the ambulance arrived. A discussion as to whether Charley needed hospitalization caused Jack to become abusive again. The M.P.'s had enough of our shenanigans and more had arrived. It looked as if the three of us were in for it. They dragged Jack out swinging, loaded Charley in the ambulance, and I headed for another exit and got away. Apparently Jack even got into it at the jail later.

In the morning McAtee was knocking on the hotel doors of the enlisted men. He wanted them to go with him to the local M.P. lock up. Edwards and Loftus were in trouble. All of the crew officers had signed up for a day trip to the Holy Land.

Mark told McAtee what had happened. We also explained that we had paid to go on the bus excursion that was leaving early.

McAtee told us later that when he arrived at the lockup he:

Asked the Captain on duty what he could do and the Captain said nothing. These two guys had hurt some of his men. They were going to pay. After all there was enough trouble in town with the sailors and paratroopers.

McAtee tried to explain that his crew members had probably gotten out-of-line, but it had been a long time since they had been to town and besides they were still a little shook up from the Ploesti raid. The Captain stood up and asked, "These guys were at Ploesti?" McAtee said "Yes". The Captain ordered the turnkey to release Edwards and find out if Loftus could leave the hospital. He told McAtee "Get them the hell out of here and keep them out of trouble".

Mark Morris remembers:

Later, much later, when Charley discovered what had happened, he complained about the episode. He told Jack and I, "No matter what! Don't ever again cause me to be sent to get my stomach pumped!" He said the hospital doctor, after the pumping, told them; "Nothing wrong with this guy, he is just drunk. Get him to hell out of here!"

There were six of our crew members signed up for the bus trip through the Holy Land. They included Joe Young, Harold

Laudig, Dave McCash, Mark Morris, Albert Kerns and myself. First we headed for Jerusalem. There we visited the Dome of the Rock, The Mt. of Olives, Mt. Calvary, The Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the Wailing Wall and other religious sites. Then we went to Bethlehem and the Church of the Nativity. It was a very awe-inspiring all-day trip.

Back in England, Ray Marner wrote:

August 18--Major Moore, C.O. of the 67th, was here today from Africa. I don't think the 506th lost a single ship. The 67th lost about 8. Some of the men are going back to the States. We had a black air raid last night with lots of enemy planes flying over. I don't know where they bombed.

There are indications that our aircraft participated in a second raid on Foggia on August 19th. However, it is not clear how many aircraft went nor who the pilots and crews were. For the Group, it is indicated that ten of the 44th ships took off that morning.

Will Lundy's records show that there were five aircraft from the 66th (including Rebich) and five from the 68th. Three aircraft, including Rebich, aborted and one landed in Malta. The six attacking aircraft went to the marshalling yards and an overpass which were hit with good results. There was little enemy opposition from ground guns or enemy aircraft. There were no losses.

On August 21st, our 506th aircraft once again were out. However, technically there were only two ships from the Squadron.

Taking off that morning were A/C #013, Bar D, flown by Olson and A/C # 283, Z, flown by Slough. They were joined by A/C #764, M, Helen Be Happy (a 66th ship) flown by Rebich and A/C #788, D, Avenger, flown by R. J. Lehnhausen.

With Lehnhausen were Lts. R. E. Hamlyn, R. C. Peterson, and C. E. Hulpian. Also with him were Sgts. W. G. Morton (During his career, Morton shot down many enemy aircraft and later received a Field Commission.), H. D. Cole, R. H. Wright, E. M. Semons, A. J. Terwey, and J. Merrigan.

These aircraft joined with six other 44th ships to attack the railroad station at Cancellio, Italy. Slough, flying in the Old Crow, aborted and landed in Malta. The attacking force

believed that they had hits in the target area. The uncertainty was due to the intense fighter attacks that were carried out just before and during the bomb run.

Olson, flying in Trouble, picked up flak that was heavy and aimed from near Naples until about one minute after the bomb run. They were subjected to two attacks from fighters coming in at 5 and 7 o'clock below. Dugan, flying the tail turret, fired on one Me-109. He saw the enemy aircraft explode in midair. This was confirmed by Hockensmith and Denly. The crew saw one Me-109 go down in flames at 1220, another explode about 200 foot below the formation and also saw one crash into the mountains and burn. They saw a pink B-24 (from one of the African groups) go down over the target. It was in a steep dive, but appeared to be under control. A second B-24 left the formation over the coast of Sicily, apparently with the intent of landing.

Lehnhausen, in addition to heavy normal attacks by enemy aircraft, was bombed by fighters flying above the 506th formation. A number of these fighters dropped bombs. They were estimated to be 100-pound bombs. The timed explosions were accurate with regard to altitude.

Lehnhausen's gunners accounted for three enemy aircraft. Morton, in the top turret, fired at one Me-109 that went down burning in a slow flat spin. Two minutes later, he caught another Me-109 coming in from 4 o'clock and watched it make a sharp wing over and dive to the ground in a spin. Merrigan, the tail gunner, destroyed one Me-109 which attacked from 7 o'clock. This aircraft came to about 200 yards before going down in a steep dive flaming. This kill was witnessed by Morton.

The Group did not lose any aircraft on this raid. However, their ability to continue to operate effectively was now in doubt. In spite of outstanding efforts of ground personnel, maintenance problems were eroding our ability to consistently place aircraft in the air. The decision was made to return to England.

From a combat loss point of view, the effect of this African excursion is well expressed by Donald Chase:

Without loss, the 44th flew another two missions after losing 60 percent of the strike planes in just two raids, Ploesti and Foggia. Late in the month, 44th personnel returned to our base in Shipdham, England. Only 22 A/C

made the trip back, whereas 41, plus four replacements, had come to Africa two months earlier.

Costly (about \$300,000 each) as the loss of our 22 bombers may have been, more importantly and personally grievous was the loss of more than 200 airmen. Several of those "airmen" were ground crew fellows who volunteered to fly as gunners when attrition slashed the number of available regular gunners.

I returned to England in mid-September after being hospitalized with sand fly fever in Marrakech, Morocco, for two weeks. I never saw Holtz, Schwab or Phipps again.

Ray Marner's diary indicated on:

Aug. 23--I went to a dance in town tonight. The air raid siren blew while I was dancing. The all clear came a short time later. We found out next morning that they were bombing our field.

Aug. 24--We found they were dropping antipersonnel bombs (butterfly bombs) and they were exploding all day. (Note: Will Lundy's records show that two 68th men were killed on this date when their auto ran over a land mine at Shipdham.)

Aug. 25--The bombs are still being exploded today. You can hear them all over. One civilian was hit on the perimeter, but was not killed. Our planes are coming in tomorrow. They couldn't come before because of the bombs.

Mark Morris wrote in his diary:

Aug. 26--Benghazi to Marrakech, Morocco, 10 hours.

That morning Norm Kiefer found that the Gurkha soldiers assigned to guard our ships had a deep love for knives. For the flight through South America and Africa we were each issued a jungle emergency kit in case of a crash landing. In the kit was a machete. I always kept that knife, and another one that I got in Brazil, in the wall lining over the radio operator's position. I know that they were in place the day before we left. However, after we were airborne, on the way to Marrakech, I noticed that my knives were missing. Today, they are probably somewhere in India.

Mark's diary continued with:

Aug. 27--We are back home again in beautiful England. There is good food in the mess & I love those Norwich trips & chips.

On that same day, Ray Marner wrote:

Aug. 27--The bombs are still being exploded on the field. The planes just came in. They were in French Morocco last night. Majors Beam and Anderson had engine trouble and were forced down in Portugal. I don't know what will happen now. The boys are black and covered with sand. They are plenty glad to be back. Rebich's crew and aircraft have been transferred to the 66th. Nick is on Rebich's crew. They haven't come in yet. Other transfers were Slough's crew and aircraft and Bunker's crew and aircraft to the 67th.

They pulled 12 raids down there. We lost two ships on the last raid. Lts. Austin and Whitlock's crews. Kosch went down. Most were new men and I didn't know them well. F/O Wilson went down on another ship. Lt. Young and Spivey were lost on the Ploesti raid. (Note: The only Spivey, that is listed by Lundy, was Joseph B. who was lost on the Ploesti raid. He was flying with the 66th. There is no Lt. Young listed.) Germann, Haas and Ackerman were all shot up and are in the hospital at Malta. A lot of men are coming back by transport later.

Upon our return, some of us did not waste any time starting to enjoy the pleasures of England. Mark Morris wrote:

Aug. 29, 30--Pass to London. A.G.(Kerns), Kief and I.

Aug. 31--Back to base.

That same day Ray Marner wrote:

Majors Beam and Anderson got back. They made Gibraltar and didn't have to land in Lisbon. The whole crew got back. Rebich's crew got back. It sure was good to see Nick again. They certainly did see the action and country.

It was also on the 29th, after a three day train ride, that Robert Mundell arrived at the prison camp at Sulmona. Mundell recalls:

They gave each of us a piece of bread and a piece of



cheese before we left, but I ate mine right away and didn't eat again until we arrived. We got some oatmeal from the Red Cross at the prison and we built a fire in the yard to cook it. Dennis Slattery (Slats) ruined it by pouring in too much salt, but I was so hungry I ate it anyway.

In the prison camp we played softball with the English prisoners almost every day and beat them pretty badly. They didn't know much about playing, but they were good sports. Tom Purcell (from Austin's crew) was our best player. We also watched a play or two that the English put on.

We were fed mostly spaghetti and bread. Generally, we were treated pretty well. There was an Australian named Pat that called us out for roll call every morning and was more or less in charge of us Americans. A little Italian Captain was in charge of the prison and Pat said that he was a good man.

On August 30th Lt. Charles R. Conner was assigned to the 506th. With him were Lts. Waino W. Hannuksela, Chester B. Hanson, and Edward J. Ackerman. The enlisted personnel included Sgts. James H. Bales, Chester W. Yurick, Ralph E. Strait, Aubrey J. Maloy, James L. Wilson, and George N. De Wald.

**James H. Clements reports:**

Upon arriving in the U. K. we were assigned to the 93rd B.G.. Within a few days we (all fourteen replacement crews) received orders for TEMPORARY DUTY in North Africa. Of course we didn't know why. At that time my bombardier was in the hospital. As no replacement was available, our orders were held up. Some of the other crews got to Ploesti; how many and who made the mission, I don't know. When my bombardier got out of the hospital we proceeded by Air Transport Command to North Africa. When we got to Tripoli we were dumped. By that time the Ploesti raid was over. We had a hard time getting back to the U.K., late in August.

**Wade Huggins recalls:**

After we got to Africa, our ship was taken away from us. When the Group left to go back to England, we had to hitchhike by caravan from Tripoli to Marrakech. We then

caught a flight back to England sometime in September.

With Lt. Clements were Lts. Richard Boykin, and Joseph Bumbicka. The enlisted personnel were Sgts. James Bolger, Carl Shook, Marion Tiemeier, Claud Horner, Elmer Hagner, and Wade Huggins.

The following are extracts from Norm Kiefer's letters to his wife in August:

"I just ate a Babe Ruth candy bar. It had a slight taste of gasoline, but so what. It came from you."..."Do you remember the song titled *My Pretty Little Red Haired Girl*? I now substitute Arab Girl for Red Haired! Ouch! Why did you hit me? You ought to see your competition. Not quite like the movies."..."Early in the year, I was in the harem room of a Sultan's palace. Now why that look? The gal part of the harem was up in the mountains with the Sultan"..."We signed up to go swimming this afternoon. I hope that we can go. I am badly in need of a bath, after the way the wind and dust blew yesterday. We have to use special soap that will do its job in salt water."..."Laudig got his telegram! The crew now has a baby girl!"..."I was in a place that we could get some wine yesterday. It isn't as good as the wine that we got in North Morocco, but it didn't cost as much. We got one liter for 20 lire, Italian money." (Note: I had just gotten back from Sicily. Where was the censor?)..."We went to Tel Aviv. The first thing we did was take a nice hot shower. This was my first real bath since we left England."..."We found an ice cream parlor. I ate \$5.00 worth of ice cream, malted milks, sundaes and banana splits. The waitress thought we were crazy."..."How do you like my American Red Cross paper. I am sitting in the Washington Club in London. We had to stand up all the way down here."..."No kidding, this island is really a fortress now. From the number of wings that are running around, I should say a Flying Fortress."