



*Fourth*  
**PHASE MAP**  
*Jan. 23 to Mar 26*

**LEGEND**  
 AXIS  
 8th ARMY

AREA COVERED  
 0 100 200 300  
 SCALE OF MILES

**AIR BLITZ**  
 MARCH 2nd

**ADVANCE**  
 JAN. 24th

**FALLS**  
 FEB. 7th

SGT. Nathan H. S. Clark

## No Pause at Tripoli

**W**ITH the city of Tripoli in the hands of the Allies, the Ninth U.S. Air Force paid tribute in speeches and awards to those whose exploits had played a large part in the winning of the Western Desert. While British and American flags waved over the fallen city, President Roosevelt and Mr. Winston Churchill were meeting in Casablanca, 1,500 miles to the west. No time was lost by the victorious Eighth Army for on the day following their triumphal entry into Tripoli, they again moved westwards.

Consequently, there was no pause in the Ninth's hard-hitting schedule. Its strengthening air weapons continued to pound retreating enemy columns west of Tripoli and operations against the Continent mounted on an ascending scale.

The Liberators continued relentlessly to deal out punishing blows on Naples, Crete, Messina, Palermo and Crotona. The aerial assault of these targets became more intensified as the Axis withdrew into southern Tunisia and small areas of western Tripolitania. And in Tunisia, near the coastal corridor which is the elbow of the historic French province, the striking power of the Ninth Air Force was also applied. Mitchells from the 12th Bombardment Group raked the Medenine area with explosives and Warhawks of the 57th Fighter Group attacked shipping off the Tunisian coast and dive-bombed the Tripolitanian port of Zuara.

On one of the now numerous Liberator raids on Naples harbor, three merchant vessels moored there were sent to the bottom. Scores of hits on the Massaniello and Vittorio Emanuel moles and along the waterfront left great fires blazing from one end of the harbor area to the other. Heavy black smoke again rose to great heights over the city.

The Liberators flew hundreds of miles over enemy territory approaching and leaving Naples without fighter escort at the cost of only one bomber shot down. That ship fell victim to a formidable force of fighters. It was shot down immediately over the target area and fell into Naples Bay after having dropped its bombs on the target. In return, two and possibly three ME-109's were shot down and others damaged.

General Timberlake, described the attack as one of the most successful yet carried out by the United States Air Force in the Middle East.

"It points to things to come," he said. "To reach a target like Naples you have to have heavy bombardment. To bomb it with precision you have to attack during daylight. You can't have fighter protection because your fighters can't fly that far and get back to their base.

"Our aircraft have the armament to take care of themselves, and the boys who fly them know how to use that armament. The enemy in the future can expect us to penetrate deeper and deeper into his territory to strike at his vital spots."

### FIRST NURSES ARRIVE

The first American nurses to go into the field in the Middle East arrived at the 98th Bombardment Group at Gambut in January. Practically the whole camp turned out to greet the six nurses who were a part of an American Field hospital unit. The young women, all second lieutenants in the Army Nurse Corps, were greatly envied of the trip forward by their sisters at the base hospital from which they started.

Major Alex Tulsy, commanding this American field hospital, said they were good soldiers "They didn't have to come up here in trucks like the rest of us," he said. "They could have made the trip by plane."

Lieutenant Colonel William I Marsalis, camp commander, turned over his tent to the nurses until they could get settled in their own quarters. One of the girls said the four-day motor trip was uneventful, "except at a British camp. We stopped there overnight and asked them to lend us their showerbath. They did but couldn't understand how we stood the cold water."

To get the real story of the job done by this field hospital you would have to know about one night when a young bomber pilot lay on an operating table in a wind-tossed tent and underwent an emergency appendectomy.

It was late and outside the tent the winds blew cold. A kerosene stove made little headway against chilly blasts that whistled through openings in the door flap. Over in one corner Major Tulsy had rigged up a parachute drier that he hoped would soon warm the air inside his desert operating room. In another corner Army nurses hovered over a small heater on which simmered a pan of water. They waited impatiently for it to reach the boiling point so that instruments could be sterilized.

When the temperature inside the tent was several degrees warmer and other preparations had reached the ready stage, Major Tulsy bent to his task. Outside the tent a motor generator kept up its noisy clatter, supplying light as the surgeon performed his first operation under desert conditions. The young bomber pilot recuperated in good time.

There was a time, the last day of January, when the Liberators had to penetrate a particularly thick curtain of ack-ack in their trip over Messina. The barrage was described as one of the "hottest," and the mission was marked by the loss of a Liberator and crew.

The big bomber, flown by Major John M. Toomey, had taken too much ack-ack and was force-landed in the sea.

With two of his engines silenced and half his landing gear shot off, Major Toomey put his ship down off the coast of Sicily while one of his squadron mates, Lieut. Richard Miller circled low overhead and dropped drinking water and rations.

"We saw at least four and probably six of the Major's crew get into their two rubber boats," said Miller. "They didn't seem much worried and waved us away as soon as they collected the things we dropped."

Meanwhile back over the target area Lieut. William Stewart and his crew finished their bombing run and were attacked by two enemy fighters as they turned away. In order to protect Stewart, Lieut. Fred Milam brought his ship alongside and saw a "whole mess of holes" in the middle of the ship.

"He came down out of the formation like a bat out of hell," said Milan. "Those pursuits on his tail were really giving him blazes, and it was all we could do to catch up. Finally we got into firing position on his wing and we downed the Jerry. We then escorted Stewart's bomber into Malta, where he landed safely."

A searching party from Malta failed to find Major Toomey and his crew and they were marked down as "missing" and presumed to be prisoners as their rafts were not far off shore.

The 12th Air Force in Algiers, at this period, called on the Ninth Air Force for an experienced bombardment squadron. The same 376th Group which had just lost Major Toomey and his crew sent a detachment of twenty-five officers and seventy-three enlisted men from their 513th Squadron. This squadron which went to the 12th Air Force on detached service was later to be permanently transferred.

By the first of February, the Axis-held port of Zuara, near the Tunisian frontier, felt the full weight of Allied medium bombers and fighter-bombers. After Zuara was taken by General Montgomery's men, the Ninth Air Force continued its attacks on Rommel's war machine which was still running in reverse.

Back at the 376th Bombardment Group, Keith Karl Compton, 27, became the commanding officer on February 3, with the rank of colonel. He succeeded Colonel George F. McGuire who was transferred to another theater of operations.

At another Liberator bomber base, American soldiers had their own version of "any old port in a storm." When three German planes paid them an unexpected visit, five of the ground men climbed into a brand new bake-oven, and stayed there until the shooting was over. They later explained that under the circumstances the fifty yards from where they were to the nearest slit-trench seemed a trifle too far. The oven fortunately was cold.

### MIRACLE MISSES

The miracles wrought by machine gun slugs and ack ack shell fragments were taking their place alongside the peacetime fables of tornadoes that blow straws through telephone poles. Reports reaching headquarters were revealing a remarkably small number of casualties among airmen from enemy bullets and shell splinters, even though numerous aircraft have been holed by both. The reports showed likewise, a remarkable number of miraculous escapes from injury due partly to luck and partly to sound construction of our aircraft. There was the case, for instance, of Lt. Henry D. Chism of New Orleans, La.

It was during a heavy bomber attack on shipping in Benghazi harbor. Chism is a bombardier. And as the bomb run started, he glued his eyes to his bomb sight. Nerves taut and body straining to hold the sight on the target he paid no attention to the white and black smoke puffs of ack ack bursts above, below and to both sides. In a moment the bombs were away. And as they arched out and downward Chism moved his head slightly to the side in an effort to see them fall.

At the moment he moved a shrapnel splinter from an ack ack burst below the ship crashed upward through the bombsight exactly in the spot where he had held his eye during that bombing run. The splinter of steel sang past Chism's head, snapped a thick brass connector on his interphone headset, clipped a small patch of hair from his head and sent him tumbling backward.

"Those dirty so and so's", he cursed, "they've ruined my bombsight."

At another time the heavies had dropped their bombs on the target and were engaged in a furious battle with Messerschmitts. One ship was hit several times by machine gun slugs and 20 millimeter cannon shells. It was at high altitude and very cold, and when the fight was over and the Messerschmitts driven off one of the ship's gunners felt an icy breeze in the vicinity of his rear section. Examination revealed that an enemy missile of some sort had blasted away the entire seat of his leather flying suit, his overalls and his underwear without so much as touching his skin.

Other articles of wearing apparel likewise have turned fate into luck. The pilot of an aircraft was attacked recently by enemy fighters. A bullet crashed into the cockpit and the pilot felt an acute pain in the region of his heart and blood smeared the front of his shirt. Upon landing, he found that the glancing bullet had struck his pilot's wings and had driven them through his shirt and into the flesh just over the heart. The wings had to be removed by surgery, but they unquestionably saved his life.

In tribute to the rugged construction of our aircraft, there was the time when Major Paul F. Davies of Atlanta, Ga., who recently was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his achievements, was flying a B-24 and was set upon by a number of enemy fighters. One of the fighters got a lucky shot at Davis' aircraft. A 20 millimeter explosive shell hit the de-icer boot on the leading edge of one wing, went through to the center portion of the wing and exploded. The wing bulged like a balloon and was riddled with holes. But it stayed on and Davis limped back to his base. Another B-24 had both ailerons shot away and two engines knocked out over an enemy target and flew back with but half its control and only two motors, hundreds of miles to a safe landing.

### CHANGES IN COMMAND

On February 6 was announced one of the most important changes in command to come out of the Middle East theater of operations. General Brereton succeeded Lieutenant General Frank M. Andrews as commander of all United States forces in the Middle East. General Brereton now held the dual command of theater and Air Force. Since the Middle East

was an air theater it was significant that General Andrews, an Air Force officer, was followed by another officer of the Air Force. General Andrews went to England and from there to Iceland, where he was to meet death in a plane crash the early part of May.

During the same week Colonel Robert Kauch, commanding the Ninth Air Service Command was promoted to the rank of Brigadier General.

The next change in command announced was that Col. Hugo P. Rush would succeed General Timberlake as commanding officer of the Bomber Command. His appointment followed award of the Distinguished Flying Cross which he had received on the previous day. Col. Rush formerly was chief of staff of the bomber command.

General Eisenhower during this period was made a full General and Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder became responsible to him for all air operations in North Africa. This scope of responsibility included the Middle East since there then existed the need for closer co-ordination of all forces in Africa with a steady shrinking in the zone of operations.

Major General Robert W. Crawford was appointed head of the Services of Supply in the Middle East on February 18. He succeeded Major General Russell L. Maxwell. General Crawford is a graduate of West Point and has been an engineer officer during most of his army career. During the first world war he was a lieutenant colonel in command of a batallion of chemical warfare troops in France. General Maxwell came to the Middle East in 1941 with orders to set up and operate a United States Military Mission in Cairo. The function of the mission was to speed lend-lease aid to the British and to Russia.

The recurring question was: "Where is the Luftwaffe?" The fighter pilots, returning to their base after missions, would repeatedly report the absence of enemy aircraft while over their objectives. However, it was estimated by the intelligence officers that at the time Tripolitania became Allied territory, the Axis had about 400 planes remaining in Tunisia. About four times this number were scattered on landing grounds in Greece, Sicily, Crete and Corsica—the bulk of them in Sicily. The Luftwaffe and the Regia Aeronautica had abandoned more than 1,100 planes from El Alamein to Tripoli. But the clearest answer to the query could have been found on the combat score boards of the Allied Air Forces and the ashes on the desert. For example, the total air victories of the 57th Fighter Group alone up to January 23, when Tripoli fell, was 124 destroyed, probably destroyed, and damaged enemy aircraft. From this 65 were definitely destroyed. Multiply this number by the number of Groups operating in the desert.

During one of the early February Liberator attacks on shipping in Naples harbor, hits were scored on vessels and fires started along the water front. Fighters attempted to intercept the bombers but failed to interfere with their successful bombing run. Colonel Rush said that a compilation of reports from the mission indicated that considerable damage was done although much of it was not observed due to medium cloud coverage.

### **DESERT AIR TASK FORCE**

On February 15, the Desert Air Task Force was established. The Headquarters Desert Air Task Force was charged with the operational and administrative supervision of all Ninth Air Force west of, and including Marble Arch, Libya.

Specifically, the DATF served as the tactical command for all units of the Ninth US Air Force operating under the command of Headquarters, Royal Air Force, in the Western Desert which unit controlled all Allied air operations in direct support of the British Army.

The DATF was set up with its own operations and intelligence sections. American officers were also attached to fighter control operations principally to gain experience from the British in this most secret system of interception and defense. These officers several times had the novel and dangerous experience of actually watching on instruments, the approach of enemy raiders right up to the point of their station. They remained on the job until the last moment, allowing scant time for a foot race and dive into slit trenches in a hail of fire. On February 20, the 93rd Bombardment Group was released from the Ninth US Air Force and returned to its former station in England.

Following the historic Casablanca conferences, Lieutenant-General Henry H. Arnold and Lieutenant-General Brehon B. Somerville arrived in the Middle East for further discussions. They were accompanied by Major-General Carl Spaatz.

General Arnold, accompanied by General Brereton and General Timberlake, made a personal tour of inspection to advanced Libyan bases of the Ninth Air Force. At one of these landing grounds, General Arnold asked a pair of bedraggled, unshaven fliers where they had been.

"Over Palermo," one of them said. He and the others snapped to attention, tried to conceal their amazement. The other pilot gulped audibly and called attention to their un-military appearance. "We just got in, sir. Haven't had time to clean up."

General Arnold, chief of all the Army Air Forces, waved the apology aside without comment and got down to work. Was their oxygen equipment all right? Have any trouble with the guns? What did they think of such and such a gadget? Were the planes they were using at the time satisfactory and if not, why not?

The little group around the figure of the hearty, amiable general grew into a crowd. Pilots, navigators, bombardiers, and sergeant gunners came out of their desert tents and gathered around. "Hap" Arnold was in the desert to pay them a visit. It was the biggest event anybody could remember at that landing ground. While General Brereton and General Timberlake looked on approvingly, the fliers and their crews aired a several months' accumulation of pet theories and minor gripes about their equipment to the best possible ears. The general didn't confine himself to asking questions. He also talked. He told the men all he could about what was in the store for them in the way of new equipment, new ideas for bombers, bombs and guns. He explained why some things weren't as good as they might be, and how others were a lot better than anything the enemy ever heard of. When he finished and turned back to his plane the crowd didn't cheer—they yelled their heads off. Even the cooks came out of their cook tents to see him off.

"Hell," said a mess sergeant. "He ain't going to be here for dinner, and here I was planning something pretty special."

About the time of the General's visit, two Sergeants in a Liberator over Messina harbor, had their hands full of action. They were photographers.



GENERAL ARNOLD in the Western Desert with GENERAL BRERETON



Sent up with the bombers to do a picture story of the attack, they soon dropped cameras and grabbed machine guns when the flight was attacked by too many enemy aircraft after leaving the target area. "We fired about a hundred rounds apiece at them," cameraman Joswick said, "but we couldn't see results. My aim was just getting good when I had a little trouble with my oxygen mask and had to stop."

Wade, the other cameraman, said the Germans used "their usual tactics. They go straight up in the air and over on their backs after you shoot at them, then head down in a dive. You think you got 'em for sure but a few minutes later they're back on your tail."

Both of the photographers reported unusually heavy anti-aircraft fire over the target. "It looked as if they sent up a preliminary barrage ahead of us to rattle the bombardiers as we came in. But it didn't do any good. We got one ship all right, right on the nose."

These two sergeant-photographers also took part in the American Air Force raid on Naples harbor the evening of February 7. "We really did a job on them that time," related Joswick. "When we came back we heard an Italian radio report that thirteen of us were shot down and five of us left the target in such bad condition we couldn't possibly get home. When they make up stories like that it means we did a lot of damage."

The official Air Force communique on this raid listed only one plane shot down, a total which Joswick confirmed.

Wade said that in the ship flying next to his, gunners grabbed Tommy guns from their racks inside the plane to fight off enemy interceptors when their 50 caliber weapons went temporarily out of commission.

### MID-AIR REPAIRS

During the February attacks on Axis-held harbors by the Ninth Air Force, a number of dramatic stories came to point. One of these was the story of how two crewmen of a Liberator repaired a severed rudder control cable in the air with wire from a rations box. The story was told by Sergeant Charles A. Lawson who was the right waist-gunner of the bomber whose objective was the harbor at Sousse, on the Tunisian coast. Here is the story how he and Technical Sergeant Oscar L. Waits of the 98th Bombardment Group put the unserviceable rudder back into operation.

"Our ship 'Rosie' took off from its desert base with Captain William C. Bacon at the controls. We were in a formation of Liberators headed for Sousse. Over the Mediterranean the gunners on 'Rosie' tested their guns and reported that they were in working order. Captain Bacon gave word over the interphone that we should use our oxygen sparingly as we would be using it for a long time.

"Captain Bacon called up the navigator, who was up in the nose plotting our course, asking when the target would be reached. The navigator told him it would be about 20 minutes. The bombardier, said he was ready, and lined up on the target for his bombing run. He opened the bomb-bay doors, reached up and pushed his release. The bombs left their racks.

"The first two bombs hit a warehouse on the mole while the third bomb struck water. The fourth and fifth hit two small destroyers which were anchored outside the harbor. Smoke bellowed up from the mole and the two ships were ablaze.

"The ack-ack was heavy and black smoke poured into our windows. Explosions could be felt against the side of our ship but 'Rosie' banked and weaved so that never a chip of ack-ack touched her. We were on a sharp lookout for enemy fighters when the words we expected came: 'pursuits at 6 o'clock'—fighters on our tail. There were three of them. Tracers streamed past us and through the bomber, shooting out our hydraulic system and radio. Waits' left waist gun was knocked out of commission and a sergeant tried to help him get it back in firing order. Meanwhile I was shooting at a Messerschmitt that hovered over our right wing.

"I heard the tail-gunner, call over the interphone: 'I got one! I got one!'

"Captain Bacon put 'Rosie' into a dive at 300 miles per hour, leaving the two attackers sitting about 6,000 feet above us. They did not come down after us but headed back. They must have been badly damaged.

"It was then that we knew something was wrong with our ship. Captain Bacon pressed his rudder control pedals but nothing happened; the rudder control cable was shot out.

"The radio man sent out an S.O.S. as it was not known whether or not we would make it back to our base. Waits and I unwrapped the wire from a rations box and spliced the ends to the broken cable, mending it the best we knew how. It was good enough to enable Captain Bacon to regain control of the ship. All our troubles were not yet over. We could not get 'Rosie's' nose wheel down and locked. Captain Bacon circled above the field for fifty-five minutes. During that time Waits and I finally succeeded in getting the wheel down. The ship was then set down perfectly on the runway."

Two more decorations were awarded General Brereton. He was presented with the Companion of the Bath and the Distinguished Service Medal. The award of CB, given on February 24, was 'graciously approved' by His Majesty King George VI of England, for distinguished service in operations in the South West Pacific. The citation for the Distinguished Service Medal, awarded February 25, reads:

"As Commander of the Far East Air Force his personal example, superb direction, unflagging energy and spirit of co-operation with our Allies were instrumental in delaying and disrupting the advance of the enemy air, land and sea forces. With only patched remnants of air power he delayed and harassed enemy landing operations at all points of attack on the Phillipines. He accomplished the apparently impossible withdrawal of his air force from the Phillipines to Java, and at the same time continued to attack the enemy seaborne invasion from the straits of the Dutch Indies. He again succeeded in withdrawing his air force, already taxed to the limit of human endurance, to a new base in Australia where it was reconstituted for further service."

### PRISONER REACTION

Let's have a look at morale in the enemy forces at this period when hope of victory could still have persisted in the vigorous German mind.

Four German soldiers surrendered to a supply party of one of the squadrons of the 79th Fighter. These men, one of whom was a non-commissioned officer, had been wandering about for nearly a week after the German retreat had been resumed. They were brought to the camp and fed. Then a most informal questioning took place before they were turned over to the British Ack-Ack for proper disposal through channels. The process of questioning them for specific military information was the function of the British Ground Forces in this instance.

The informality of the questioning discouraged the use of pre-arranged statements, although none of the prisoners revealed any pertinent military information. The questions asked, moreover, tended only to identify each prisoner and his unit. Any other questions sought more the prisoners' background and thoughts than military dispositions.

Each prisoner presented a different type. The first was evidently a well-trained soldier and a veteran of the African campaign. He made no pretense to win our sympathies or to show any contempt for the Allies. He merely sat with a determined, Spartan attitude answering most of our questions with "I don't know." The second prisoner was a thin, nervous, blond boy. All of these men were in their early twenties. He might have been a fanatic, a lunatic follower of the Fuehrer. Because of his temperament and tenseness, it was impossible to talk at length with him. These first two men were engineers. The first prisoner's aircraft had been destroyed by an American Warhawk. They definitely could distinguish American planes. The third prisoner was nineteen years old, a medical helper. His extremely pleasant personality was very noticeable. And he used his youth as an excuse to avoid answering. He had been in Africa a short time; and he was really too young to know what was happening in Germany. The last man was the most educated of the lot and the only one who professed to be a party member. The first three were Catholics; the last, a Protestant. This fourth prisoner studied at Dresden University, specializing in engineering. He could not offer a satisfactory excuse for being only a non-commissioned officer. Yet he immediately acknowledged the superiority of his officers. It was as though for a moment he had lapsed into a normal unregimented discouragement.

From speaking with these men, certain definite conditions could be seen :

The usual contempt for the Italians.

A desire to know what has happened to the Luftwaffe.

A bewildered attitude concerning the retreat across Africa.

The mixed sentiments of knowing the prisoners' fighting is over and the desire to rejoin his comrades-in-arms.

Praise for our rations; but their food is as good.

They had never seen Americans before—except in passing aircraft.

Oh, yes, there were plenty of Allied aircraft.

It was also evident that each man was beginning to suffer discouragement which may be blamed upon his capture. Yet even though each prisoner revealed all the attributes of a good soldier, he was wondering about the outcome of the war. Each man claimed, however, that everyone always believes in the Fatherland. There was no evidence of the Nazi salute, and only one of them clicked his heels. He soon wilted into the posture of one who is tired.

## CRETE BOMBED

Air initiative still rested almost entirely with the Allies. American and British bombers attacked Axis key ports and strong points day after day while German air attacks were carried out on a small scale and chiefly with nuisance value.

Ninth Air Force striking power, however, was not turned exclusively upon the enemy in Tunisia. Mitchell bombers as well as Liberators gave enemy harbors on the Continent no relief. Among the current targets were the airdromes at Heraklion and Kastelli Padiada, Crete.

From one of the missions on Naples came a story of how Lieut. Edgar W. Keller of the 98th Bombardment Group had his parachute to thank for saving his life but not in the usual way.

Keller, a bombardier who had the Air Medal for sinking two enemy submarines before coming to the Middle East, had released his bombs over the target. About this time a shell exploded in front of his Liberator, sending a piece of shrapnel through the framework of the plane's plexi-glass nose. The shrapnel struck a metal fastener of the parachute which was on his chest and ricocheted through the ceiling of the compartment. He looked to see if he had been injured, but instead he found only a dent in the parachute fastener and a small jagged hole above him in the ceiling.

He was not only extremely lucky on the receiving end of this mission but scored heavily on the giving side by making two direct hits on a dock installation.

During a bombing and strafing mission over the Mareth Line, Lieutenant Frederic A. Borsodi of the 79th Group was forced to land his damaged plane in the middle of an artillery barrage. He quickly crawled out of his plane and ducked for cover. A truck was sent out by the New Zealand forces holding the area to pick him up, but on the way back to the lines the truck engine overheated and they were forced to take cover behind some rocks. Lt. Borsodi and the driver got out and ran for it. Later, he was taken to the officer in charge of the sector. Borsodi was astounded by his casual attitude, "Glad to see you're all right," said the New Zealand officer, "sorry not to have the time to visit with you, but we're right in the middle of a battle you know."

Meanwhile the 57th was still adding to its stories as well as its list of victories. One of the pilots of this group, Lt. William 'Lucky' Campbell, had an opportunity to earn his nickname when he brought his Warhawk down in the midst of a mine field and escaped hurt.

His formation was engaged by enemy fighters and in the melee his plane was disabled. He decided to land on a strange field about half a mile behind his own lines. As his plane rolled to a stop he saw men standing at the edge of the field waving their arms violently. He cut off his engine and waved back to them.

"You've come down in the middle of a mine field," they yelled. "What'll I do? How'll I get out?" demanded Campbell. They couldn't tell him just where the mines were so he refused to budge from the plane, sitting on a wing until a footpath was finally adjudged safe. Two jeeps which later attempted to get to the plane had wheels blown off by land mines. Finally a strip was cleared and the plane taxied out of the danger zone.

A factual report of Ninth Air Force activities in the Middle East during the previous six months was gratifying to its leaders. In that time its aircraft engaged in more than six hundred missions. They dropped more than 8,500,000 pounds of bombs. They spent 21,000 hours in operational flights. They definitely sank 49 enemy ships, probably sank 29 others and damaged 28 in addition. In combat skies they definitely destroyed 99 enemy aircraft, probably destroyed 41 others and damaged 59 additional.

Total losses in this six month period were 62 aircraft plus four others which were interned in neutral countries.

There was the extraordinary service rendered by the Douglas planes of the Air Transportation unit, Air Service Command. In one three week period, when time was of the essence, these 'Camels of the Air' transported two and a half million pounds of vitally needed equipment. These giant cargo ships moved right up to the front lines, often with no protection whatsoever.

The 376th Bombardment Group, in March, carried out its one-hundredth bombing mission. The mark was reached when their Liberators returned from a successful attack on Crotone, Italy. Major J. W. Sibert led the raiders on this mission. Due to the unfavourable weather during this month only five raids were conducted against enemy territory.

The first mission of the 376th Group was the first attack on a European target by the United States Air Force in the Middle East. Some of the original crews had returned to the States to teach the lessons they learned in combat. Others had gone to India to make life unhappy and unhealthy for the Japanese.

The first day of March saw the Eighth army drive the remnants of the Afrika Korps into the Mareth area where they were known to be strongly entrenching.

It was Rommel's orders to hold Tunisian soil as long as possible despite the cost in order to provide the Axis with time to strengthen defenses in southern Europe. The Germans were daily reinforcing in Tunisia by sea and air, and thus they stood on March 5, the end of this phase, prelude to the last mile on the long road back.

## RECAPITULATION

Cumulative figures through April 3

### BOMBER ACTIVITY

Group	<i>Missions</i>	<i>Sorties</i>	<i>Bombs Dropped (in Tons)</i>
12th .. .. .	135	1098	1287
98th .. .. .	121	875	1463
376th .. .. .	107	795	1425
TOTALS :	<u>363</u>	<u>2768</u>	<u>4175</u>

### FIGHTER ACTIVITY

Group	<i>Mission</i>	<i>Sorties</i>	<i>Enemy Aircraft destroyed Prob. Dmgd.</i>		
57th .. .. .	286	3840	91	20	39
79th .. .. .	57	1133	2	1	2
TOTALS :	<u>343</u>	<u>4973</u>	<u>93</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>41</u>

(The 79th Group started operations in this theater March 14).