

APPENDIX

Mediterranean Campaign

The Role of the NINTH
U.S. ARMY AIR FORCE
in the Allied Drive across
the Mediterranean

Swift Victories

NORTHWARD across the Mediterranean pointed the Allied path toward victory. Modern three-dimensional war was gloriously giving the lie to ancient history's lessons against Mediterranean northbound invasion. Precept had not reckoned with air power.

The Ninth Air Force moved into the island-conquering, pre-invasion phase without rest from Tunisia. Coordinating with the North African air, land and sea forces, the Ninth shared heavily in the actions which brought the fall of Pantelleria the impregnable, and in rapid succession, Lampedusa and Linosa.

The start of the second campaign in mid-May lent impetus to the era of swift victories which began with the fall of Tunisia and built up to the capture of Sicily on August 18.

Italy was nearing the brink of internal collapse. Heavy bombers of the Ninth fed this strife with ceaseless hammering of Sicily and the Italian mainland.

The phrases, "more than fifty Liberators" and "a quarter million pounds of bombs," became standard operational language in the latter part of May and June as the air war progressed toward the epic attack on Rome with its vast repercussions.

Heavy bombers centred most of their earlier attacks of the campaign on Reggio de Calabria and Messina, ferry links between Sicily and mainland which face each other across the narrow Messina Straits. The oft-pounded waterway had become "Bomb Alley" to the airmen. Mitchell mediums and bomb-carrying fighters were directed toward Pantelleria after Tunisia—adding to that heaviest focus of air power ever turned on an island stronghold.

Fighters of the Ninth during May flew 2,182 sorties on 162 missions. This was during a period when many American fighter pilots with hundreds of operational hours accumulated in the long desert drive were being returned to America to teach or to head new units being trained for war.

During May operations over the sea seven Axis ships were sunk, twelve others listed as probably sunk and thirty damaged, an impressive record for a secondary duty of land-based aircraft.

May was not without its stories of heroism. There was the story of the nervy bombardier, Lieut. Robert Austin, who hung from the cat-walk in flight to deaden a jammed and rapidly fusing thousand pound bomb which was within minutes of blowing a Liberator and its crew to bits.

Nearing the target in Southern Italy, the bomber ran into a covey of enemy fightercraft. The pilot ordered the bombardier to salvo his bombs and immediately started evasive action. Back in the bomb bay, the assistant engineer saw that two of the thousand pounders were hung up and that one had jammed the rack. With wind rushing through the open bomb bay doors a tail fuse started spinning. The information was passed over the interphone from engineer to pilot and from pilot to bombardier and the pilot immediately levelled out of evasive action for fear that the slightest jar would set off the bomb. Crawling across the narrow cat-walk 23,000 feet above enemy territory with both bomb-bay doors banging in the wind Austin reached the bombs. Aided by two other crew members he leaned far over the opening and worked feverishly against time and destruction. In a matter of seconds the difficult task of defusing the bomb was completed. Luckily the pursuits had abandoned the fray during this operation and the bomber returned safely to base. From May operations as a whole, however, six of our aircraft were lost.

MEMORIAL DAY

Missing the familiar home-town parades and bands, Americans in Cairo nevertheless paid homage to May 30, Memorial day.

Archbishop Francis J. Spellman, special envoy of President Roosevelt, celebrated a Memorial Day Mass at St. Joseph's Church. Diplomatic officials and high ranking military officers of other United Nations and of neutral countries represented in Egypt attended and gave to the hallowed American day of remembrance an international flavor.

In a brief but formal address the Archbishop said :

" We Americans thank you who are not our countrymen who have come to this Church this morning to participate with us in prayerful tribute to our beloved dead. We assure you that, as we have prayed for those "who fought the good fight" as saviours of our own nation, we have also remembered the honored dead of your peoples, men who gave their lives either in defense of your countries or in the cause of justice and right.

" America has many treasures both material and spiritual. In the bosom of her earth are mineral treasures. From her mountains, mines and prairies, from her lakes, rivers and oceans have come the sources of her agricultural, material and industrial greatness.

" From the peoples of all colors, regions and races, freedom-loving and freedom-giving, from her Constitution and the Bill of Rights, from her democratic form of government with guarantees for individuals and minorities, from God-serving, neighbor-helping men and women have come her spiritual treasures.

" Thus today, while far away from our homeland, we are, nevertheless, spiritually united to our country not only in citizenship, in brotherhood and in service but also in grateful reverence to those whose premature deaths speak with deathless eloquence of their contribution and of ours not only to the cause of war but to the cause of peace.

" Let our thoughts, our words and our prayers be to the end that our honored dead shall not have died in vain, that our country shall be ever worthy, both of her material and spiritual treasures."

The arithmetic of war claimed a department all of its own in the air force June 3, with the creation of the 26th Statistical Control Unit. Statistical Control had the job of making figures talk sensibly. It collected factual data from all air force units and pieced it together for composite pictures and percentages. This information had many uses in many places. It was most effective in aiding staff sections in anticipating the needs of war and thereby reducing the time lag between demand and supply. This applied to personnel as well as material.

Statistical Control perpetually held a gauge on the recent past to obtain a measure for plans of the immediate future. It knew, for example, the life expectancy of a Liberator bomber under a given set of circumstances. Their findings made it possible to project operations into the future with a rare degree of accuracy.

Lt. Col. Edward G. Hamel was taken from the G-3 section of the air force to organize and head the new unit. They immediately moved into a wing of the headquarters building at 24 Shari del Nabatat and covered the walls with maps, charts and tabulations and began to function in accordance with the wishes of Washington.

Operational reports of early June were studded with accounts of the relentless pounding of the island fortress of Pantelleria which collapsed early on the morning of June 11. The surrender followed 24 hours of continuous bombing by hundreds of Allied planes of all types. So tight was the air and naval blockade that not one member of the garrison escaped to Italy after the blitz began.

The fall of Lampedusa and Linosa followed on the 12 and 13 and were immediately occupied by ground forces. The Allies were at the gates of the fortress of Europe.

Among the air battles leading to the capture of Pantelleria a striking success was that of the "Mosquito" fighter squadron. On June 10 they shot down eleven Messerschmitts and four Italian Macchis without loss of a single one of its own pilots. Ten of the Messerschmitts were encountered just north of Pantelleria, escorting a four-engined rescue seaplane. The unarmed seaplane was unmolested, but all of the escorting fighters were destroyed. The other three victories resulted from a battle which followed this by a few minutes when the enemy planes flew into the Pantelleria "umbrella."

This achievement followed that of the "Flying Skull" squadron of the same group which destroyed nine of the enemy's Messerschmitts and Macchis in the four days ending June 10.

PARATROOPERS APPEAR

Enemy parachutists dropped out of the skies over the Ninth Bomber Command base on the morning of June 14, their mission being the destruction of planes. First news of their appearance came from an Arab who reported to Bomber Command that two had already been slain by natives. During the next two days, 39 prisoners were rounded up, none of whom showed any stomach for the fight.

The commanding officer among those captured disclosed that the Benghazi landing was only part of an ambitious venture involving eleven plane loads of parachutist-saboteurs with targets extending from Benghazi to Algiers.

There was some damage to equipment, but it has been reasoned that sabotage was not the sole objective.

Knowledge of Allied intentions was being desperately sought as invasion jitters gripped Italy. The parachutists brought radio sets with them to be used in transmitting the results of their missions as well as information on the location and strength of our units. One other parachutist was captured near Afferville and there were additional reports of captures, unconfirmed in the Middle East.

Lieutenant General Joseph W. Stilwell, commanding United States Forces in the China-Burma Theatre and Chief of Staff to Generalissimo Chiang Kai Shek, paid an official visit to the Middle East early in June to confer with General Brereton and other war leaders here. General Stilwell's visit was primarily in the interest of the co-ordination of the United Nation's war effort. From Washington the General first went to England for conference with Lieutenant General Jacob L. Devers, Commanding General of the United States Forces in the European theatre. He next visited North Africa where he talked with Lieutenant General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Allied Commander in Chief in that theater.

General Stilwell stepped out of the character of "Vinegar Joe" to bring words of confidence to the Middle East. "Concerning the coming offensive", the General said, "You may be sure that the plans laid in Washington are entirely adequate and I believe that their scope will satisfy all those who cry out for strong aggressive immediate action. So far as activities within my own theater are concerned, I am quite optimistic. Certain I am of one thing — as time goes on, we shall have more and more reason to be proud of our great ally, China.

BRITISH FLIERS HONOURED

Attention of the Ninth centered briefly on personalities in June. Young Wing Commander Billy Drake, much decorated by his own RAF, was awarded the United States Distinguished Flying Cross for "excellent leadership and outstanding airmanship."

The cross was pinned on Drake by General Brereton at a special investiture in the presence of high ranking British and American air officers.

On the same order Major E. C. Saville, D.F.C. and Bar, of the South African Air Force, was also awarded an American decoration in the Middle East Theater. Major Saville could not be present for the ceremony and the presentation was to have been made at a later date. Wing Commander Drake, who comes from Chatham, Kent, commanded the famous "Shark" Kittyhawk squadron in the desert. He distinguished himself by his courage and audacity in leading fighter-bomber and strafing raids. Over the Libyan battle area his squadron fought an extraordinary action against ME-109's and destroyed three. The Kittyhawks weighed down with bombs engaged the ME-109's without jettisoning their loads and then swept down and bombed their target into the bargain. Their bombs went home on enemy transport, armoured cars and tanks. At another time, the wing of which his squadron was a part, met 40 Stukas covered by 30 ME-109's. After two minutes of combat four Stukas and one ME-109 were destroyed by the vastly outnumbered Kittyhawks. The Wing Commander himself accounted for two of the Stukas.

Major Saville's citation read: "for meritorious achievement and leadership in combat operations with the 57th Fighter Group, Ninth Air Force, operating against the enemy in the Middle East Theater during the period November 24, 1942 to January 25, 1943." The Major at the time of the award commanded the RAF Spitfire Squadron which so effectively flew top cover for the "Fighting Fifty-Seventh" in the memorable Palm Sunday massacre of Axis transport and fighter aircraft over the beaches of Cape Bon.

The announcement from air force headquarters in June that Lieutenant Colonel Alfred F. Kalberer was returning to the States to instruct, brought conclusion to the Ninth Air Force career of one of its most colorful figures.

A graduate of Brooks and Kelly Fields at the age of seventeen, Colonel Kalberer served as a pursuit pilot and then flew transport planes of the United Airlines for eight years. In 1937, he went to Amsterdam to become a pilot for Royal Dutch Airlines, for whom he flew all over Europe. His flights over Germany left him with a definite impression that military operations were imminent.

"The sky was always full of huge formations of military aircraft. When you came to a cloud formation, you had to be especially careful for Pursuit ships were for ever darting in and out," Colonel Kalberer recalled.

With the outbreak of the war, he went to Italy and, when that country attacked France, moved on to Java. As a pilot for the Royal Dutch Netherlands Indies Airlines, he flew regularly to the Phillipines, Borneo, Indo-China and the Celebes. He witnessed the Japanese entry into Indo-China and Siam, decided there was trouble ahead and headed home to re-join the Air Corps. Arriving in Washington, he was recommissioned two days after Pearl Harbor and shortly found himself with a special bombardment detachment which was headed for the Middle East.

The American bombers who startled the world by the first attack on the Roumanian oil fields at Ploesti were led by Colonel Kalberer who personally piloted the lead plane on the 2,500 mile raid, one of the longest on record.

Shortly thereafter, he led another noteworthy American air attack, this time upon the Italian fleet which had finally left its Taranto base to intercept a convoy enroute to Malta. This successful effort was marked by a record number of direct hits upon the Axis warships. For these and other successful operations, Colonel Kalberer was awarded the Air Medal, the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Silver Star.

After a period as liaison officer with the RAF, Colonel Kalberer became operations officer of the Ninth U.S. Bomber Command which position he held until his departure.

LIBERATORS COME THROUGH

Liberator bombers were still proving their toughness and their ability to successfully fend off fighters—and some times the crews were equally tough. Out of the records of the Ninth Bomber Command on June 15 came the exciting tale of two separate actions of Liberators which successfully fought off large formations of enemy fighters and returned to their bases full of bullet holes and bearing wounded crewmen.

The two aircraft were attached to the same heavy bombardment unit of the Ninth. One ship, piloted by Lieut. E. D. Jewett was attacked by five ME-109's over Sicily and succeeded in shooting down one of these and damaging two others.

Lieut. Jewett had just turned the nose of his big bomber homeward after the Bombardier had dropped his 500-pounders on an airdrome in Sicily when the trouble started. The prop of one engine "ran away" acting as a brake and the resulting vibration knocked out several instruments. Then, a few minutes later, a second engine began to lose power. Unable to keep up with the formation, Jewett's bomber was now on its own.

Suddenly from behind nearby cloud formations five Messerschmitt fighters closed in for what looked like easy game. Eagerly they attacked from three directions simultaneously. Jewett coaxed his two good engines as his big bomber kept on losing altitude. Gunners poured lead from their machine guns, meeting the enemy's repeated attacks with more than 1,000 rounds of fire. Two ME's caught some of it directly and pulled away with fuselage smoking. Then one gunner met another of the Jerry fighters with a single rapid burst of fire which caught the enemy plane by surprise and sent it crashing into the sea. At that, the other two enemy fighters turned away. The victorious B-24 limped home on her two good engines.

The story of the other B-24 is something of an epic, giving as it does the details of one of the fiercest sky battles on record. A single Liberator was attacked by fifteen enemy fighters of which three were destroyed with one other probably destroyed.

Twenty-two year old Lieut. Clarence W. Gooden of Waycross, Georgia, pilot of the battle-scarred B-24, described the thrilling air battle.

"We had just left the target, an airdrome in Sicily, when the sky suddenly became black with enemy fighters. One of them caught our No. 4 engine, setting it on fire. And it was 'nt long before our No. 3 engine burst into flames. By now, we were all alone up there. We didn't have enough power to stay with our formation and it went on without us. It was a queer feeling, with those fifteen enemy planes on our tail, coming at us from all directions with their guns spitting right in our faces.

"But our gunners were in the argument, too. Staff Sergeant Roland B. Cox, 18-year old kid from Ohio, was pouring lead from his tail guns. The waist-gunners were dishing it out from the windows. And a Staff Sergeant aerial photographer and utility gunner was hard at it too.

"Up front, Lieut. Ralph F. Perkins, navigator was busy at the trigger of one of the nose guns, while the bombardier kept another gun hot. And the Technical Sergeant, radio operator, rounded out our offensive line-up.

"We caught hell during the next 45 minutes, but we gave some back to the enemy. I made my co-pilot and assistant radio operator stay up front when it first started. A bullet just missed my head twice, so I figured a co-pilot might come in handy at a moment's notice. Later the operator went back, manned a gun and joined the fight.

" Sgts. Hendricks, Cox and Kreutzer were wounded during the early stages of the fight, but they refused to leave their guns. And Kreutzer showed the same "stuff" a few minutes later when a bullet hit him in the leg. It did something to the rest of us to see those men fight back when it would have been easy to give up. Made me proud as hell that I was one of them.

" And they really gave those fifteen enemy planes a pasting. Cox got an ME-109—saw it crash. Sgt. Ted Beaudry got another—and Sgt. Cochrane has one to his credit, too. Kreutzer thought he got a Macchi 202—which means he probably knocked it into the middle of next week.

" All together, we fired nearly 2,000 rounds of "ammo" at those babies and all the while, we were losing altitude fast. By the time we neared Malta we had one good engine left, Lord-knows-how-many holes in our ship, no brakes, no hydraulic system, no radio and only one good tire. How did we make it in to Malta? Listen, brother, we just lead good lives, that's all!"

GREECE BECOMES TARGET

In the final days of June Bomber Command began to shift attacks to the mainland of Greece. Sedes Airdrome south of Salonika was bombed and extensively damaged in the opening assault on Axis held country.

Coming in over their targets in two waves, the Liberators blanketed the airdrome with direct hits. Three large hangars were destroyed. Administration buildings were hit and large oil fires were left burning on the edge of the field. The attack apparently caught the enemy completely by surprise as there was no fighter opposition and all planes returned safely. The Liberators returned three days later to deliver devastating blows against two large airdromes in the vicinity of Athens. Eleusis, north-west of the city and Hassani west of the city were attacked. Hangars, administration buildings, oil dumps and five planes on the ground were left burning. This time the bombers met resistance in the air. Persistent attacks on the raiders were made by large formations of ME-109's and MC-202's but in spite of this all aircraft returned safely. The routine on this mission was varied somewhat by the dropping of leaflets on the city of Athens. The leaflets quoted a speech by President Roosevelt in tribute to the courage and fighting spirit of the Greeks and expressed the hope that the day would be hastened when liberated Greeks would again maintain their own government within the shadow of the Acropolis and Parthenon. The speech was made on the occasion of the transfer of an American built warship to the Greek Navy.

In 2,313 sorties over enemy targets during June fighter and bomber aircraft of the Ninth dropped a total of 3,694,000 pounds of bombs. This was a continuance of the upward trend in the monthly bomb loads and brings the total weight of bombs dropped during eight months of operations to well over twenty million pounds.

Of the great weight of bombs which shook the island of Pantelleria before its surrender more than 850,000 pounds were dropped from fighter and medium bombardment aircraft of the Ninth Air Force. Captured, the island was placed under the governorship of the former commanding general of the Ninth Fighter Command, Brigadier-General Auby C. Strickland.

In the heavy bomber attacks during June in Sicily and on the mainlands of Italy and Greece a total of two and a quarter million pounds of explosives were dropped. The twin ferry terminals of Reggio di Calabria and Messina felt the greatest weight of the Liberator attacks, nearly 800,000 pounds of bombs being loosed upon these two targets. Great destruction was wrought on harbor facilities and ferry terminal installations which link the island of Sicily with the Italian mainland.

Very successful were the attacks on the airdromes of Grottaglie, Catania and Gerbini. Great fires were started at each of these places and many enemy aircraft were destroyed on the ground.

On many raids the heavy bombers were attacked by formations of thirty or forty enemy fighters who fought desperately to stave off the rain of destruction on enemy nerve centers. That American gunners were capable of meeting and dealing with enemy fighter opposition is clearly shown by their record of 46 Italian and German planes shot out of the sky during June. Twenty-eight more were destroyed by fighters.

POWER AND PROMISE

In preparation for events to come the heavy bomber strength of the Ninth Air Force was more than doubled by the addition of three new groups transferred from the Eighth Air Force. They included the 93rd, which had been attached to the Ninth on a previous occasion, the 389th and the 44th. The transfer of these new units began late in June and was completed early in July.

The heavy bombardment pressure was on with a will and the Ninth was prepared for the preliminaries to invasion which was to hasten the end of the Axis in Europe.

Following the line of progressive increase in the weight of their attacks the Ninth sent a hundred Liberators in a daylight raid on July 2 to smash at three Italian airdromes at Lecce, Grottaglie and San Pancrazio. They dropped more than 400,000 pounds of high explosive, fragmentation and incendiary bombs. At Lecce hangars, runways and dispersed aircraft were hit; at Grottaglie the entire dispersal area was blanketed and likewise at Pancrazio.

Large formations of enemy fighters attacked and unsuccessful attempts were made to bomb our aircraft from above. Twelve of the attackers were destroyed and two damaged at the cost of three of our aircraft.

This and subsequent attacks from that date forward to July 9 were aimed at targets calculated to soften the projected invasion of Sicily.

Beginning July 5, unremitting assaults were turned on Messina, Gerbini, Catania, Taormina, Comiso and Gela. Targets were mainly airdromes, but included also were ferry terminals, marshalling yards, a telegraph and telephone building and industrial areas. At Taormina on July 9, the target was the general headquarters of the defending forces, the San Domenico Hotel. Direct hits on this target sent wreckage and debris high into the air and huge fires followed.

Fighters of the Ninth meanwhile were supporting operations of the Northwest African Forces as an integral part of the combined drive on Sicily. They engaged in dive bombing, pattern bombing, bomber escort and sea-search.

Losses among bombers and fighters in these operations were at a remarkably low point in spite of the fact that they were meeting increasing enemy resistance in the skies.

It was during the raid of July 8 on Catania the crew of a badly damaged Liberator baled out over the target and were mercilessly machine-gunned by the attacking fighter craft as they floated earthward. The Axis fighter pilots thus gave expression to their rage at an inability to cope with an American attack which was outstandingly successful. Eight enemy fighters were destroyed by gunners.

SICILY INVADED

Then came the anxiously awaited invasion of Sicily beginning on the night of July 9, an expertly planned, brilliantly executed and markedly successful air, land and sea expedition. The Allies had crossed the moat to the fortress' gates.

But, turn the dial back six years and listen !

" Sicily is so well defended on the land, at sea, and in the air that it would be a nameless folly for anyone to try to invade her. One of the happiest epochs in her 4,000 years of history now begins for her as the geographical center of the Italian empire."

It was Mussolini speaking in 1937 during Italian maneuvers. That saddest of Caesars could not then see 1943 as a grim year for Fascism. We can take advantage of his equivocation and concede Sicily's greatest epoch in the liberation of its inhabitants by Allied arms. Geographically Sicily had ceased to be even an outpost of that rapidly disintegrating empire, so ignobly built.

Invasion began about midnight with the landing of glider-borne troops. British, Canadian and Americans landing forces took a crescent of coastline in the Southern half of the island. Allied medium and fighter bombers, including units of the Ninth, were assigned the task of neutralizing the chain of Axis airdromes skirting the flat Sicilian coast. Allied air power which had carried on a remorseless day and night offensive on the Island now concentrated on points vital to invasion and in the protection of ships of the combined Allied navies which had thrown an arc of steel around landing sectors.

The war room map in succeeding days recorded a creeping shadow of Allied occupation which moved inexorably toward the northeast tenacle of the island, duplicating the pattern of Cape Bon.

Enemy resistance in the air was negligible, but the invaders met formidable counter attacks. The powerful British Eighth Army fought for days at the very gates of Catania against an enemy whose ferocity of desperation increased as Americans and Canadians swept around his positions to the rear with the dread threat of encirclement. Catania surrendered on August 7.

Sicily's history has been eventful. At one time Syracuse, founded by settlers from Corinth, became the greatest city of Europe under Dionysius after the Phoenicians had crossed from the African coast. Once again conquerors have crossed the Sicilian channel from what used to be called Carthage. Throughout the centuries this island has outlined world history by reason of its strategic position as key to Mediterranean supremacy.

BOMBS ON CRETE

The name of Crete became a new note in operational reports of the Ninth on July 9. Of twenty five Liberators on this mission over the island all reached the target and all but one returned safely to base despite the extremely heavy Axis defenses.

The target was Maleme airdrome, the largest on Crete. Dispersal areas were hard hit and considerable damage was wreaked on repair sheds and hangars.

The bombers met strong fighter opposition and in the ensuing battle five enemy planes were destroyed and five damaged.

Vibo Valentia airdromes on the boot were also added to the growing list of bomb targets between continued assaults on Catania, Reggio, Nessina, San Giovanni and Messina. Reggio di Calabria, the ferry terminal was dealt the heaviest blow by the Liberators during the Sicilian operation, being bombed by large formations four days in one week. Messina, the opposite terminal point of the island, was the target of heavy attacks for two days.

Industrial Bari, Foggia and Crotona returned to the target lists of the heavies toward the middle of June.

The Ninth Bomber Command was applying its greatly increased strength to the conquest of Sicily and beyond that, to the weakening of continental Italy.

Fighters and medium bombers were operating in close support of the Allied armies spreading their occupation of the island toward the northeast corner. Meeting little opposition in the air, they were conducting their operations with minimum loss and maximum effectiveness.

Naples, oft-bombed by the Ninth, was paid a return visit in force on July 17 when seventy-five Liberators poured destruction on marshalling yards, railroad stores depot, roundhouse and locomotive repair shops. Huge fires resulted and billows of smoke veiled the full extent of the damage from the attackers.

Concerted and prolonged attacks by large formations of enemy fighters were vigorously repelled. Twenty-one Axis fighter craft were destroyed and seven others accounted for as probably destroyed. One Liberator was the Allied penalty.

Naples was beginning to feel the weight of Allied attack in proportion to its growing importance across the path of victory and the enemy had signified this recognition by the strengthened defenses.

Aerial photography several days later gave evidence of even greater damage than first reported. Fires were started in an oil refiners and oil storage dump. Another direct hit did extensive damage to a floating dry dock used in the repair of submarines.

Approximately 45 minutes from the target on the homeward journey a large Italian transport plane was sighted and shot down to crash on the beach below.

BOMBERS OVER ROME

On July 19 came the Ninth's mass raid on Rome with shattering effects, material, moral and political. Italy staggered under the impact of bombings in the heart of the homeland. Drilled precision confined the material damage to military objectives and spared all shrines.

The immense Littorio marshalling yards were left a shambles of twisted rails, gaping craters and wreckage of rolling stock and buildings. Locomotive shed and repair shops were destroyed by direct hits. The railroad administration building was set on fire and the round-house was literally blown apart. An ammunition train moving through the yards took direct hits and exploded in a series of blasts, ironically adding to the destruction.

The airdrome which separates the yards from the River Tiber was also heavily attacked and ten small fires started in the hangar area. Three large enemy aircraft on the ground were destroyed by bursts.

Anti-aircraft defense was intense, but enemy fighter opposition was feeble and all the Ninth's bombers which reached the target area returned safely to base. It stood as the Ninth's most successful heavy bomber show of the war in point of size, destruction and safe return. More than a hundred Liberators participated and nearly 700,000 pounds of bombs were dropped. The bombers remained over the target area for an hour and a quarter. In round-trip distance the mission covered two thousand miles. Fortresses of the North African strategical air force had preceded Liberators of the Ninth over the target and so complete was the destruction that it rendered extremely difficult the job of ascribing individual accomplishments.

Brigadier General U. G. Ent, commanding general of the Ninth Bomber Command, drew attention to the careful, painstaking briefing of the pilots and bombardiers who participated in the raid. To safeguard religious and cultural sites in and around the Italian capital, the American flying officers and men were given special instruction each day for a week. Huge enlargements of aerial photographs of the city were studied. On these photographs and on the detailed large scale maps which also were used in the intensive briefing, all shrines, monuments and historical buildings were clearly distinguished by bright red squares each clearly marked with warning words, "Must not be harmed".

Bombardiers were specifically instructed that in no case should a bomb run of less than one full minute be made, regardless of the nature or extent of opposition which was met. Bombardiers were told that if a perfect, direct hit could not be scored, bombs were to be held.

General Ent addressed the men assembled for a final briefing in the pitch-blackness of the pre-dawn take-off, cautioning them to be careful.

"Remember", he said, "these military objectives are sandwiched in between some of the most sacred and historically important spots on earth. Above everything else, you must be accurate. Fly low if you must, engage enemy fighters to the best of your ability. Regardless of what you find over the target area, take your time and — bomb accurately."

The huge, hour glass-shaped Littoria marshalling yards were the bottle-neck through which flowed all traffic from Germany and northern Italy to the southern area, then under attack by forces under the command of General Eisenhower. They cover an area 400 yards wide by two miles long and were capable of handling three thousand carloads of freight each day. The purpose of the raid was to completely sever this important supply line, and to make it difficult if not impossible for military reinforcements to reach the troops fighting in the south.

During Sunday and early Monday preceding, leaflets were dropped over the city, warning the inhabitants that the military objectives would shortly be attacked and advising them to seek safety.

In the "prop wash" of the Rome raid came the enforced resignation of Mussolini; peace demonstrations and rioting throughout a war-worn Italy and more belated German reinforcements with guns ready for wavering partners.

Marshall Pietro Badoglio, at the behest of King Victor Emanuel who had recovered his voice, formed a new government, not overlooking the appointment of a minister for African colonies.

Peace for Italy became the topic of speculation on both sides of the Mediterranean. The Associated Nations responded with the olive branch in one hand, the bomb release in the other. And the Germans primed their guns, awaiting their choice of targets.

The possibility of Italy's early capitulation did win for the beleaguered nation a temporary relief from the bombings on the mainland.

But Italy was wasting her respite and the hand on the bomb release tightened. There were still persistent rumors that Italy must have time to withdraw some of her far-flung armies to the protection of the homeland lest a premature repudiation of the Axis expose them to Nazi fire. Some of the Italian troops in the Balkans had already been disarmed by the Axis.

DUEL UNDER DIFFICULTY

Of the stories told by fliers who participated in the attack on Rome, none is more exciting than that of one Liberator pilot who never saw the Italian capital, being forced by mechanical failure to turn back before reaching the target.

The bomber, piloted by Lieut. Howard B. Walsh, flew in formation as far as the straits of Messina. There it was required to fall out because of mechanical failure of the fuel transfer system. Leaving the formation and heading for Malta, the ship was attacked by six ME-109's. The twenty minutes which followed were the most harrowing in the lives of the American airmen, as the enemy fighters made approximately forty individual attacks upon the Liberator. Lieut. Walsh and his co-pilot, Lieut. Samuel E. Blessing, manouvered the ship through every trick they'd ever learned to evade the attacking ME's and to give their own gunners every possible opportunity to fight back.

During the attack the ship descended from 10,000 to within ten feet of the sea. At 8,000 feet, an ME attacked from above and to the right. Sergeant James W. Stokes, right waist gunner poured a withering fire at it from 700 yards to 200 yards. Finally it started smoking, burst into flames and was seen to crash into the sea.

A second ME attacked at an altitude of 500 feet. Sergeant Orville R. Cain, top turret gunner, opened fire at about 300 yards. Tracers were seen to crash into the enemy aircraft which headed downward and disappeared into the sea.

While the ship was only ten feet above the water, two enemy fighters pressed an attack from the left. The leader was fired upon at a distance of 100 yards. He continued to come directly toward the Liberator while the American gunners threw everything they had at him. Suddenly, when only 30 yards distant, the Nazi fighter was seen to explode in the air and fall into the water.

During this time, Lieut. Walsh was having great difficulty maintaining the ship in steady flight. First, the tail turret was shot out, followed by the belly turret and the right and left waist guns. Then the electrical system was badly shot up, the radio equipment completely destroyed, the bomb bay doors shot out and the elevator controls shot away.

The No. 4 engine was hit and damaged, with gasoline leaking badly. A fire was blazing in the tail of the ship. The left landing gear manual operation was destroyed. The entire ship was like a sieve as a result of hundreds of hits from 20 mm. and 30 cal. fire.

Pilot Walsh, despite serious wounds in the back and neck from cannon fire, kept his ship in the air and managed to climb it back to 4,500 feet. By this time, the enemy fighters, apparently discouraged by the fate of their three fellows, decided to give it up as a bad job and turned away. Since it appeared unlikely that the bomber could be gotten safely on to the ground again, Lieut. Walsh ordered the crew to bail out as the ship reached the coast of Malta. Only after they had jumped and pulled their rip-cords did they make the discovery that their parachutes had not escaped the hail of fire poured at them by the enemy fighters. Shot full of holes, the 'chutes remained opened but descended at far too rapid a rate for safety. The pilot and co-pilot landed in the sea, the others upon the shore. Sergeant Cain's parachute suffered the most holes and although he was the third to jump he landed first. Lieutenants Walsh and Blessing were kept afloat by their "Mae Wests", although even these had some bullet holes in them. They were separated by the strong currents. Lieut. Walsh was picked up after an hour; Lieut. Blessing floated for three hours before he was found and rescued by naval craft from Malta.

Of the ten-man crew in this ship four were wounded including Pilot Walsh and Sergeants Stokes, Arthur Farnham and Charles Terry.

HARROWING EXPERIENCES

Harsh treatment was meted out to some of the American Paratroopers captured by Italian troops in Sicily. Experiences were recounted by some of the American wounded brought to a base hospital near Cairo.

Startling is the story of Pfc. Michael Scambulluri, who landed in an area alive with enemy troops and civilians. Seen to land, he attempted to escape but was surrounded and taken prisoner.

Describing his experience, Scambulluri said, "The Italians took me to town and stripped me of everything I had, including my food. Everyone seemed to want to be credited with having captured me. I was led into the Captain's office in the barracks and asked a lot of questions about how many soldiers had been landed and what kinds of arms we carried.

I told them only my name, grade and serial number and refused to give them any more information. When I spoke to the Captain in Italian, asking him the name of the town, he became furious and accused me of being a spy. He ordered my hands tied behind me back and I was led out of the barracks and placed against a wall in the court-yard.

"It looked to me as if they were going to begin some rough stuff. I was'nt far wrong ; the Captain walked about twenty feet from me, took out his revolver and fired one shot at me. "All hell seemed to burn inside of me and I collapsed. He continued firing at me, pouring six more shots into me as I lay there on the ground. I was moaning and did not know what to do, but I knew I was not hurt in any vital spot."

A soldier, apparently dissatisfied with the result, threw two hand grenades at his body, the force of which turned it around completely. Whether due to a miracle, or to the captain's poor aim, the American was not mortally wounded. He remained conscious and heard his captor give instructions for his burial the following morning.

Continuing his story Scambulluri said, "I heard the group walk away and when it was quiet, I wriggled to a tree about twenty feet away and yanked myself up. I don't know where I got the strength, but I managed to get out of the place, across a nearby field and into some woods. I half-walked, half-crawled through the brush, until I came to an old cemetery. I stopped and sawed the ropes holding my hands, on the sharp edge of a gravestone."

He was finally successful in cutting his bonds, but his wrists were so torn by this operation and he was so exhausted that he collapsed on the ground. When he regained consciousness it was night. He rose and although weak from loss of blood, continued to make his way through the wood. Several times he fainted from the exertion. As dawn broke he found himself approaching a farmhouse in a clearing. He was seen by several civilians who turned out to be friendly, however. They ran to him crying, "Peace, peace" and mumbled something about having sons in the army. They gave him water and told him that American troops were advancing on the clearing from the other side. Half-hysterical, he ran in their direction crying, "American soldier—help!" Three Americans hastened to him and administered first aid. He was placed in a cart and taken to a field hospital. As he was about to be evacuated aboard the hospital ship, it was bombed and sank at its moorings. He was later placed aboard another hospital ship which brought him to safety.

Another unusual story is told by Private J. B. Mainella of Duluth, Minn., who landed between two Italian pillboxes. Putting his machine-gun together, he started crawling away flat on his stomach. As he inched forward, the machine-guns from the pillboxes opened fire. Reaching for his grenades he let one fly.

"Boy! that explosion was music to my ears for it completely knocked the box out." He then turned his attention to the other box and as he was about to throw another grenade Eighth Army men attacked from the other side. Between them they destroyed the second pillbox, but not before Mainella's right leg had been shattered by machine-gun fire.

The Americans report that the rocky, mountainous, Sicilian terrain made landing extremely difficult.

July brought a resumption of enemy fighter opposition in great strength. This resulted in a sharp increase in the number of enemy aircraft which fell before our guns. A total of ninety-three enemy fighters were destroyed ; another twenty-six probably destroyed and thirty-one recorded as damaged. Of those destroyed, heavy bombers accounted for seventy-two and fighters for twenty-one. In addition to these figures many enemy fighters were destroyed on the ground.

A total of 271 missions were flown, including 4,408 sorties, piling up a total of more than 18,000 flying hours for the Ninth during the month.

PLOESTI AGAIN BOMBED

The lengthening range and increasing power of the Ninth were turned on the Axis oil center of Roumania, August 1, with devastating effect.

Sweeping into the Ploesti area at smoke-stack height, a fleet of more than 140 Liberators spread destruction over refineries, tank farms and rail yards and left raging oil fires which burned for days afterward.

It was the biggest mission in the record of the Ninth and it brought to fruition long standing plans. It climaxed months of preparation and weeks of training. It covered 2,400 miles through skies not too clear and with the burden of added gasoline load in the planes. But it reduced the precious flow of fuel in the face of clamouring Axis needs.

Elements of the fleet roared in just over the tree tops through a thick screen of ground fire and under a swarm of enemy fighter craft. True to reports, they found the Ploesti refineries in one of the most heavily defended areas in Europe. Twenty-three bombers were brought down over the target area and twenty-one more were lost in the battle near the and target on the long route home or in the sea.

Some of the bombers, crippled by ground fire or enemy fighter craft, made landings at intermediate points on the return journey, 12 at Cyprus, 5 at Malta and 3 at Sicily. One hundred and eight ships returned safely to base on schedule. Eight landed in or near Turkey and the crews were interned.

Returning crews told of many direct hits on refineries, in the boiler houses, fractionating columns, tank farms and power houses. One hit on a boiler house caused such a violent explosion that it destroyed a Liberator flying over the target.

Aerial photographs substantiated the airmen's earlier reports that most of the larger refineries in the area were put out of action for a long period. Direct hits at vital spots were clearly shown on the photographs of the Astra Romana refinery, the largest in Europe. Direct hits were also shown on the Orion, Colombia and Staur refineries.

Travellers from Roumania arriving at Istanbul several days later reported that Roumanian and German fire services were fighting flames several days after the attack. They said that bombs hit everything worth hitting in the mile long pumping and refining districts.

The low level at which the attack was launched enabled the Liberators' gunners to turn their weapons with devastating effect on ground batteries. They spread death and destruction among the crews and guns on the ground. It was payment in kind for the planes' many harrowing plunges through ack-ack bursts in higher level attacks when they could not return the fire. "Our boys took lessons in street fighting," said one flying Major. Many of them told stories of momentary duels between aircraft and roof-top snipers and field and highway gun positions.

"It seemed like we were looking down gun barrels from every angle throughout the run," declared Sgt. Stoddard, gunner of the Liberator "Lorraine." "It was the first time I had ever been fired at by a haystack. I got a great kick out of being able to shoot back. More than fifty Messerschmitt and Fock-Wulf fighters attacked the low-flying bombers from above and paid heavily when they came within range of the top turret gunners who could give them their undivided attention. Forty-six enemy fighters were known to have been destroyed with many more damaged.

The story was told of one Liberator crew which kept their ship on the target and dropped their bombs with accuracy despite the fact that the plane was blazing and apparently doomed. The civilian population is believed to have suffered minimum harm. Many of them were seen spending the Sunday afternoon in parks, at lakes and in the countryside. Crews told of farmers in the fields and children, both in Greece and Roumania, waving in friendly gesture to the American planes. One flier told of a soldier waving his gun over his head at them.

Brigadier General Ent, commander of the bombers, who flew in the lead ship of the Liberator group, estimated that the raid was sufficiently successful to play an important part in hastening the defeat of the Axis in Europe.

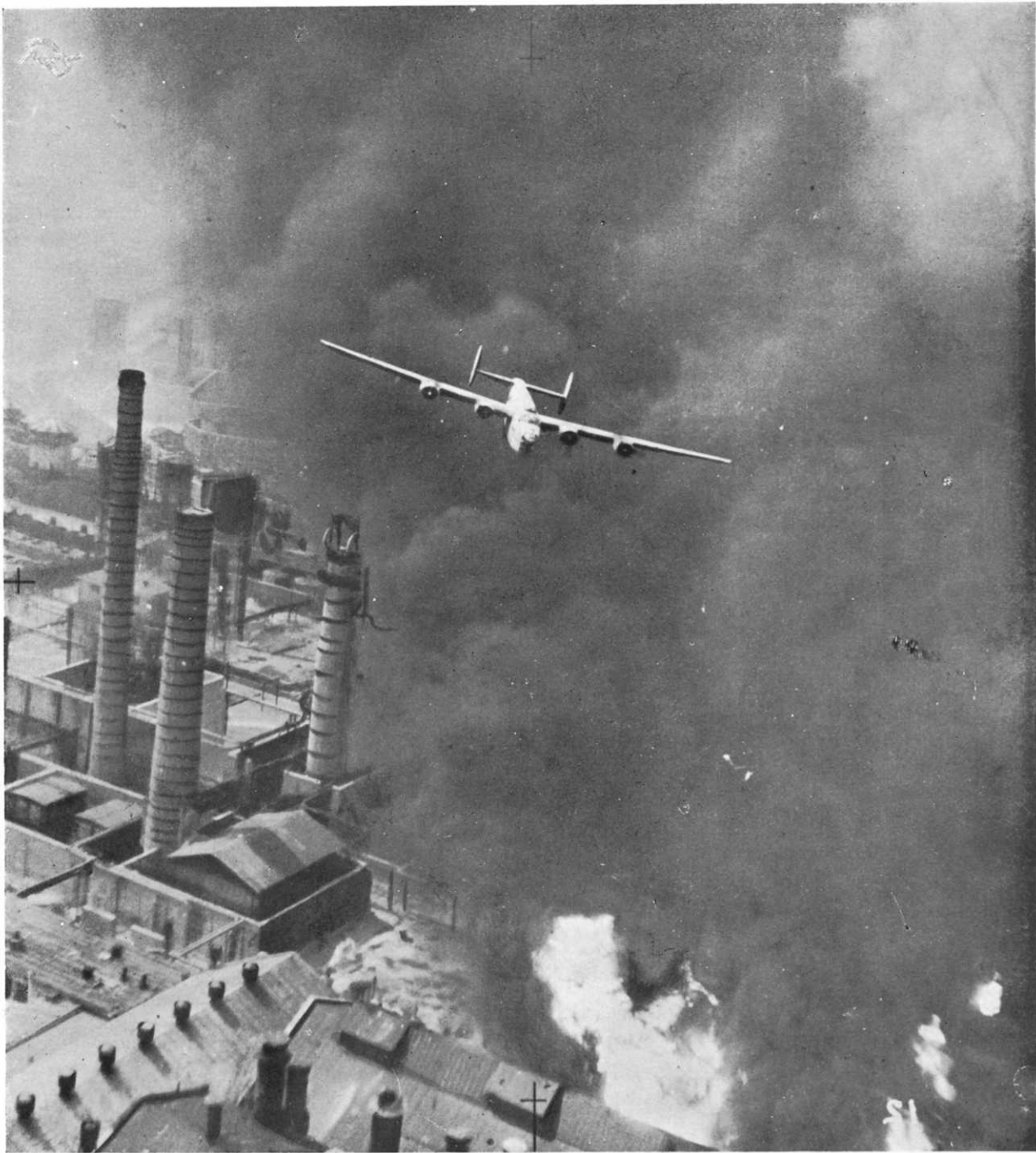
"I think we have dealt the enemy a smashing blow where it really hurts," commented the general, adding praise for the work of his crews.

THRICE ATTACKED

The City of Ploesti, deep in Roumania and surrounded by oil fields, with its important refineries and transportation facilities, was counted one of the prime targets for Allied bombers in Europe. Complete destruction of its fuel production plants would have immobilized an estimated one third of the German war machine by denying fuel and lubricating oil to aircraft, tanks, ships and motor transport, so sorely needed in over-extended lines of communication.

On three other occasions Ploesti was attacked by Allied bombers, twice in 1941 by the Russian air force and once in the summer of 1942 by the small force from the Ninth Air Force from bases in Palestine. In all three attacks some damage was done, but not enough to seriously hinder Ploesti's fuel production capacity.

Little is known of the two attacks by the Russian airmen except that a gasoline storage tank at the refinery on the north edge of the city was destroyed by a direct hit and that a fire was left burning at the Orion refinery.



PLOESTI, August 1, as viewed from a Liberator

Determined to shroud the activity of their oil city in the utmost secrecy at which they never succeeded, the Germans forced thousands of persons not actively engaged in the Axis war effort to move to less populous areas in the surrounding country.

Ploesti had a population of some 100,000, about a third of whom were employed in the petroleum industry. The city is situated 35 miles north of Bucharest on the river Dambul, which knifes through the Wallachian plain of Roumania and converges with the larger river Teleajen a few miles east of the city. Lying at the foot of the Buzau mountains, it nestles in the inverted U-shaped valley formed by two ridges descending in a south-easterly direction. It is a naturally defensible region. The ridges protecting the city, bristle with anti-aircraft guns. Previous attacks and the city's importance to the Axis cause, dictated the necessity of heavy defenses.

Experts on oil refineries and military specialists in aerial bombardment combined their knowledge to work out plans for the raid in minute detail before training began.

First a table-top replica of the city and industrial area was constructed at the desert bomber base, and for weeks plane crews gathered around the model and studied it in all its features. Each crew was mainly concerned with one prescribed section, for this was pattern bombing. Training then moved out to the ghost town set up in the desert and born only to be destroyed. Weeks before, an engineer unit selected a remote section of the desert, not far from the bomber base, and there began the construction of a full scale lay-out of the Ploesti targets. With a remarkable attention to size, relationship and major detail, a giant picture was staked out with whatever material could be made available. It "blue printed" the target, indicating refineries, tank farms and even the principal rail lines which pass through and around the Roumanian oil capital.

While this work was in progress the whole area was carefully guarded and military personnel only were allowed to enter its confines. The area's natural isolation aided in maintaining secrecy since it was necessary, only occasionally, to turn aside wandering Arabs.

Sometime later, the task completed, the combat crews began a daily routine of studying the image from the air until each man knew the section assigned to his crew as well as his own neighborhood at home. This done, tactical practice was begun.

Flying over the mock-town in tight formations at low altitude, the Liberators, day after day, dropped dummy bombs on the marked off targets until their aim became accustomed to the low level sweeps.

Then came the final test, the actual destruction of the dummy targets. With 100 pound, delayed action bombs in their racks, the planes took off, assembled according to plan, and with promising precision, executed the long-planned operation without hitch.

The scene was not without its dramatic touch. Overhead droned a single Liberator with the Commanding General, senior intelligence and operations officers of the Ninth Bomber Command. Suddenly, on came the bomber fleet, skimming low across the desert floor. On they came in perfect formation, almost 200 in number. The desert echoed to the roar of nearly eight hundred engines. Then they began crossing the targets. Bomb bay doors

opened and the light bombs with delayed action fuzes were hurled at the picture town beneath. Forty-five seconds after the first plane was over the target, the last ship in the last formation "laid its eggs" and sped off. There was thirty seconds of silence — and then, with a great roar, the ground erupted. The desert Ploesti vanished in dust and smoke. The crews were pronounced ready.

Thus it was that nearly two thousand American combat crewmen, trained to the final degree and conscious of the importance of their task, set out with high courage on that Sunday to accomplish the Ninth's most daring raid.

BACKGROUND

Roumania's position in the world oil strategy during the last thirty years has been due more to geography than to quantity of output. Its yield has never been more than six and a half per cent. of world output.

The fields were burned by the Roumanians and their British allies to balk German seizure in the first world war. British, Franco-Belgian and American capital developed the industry after the war until the avaricious Roumanian government began to want all the profit without the risk.

Development lagged and production dropped.

The Germans continued to cast greedy eyes on Roumanian oil because it was the best source of supply they could get without crossing dangerous seas. They wormed their way into the industry after the war by dumping material and equipment into Roumania for development purposes. Due to their aggressiveness and somewhat higher standards of education they were able to infiltrate hundreds of German Transylvanians and Roumanians of German birth into the industry as employees. Backing this organization tactic by manipulation of the exchange markets the Germans were furthermore able to gain a large share of Roumania exportable oil without making any payment beyond occasional shipments of mouth organs, aspirin tablets, poor quality automobiles and other products more absurd.

After the rape of Czechoslovakia in the Spring of 1939, the British Government gave guarantees of Military support to Poland and Roumania. The Roumanian-British alliance of the last war was revived, with the natural consequence that, after war broke out in September 1939, representatives of the two countries and France set to work on the preparation of plans for the destruction of the industry, for it was a foregone conclusion that the Germans would make every endeavour to seize Roumanian oil and grain at the earliest convenient opportunity.

The catastrophic events of June 1940, changed everything however. Dunkirk was evacuated, the French collapsed and signed an armistice with Hitler, and within ten days, the Russians had presented a demand to the Roumanian Government for the return of the provinces of Bessarabia and Bukovina. Knees wobbled in Bucharest and the Roumanian Government delivered the territories in quick time. Thereupon, Antonescu's Fascist government assumed power, and immediately appealed to the Germans for help against possible further Russian demands.

This was an unexpected windfall for Hitler, who had meanwhile gained possession of the French copies of the destruction plans and was only too willing to cash in on Roumania's fright. He offered a guarantee of protection on the condition of immediate German military occupation and instant expulsion of all British oil engineers and executives, who were the cornerstone of the destruction plans. Almost before the wires had ceased humming with the German message, the abject Roumanian Government had given orders to the secret police to round up all the British in the country and put them over the frontier without delay. There ended all hopes of burning Roumanian oil before the Germans could lay hands on it, for the oilfields extend over an area sixty miles long and ten miles wide. The 30 British technicians were compelled to abandon the project.

From then on, the Germans had it their own way. The reserve fields were thrown wide open, and the whole industry so shamelessly pillaged that production continued to fall, notwithstanding increased drilling programs and frantic efforts to find new oilfields. Meanwhile the Germans, in true Nazi style, fought each other tooth and nail for the plum jobs vacated first by the French, then by the British and finally by the Americans when they left too, a couple of months before Pearl Harbor.

STIRRING RESCUE

A stirring human document of the rescue at sea of a wounded pilot, the sole survivor of the crew of a wrecked Liberator, came from the records of early August.

Lieut. Lawrence G. O'Brien of Delta, Colorado, was co-pilot of the "Pink Avenger II" and flying his 21st mission. The plane was returning from a raid on Catania and, just off the south-east coast of Sicily, was attacked by twenty Messerschmitts which struck again and again in a period of twenty minutes.

The "Pink Avenger" was flying in the No. 2 position in the fourth element, that most vulnerable of all spots, known among airmen as "Tail End Charlie".

The enemy pressed the attack fiercely and their concentrated firepower was too much for the Liberator. O'Brien heard four cannon shells explode behind him, apparently in the bomb bays. Seconds later, flames were raging in the ship.

The crew chief, Sergeant Kenneth Calhoun, snatched two fire extinguishers and crawled down into the bomb bays in an attempt to put out the fire. Almost the last thing Lieut. O'Brien remembers is Calhoun yelling to the pilot, "I can't put 'em out!"

The pilot, Lieut. Wayne Field, rang the bell for the bail out and O'Brien prepared to leave the ship. That's all he remembers except that just at that instant there was a terrific explosion. He has no recollection of actually jumping or of pulling the rip-cord. He regained consciousness to find himself floating down through space. He counted seven parachutes above him but the plane was nowhere to be seen.

He believes his 'chute must have been damaged for he came down fast and hit the water hard. His head, he discovered, was covered with blood and he shook violently from the nervous shock.

It was about three and one-half hours before sunset. After getting his bearings he looked around for the other members of the crew but could see no one. Presently he spied a dinghy about 200 yards away. Swimming to it, he found it half-burned but there was enough left to hold on to. Then, in the distance, he saw another dinghy and swam to it. It, too, was burned. He tied the two together and made them stable enough to lie in them. He figured that he was about 25 miles off the coast of Sicily.

About two hours later a Baltimore flew overhead about a hundred yards away, but, despite its low altitude, the pilot did not see him. Later, two more planes flew toward him but turned away before reaching him. Night came on and he drifted out to sea. His head wound was bothering him. Against the sky, he could see the lights and reflections from the bombing and ack-ack fire on the Sicilian shore.

Through most of the night he was awake. Once, a voice cried, "Ahoy, ahoy" five or six times but he was unable to make out the direction from which it came. He shouted back but only silence met his cries.

All through the next day he drifted about in the broiling sun without seeing a vessel of any kind although he saw many planes flying at a distance. As night came on again, the weather turned ugly. The sea became rough; huge waves thirty feet high tossed O'Brien and his tiny dinghies about like a cork. The sea frequently swamped the raft and he was washed out. Through it all he hung tightly to the side ropes, well realizing that he was lost if he became separated from the boat. He began to doubt that he would survive the storm. Finally, he tore strips from his clothing and tied himself firmly in the frail craft. He had swallowed a great deal of salt water. Now he began to feel the pangs of thirst and hunger. Somehow, he got through the night and when day came the sea subsided and the scorching sun came out again. He could hear planes passing overhead but could see nothing. His thirst became unbearable. All through the day he drifted.

As darkness came on, he made out the outline of Mount Etna and realized that the currents and wind were taking him back toward Sicily. That night the heavens were aflame with gunfire and explosions—red, yellow and green bursts everywhere in the skies to the west. All night, the rumble of guns continued. Two or three times the lashings saved him from being washed overboard. Then he became delirious and imagined that he had found an officers' mess out in the sea. Little men kept bringing him steak after steak and all the orange juice and lemonade he could drink. Falling into a fitful sleep, he awoke frequently, to realize his position, only to doze off again and the dream would continue.

Early on the morning of the fourth day he awoke at the sound of boats and planes to the west. At about ten o'clock in the morning, he discovered three other dinghies off in the distance. At length he made out three men in them. He yelled and waved his arms but they apparently did not see him. Still delirious, he kept imagining that he had a flare pistol and found himself searching the boat to find where he had hidden it.

The wind came up again and began to carry him away from Sicily. Frantically, he paddled with his hands to try and stay near the island. He lost sight of the other rafts, although he later saw two which he believed to be the same he had seen earlier. Next, his delirium had him imagining that he had a portable radio set and he kept sending bearings to Malta, asking them to send a rescue boat.

Finally, at about 6 o'clock, three torpedo boats came into view a half mile away and stopped. Then four more came up from another direction. The first group made as if to join the others and Lieut. O'Brien breathed a prayer that they would pass close to him. Presently one of the boats broke from the formation and headed for him. Joyfully he watched it approach until it drew alongside and a rope was thrown him. He was too weak to do more than hold it, though, and it took four sailors to get him aboard the torpedo boat. He was unable to stand and was carried below decks and his wet clothing was removed; he was given a big wool sweater and wrapped in blankets. Upon examination, he was found to have more than thirty second-degree burns on his legs, arms and body. In addition, he had four deep cuts in his head.

The first thing he asked the crew was, "Did you have trouble finding me?" still thinking of his mythical radio and his calls to Malta for help. The crew explained that they accidentally came upon him while moving to a rendezvous with other torpedo boats preparatory to a raid in the Messina Straits.

Instead of taking Lieut. O'Brien to land, they carried him with them on the Messina raid. For the American flyer, danger still was not over. All three motors on the torpedo boat went out and they worked on them for hours before getting them started again. All the time, Italian E-boats were searching for them and enemy planes were droning overhead in the darkness. The captain of the British boat admitted that the outlook was not bright.

But, before morning, the motors were running and the ship made Malta late that afternoon. He was taken to a British hospital where he remained for two weeks and was then returned to Africa where he entered an American field hospital.

One of the first pieces of news to reach him upon his arrival was that he had been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his superior skill and heroic action demonstrated during an earlier raid on Taormina when, with two engines shot out, his bomber was attacked by heavy ack-ack and four ME-109's, one of which was shot down. He has since received the Purple Heart.

Epic events crowded September after the invasion of the Italian mainland. Italy's unconditional surrender was announced on the ninth, just 45 days after the fall of Mussolini and 39 months after Italy's entry into the war.

German troops, which had been pouring into Italy since it became apparent that capitulation was imminent, seized Rome and Naples. Mussolini escaped arrest with the aid of German parachutists and forthwith set up a puppet Fascist government in Nazi-smirched Munnich. Allied units continued to land at widely separated points, advance and link forces in the face of stiff German resistance. Italians drove the Germans off the Island of Sardinia and thus assured the eventual capture of Corsica with the help of the French. But Nazi air power was lacking. It was the eve of Allied victory in Europe.

A world strategy paced to a rapidly changing pattern had decreed a redistribution of American air strength. Africa and the Mediterranean were won, and the job of the Ninth Air Force in the Middle East was finished. Although the Ninth was to continue as an Air Force, reassignment of its original service and combat groups had been ordered. Transfer of these units began late in August and was not completed until October.

Bombardment and fighter groups remained intact, joining the Eighth and Twelfth Air Forces. The 93rd Group, twice a part of the Ninth, returned to England along with the 44th and 389th Groups. The 376th and 98th, veteran Groups of the Ninth, joined the Twelfth Air Force in Northwest Africa. The medium bombers of the 12th and 340th Groups and the fighters of the 57th, 79th and 324th Groups also joined the Twelfth to which they had been operationally attached since July.

The 315th Service Group was transferred to the Twelfth on August 23 to be followed three days later by the 316th Troop Carrier Group, with the exception of its 37th Squadron. The 37th was retained by the Air Force as an air transportation unit. The 43rd and 323rd Service Groups went to the Twelfth in mid-September. At the same time the 83rd and 26th Air Depot Groups at Gura and Deversoir respectively were retained by U.S. Army Forces in the Middle East. The 17th Air Depot Group and the 306th Service Group had been lost to Northwest African Forces in June.

General Brereton and General Ent returned to Washington for war department conferences. General Strahm assumed command of the Air Force and Col. John C. Kilborn took over the Bomber Command at Benghazi during the period of transition.

Major General Ralph Royce came from the States to assume command of the U.S. Army Forces in the Middle East. General Royce had served in Mexico, in the Philippines, in Australia and more recently was in command of the Army Air Forces Southeast Training Center with headquarters at Maxwell Field, Ala. General Royce graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1914, in time to begin his army flying career in the first world war.

The headquarters organizations of the Air Force and Air Service Commands and the Fighter and Bomber Commands left Cairo early in October for Great Britain where they were to put together new tactical outfits to carry the traditions of the "Fighting Ninth" into conquests closer to the heart of Naziland.

The men of the original Ninth Air Force had been brought together from all sections of America and out of many vocations besides the military. Their record was one of resolute courage in the air and unselfish devotion to administration and ground service duties for the men who flew. A share in the Mediterranean victory by the side of gallant allies was their reward.

In the cryptic language of the war: Some of our aircraft are missing. Some of these men must forever remain beneath the Libyan sands or the green slopes of Tunisia. May memories of them endure with the help of these printed pages to enrich the ideals for which they died.

As men of the Ninth had fought together and worked together toward victory so may they remain together in spirit in succeeding conquests and throughout the ultimate peace.

The Ninth Air Force had tested American wings over desert, plain, mountain and sea. This experience was to contribute materially to the plan and pattern of Allied aerial warfare.

INTO GREATER GERMANY

Greater Germany fell within the lengthening sweep of the Ninth Bombers on August 14. Sixty Liberators carried the battle to the birthplace of Messerschmitt fighters near Vienna. It was another 2,500 mile flight and it left destruction in the big aircraft works of Weiner Neustadt on the Danube.

Significantly it marked the first penetration of Germany by Africa-based aircraft and demonstrated that no part of the Nazi homeland was immune to Allied air attack in the latter part of August 1943. Weiner Neustadt was only 200 miles south of the deepest point of attack into Axis Europe from England. It bordered the mis-called Axis safety zone from Berlin south to the Vienna area where so many of Germany's moveable war industries had been concentrated. Attacks from England were dipping southward into this zone. The ring was tightening and as it closed in on this vital zone it sapped the enemy's power to resist.

This power was reduced in the Weiner Neustadt attack by the destruction of scores of newly assembled aircraft in neat rows on the parking area.

Bomb bursts blanketed the factory. One wing of the U-shaped plant was destroyed. The Weiner Neustadt Airframe Works was one of the Axis' largest assembly plants. It was reportedly assembling ME-109's at the rate of 400 per month, accounting for more than a third of the Messerschmitt output. It was a crippling blow with the Axis committed to defensive strategy and the emphasis on fighter production. Fighter craft production had been increased considerably at the sacrifice of a sharp decline in bomber production.

Pilots reported that the enemy defenses were taken by surprise in spite of the long trip inland over Axis territory. Slight opposition was encountered from ground fire or enemy aircraft and there were no Allied plane losses.

Of some fifteen enemy fighters which half-heartedly attacked the Liberators, one ME-109 was shot down.

"No foreign power can ever harm Germany from the air," promised Hitler's Air Marshal in safer days.

There was a sky-borne answer to Goering's boast in August in the almost daily drone of Allied planes far into middle Europe, carrying loads of destruction to industrial plants, utility systems and the net-work of transportation lines so essential to the Third Reich's military effort.

Strangely-ominously Germany's "black days" of just a quarter of a century before had begun on August 8, the same date in 1943 on which the Third Reich began evacuation of some of its cities under the growing threat of decimation by Allied bombers.

Many sources were beginning to report the cracking of German morale under the ceaseless saturation bombings. For months arrogant herrenfolk may have felt pride that their sons were dying for the Reich in Russia, but now the surviving sons were learning that their families were being blown to the Aryan Valhalla on the home front. And none of this contributed to the Nazi "Strength through Joy."

The first fifteen days of August were a hectic half month for medium bombers and fighters of the Ninth. While the heavies were reaching over them to continental Europe they were applying tremendous pressure on that part of Sicily which remained in Axis hands. Catania, Randazzo, Milazzo, Bronte, Francaville and Messina were attacked by large formations during the first week with remarkably few Allied losses. As the enemy began to move northward, pin-pointed road junctions and vehicle concentrations were bombarded with a regularity and an accuracy which pushed the enemy toward Messina with only brief halts.

Enemy opposition in the air was weak and ineffective at some points and strong and ineffective at others. Ground fire, as usual, constituted the greatest hazard to Allied air attack and over the San Agata Beaches on August 15, twenty out of thirty-five Mitchells of the 340th Group were hit. All the Mitchells, however, returned safely to base.

The Eighth Army did not promenade into Catania. Its course was marked by an unusual number of graves, by a great amount of wreckage and damage, the larger part of that being of enemy armor and equipment—by wide-spread destruction, by fires, and by every other evidence that on the long ridge bordering the wide Catanian Plain, and the roads leading north, north-east and east from its approaches, men fought grimly and doggedly. When the enemy collapse came, and he retreated northward out of Sicily's second city, he went fast ; but until that night and morning he fought furiously.

The course of this battle, as it was all the way up from the south-east corner of the Island, was from position to position, the enemy having dug in at intervals of a few miles with batteries, trenches, gun positions, machine gun nests, barbwire entanglements, tank traps, and pill-boxes, each line to cover that ahead, and while General Montgomery's boys moved rapidly at one stage soon after the invasion opened, they had to slug their way forward, foot by foot, from Lentini on.

After the Highlanders, their invariable comrades of the 50th Division (North of England), the 78th Division, and the armored elements had taken position along the southern border of the plain, backed by the artillery all along the ridge north of Lentini, there came the apparent lull in the battle. Montgomery swung his newly arrived Canadians and his armor around north and west, reaching all the way up to the point west of Mount Etna, where they contacted the fast moving Seventh Army. Then it was a case of bite by bite, position by position, until enough strong points were held to permit the final onslaught with assurance of success. Here where the battle was fought, the British commander is credited with having saved the lives of thousands of his men by refusing to make the main attack and insisting on penetrating and outflanking until, literally, he couldn't lose—thus conserving British lives.

At every crossroads, every building, every other spot which made a target between the low hills on the south and the German lines extending out from the city, were smashed enemy tanks, armored cars and trucks ; helmets, rifles, gas masks, grenades and all the other debris of stubborn battle. The accuracy of the bombing and of the British artillery fire was effective, attested by the concentration of the shell holes, bomb holes, and direct hits on visible targets. The airfields of the Gerbini group were so pitted with huge bomb holes

that the enemy aircraft couldn't take off and, more than a hundred of their planes were marooned on them when Allied forces came in. On the big Catania airdrome, just outside the city, was the wreckage of dozens of German and Italian aircraft. Every hangar and workshop was destroyed, revetments were blown in, and the whole area wrecked by accurate bombing.

In spite of the destructive battle for Catania, many of its quarter-million people clung to their homes throughout the long weeks of bombing and shelling. An extremely high share of them were homeless.

ENEMY FIGHTERS PAY

Heavies of the Ninth again directed their blows at Axis air power on August 16 in co-ordinated attacks on satellite airdromes surrounding Foggia in Southern Italy.

Great fires sent dense black smoke thousands of feet in the air over San Nicola and Tortorella airdromes. Other dromes were blanketed with high explosive and fragmentation bombs. Here, contrary to recent experiences, the enemy fighters were out in force. The bomber formations were attacked by groups of from twenty to sixty at a time. Anti-aircraft fire was also intense and accurate and the Ninth counted the loss of eight Liberators. Most of the crews were seen to parachute safely.

Forty-three enemy fighters were destroyed and more than a dozen others damaged by gunners. Lt. Charles W. Bley, pilot, and Lt. J. L. Lovelace, navigator, told a story of a busy afternoon in the skies over Foggia. Bley said: "As we came over the field they turned loose on us with the heaviest ack-ack I have yet seen. We got hit, shrapnel wounding my radio operator in the elbow. Then we got the fighters. They came on in waves of five and six against a single ship, with as many as sixty in the air at one time against the formation. The formation got as tight as any formation you ever saw, and we beat them off with no loss to us. We got four ME-109's for sure and four other probables."

The Liberator "Caliban," piloted by Lt. James E. Hiller of Midland, Texas, is credited with bringing down six ME's and two more probables. Top-turret gunner Technical Sergeant John Pitcoveck, engineer of the ship is credited with two; tail gunner Staff Sergeant Herbert J. Womack, Fort Worth, Texas, is also credited with two. One ME each is chalked to the credit of Staff Sergeant John F. Russell of Harrisburg, Illinois, right waist gunner, and Staff Sergeant Clark G. Bailey of Linworth, Ohio, left waist gunner. For all its triumph over the Messerschmitts the Caliban didn't escape enemy fire, however, Technical Sergeant Ray P. Reeves of Amarillo, Texas, reporting that armor piercing 20-mm. fire went through his radio set. "Where was I then? Boy, don't ask me. I haven't any idea," Reeves said. "You could spit in the pilot's eyes the way they came at you," reported Bailey. "There was no scaring them away. I was in the waist window peppering them from the instant I saw them come on, but boy, they would head for the plane and keep at us steadily. These guys were hardened, experienced pilots."

Top honors for the day went to Staff Sergeant Albert H. Oser of Boston, Mass., waist gunner on "The Blasted Event." Oser's bomber was attacked by at least 12 enemy fighters near the target area, and in the aerial battle that followed the Massachusetts gunner shot down three Macchi 202's.

The enemy was beginning to counter Allied air blows with a desperate defense of its most vulnerable area which proved costly to Allies and Axis alike. Three more Liberators of the Ninth were added to the eight downed a few days previously over Foggia when the Ninth joined with the Twelfth Air Force in a two-pronged blow at Foggia's marshalling yards August 19.

The Liberators followed the B-17's into the target and dropped approximately 330,000 pounds of bombs on the busy transportation center. Direct hits were observed on the locomotive shops, the railroad tracks, many bombs were seen to burst in the vicinity of a railroad overpass, destruction of which would slow effectively the flow of traffic through the Foggia bottleneck. Many railroad cars were set afire and some were seen to explode. Leaflets also were dropped over the city itself.

Some of the groups from the Ninth observed the Flying Fortresses from the North-west African Air Force leaving the target area just as they were approaching it.

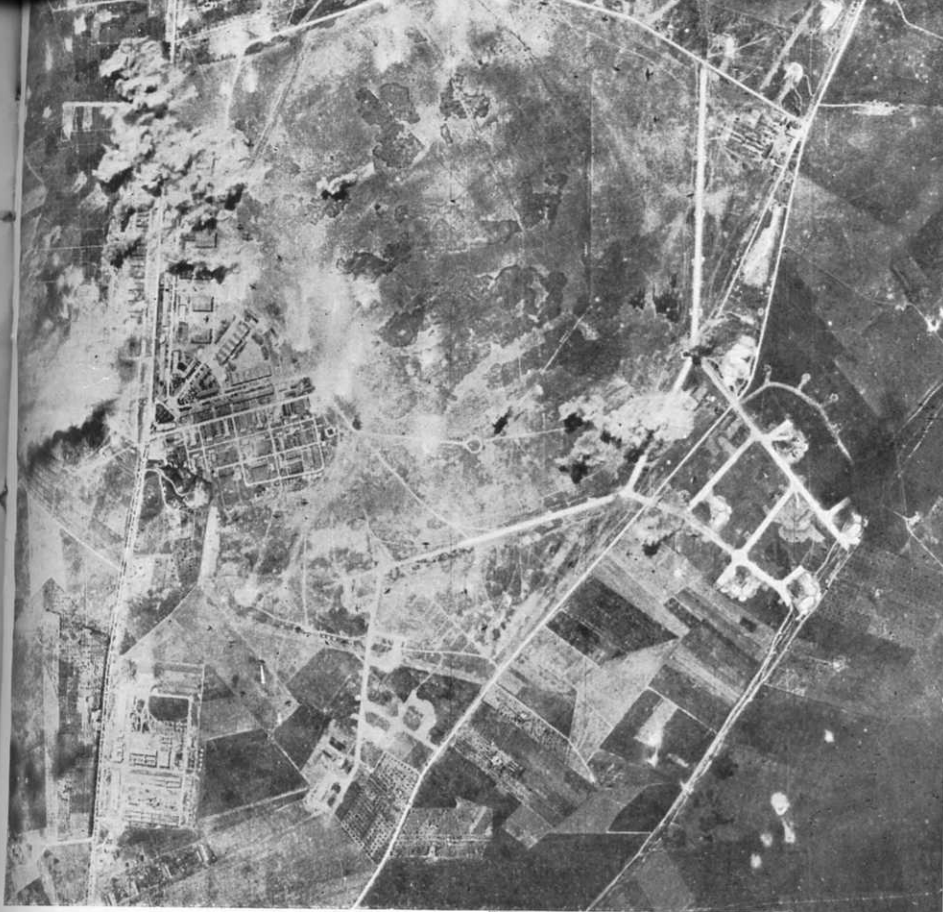
Three ME-109's and MC's were destroyed by Col. K. K. Compton's "Liberandos," who encountered most of the fighter opposition. Other groups, while making no claims, reported seeing "several" other enemy fighters crash into the sea.

Liberators hit the target in two waves—"The Pyramiders" of Colonel John R. Kane leading one force and "Ted's Flying Circus" commanded by Lt. Colonel Leland G. Giegler leading the other.

Cloudy weather over target areas in Italy began to aid the Axis defenders late in August. Targets were difficult to find and results difficult to see. Operations, nevertheless, did not await fair weather at this critical period although they were necessarily reduced in volume and effectiveness.

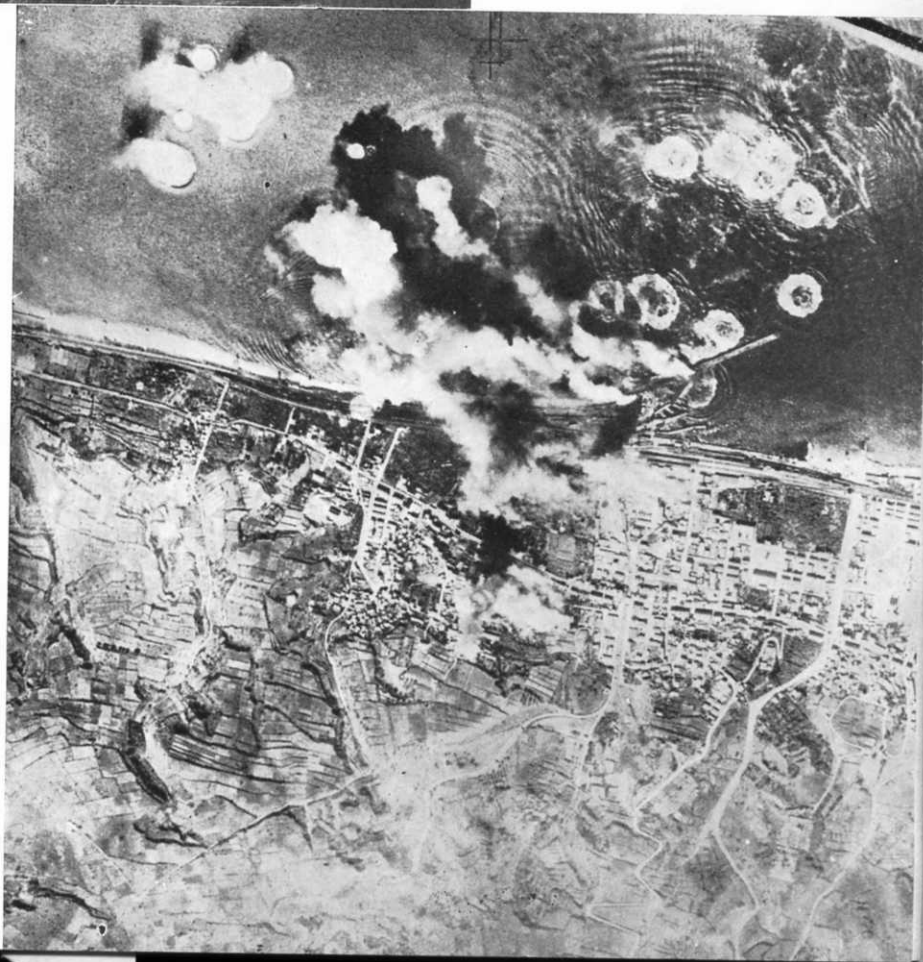
Trouble came in bunches for the Liberator "Let's Go" on the return from one of these difficult raids over Cencella, August 22. The flyers were pressed to the limit of their ingenuity to bring the crippled bomber back to port. Their trouble started when "Let's Go" lost her Number Three engine due to mechanical failure, causing them to drop behind the formation. They jettisoned their bombs on a small railway junction in a vain effort to keep up with the rest of the formation. Their troubles seemed to multiply when the other engine on that side began to smoke. Help arrived in the form of three B-24's from their sister group, who saw their trouble and slowed down, affording them the protection of their formation.

About ten minutes from the target, fighters attacked the formation, concentrating on the smoking "Let's Go." At this point the tail turret went out allowing the fighter attacks from the rear to go unchallenged. One of the fighters let down his wheels in order to get a few seconds longer to throw his twenty millimeter cannon shells into the big Liberator. He stayed just a second too long, for the rest of the formation concentrated their fire on him, blasting him from the sky. Three more of the twenty attacking fighters met flaming ends before they decided the Liberators were too much.



Foggia, Italy, under
attack.

Bomb bursts in San Giovanni
Harbour.



The sky over the target was black with ack-ack bursts but the Liberators ploughed in, adding more holes to their already battered planes. A few short seconds after the formation had dropped its bombs squarely on the target, one of the B-24's exploded in mid-air. The explosion caved in the bomb-bay doors of "Let's Go" and tossed her crew around like dice in a chuck-a-luck cage. The big Liberator shook off this blow and headed for home. Five times on the trip over Italy ack-ack batteries tried to pot-shot the Liberator formation, but without success.

Upon reaching the comparative safety of the Mediterranean the crew waved an enthusiastic goodbye to their tormenters and turned toward Sicily. The smoking motor was still running when they reached Sicily so they decided to go on to the better equipped fields at Malta. The Captain, Lieut. James, had all he could do to land the crippled B-24, but brought her down safely. The crew piled out to inspect the damage—over 150 holes from the size of a quarter, to two in the tail assembly large enough to stick a head through. Glad to be back on the ground again after a tough afternoon, the men headed for town to get a good meal. Bari's railway yards and airdrome furnished the next strategical target for the heavy bombers and here again clouds hindered operations and enemy fighters attacked in force. The bombings nevertheless were counted as successful, particularly in the airdrome area. The heavier clouds were over the rail yards where results could not be verified. The attack was carried out by the Liberandos and the Pyramiders in two waves.

Ack-ack fire was light and inaccurate, but the fighters swarmed around the B-24s, concentrating their attack on the Pyramiders' ships. Without loss to themselves, the heavies downed 14 of the attackers, probably destroyed more and damaged others.

"Shanghai-Lil", piloted by Lieut. George L. Clark, is officially credited with shooting down three of the 30 to 40 attacking ME-109s, Mc-202s and FW-190s'.

Jumped by the enemy fighters as they approached the target, another Pyramiders' ship, "The Sad Sack," piloted by Lieut. William D. Banks, is also credited with bagging three ME-109s during a dog "fight" which lasted 25 minutes.

Allied bombs were still falling in the latter days of August with destructive regularity on strategical targets inside Italy as well as along the coast. Foggia was again bombed on the 26th with 130,000 pounds of explosives dumped on railroad installations to create a bottle neck at this important center of transportation in Southern Italy.

Extensive damage to shops, marshalling yard and railroad overpass was shown on aerial photos taken after the raid.

More than twenty enemy fighters attacked, but the gunners on the bombers felled seven of them. Staff Sergeant Kenneth Abraham, making his third mission, accounted for his second ME-109 victory, blasting it out of the sky at a distance of 800 yards. Marksmanship like this, plus skillful flying was repeatedly adding to the communiques: All our of aircraft returned safely.

At Taranto a few days later the bombers varied the routine of attacks on rail installations, with the bombing of shipping in the harbor and made a direct hit on a large cruiser.

Rail installations on Pescara, on the east coast of Italy was next on the list of targets and Pescara was followed a few days later by Suloma, where the objectives were an explosives plant as well as rail installations. Here enemy fighters were out in force and six Liberators fell before the onslaught of more than a hundred pursuits. Thirty-seven of the fighters more shot down and six were reported as probably destroyed. The enemy here employed a new technique of formation attack.

These raids were part and prelude to invasion of the Italian boot which was accomplished by the British Eighth Army in the early morning of September 3. Forward elements swept across Messina Straits from Sicily and began to spread fan-wise across the foot of the boot as reinforcements streamed in behind them. Political unrest was brewing in many parts of Europe—the conquered and half-conquered. The clamor for a “just Peace” in Italy arose afresh, but the Allied drive was not attuned to negotiation. To give moral support to the Allied cause in Italy there were continued Russian victories; agony in Berlin; fire and hope in France; un-employed Allied armies awaiting marching orders, and the ever growing strength of the Allies in the air.

REWARD

Due tribute came to leaders of the Ploesti raid and others whose services with the air force dated back to Alamein. In an impressive ceremony on a wide palm bordered greensward near the banks of the storied Nile twenty-one men from generals to sergeants were decorated September 4. Representatives of British and Egyptian forces were present as well as nearly two thousand officers and men of the U.S. forces in the Middle East.

Presentations were made by General Brereton who was, in turn decorated by General Strahm on behalf of the Commanding General of the U.S. Air Forces.

Highest award, the Congressional Medal of Honor, went to Col. John R. Kane, commanding officer of the 98th heavy bombardment group, who led one of the elements over Ploesti through a blazing target area and in the face of alerted defences. Col. Kane was also awarded the Legion of Merit in recognition of outstanding leadership of his group.

General Brereton got the Air Medal for “meritorious achievement while participating in aerial flight from April 2, 1942 to July 11, 1943.” During this period General Brereton flew with numerous missions of the heavies from their Middle East bases.

General Strahm, hard-working chief of staff and proven ace in administration as well as rated ace in aerial combat was given the Legion of Merit. “General Strahm,” reads the citation, “displayed marked administrative ability and resourcefulness in meeting the many difficult problems connected with the organization and later the supervision of the Ninth Air Force staff.

Brigadier General Uzel G. Ent's Distinguished Service Cross came in recognition of his “tireless efforts, brilliant planning and directing of the Ploesti raid. General Ent flew in the leading aircraft of the first formation over the target. “His fearless leadership,”

says the citation, "was a source of inspiration to all who participated in the mission and reflected credit not only upon himself, but upon the forces which he commanded. General Ent was also awarded the Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster to the DSM for outstanding and distinguished service as commanding general of the IX Bomber Command.

Col. Keith K. Compton, commanding officer of the 376th Heavy Bombardment Group, received the Distinguished Service Cross and also the Legion of Merit. Col. Compton flew the leading plane of the Ploesti raiding force with General Ent. "He coolly and courageously maneuvered his force at low level and in the face of blazing anti-aircraft fire and balloon barrages to a position from which it could bomb the target successfully," says the citation.

To Col. Raymond T. Lester, the award of the Legion of Merit was made posthumously. Col. Lester, special-staff officer, lost his life early in July when his plane was forced down in the desert.

Col. Louis E. Hobbs was given the Legion of Merit for outstanding service in far flung areas of the world conflict as intelligence and liaison officer in air force and army. His record extends from Manila through Australia, Java, India and finally the Middle East where he served as aide to General Breerton.

Col. William K. McNown was rewarded with the Legion of Merit for his work as commanding officer of the 324 Fighter Group which rendered valuable tactical support to ground forces. He was credited in the citation with resourcefulness, courage, sound judgement, superb airmanship and outstanding leadership.

For brilliant work as intelligence officer of the army and later the Ninth Air Force, the Legion of Merit was awarded to Col. Robert W. McClenahan. "His outstanding ability, foresight, keen judgement and devotion to duty are worthy of the highest emulation," reads the record. Four other officers who were given the Distinguished Service Cross for leadership in the Ploesti raid were: Lt. Col. Delbert H. Hahn, Lt. Col. Julian M. Bleyer, Major Herbert I. Shingler Jr., and Major Norman C. Appold. Their awards were for exceptional courage, skill and daring in carrying out their tasks under heavy attack.

Other officers receiving the Legion of Merit for outstanding service in the Middle East were: Col. Edwin N. Clark, Col. William E. Chickering, Col. John N. Hodges, Col. Carl R. Feldman, Lt. Col. Edgar W. Gardner, Lt. Col. Ulysses S. Nero, and Major David H. Likes. Three enlisted men were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for their participation in the Ploesti raid in which they distinguished themselves conspicuously. According to the citation, "Their capable performance of the tasks assigned, their gallantry under fire and in a time of great peril and their unfaltering determination to accomplish the mission in spite of all obstacles constitutes heroism of the rarest sort. The men receiving the awards were: Technical Sergeant William F. Leonard of Dorchester, Massachusetts, Technical Sergeant Russell B. Page of Groton, Vermont, and Staff Sergeant Christopher N. Holwecer of Middletown, Ohio.

Enlisted men receiving the Legion of Merit were Master Sergeants with one exception. The top ratings were : William C. Plyier of Frank, W. Va. ; Paul W. Fitzsimmons, Washington, D.C. ; Dewey J. Williams, Tyrone, Pa. ; Gordon H. Hadlow, Washington, D.C. ; James E. Kiser, Scottsboro, Ala. ; Robert N. McCombs, Easley, S.C. ; Leo F. Fanning, Moosup, Conn., and Nathan C. Drown, Northfield, Vt. The one technical sergeant in the group was Charles C. Rupert Jr., Sapulpa, Okla. All of these sergeants were aircraft mechanics with the exception of McCombs who was a radio operator.

These awards called attention to personalities in the Ninth whose careers have been as colorful as the single deeds for which they were honored.

There was General Ent who military career began during the first world war in the aviation section of the Signal Corps.

Returning from the war, he completed his course as Susquehanna University and then entered West Point, graduating in 1924. While at the academy, he played football, baseball and soccer.

Then he spent six months at Brooks Field, Texas. In 1925 he graduated from the Chemical Warfare School at Edgewood Arsenal, Maryland, and a year later, from the Balloon and Airship School at Scott Field, Illinois, with the rating of airship pilot and balloon observer. He also graduated from the school for heavier-than-air observers at Kelly Field, Texas.

The general narrowly escaped death while taking part in the National Balloon Races in 1928. His balloon was struck by lightning and the pilot was killed. But, despite this, he succeeded in maintaining the craft in flight and finally brought it safely to earth. As a result, he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, and the Cheney Award, granted annually for outstanding achievement in the Air Forces.

Graduating from the Aerial Navigation School at Wright Field, Ohio, in 1929, he was assigned to the Phillipines where he served for three years as Engineering Officer of the Phillipine Air Depot.

In 1933 he became post meteorological officer at Langley Field, Virginia. Then, deciding that he wanted to fly airplanes, he won his wings at Randolph and Kelly Fields, San Antonio, Texas, in 1936. The next year he graduated from the Air Corps Tactical School at Maxwell Field, Alabama, and the following year he completed the Command and General Staff Course at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

He served as military attache and military attache for air in Lima, Peru, from 1939 until 1942. And while there he was decorated with the Order of Ayachucho by the Peruvian government and with the Condor of the Andes Award by the Bolivian government.

In November, 1942, General Ent was appointed Chief of Staff to Lt. General Frank M. Andrews, then the commanding general of U.S. Forces in the Middle East. In February, 1943, with the transfer of General Andrews to another theater, General Ent took over the IX Bomber Command.

He married Miss Eleanor Witmar, former Ziegfield Follies star, in 1929, and the couple have one son. Mrs. Ent now resides in Orlando, Florida.