

THE PAUSE

Mark Morris noted in his diary on June 1st:

I made a high-level practice mission with Lt. Graham.

All the rest of his notations, until the 26th of the month, referred to low-level practice flights.

Norm Kiefer's flight records show that during that period he logged about 25 hours of low-level flight.

WHAT'S GOING ON? SPECULATION!!! There was lots of it. I remember it was about this time that the RAF was making headlines with a new bombing technique.

Certain targets had proven to be exceptionally difficult to hit with high-level bombing. Typically these were small in nature, heavily defended with antiaircraft guns and in an area that, for political reasons, the Allies did not wish to use saturation bombing.

A good example was a dam in German-occupied territory. It would require pinpoint bombing and the guns could be concentrated tightly around it. Thus it was a poor candidate for both high level and dive bombing. If the dam could be destroyed, the electrical power that flowed into the war production factories around it would cease. That would be a quick means of achieving the shutdown of these factories. To destroy these targets from high level or with dive bombing probably would require months of bombing.

The British solution was a new type of bomb that, when dropped in low-level flight, could be skipped off the water and into the dam. They reasoned that an approach from the lake side of the dam would give them the surface from which to skip the bomb. It would also be the safest since German guns, that could be depressed to fire at low flying aircraft, would be a distance away on shore.

Now if these headlines were to appear at about the time that you were removed from combat operations and ordered to fly around the countryside at low level, what would you think?

Ray Marner wrote on June 3:

The "Eightballs" on our planes were removed and they are

practicing bombing from 50 ft. altitude. It looks as if something is in the wind.

The removal of the "Eightballs" was not universal. The author has a picture of the *Old Crow*, that was taken in Africa, with the Group insignia still there.

Regardless of what we thought about the low level practice missions, I am certain that the British people had their own thoughts about the "Crazy Yanks". More than one of them was frightened out of their wits when the unexpected sound of our engines suddenly engulfed their villages.

One of the things that we found intriguing about England was the antiquity of some of the occupied homes. In the countryside many of these homes had thatched roofs. Most of the others were tiled. Both of these types of construction are highly susceptible to damage when subjected to the prop-wash generated by a four-engine bomber flying at 50 feet. I am afraid that we significantly increased employment in the roof repair business during the early part of June.

Probably, an even greater economic loss occurred on the farms. I recall being in the top turret one day. I was facing forward so that I could see where we were going. In the distance I could see some cattle. They started to stampede when the roar of the engines were heard. One bull stood his ground and just before the aircraft passed overhead I could see the bull's tail going round and round. I swung the turret to look back at the field. The bull was entangled in a hedgerow that bordered the ditch defining the field. I recall hoping that the bull wasn't injured.

On June 5th Ray Warner noted:

I went to Watton and about 8 P.M. a truck came in to get everyone. An epidemic of ptomaine poisoning started. Over 400 are in the hospital. I got a touch of it, but didn't get too sick. Our men are dropping on the streets in Norwich.

On June the 13, a new crew joined the 506th. Lt. Edward R. Wilson had flown a B-17 from the States to Prestwick, Scotland. He was ordered to leave the ship there and to board a train for Shipdham. With Lt. Wilson were Lts. Edgar W. Roberts, William H. Novak, and John Kellogg Waite. His enlisted personnel were Sgts. Clyde C. Fry, Robert F. Mundell, George T. Duquette, Robert C. Freeland, Perl R.

Rush, and Neil M. Hills.

William Novak recalls:

We were assigned to the 44th on or about the 15th of June. My records show that I flew with George Rebich to Langford Lodge on the 20th for aircraft modification. We didn't have much time to become acquainted with anyone because the Group took off for Africa and left us without an aircraft. I remember Strong and McAtee as two veteran pilots. Gordon Stevens and Dick Larson were known because of State side training and probably joined the Group no more than a month before us.

The first member of our crew was separated when Stevens took C. C. Fry with him to Africa. During the month of July we spent most of our time at Hardwick. That was where we lost the copilot, Roberts. He was replaced with Flight Officer C. R. Horne and Emil Kosch replaced Fry.

We left Shipdham in aircraft #021 on August 11th and rejoined the Group at Benina on the 13th. We had to land at the first airfield we spotted to get directions because the 44th location was not specified when we left England.

Following the Foggia raid, what was left of the crew returned to England via ATC. That marked the end of the Wilson crew for me. I don't recall seeing Horne after that. The others must have been assigned individually to other crews and I lost track of them. I joined Captain James Bunce and his crew.

Robert Mundell recalls:

After we arrived in Shipdham, we flew a couple of search missions over the North Sea looking for flight crews returning from bombing raids. Also, a skeleton crew of four of us picked up freight two or three times. On one of these, we stayed overnight in Belfast.

Our crew was on pass in London in late July when we got the call to go to Benghazi. We flew from Shipdham to Oran and spent the night. I believe we stopped at Gibraltar on the way.

It was about this time that Charleston Miller had a day that he will never forget.

Remember the trailers which we rode back and forth from the airfield to the mess hall? One day an M.P., on a motorcycle, ran up on our transport trailer as it was parked in front of the hospital. I got in the way and my leg was broken. I was sent to a hospital down around London some place. When I got out of the hospital, I was going to be sent to a replacement depot. Somehow, the ground crew got wind of it and they signed a petition that got me back with them.

On June 19th Ray Marner wrote:

RAF planes flew over for hours last night. You could see thousands of vapor trails in the sky as they went over.

To the members of the *Old Crow* crew there was another important event that occurred in June. Medical personnel decided that the back injury that Lt. Graham had sustained over Kiel was not going to heal quickly. This meant that he would be rotated back to the States for treatment. Lt. McAtee, who had lost his crew when Capt. Swanson was shot down, was assigned to the *Old Crow* crew. It was about this time that Charles R. Loftus Jr. joined the *Old Crow* crew as a gunner.

Loftus was probably the last of the group of men who were brought in to fill the hatch and other open gunner positions in the 506th. Others that have not been previously mentioned, were J.R. Bell on Anderson's crew, Lonny L. Ackerman and Oliver R. Germann on Strong's crew, and William D. Middlebrooks on Bunker's crew.

New faces among the officers were Flight Officer Raymond J. LaCombe, copilot and George G. Grimes, navigator on Slough's crew.

Also, there was a decision made to build up the strength of our combat squadrons. Ray Marner wrote in his diary in late May:

We got a new combat crew today to replace one of our lost crews.

He was probably referring to the Lt. Charles A. Whitlock crew. With Whitlock were Lts. William H. Phipps, Robert A. Ricks, and Harold W. Schwab. Among the enlisted men were Sgts. Charlton H. Holtz, Ralph B. Knox, Donald V. Chase, Edwin N. Stewart, Robert W. Bonham, and Hugo Dunajecz. They

brought with them aircraft #370, *Heaven Can Wait*.

As these new crews moved in, there was no increase in living accommodations. First it was more beds in a hut and then double-deck beds. That is when I started looking for a new place to live.

About twenty-or-thirty feet from the combat crew Nissen huts was a latrine. Behind the latrine was a room that was empty. It looked like it was intended to be a drying or storage room. It had electricity and a small stove with the chimney going out through the roof. It had a slate roof and the room was dry, but needed to be cleaned up. On June 15th I wrote to my wife:

"Well we are fully moved into our new domicile. There are three of us in here. They are Mark (Mark Morris), Ag. (Albert G. Kerns) and myself. We have a place to hang our clothes, two one hundred watt light bulbs, a radio and a hot plate to heat water on. We call it our apartment".

Other combat men thought that we had a good idea. In the next few days two similar rooms were occupied.

Robert Struble recalls:

I moved into a clothes drying building. If you remember, they were about 7 feet wide by 14 or 15 feet long. My fellow roommates were Jack Edwards and Wayne Terry (Quartermaster P/X). We had a hot plate and always managed to get plenty of local bread, butter, and eggs. We used cigarettes (obtained by Terry) for barter with the local farmers. I guess we fed egg sandwiches to almost everyone in the 506th.

Another room was taken over by members of Bunker's crew. Their room was along the path that most of the drunks took when the trucks dropped them off after a night on the town. On June 18th I wrote to my wife:

Gee, Kooken is on the warpath again. Yesterday, Kooken and Middlebrooks moved into a building like we are in. Last night when the trucks returned from town, some of the boys started to throw rocks on the slate roof. As a result, there were a couple of holes knocked in it. Kooken took his rifle and started to shoot up the roof of the other barracks. The throwing ceased.

Mark Morris recalls an incident that probably happened at about this time:

You recall that under our parachute harness, we wore a "Mae West" vest (a yellow inflatable life preserver that was to be used if you went down in the water). Also, I carried a rubber dinghy that was issued. It weighed about 20 pounds, was about a foot square and six inches thick. I lugged it aboard and fastened it with a strap to my chute harness. Once, while gathering my equipment from the locker room, a Major commented that no one with one of those small dinghies had ever been picked up out of the cold, rough North Sea. For all I know, that dinghy may still be in the locker room. I never bothered with it again.

It was about this time that Glenn Hall joined the 506th as a spare gunner. Hall recalls:

My first night was in the Nissen Hut with Anderson's enlisted men. They were drinking beer and kept saying they would like to fly 12 more Kiel missions in a row if they could go home.

I was sent to gunnery school at the Wash when the Group left for the Ploesti mission.

On the morning of June 26, nine 506th aircraft joined with 29 other 44th Bomb Group ships on a secret mission. The 506 contingent consisted of A/C #283, Z, Old Crow, McAtee crew; A/C #234, Bar U, Mr. Five By Five, Rebich crew; A/C #172, Bar N, Lynn Bari II, Anderson crew; A/C #282, Y, Ruth Less, Slough crew; A/C #201, Bar O, Baldy and His Brood, Strong crew; A/C #778, T, Southern Comfort, Austin crew; A/C #370, V Bar, Heaven Can Wait, Whitlock crew; A/C #606, X, Bunce crew; and A/C 787, B, Stevens crew. Bunker and his crew remained behind with the intention of joining us at a later point in time.

In his diary Mark Morris wrote:

June 26--"We packed and left for a destination unknown. After two hours flying, we landed at Port Wreath, Eng., near Lands End. There was lots of vibration and the nose tire seemed flat. The nose wheel is damaged. (Note, we had our ground crew and all of our gear, except our carbines which we left in room.) We were all called to the front of the plane for landing so weight was all

there. The tire didn't blow."

June 27--"The nose wheel was repaired, but now there is engine trouble, a bad plug in #3. We laid over, but Group the left."

June 28--"We took off alone with the *Old Crow*. Our destination is unknown. There was flak at Gibraltar. It was a nine-hour flight. We landed at Oran and stayed overnight."

June 29, "We took off for destination unknown. Landed Benghazi, Libya, after six-hour flight."

The Group report on this change of station indicated:

....3. All ground personnel, their equipment and personal effects, were transported by air in combat aircraft of the Group. The afternoon of 26 June, thirty-nine B-24's loaded with their crews and above mentioned ground personnel took off for Portreath, England.

....5. On the morning of 27 June thirty-nine B-24's took off from Portreath. The long trip to Oran was uneventful aside from some slight flak put up from Spanish Morocco. The night was spent in quarters of the old French airdrome at Oran. Takeoff in the morning was somewhat delayed because of difficulty in refueling. The takeoff was finally accomplished by noon. No briefing information for the remainder of the route was available at Oran except weather.

....6. In the late afternoon aircraft landed on Benina Airdrome. This airdrome was an old Italian field approximately 20 miles west of the city of Benghazi. It was currently in use as an operational field by the 98th Bomb Group of the IX Bomber Command.

....7. All personnel were housed in tents and nearly all ground departments were similarly housed. Mess, Headquarters, Briefing Room, Communications, Photographic and many other necessary facilities were made available by sharing the existing facilities of the 98th Group which had its full ground equipment. In addition, some additional personnel were obtained from MP units and from the detached ground echelon of a troop carrier unit and a service squadron.

I recall what it was like to be suddenly thrust into that flat featureless land of red dust and winds. Winds that started not long after sunup and quit just before the moon came into view. The land that was strewn with the debris of the struggles of many armies as they marched back and forth across its surface. It was not a hospitable place

Once our engines were cut, we were quickly greeted by two truck drivers who wanted to know what our Squadron number was. We were then instructed to load with our gear into the back of the trucks.

There did not appear to be any clearly defined roads, and the drivers seemed to just drive across the desert. They stopped at a lone standing tent that we learned was our Squadron Orderly Room. It did not seem to be different from other tents that were scattered near by. However, it did have ground level electric and telephone lines running into it from somewhere out in that desert.

The enlisted men were told to unload their gear and were then directed toward two tents--one for the air crew and the other for our mechanics who would share a tent with other squadron ground personnel. We were also told how fortunate we were. "Yesterday, everyone had to put up his own tent. You will have to put up the tent for the next arrivals".

Before the officers and their truck departed for their tent area, we were all instructed to immediately use the pick and shovel that was at each tent site. "Dig a slit trench in case of enemy air attack." What a way to welcome you to your new home! (Years later, McAtee told how he had written home to his wife and told her about digging a slit trench. In the return mail, his wife informed him that he had misspelled the word. An "h" was supposed to be where he had an "l".)

In the heat of the day, digging was hot work. We were informed that the dull green, wheeled water wagon that was parked not too far away was our sole source of water. "Fill your canteen, but be careful. Water is rationed." What a way to welcome you to your new home!

Where is the latrine? Well, do you see that barrel with the wooden top and the oil can next to it? Of course there is no privacy screen! Who is going to watch you. Oh! I forgot to tell you. They burn those barrels out each morning so be careful, they may be hot. Also, when they are burning stay up wind. It will smell better! What a way to welcome you to

your new home!

The tasks at hand kept us busy until dinner time. We were informed that we would need our aluminum mess gear if we were to eat. Where do you go? See that lone squat building way over there? That's it. Just get in line and soon you will be inside. The line will pass by the serving crew. Then you can try to find a place to sit down. When you have finished, get into the line going out the opposite end of the building that you came in.

That line will take you to the dish washing area. First there are a series of upright barrels for your scraps. Do a good job here since we do not want your garbage in the hot water. The boiling hot water is contained in a series of barrels that have been laid on their sides and cut in two. There are dish mops available at each barrel. Once again, do a good job since we do not want debris in the barrels of scalding rinse water that are next in line.

You will not be here very long before you learn the importance of keeping your mess gear clean. Food poisoning is not funny, and don't forget that there are no privacy screens on that 'John'. What a way to welcome you to your new home!

The ones who had been left in England were also leading a hard life. Bob Struble went for two weeks of gunnery school. He shot skeet, and met a lot of girls. Ray Marner was dancing at Covent Gardens in London.

Ray Marner noted:

The five combat crews that came in on June 19th left for combat training at Hardwick on June 26th. An additional 34 men left on detached service near the town of Newquay in southern England. About 3/4 of our Squadron is now on D.S. However, we got in some planes that were attached to us for a while. They had been on submarine patrol. At the end of the month we received word that Ruth Less went down in Spain. No particulars yet, but we believe they are okay. (This was a rumor, and not true.)

The following are extracts from letters to my wife during the month of June:

"I am sorry that I have gone back to v-mail. They are out of stationery in our P.X."... "Yes there are changes in the

crew, but they won't let me send pictures of more than two men in a group."..."I tore up my bed and hung the blankets outside over the barbed wire fence to air out."..."As we went into the mess hall they gave us each one egg. It seems we are going to get a few eggs per week. Now, that is the combat men. I don't know about the rest."..."Last night one of the boys came home pretty drunk. This morning when he woke up, he jumped up and hollered "My Face!" He then went outside looking. I rolled over and there on the floor were his false teeth. I called to him and told him to come back. He was very embarrassed. He didn't want us to know that he wore them."..."Don't you worry about my being broke. I almost always have between 10 and 20 dollars in my pocket in case we put down somewhere away from home field."..."The boys just came in and said that the island of Pantelleria fell without loss. Maybe not so very much longer. I have said ever since we got here that I would live to see my next birthday. I'll live to see home again."..."It was nice of you to send the box of candy. Thanks! The box that the peanuts were in was crushed a little, but not broken."..."I had Macaroni and Cheese tonight."..."Got up this morning and chopped some wood, swept out our apartment and then tore down my bike. This afternoon I cleaned the parts and put it back together."