



No Pause at Tripoli

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FIRST NURSES ARRIVE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

