

November 3, 1943.

SUBJECT: Historical Material (Supplementary).

TO: All Concerned.

SIGNIFICANT ACTIVITIES

OF

340th BOMBARDMENT GROUP - MARCH 12, 1943 - OCTOBER 31, 1943.

1. In the Tunisian campaign one raid in particular typifies the excellent work done by 340th Group. On May 6, 1943, in the area northwest of Medjez El Bab and on the road through that area to Tunis the 334th Division (German) was known to be retreating. At the same time it was holding up the First and Eighth British armies as the Germans fell back on Tunis. The area in question as well as the towns of Furna and St. Cyprien farther along the road to Tunis was alive with 88mm dual purpose guns which the enemy could use and had been using with good advantage. 340th Group sent 15 planes, along with 18 supplied by the 12th Group, to attack Furna at 0755 hours. The 340th planes dropped more than 24 tons on the road and town of Furna, turning the retreat in that area to a rout. At approximately 1400 hours the air attack shifted to St. Cyprien, 340th Group dropping eight tons from eight planes in company with nine planes of the 12th Group. Direct hits were scored on the town and fires started. The terrific anti-aircraft barrage that hit the formations at Furna was not repeated on the second target, 340th crews reporting the ack-ack "not as accurate as usual." As a result of these excellently executed close-support attacks the British 6th and 7th Armored Divisions swept into Tunis 30 hours after the attack started. The 340th Group achieved this success not without its price. Over Furna one aircraft was shot down, with the Group Commander, Col. William C. Mills, and the Group Bombing Officer, 1st Lt. Edgar C. Penney, and a gunner missing in action. The Group Navigation Officer, in the same plane, was so badly injured when he was found in a Tunis hospital that he was sent back to the United States, as was Capt. Donald Marcan, 487th squadron commander, pilot of the aircraft. Capt. Marcan lost his right hand. The flak on this raid also killed the operations officer of the 486th squadron, 1st Lt. Robert R. Bennett, and caused two other planes to make crash landings at the home base and another plane to be abandoned in air by its crew over the base.

2. In the last bombing raid of the Tunisian campaign - on May 12, five days after the occupation of Tunis by Allied forces, nine 340th Group planes attacked concentrations of motorized infantry of the German 90th Light Division at 1530 hours at Bou Ficha. About the same time nine planes of 12th Group and a formation of Baltimores from the 232nd Wing (RAF) hit the same target. The enemy was flanked on both sides by the 6th Armored division and the 56th division, both of which put down smoke lines defining the target. After the 340th planes bombed the area, white flags of surrender appeared in many places.

3. In the Pantellaria island campaign 340th Group was one of several American and British units that systematically smashed this Italian "Malta" and caused it to surrender through air attack alone, the first time in military history that such a victory had been won. The group flew approximately 200 sorties in this mass blitz, knocking out and helping knock out the harbor, town, landing field, gun emplacements, supply concentrations and other vital targets. Only two aircraft and one air crew member were lost in the campaign.

4. The operations of the 340th Group in Sicily were of two kinds, strategic - these were made for the most part prior to the Allied landings July 9,

1943, - and close support -made after the landings, in favor of the British Eighth Army and the American Seventh. The group flew approximately 1100 sorties in this campaign, dropped approximately 1500 tons of bombs on such vital airfields as Comiso and Biscari, and enemy supply lines and avenues of retreat at Randazzo, Adrano, Catania, and the Messina area. On August 6, 1943, the enemy was holding off the first Canadian infantry brigade south of Adrano, the road running north to Adrano being the point of contact for the opposing troops. In particular the enemy was using three 88 mm dual purpose guns to hold back the Canadians. 340th group sent 12 planes over at 1245 to drop 20 tons of bombs on this narrow line. The bombs landed 200 yards away from the Canadians, wiped out all three guns, and the Canadians swept through. "Raid extremely successful" they wired 340th.

5. In calling for attacks on enemy-held Randazzo a little later a spokesman for the ground forces said he "trusted your group won't smash Randazzo as badly as it did Adrano. It took our engineers 36 hours to make a single line traffic passage through the town." On August 6, the day of the Adrano raid, 340th group flew a record number of sorties, at least a record number for itself - 71 sorties on 6 separate missions. In the ten weeks and five days of this campaign the organization, flying day and night missions, lost 22 air crew members killed or missing, and 11 aircraft.

6. At the close of this campaign, on August 16, 1943, 340th Group had one of its most successful operational days, when it sent 36 planes in three waves to bomb the evacuation beaches at San Agata, north of Messina. The enemy was pouring out of the northeastern tip of Sicily in every kind and size of craft, the meanwhile throwing up an extremely accurate and intense heavy and light calibre anti-aircraft barrage. In the Messina area this barrage was described as the heaviest of the war. 340th Group's first mission hit the evacuation beaches squarely as ordered at 1105 hours, at least one motor torpedo boat taking a direct hit. Five minutes later the second mission put down an accurate pattern on the gun-littered, equipment laden beaches and roads, and at 1610 hours a third mission repeated the accurate pattern. Many casualties and extensive damage to equipment and evacuation boats were known to have been effected. These raids also contributed, undoubtedly, to the abandonment of Axis equipment as the army fled. We lost a plane and four crewmen.

7. In the Italian campaign shortly after the Salerno offensive opened September 9, 1943, 340th Group gave desperately needed assistance to the American Fifth Army beachhead by attacking in the Battipaglia area September 14. The enemy, following the initial success of the 56th Division (British 10th Corps) in occupying Battipaglia, recaptured the town September 15, and surging forward with violent counter-attacks against the 56th and the American 45th Division south of it, threatened to split the Salerno bridgehead in half. If this had happened a second Dunkirk might have materialized. It was prevented; the Allied Air Forces threw almost their full weight (Strategic Air Force as well as Tactical Air Force) against the enemy. 340th Group bombed early in the morning of September 14th, an important road junction near Pompeii in an attempt to create a road block that would forestall the launching of a German counter-attack from that sector. The target was solidly hit by the 12 planes sent out and no counter-attack developed there. Later in the day, at 1012 hours, 24 planes smashed at the Germans in Battipaglia and again at 1526 hours 24 repeated the attack. In these two mission 99 tons of bombs were dropped on the town. At other times during the day Mitchells, Mauders, and even Flying Fortresses battered the city. This air support won the day, forcing the enemy to fall back at a time when they threatened to crash through to the sea in strength. Capt. Samuel P. Shireman, a 340th Group pilot who had been shot down with his crew September 9 on a night raid on Grassano landing ground and who a few days later had occasion to talk to a 45th Division officer, reported the officer said a few German tanks actually did penetrate to the sea, but that the air attack was so effective that there was no possibility of the enemy's following up. This officer praised in particular the work

340TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP HISTORICAL MATERIAL (SUPPLEMENTARY), cont'd.

of the B-25's on that day, and said that without the terrific air support the ground forces could not have held out. The day's activities and their value were typical of the services given by 340th Group on the Salerno front during the week September 12 - 18 inclusive. During this period, flying both day and night missions, the group made approximately 325 sorties on 19 missions, dropped approximately 480 tons of bombs. This was the week of crisis on the Salerno front.

8. Throughout the month of October, 1943, the 340th Group executed several successful bombing missions despite two considerable operational difficulties, persistent bad weather and a ten-day move to a new base - from Catania airdrome, Sicily, to San Pancrazio airfield in the "heel" of Italy. Although several missions were weathered out before takeoff and six returned from the target with bombs because of total cloud coverage, the Group actually completed 17 missions involving approximately 250 sorties and dropped a bomb load of approximately 360 tons. Gun emplacements and road junctions in the Capua area were quite successfully hit on October 6 (at Cascano and Teano), on October 9, and twice on October 10; at Venafrò on October 22, and Terracina on October 19 and October 26. The October 26 raid was particularly effective in that the 21 planes attacking hit the three main roads entering the town.

9. In little more than six months of independent combat operations the 340th Bombardment Group flew 174 missions, with approximately 2817 sorties, and a dropped bomb weight of approximately 4056 tons. It lost 30 of its aircraft (counting those lost while operating dependently with the 12th Bombardment Group in March and April) and 61 men killed or missing in action.

10. These contributions to the Allied drive from El Azza, Tunisia, to Naples, Italy, are all the more impressive in that the 340th Group operated regularly under adverse conditions. Throughout the entire Tunisian campaign and the Pantellarian campaign the group functioned on begged and borrowed equipment living in semi-desert areas and poorly fed. In the Sicilian and Italian campaigns the combat crew members began to show marked signs of combat fatigue, and the ground personnel were likewise worn by the strain of day and night operations. Despite provisions made on paper for rest leaves for combat crew members every fifteen missions or so, a great number of the combat crew members who finished the fifty-mission tour did so with only a three day pass to break the strain of the grind. Men who were shot down and managed to return to the base were given ten day rest leaves if possible, but for the majority of the flying personnel it was almost day to day flying for seven and eight weeks at a time. Ground personnel in the same period averaged perhaps two or three one day passes.