

## HOW I GOT TO TORRETTA

*Many air crews, including those of the 461st and 484th Bomb Groups, owe their lives to the existence of the emergency landing fields on several Yugoslavian islands in the Adriatic sea. Member Bill Kinyoun, 496th Service Squadron, sent in this report of his experiences travelling via military transport to Torretta.*

*While on detached service, Bill's duties took him to the Island of Vis where he labored to restore battle damaged aircraft, that had landed or crashed on the Island, for ferrying back to Italian bases:*

January 13, 1944 that was our day. No one slept much that night we just laid in our bunks and wondered what was in front of us. We knew we were poorly trained men with little experience. As for myself I graduated from Aviation Cadet training at Yale University on September 9, 1943 as a 2nd Lt. I had had only 2 weeks trianing with the squadron in the field and that was on P-47 type aircraft. We were going overseas as a trained B-24 service squadron. While in Cadets at Yale, I had worked on a Liberator for a day and once during our two weeks trianing in Florida we worked on a B-24. We were to pick up a B-24 bomb group overseas, that we knew. Another thing, where are we going Europe, Mediterranean, Africa, India etc.?

We boarded a train and in an hour we were along side our ship. A little gray thing. How could that get across the water? Red Cross Gray Ladies were there to send us off with warm coffee as it was bitter cold and a GI orchestra was there to play a few march pieces.

I was platoon leader of the 1st platoon and consequently I was the first to lead the troops up the gang plank. We were carrying bed rolls, musette bags, overseas bags and besides I was carrying my flight bag. As I struggled up the gang plank under my load, Doc, Beck, Richardson and the enlisted men who were on the advance detachment met us with all kinds of remarks, joking and I quickly straightened up, looked around and snapped "where are the oars for this tub; they all laughed and 1st Lt. Bill Richardson took me to my quarters so I could get rid of my equipment and then we all placed the enlisted men in their quarters. When I saw what they had my heart bled for them. It was a shame to put men into a dirty hole like that. Approximately 500 men in bunks stacked 6 in a tier and a room not much bigger than 3 tennis courts put together. After we were all settled we went up on deck. Our first meal on the boat was good and while we were finishing it was dark and I was informed we were to pull out at dusk so

Richardson, Beck, and the rest of us went up on deck as we were MP's and were ordered by the transport commander to keep all the men below deck while we were pulling out of the harbor. It's a funny feeling that comes over you when they hoist the anchor and the boat pulls away and out into the Chesapeake Bay. We could see many lights in the bay and as we moved down the bay and out we finally dropped anchor in a few hours and waited most of the night then we could see the lights of the other ships doing the same and heard the noise of their anchor dropping. We knew then that the convoy was forming. At daybreak we hoisted anchor and on January 14th our convoy sailed out into the Atlantic to our unknown destination.

After we were about two days out we turned south toward Bermuda, a Navy blimp and seaplane came out and escorted us for awhile. We turned north and then changed our position about every fifteen minutes. We had a lot of ships in our convoy. I counted 97 with our destroyer escorts. After we were about 2 weeks out, British patrol planes picked us up and we were informed they were from the Azores. Then about daybreak the officer of the guard work me up and said he could see lights as if they were on land and thought we were at the straits of Gibraltar. He turned out to be right and the lights turned out to be Tangiers on one side and Tarifa Spain on the other side and we steamed through the Strait. We could look through the glasses and see people in the fields and finally we could see the rock of Gibraltar. By this time it was daylight and everone was on deck. One of the boys remarked "Gee there is no Prudential Life Insurance Sign on it." He was sure ribbed by those present.

Here at Gibraltar we picked up a Canadian Corvet squadron and they escorted us in the Mediterranean. We lost our American escort at Gibraltar. Lt. Ashley came running up and said we were going to Oran, we went past Oran as, we steamed down the mountainous African (North) coast. As we approached Algiers and were due south of the Baleric Islands our trouble really started. We had had submarine scares in the Atlantic but this was an aerial attack by the Germans. The flak put up by the ships in the convoy was intense. Beck and I were under cover watching when we both saw what appeared to be a man hit and leaning over the rail. I hit the deck with my steel helmet on and crawled with the shells hitting all around me to get the man. I reached up to pull him off the rail and it was a pair of overalls someone had washed and put there to

dry. I was glad no one was hit but felt mad I almost got killed saving a pair of overalls. I crawled back and almost got under cover when shells started to hit the deck again,\* then I got up and ran to cover diving like a swimmer for cover and fell right on top of Beck and Doc Krajec. Nothing was said. (\*Fragments of spent anti aircraft shells.)

None of us could sleep that night as we expected other attacks to follow as the wiping out of a convoy the size of ours would greatly aid the Germans. The following morning at 7:00 as I looked toward the north I heard a rapid succession of flak batteries come from the corvets and saw them shoot down a German observation plane.

As it came spinning down toward the water I looked to see if the pilot chuted out but saw no chute so I guess the pilot was killed by the flak barrage.

The following day was spent with one submarine scare after the other and a constant lookout for further attacks from the air. On February the fourth we sailed past a couple of small rocks. Our ship stopped and turned around. We didn't know what to think. Four other ships dropped out of the convoy and proceeded with us into the Bay of Tunis. We dropped anchor about a mile off of shore and could see a town with a lot of people. We saw several jeeps and war planes flying overhead. This was the first stop we made and we had now been on the boat 22 days. Looking around we could see beaches and sunken ships with stacks sticking over the water. The town turned out to be LaGoulette between Bizerte and Tunis. We stayed there at anchor for three days and were joined at anchor by 12 more ships on February 7 making 24 ships sitting here at anchor. The morale of our men was high but slowly slipping. At 2:30 p.m. on February 10th we hoisted anchor and sailed north toward Sicily. February 11 we passed about 2 miles off the west coast of Sicily and saw how rough and mountainous the terrain was. We all heartily agreed that the boys of the infantry had done a wonderful job capturing it as quick as they did, 18 days. That night as we were sailing north we could see a volcano glowing in the distance to the east of us. One of the sailors on board said it was near the Strait of Messina and in the Lipari group of islands. It was called Stromboli. On February 12 we sailed past the Isle of Capri and into the Naples harbor. It was here we first saw the destruction of war. Ships were sunk at the moorings and capsized in the bay. The buildings as far as we could see were in ruins. Mt. Vesuvius was directly in front of us and smoke was