

The fire department hosed out the mud as well as they could. We left the next day for Natal where we would jump off for Africa.

Traffic was backed up all the way to Algiers so we stood down at Natal for four days. Natal is drier than Belem and the remaining mud dried out. We cleaned up as much of it as we could and left for Dakar, French West Africa on the 25th.

As we reached the point of no return out over the Atlantic, Chief Engineer Marvin Fischer began to transfer fuel from the outboards to the main tanks. The fuel transfer pump was frozen. It wouldn't turn over: More mud. We started planning for a water landing somewhere off Dakar because we couldn't make it on the contents of the main tanks alone. Pretty soon there was a thumping sound in the bomb bay.

I looked back and saw Sgt. Fischer kicking hell out of the transfer pump which was fastened to the catwalk. It worked. The pump started up and he transferred our fuel and we made it into Dakar. The term "Give it a good kick" has had a special meaning for me ever since.

On March 26 1944, all of Crew #76 left Dakar for Marrakesh, Morocco. I'm a little hazy on details. This should be told by Jud Suddarth, our navigator. I remember the situation only because everything seemed to be working against us. Dakar operations told us to beware of a radio beacon that the enemy was using to decoy unwary pilots into serious trouble. There were mountains on our route almost 14,000 feet tall. We were to fly at 11,000 feet. We were to follow the Algiers radio range and it would guide us to the only pass through the Grand Atlas Mountain Range.

Any other pass at our altitude would be a box canyon without room to turn around. A crash for certain. The forecast was not reliable because a desert storm had moved into the area causing rapid wind changes. There were no pilot reports because we all kept radio silence. We went anyhow.

There was a terrific dust storm blowing in the Sahara Desert all the way to the Atlas Mountains obscuring the ground so we couldn't check our drift.

I don't think sunlines are of any use on a north south route. At least we didn't shoot any. The only radio signal we could receive was the decoy range which should be to the right of course if we assumed that it was somewhere inland. We used dead reckoning.

As we neared the mountains the dust thinned out and we could make out the entrance to a pass, so we headed for it. Just like Dakar said. It was a dead end. All we could do was try to turn around while climbing desperately.

It looked like we were not going to make it. About half way through the turn the hills were getting very close when we spotted a



Some of the 824 Sq Medical group standing in front of the squadron's ambulance and dispensary. Preston Wade Photo 824 Sq.

narrow canyon heading back to the southwest. We ducked into it even though it appeared not much wider than our wing span. A short way further and we turned sharply to the right and could see the flat ground north of the mountains. Now, after we didn't need it, the legitimate radio range came in loud and clear. We had come through the hills to the right of course, mighty close to Jebel Toubkal, Elevation 13,665 Ft. (I looked it up.)

The final stop before reaching Torretta was Djedieda on the outskirts of Tunis where we were to be checked out once more before going into combat.

I guess we needed it because we had to repeat at least one check flight. We couldn't satisfy the powers in charge.

The facilities at Djedieda were primitive. We had pyramidal tents ok, but no beds to sleep on. The ground was rocky and buggy and the reed mats we bought from the natives to keep our stuff out of the dirt helped very little.

The heating system is worthy of comment. Stoves were made from half of a fifty five gallon drum with a length of sewer pipe for a chimney. The fuel was captured German gasoline. The gas was in low pressure oxygen tanks which fed gas onto the ground under the stove via a length of hydraulic tubing. They were almost impossible to regulate and would either shoot flame out the sides of the stove or die completely out. Many people got scorched trying to fool with these things and at least one was severely burned when his tent caught fire.

Food was prepared in the open under a canvas fly. Italian prisoners of war did the KP. We ate under the skies.

### **If you wanted a bath, the largest tub was your helmet.**

If you wanted a bath, the largest tub was your helmet. For a shower, you had to go to the Tunis YMCA. I felt squeamish about using those showers because the walls had a layer of soap so slick that you couldn't lean against them to scrub your feet without slipping. The local population had no soap and I wondered why someone wasn't scraping it off and selling it on the black market. I remember taking only one shower during the seventeen days we spent there.

We were finally sent off to Torretta on April 14th. The trip was uneventful but half way across the Mediterranean we all had to go back to Djedieda again to be searched for stowaways. An Italian POW was missing. They found him in somebody's cargo rack. We felt sorry for the poor guy. His war was over so all he wanted to do was get back home.

At Torretta our Squadron area wasn't ready yet: No tents. We spent the first night at the air base group. They treated us like royalty, setting us up with the latest style padded flying gear and feeding us steak. They had been sharing warehouse space in Bari with the Quartermaster Corps and the Quartermaster had complained to security about some missing supplies and security was investigating. I am sure that it was just a coincidence that they gave us all that good stuff.

The next day we moved to our squadron area and got first pick of tent locations. We chose our spot under a locust tree on a slight rise overlooking a small lake which eventually became the baseball diamond as summer drew on.

These are my memories of my stay with the 827th Bomb Squadron from its beginning until the time it entered combat.

THE END