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# The Way it Looked to Me

*By Rex Bennett, 824 Squadron*

There are two ways to look at every event: the way a newspaper writes and you read about it, and the way it is from a participant's viewpoint. This holds true for a football game, a political rally, a murder, or a war. I'm going to give you the story as the newspapers gave it, and the story behind the news as I saw it, on combat missions with the Fifteenth Air Force. I'm going to tell you of mistakes made, a little about the personalities of the crew members, and a whole lot of the history of the 484th Bomb Group, 824 Squadron, the way it looked to me.

Our group, composed of four squadrons, was trained as a complete unit in the States. This included officers and enlisted men, both flying and non-flying, as well as the medical units for each squadron. Going overseas as a complete group had many advantages. The crews were all personally acquainted with their flight leaders, and the bonds of friendship provided a well-knit group of men with high morale and "esprit de corps". We all had the highest of confidence in, and the greatest of respect for, our commanding officers. We flew, as did each new group, several easy missions to condition the crews for combat. We went into combat supremely confident of our ability and extremely concerned about the future. As a seasoned group, we made a record of which I am justifiably proud.

On a day when newspapers carried this choice morsel of news, "American Liberators bombed German installations in northern France carrying the huge pre-invasion air offensive into its 18th consecutive day", our group was flying its third mission and many of us our first. The target for the day was Parma, Italy. The group base was located in the south eastern portion of Italy,

some forty miles from Bari, and the route for this mission took us west across Italy, out over the Mediterranean, and up along the west coast. We saw smoke on shore and many ships off shore which located the embattled Anzio beach head. I wondered then, as I did every time we flew past that



spot, if our flying by gave their morale a lift as they lay in their foxholes. Upon reaching a point opposite our target, we turned in-shore, crossed the coast and, just before reaching the target, we ran into the clouds. Clouds in the sky are exactly like fog on the ground and flying into them in formation will result inevitably in a collision of at least a few of the forty-two planes flying close formation. The group leader turned sharply to avoid this catastrophe and our squadron, flying the inside of the turn, was unable to stay in position and became separated from the group. Before we were able to rejoin the group, they had bombed the secondary target, La Spezia. The squadron leader, not to be thwarted on his first mission, started his own bombing run. Just short of the target, four large blooms of flak suddenly appeared before his nose and so disconcerted him that he turned away, the rest of us, six ships in all, following like sheep. He circled the target and then suddenly turned toward the target nosing his airplanes down as he made the

turn. This loss of altitude sent us hurtling across the target at a considerably higher than normal air speed. The squadron bombardier opened the bomb bay doors and, after a short interval, which gave us time to open ours, released his bombs, I know, without using his bombsight. We then "got the

hell out of there," as my bombardier later told the interrogation officer. To the surprise of all, pictures showed our bombs landing on a ship in the harbor and adjoining warehouses. So ended mission number one, forty-nine yet to go.

This amazing episode was followed two days later by a practice mission. On take-off, a pilot, who during training had collided with another ship and had killed the crew, raised his wheels too quick and settled back on the ground wrecking the airplane. The remainder of the group continued on the practice mission and an air collision resulted in the damaging of two planes, which, however, were able to land. The bombardier and navigator in one of the ships "bailed out" as soon as the collision occurred without waiting to determine the seriousness of the damage. The navigator had his life jacket on and was later picked up. The bombardier had left his life jacket in his tent and had to swim for an island nearby. After reaching the island nearly exhausted, he was forced back in the water because the island was used as the target for practice missions and another group was on a bombing run. He was the victim of much good natured kidding thereafter because, "the way you bombardiers bomb, the center of the island was the safest place to be".

The newspaper account, "Liberators and Flying Fortresses perhaps 500-750