

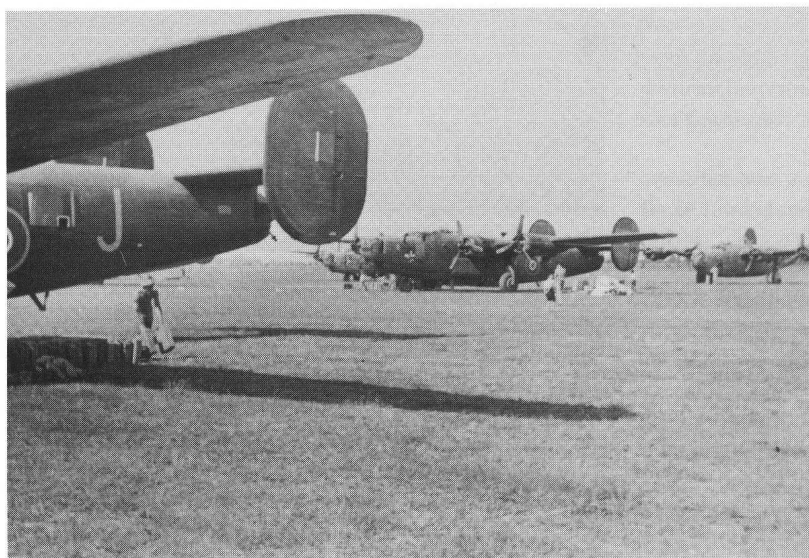
go round again and drop the rest of the bomb load. On approaching the target we were immediately subjected to deadly-accurate flak and after a brief discussion with our bomb-aimer we decided to use the marker-bombs dropped by two Libs who were ahead of us. The bomb-run was very 'dicey'. When the bomb-doors were closed, full power was applied and a steep climbing turn executed. My hands were shaking so violently that I couldn't make my log entry for several minutes.'

Having so many groups in such a confined area caused many problems, as Frank Mortimer recalls: 'Foggia Plain comprised four airfields very close to each other. The flight paths overlapped and the risk of collision was very high. On one occasion two Liberators collided and we had to take the corpses to Bari cemetery. We collected them from the hospital in Foggia which was piled up with coffins. While going through the dock area an ammunition ship exploded and within minutes we were surrounded by hundreds of running Italians. 'As a result of the collision an order was made stating that the rear gunner had to remain in his turret

to look out and warn of collision. Inside the tail turret was a notice which said OWING TO HIGH ACCELERATION GUNNERS MUST NOT LAND WHILE IN THE TURRET The first time I actually landed in the turret it was a daylight raid. We had been warned to brace ourselves because the tail unit shook terrifically on a tricycle undercarriage but fortunately it was a very smooth landing. An aircraft rarely lands straight, it lands sideways, and this causes a lot of acceleration. The second time I landed in the turret was after a night raid and I suppose I was a bit cocky and didn't brace myself. I remember that I banged my head on the gunsights.

'The other dangerous practice was dropping the photoflash to enable us to make a photo record of the bombing. It was a very dangerous 'pyro' in a long cylinder about three foot long, and usually dropped at the same time the bomb-aimer called "bombs away".'

'It was well known that many photo flashes had hung up in the bomb-bay and blown the aircraft in two. Our pilot was very wary of them and asked the rear gunner to throw it out of the rear turret during bombs away. The flash had two safety devices on it. Two wires like hooks on a fishing line connected the fuse to two lines clipped on to the side of the fuselage. It was my job to see that the two fuses came out as the 'pyro' descended. It was a very 'Heath Robinson'



*British Liberators on a transport mission probably after the war in Europe ended.*

affair and extremely frightening. Prior to throwing out the photo-flash we had to jettison large bundles of leaflets out of the window.

'The rear turret was fitted out for electrical flying-suits although we didn't get these until the end of the war. Owing to dampness in the tents we got a lot of shorting out. On one raid my gloves caught fire and I had to throw them out of the turret. After that I used only silk gloves. My main clothing was two pairs of silk underpants, two vests, probably a shirt and RAF pullover, plus an inner suit. There was no way I could wear an Irvine jacket in the cramped confines of the turret.'

By early 1945 the war seemed to get more vicious rather than the reverse. During a briefing RAF Liberator crews learned that one airman who had baled out had been hanged on the nearest lamp-post by Italian fascists. RAF Liberator crews were still coming through to replace those lost on

operations although their training was not as complete as it could have been. Deryck Fereday, a pilot who joined 178 Squadron in March 1945 recalls: 'Pilots for 178 Squadron were taken from those who had undergone the OTU (Operational Training Unit) on Wellingtons-several in Palestine. Then instead of going straight to a squadron at Foggia they went to 1675 HCU (Heavy Conversion Unit) at Abu Suair, Egypt. The OTU course was five weeks and HCU only

three. I still cannot believe that in so short a time I sufficiently mastered the intricacies of such an advanced aircraft to be entrusted with the lives of seven men and 8,000 lb of high explosive, not to mention thirty tons of Liberator. I joined 178 Squadron at Amendola along the Manfredonia road from Foggia, which we shared with 614 Pathfinder Squadron-just converting From Wellingtons to Liberators. The airfield had only one runway, 2,000 yards long (essential for a fully loaded Liberator), constructed of perforated steel planking laid straight on the

ground. The surface was far from level with plenty of friction to retard acceleration on take-off. With only one runway it meant that we could be as much as ninety degrees out of wind which presented severe flying problems.

'Operations were mainly to northern Italy, Austria, and Yugoslavia, and nearly all the raids, until towards the end of the war, were to railway junctions. I did just two daylight raids, both to coastal targets. It would have been suicide to have tried to go inland with our depleted fire-power but a hit-and-run raid could be pulled off.

'A typical raid took about five hours, usually taking off at 22.00 or 23.00 hours and returning in the small hours of the morning. For a maximum effort the Group could muster about seventy aircraft. For a 'sustained effort' this was cut back to about forty or fifty aircraft to ensure enough carry-over of serviceable aircraft to the next night. The Liberators had a much better serviceability

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