

WORLD WAR II
COMMEMORATIVE
GROUP (W)



Flight of the Vulgar Vultures
1943-1945

740th Squadron

The following consists of quotes and excerpts from historical records prepared by our fine 740th Intelligence Officer, Leroy A. Crum, and personal accounts of experiences by squadron personnel during the combat months in Italy. Leroy not only served as the Squadron Intelligence Officer, but taught courses in business management, advertising and salesmanship to the officers and men who wanted to further their education while in the combat theatre.

Combat Begins

Each squadron had its own flight surgeon and medical staff. They diligently worked to keep the health and well-being of the squadron personnel in top condition to meet the rigors of the environment, long working hours and flying combat. This is a description of the duties of the medical section as defined by Captain James S. Gosman, our fine squadron flight surgeon: "In view of the necessity for absolute physical fitness required in high altitude flying, it was necessary to hold two periods for routine sick-call in order to accurately determine those not qualified



First Squadron Commander Lt. Col. William Keefer.

for flying on the following days. It was found that these periods did not suffice and that constant attendance at mission briefings was necessary to meet the demands placed on the medical section. Early morning briefings had to be attended in order to ascertain the reactions, processing and habits of the personnel during these periods. Following these briefing periods, last minute medical attendance was always in demand. The ambulance staff covered all takeoffs and landings and emergency treatment of battle casualties returning from operational missions. Instructions in the physiology of flight, use of oxygen and its equipment and other high altitude flying equipment were given. Advising the removal of personnel from flying when it became apparent they were not psychologically adjusted to continue in this capacity were problems met by the medical section."

Our first several missions, starting 12 February 1944, were relatively easy with little flak and no enemy fighters which gave us a little more time for training and seasoning. This soon changed on the 25th when the target was the Graz-Thalerhoff Airdrome in

Austria defended by both flak and enemy fighters. We lost Lt. Cleland and his crew that day, our first combat loss. There were somber faces that evening.

The decorations started early. Captain Alfred Asch, Squadron Operations Officer, was first to be recommended for an Oak Leaf Cluster for the Air Medal. He had completed 28 missions in the 8th Air Force before being assigned to the squadron, and completed two more missions during the month of February, making a total of 30. Captain William E. Keefer, Squadron Commander, also completed 20 missions in the 8th Air Force before joining the group at Clovis when it was activated. He had received the Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal with three Clusters and several campaign ribbons.

On 19 March the mission was the Graz-Thalerhoff Airdrome, Austria, a very heavily defended target. All squadron planes were returning home with the main formation when there was a midair collision over Tremeiti Island in the Adriatic Sea. The pilots were Lt. Albert A. Lundwall and Lt. James (Jimmie) Pidcock. Lt. Lundwall was flight leader of "F" box with Jimmie flying on his right wing. The collision was severe and tore both airplanes apart in midair with debris floating through the formation causing considerable damage to other aircraft of the formation. No one knew the cause of the collision and there were no parachutes seen leaving the airplanes. Their crews were part of the original complement and well-liked by everyone. It was indeed difficult for everyone in the squadron to recover from the tragic accident.

A Small Diversion from Combat

On 31 March, it was pay day. The

PX had chocolate bars for the first time, two to each man. Donations were made at the end of the pay line for building an enlisted men's club. A total of \$1,593.18 was collected, demonstrating the willingness of the men to help themselves make life more pleasant.

The Combat Crews Never Gave Up



T/Sgt. W. Lipps, "Too close for comfort!"

These are accounts of the experiences of three combat crews that flew on the mission to Steyr, Austria on 2 April 1944 to bomb the important German ball bearing and aircraft factories. The first account is of Lt. John L. Bethune and his crew. On the way to the target, several of the B-24's of his flight did not take off or dropped out of the formation before reaching the target. Bethune kept moving up in the formation to where he was leading the flight with only three airplanes rather than the normal six. This left the flight more vulnerable to fighter attack. Bethune knew he should not turn back as it would leave the main formation more vulnerable to attack with fewer airplanes.

Bethune started having trouble on #2 engine but was able to hold his position in the formation. About one and a half hours before arriving at the target, the crew noted a terrific dog fight off to the left between German fighters and

our P-38's. Those little airplanes were all over the sky. Then some of the German fighters started attacking Bethune's flight. The plane received no damage with their first pass but Harry Prosser's airplane flying on Bethune's right wing had his right rudder ripped to shreds. Nevertheless, he was able to hold his position in the formation. With the next attack, all hell broke loose in Bethune's airplane. The interphone system was shot out and the radio operator, Riley, was told to go to the back of the airplane and have everyone switch to the command channel. He found "Pop" Bodley, the left waist gunner, sprawled out bleeding heavily from wounds in the chest and right arm. Vick, the ball turret gunner, was struggling to free himself as the power to his turret was shot away and Brown, the right waist gunner, was suffering from a wound in his right ankle. Nevertheless, Brown was using a canvas cloth to extinguish a fire burning around Pop's oxygen mask. Churchill, the tail turret gunner, was wounded in his right leg and was struggling to get out of his turret.

Riley adjusted Pop's oxygen mask after the fire was out and made him as comfortable as possible after insuring he was getting oxygen. Brown, with his wounded leg took up the waist gun position and continued to fire at incoming fighters. Vick, who had freed himself from the ball turret, helped Churchill from the tail turret and put him on oxygen from another position. He then got into the tail turret and fired upon the incoming fighters. Lt. Adkisson, the co-pilot, left his position with a walk-around oxygen bottle and assisted the wounded crew members by administering first aid and insuring they were getting oxygen. Bethune fought to keep the flight in formation with the rest of the group, bombed the

target and brought the badly damaged airplane and wounded crew back to the base. All recovered from their wounds and flew another day. Harry Prosser also got his airplane back to base and landed safely with his right rudder shot away and with other damage.

Lt. John J. Power, Jr. was first pilot on the same mission. Just before the target, the fighters hit his left wing and one engine and they caught fire. Their guns kept blazing and finally eight men were seen to bail out and their chutes opened just before the airplane crashed into the nearby mountains. All the men lost were on their first mission except Power who was a seasoned combat pilot.

Lt. George Scrimshaw's crew also flew the Steyr mission and their airplane received considerable damage from fighter attacks. It had numerous holes from flak and 20 mm guns from enemy fighters. One engine was damaged and feathered. Oil was coming from another and gasoline was leaking from one of the fuel tanks. They had used up all their ammunition in the battle that raged for more than an hour against enemy fighters. Scrimshaw got his airplane back and landed safely. After each crew member received his shot of booze, doughnuts and coffee, debriefing and supper, the crew came en masse to the operations tent asking for a replacement airplane to fly the mission the next day. This was a great display of dedication and leadership by Scrimshaw and his crew. The crew finished their combat tour in record time without an abort and returned to the States.

On 3 April the squadron provided nine B-24's for the mission against the Budapest main marshalling yard where heavy flak and fighter attacks were encountered. Flak holes in four of the airplanes were repaired so efficiently and speedily that they were available for

the next day's mission. On this mission, the fine aerial engineer on Harry Prosser's crew, T/St. Samuel F. Austin, escaped serious injury when shrapnel broke his goggles. During a previous raid, Sgt. Austin missed injury when his flying boots stopped shrapnel from lodging in his foot.

A Day Off for the Crews

On 8 April, the mission was "scrubbed" and it was declared PX day. Beer was sold to the men for the first time since the PX was open for business.

On 16 April, the African-European Theatre Campaign ribbon with a Star for the Italian Campaign was given to the squadron.

A piano was given to the squadron by the 15th Air Force Special Services Office and it wasn't long before Sgt. George Heibel was playing "Boogy-Woogy" music over the "ivories." The men were lulled to sleep that night by a real "Boogie Beat."

Missed Communications

On the 28 April mission to the Bucharest marshalling yards, Lt. Willie Moore's airplane was badly damaged in the nose section by flak and fighters. The bombardier and navigator in the nose section lost their intercommunication system with the pilot and were concerned about the plight of the B-24. One stuck his head in the navigation bubble to see the pilot, and Willie gave him the "thumbs up" signal. This was taken as an order to bail out so both the navigator and bombardier parachuted out over enemy territory. Willie was able to get his damaged airplane as far as Lake Verona, Italy where the rest of the crew bailed out. They had been given up for lost when at midnight we received a telephone call from the 5th Army that they were safe.

The Improving Living Conditions



Tenting tonight!



740th Squadron area.

Corporal Walter Mislik gave a piano accordion recital over the squadron's loudspeaker system. It was mighty good music!

On 15 May the combat crews were given a first-hand lecture on escape and evasion by an officer who recently escaped from enemy territory after eight months of evading the enemy.

On 16 May there was another stand-down. It seems as though where there is a G.I. there is a dog. It looked like a dog town instead of a squadron area. Even the photo section had a pup named Fido. A few other names given to the dogs were Teenie, Tar, Rogers, Petesakes, Sally and Wumpus. Not only were there dogs as pets to relieve tension, there was a monkey, parrot and even a lizard.

Pfc. John Macario was dumfounded when his Dad suddenly popped his head inside his tent. Pop flew all the way from Africa to Naples, hitchhiked from Naples to San Giovanni to see his son for the first time in 18 months. Pfc. Macario was given a pass so both father and son could visit their grandparents in southern Italy.

On 18 June, the new mess hall opened for the first time for a breakfast meal. No one could believe it but everyone was pleased. It was described as luxurious, palatial and comfortable.

At a short squadron meeting, the 1st Sergeant stated that the new enlisted men's club would officially be opened in eight days. The squadron historian of the club, Sergeant Mastroleo, in charge of the employment of Italian labor, promptly hired ten more men to speed up the construction. At its opening, wine, cognac and soft drinks were served.

On 28 June, the squadron had a very rare delicious fried chicken supper. Major Coons from Group Headquarters smelled it and followed his nose to our mess. We were pleased to have him as our guest. On the following night, the squadron was served ice cream and American canned beer was sold at the enlisted men's club for the first time. As canned beer was new to the men, they did not know how to open the cans. They finally jammed holes in the cans by using their knives and the warm beer squirted in their faces. It, nevertheless, was enjoyed.

On 21 July, the new officer's club was opened. The interior with its modern bar and fine furniture brought home comfort to the officers.

A Crew Limped Home

On 25 July the group bombed the Herman Goering Tank Works at Linz, Austria. Lt. Riley's airplane was hit by

flak over the target and he had to feather two engines; he gave the "stand-by" signal to his crew for bail out. He managed to bring one engine back to life and to reach the coast of Italy when the engine had to be feathered again. Once more the "stand-by" signal was given. Suddenly, the other two engines stopped for lack of gasoline. All bailed out and landed safely in the vicinity of San Severo and were greeted by the neighboring civilians who kissed the crew's hands and exclaimed: "Thank God you are safe!" It wasn't until late that night that the crew arrived home. Lt. Clowery, a fine bombardier, was one of those who bailed out. What a way to complete his last (50th) mission.

There is Always Training

Seems like the personnel were getting back to their old Army school days when link training, turret, bombsight and navigational classes, and night flying were scheduled. For night flying, the planes usually took off around 2300 hours and landed at 0400 hours.



Party time!

Time Out for Social Activities

The officers had a dance at their club with music furnished by the group band. As for girls, Red Cross Hostages, British WAF's and a few local Italian girls who were employed by the Allies

were guests. Everyone had an enjoyable time. The mission the next day was a long one, to Lyon Port Herriot Oil target in France. Captain Ohlmeyer, bombardier, Captain Gross, navigator, and Major Asch led the Group; 93% of our bombs fell within 1,000 feet of the aiming point. It was the highest accuracy achieved up to that time.

Some Clothing Arrived Late

It's better late than never! On 20 August, some of the original crew members received their duffel bags just in time to take them back to the States as they had completed their tours.

Crews Were Injured in Strange Ways

The target was the Moravaska Ostrava Tank Works in Czechoslovakia. Lt. Felder was flying in one of the diamond positions in the second section. He was forced to make an early return as a spent .50 caliber casing from one of our planes crashed through his windshield and severely wounded Felder in the head. In landing, his right wheel collapsed and the plane swerved to the right, severely damaging the right wing and two engines. The B-24 was scrapped for spare parts. The crew scrambled from the plane unhurt except for Felder who recovered in the hospital.

Above and Beyond the Call of Duty

In September, S/Sgt. Albert Alt, one of the original squadron crew members, completed his 50th mission and earned the long cherished "ticket" home. He had been wounded twice and each time was grounded but Ault requested to participate in further combat flights. For his extraordinary achievement and heroism, Sgt. Alt was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

A Surprise Inspection

The squadron had a surprise tent inspection and as a result, approximately 50 enlisted men participated in close order drill. They were warned of future surprise inspections so after that, the tents were maintained in "tip-top" order.



Squadron Staff. Front row, l to r: Ohlmeyer, Compton, Gross. Back row, l to r: Asch, Keefer, Miller.

Distinguished Accomplishments

Captain Harold Ohlmeyer, former squadron bombardier, received his orders to return to the United States. As the squadron bombardier, he achieved one of the highest bomb scoring percentages in the Air Force. Fred Gross, the fine squadron navigator, deserves some credit for Harold's accomplishments. Fred was an outstanding navigator and he always brought the formation exactly over the IP and the briefed heading to the target. Very few course corrections had to be made from the IP to the target. Fred made it easy for the bombardiers and pilots through his precise navigation.

Captain James Gosman, squadron flight surgeon, was awarded the Legion of Merit for exceptionally meritorious

conduct in the performance of outstanding service for a most conspicuous record of medical achievements. This was the only record found for the award of the Legion of Merit within the squadron.

The 740th had the distinction of having the only flying First Sergeant in the Air Corps. First Sergeant Charles Adams was placed on flying status and he distinguished himself as a flight crewman. After completing five missions, he received his battlefield promotion to a commissioned officer.

S/Sgt. Max C. Lewis received his T/Sgt. stripes for his efficient and courageous work as a crew member. The Sergeant completed 88 combat missions and two combat tours in the Theatre; 53 missions on his first tour, flying from North Africa and 35 missions with the squadron on his second tour. He was credited with two enemy fighters destroyed on his first tour and was awarded the Air Medal with 13 clusters. He also earned several campaign ribbons and the Good Conduct Medal.

Improvements Continued

The engine change building was completed at the line, another great gain in aiding the Allies to victory. The building held eight engines for storage and two more for assembly.

A large number of improvements were made by Captain John Davis, the Squadron Adjutant, particularly as to meals. Soup started to be served for noon chow every other day and the quality of meals improved. The Italian mess workers improved their building to make working conditions much better. Captain Davis also implemented procedures to keep the pay line moving at pay call to save time and improve morale.

Changing Squadron Commanders



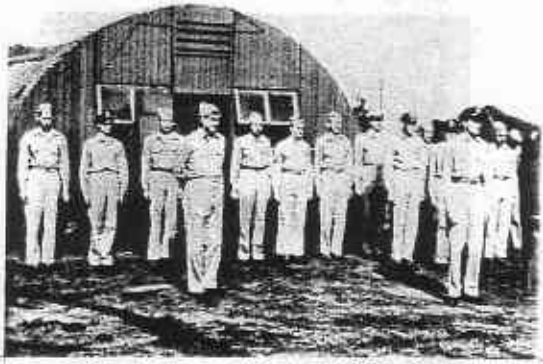
David Harp, second 740th Squadron Commander.

Lt. Col. David Harp, who had replaced Major Keefer as Squadron Commander, completed his missions and was ordered to the States. Before leaving he "buzzed" the field twice with a B-24. Everyone was outside their tents to watch him say "Good-bye" by brushing the dust from the tent tops. Major Francis C. Doring, a former member of the Flying Tigers in China, replaced Col. Harp as Squadron Commander. He was most welcome with his combat experience.

Another Change in Command

On 3 March 1945, Major Smith was relieved of his command and transferred to the 743rd as Commanding Officer. Captain Betke was relieved as Operations Officer and assumed command of the 740th Squadron.

On 1 March, Major Herbert A. Meyer became the Squadron Commanding Officer. The war was over and the squadron turned its energies toward making things ready for the occupation forces.



Decoration Awards Ceremony.



740th Squadron staff administrative headquarters. Front row, l to r: L. Ward, J. Villemez, C. Adams, M. Post. Back row, l to r: Unk, Unk, J.B. Goodrich, E. Koch, B. Furlow.



Riding in style l to r: J. Brown, R.L. Spires, A. Burke.



"I'm only going to tell you once, this is a prop." L to r: Smith; Betsinger.



740th Squadron maintenance personnel.



Just relaxing! l to r: P. Harrell, P. Cramer, J. McGowan, Unk.



740th Squadron headquarters staff.



740th Squadron operations. L to r: Ohlmeyer, Asch, Gross, Miller.



740th Squadron engineering. L to r: Spires, Brown, Foith, Ringsted.



Falkowitz hard at work.



Down by the old line shack...

741st Squadron

The 741st squadron crews followed the same route to Italy as the others except five were ordered to land at a small field with a dirt runway at Chateaudun, Algeria. All other airplanes landed at Djedeida. Although the two airfields were only 50 miles apart, neither the squadron nor the five crews knew the whereabouts of the other. There was a service squadron in charge of maintaining the airfield at Chateaudun but were in the process of moving out. The two senior officers of the 741st, 1st Lts. Lawrence F. Liberty and Louis L. Nangeroni, convinced the service squadron commander, a captain, to stay a few days until the lost crews could find their squadron. The crews needed tents, cots, blankets and food. Liberty and Nangeroni organized a radio watch to monitor the interplane frequency of the squadron to determine their whereabouts. On the fourth day, contact was made and it was learned that the five crews should have gone into Djedeida. During the four-day delay, there was a shortage of food so the crews bargained with the local Arabs for almost everything they ate: chickens, bread, wine, etc. One tent caught fire and burned to the ground with bedding and clothing lost. On the



*741st Squadron Commander Lt. Col.
Horace Lanford.*

fifth day, the crews started leaving for Djedeida. Their airplanes were in bad shape yet flyable. Lt. Eugene Hudson could not get his airplane started as the auxiliary generator (putt putt) would not run and provide electricity for the engine starters. They took a putt putt from another airplane that had been started and installed it in Hudson's to get his B-24 running. It worked and all five airplanes took off and joined their squadron at Djedeida.

When the squadron flew into Cerignola, Italy on 1 February 1943, one could see from the air that much would need to be done to provide the basic comforts for the men and acquire the minimum supporting equipment and facilities for the maintenance of our B-24's. After landing, all the airplanes had to be lined up wing-tip to wing-tip because there wasn't enough pierced-steel planking for hard stands and taxi ways. This presented a most inviting target for an air attack which, fortunately, never came. Eventually, enough planking was obtained for each hard stand which improved working conditions for the maintenance engineers and better dispersal of our aircraft against air attacks.

Although the basic character of the

squadron had developed during training, its development continued under combat conditions but at some cost. For example, the four officers of each combat crew were quartered in one tent and the six enlisted men in another. The Squadron Commander, Horace Lanford, adopted a policy of having the operations sergeant on duty wake the crew commander scheduled for a mission that day. The crew commander was then responsible for waking the rest of his crew, the officers and airmen, and getting them to the group briefing on time. The penalty for violating this policy consisted of fining the crew commander \$50 (to be placed in the officer's club fund) if he failed to get his crew to the briefing on time. There was an alternative, the off-track crew commander was given the choice of a court martial if he refused to pay the fine. One such officer refused to pay the fine and chose the latter. Because a court martial procedure would have taken the time of many people away

from the combat objectives, the pilot was denied a promotion and transferred to a fighter squadron where he became successful. There were no more crews late for briefing!

Personal Flying Equipment

Captain Harold F. Schuknecht, the fine squadron flight surgeon, provided an evaluation of the personal flying equipment for the first three months of operational flying: February, March and April of 1944. The temperatures during these months at 20,000 feet ranged from -20°F to -50°F. The gloves and boots of the electrically heated uniforms were entirely inadequate, both in quantity and quality. Twenty cases of frostbite were treated of which three were hospitalized. Frost bite of the fingers and toes was a major problem. With care, all persons recovered. Quantity deficiencies were slowly remedied by the use of British equipment. The use of silk liners in gloves was found especially effective and the use of a pair of light-



Capt. Schuknecht's medical staff.