

October 1988

A D D E N D U M T O A P P E N D I X

of

World War II Diary

of

Donald J. Tolle
(May 1987 edition)

The following items are brief expansions or vignettes relating to some of the entries in the diary. In each case, I will give an actual diary entry to locate the approximate place and time of an event and then go on to add information not included in the original account. These new notations are based upon my own recollections and in some few instances upon something one or another 47th Bomb. Group veteran has said to me since copies of the diary were given out in Long Beach, California, in May 1987. Forgive any disparities between fact and fiction which may have occurred because of faulty memory. And remember that I am writing this in major part for my children and other family members. (The items below are frequently not in chronological order.)

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Fri., Dec. 25, 1942--Ate Xmas dinner above the clouds between Blida and Youks. Dinner consisted of cheese and crackers. Two old-timers got air sick after telling us not to puke on them!

J. Owen ("Mother") Howard contacted me after reading the diary and asked why I hadn't gone ahead and named the two "old-timers," whom he identified as himself and Dick Gallup. The truth was that I didn't remember exactly who the two were after all these years, and also I didn't know whether they would have appreciated being labeled in that way. But J. Owen even went a step farther: He admitted that he had drunk a large quantity of the local vino ("P.D."--"Purple Death") the previous night (Christmas Eve) and that that was the reason for his digestive upheaval on the plane. (Dick Gallup, no doubt, had his upset stomach because of the sumptuous C-ration lunch we had in the air!)

Sun., Jan. 10, 1943 (Thelepte)--Field strafed by four ME-109's. We had a "dogfight" to liven up breakfast.

Mon., Jan. 11, 1943--Four ME's strafed field again. Another show for breakfast. A major across the field was killed.

Using descriptive terms such as "a 'dogfight' to liven up breakfast" and "another show for breakfast" sounds to me now like youthful bravado to cover up the fact that I was scared during the bombing and strafing raids we had at Thelepte and later. I was scared; but let me

confess that after the first couple of raids I felt almost a sense of exhilaration in discovering that I was deeply afraid only during the attacks, much less so between them. I think that none of us really knew how we would react to someone's trying hard to kill us, until we faced the reality directly. That's the reason I had such a sense of relief to find that I didn't have to spend an undue amount of time after a raid worrying about the next one ("Sufficient to the day is the evil thereof" and all that). But enough of philosophy and psychology.

Our kitchen at Thelepte was below ground-surface, like everything else, except the planes, which were partially protected on occasion by revetments made of dirt and gasoline cans ("flimsies") filled with dirt. The kitchen was a large head-high hole covered by canvas tarps and with dirt-filled flimsies stacked up around it for added protection. During the two attacks noted above, many of us were in the chow-line around the outside low wall of the kitchen. As the planes came in to strafe, we would run to the opposite side of the kitchen wall to keep it between us and the attacking planes. (There were few foxholes close to the kitchen, but their number grew and the depth increased in proportion to the frequency of the raids.)

Fri., Jan. 15, 1943 (Thelepte)--Three attacks today, two by ME's in the morning and one by 10 JU's in the afternoon. All of the JU's were shot down by P-40's. Two or three of the "pea-shooters" (P-40's) were shot down in the morning.

Our best early protection at Thelepte was provided by the P-40 outfit of Major (later Lt. Col.) Philip G. Cochran (who, because of his exploits, became the inspiration for Milt Caniff's comic strip "Flip Corkin," which was popular for a few years during and after the war.) One of Cochran's much talked-about feats (which I believe was true) was his taking a small bomb on his lap and dumping it out of his P-40 by hand on a nearby German headquarters, just to let the other side know that their raids had not knocked out the Thelepte field. (Cochran's P-40's had gotten to Thelepte a month or so before our own outfit got there.)

Our ground protection against air raids was in the hands of a Bofors(40mm) anti-aircraft outfit which set up gun-pits around the airfield. (The airfield was just a plain below the mountains.) In all honesty, I will have to say that I never saw an enemy plane shot down (or even hit) by the ack-ack crews, who were mainly young and inexperienced (as, of course, most of us were).

For example, one day during an air raid my brother Ed ("Junior") was near one of the gun-pits, and he hopped into it for protection, only to find that he was the only one in it. The gun crew, believing they were the target of the attack, had run for foxholes some distance away! I did see one plane hit one day by their anti-aircraft fire: a B-25! If any plane was ever easy to identify, it was the B-25. A flight of six or so came over our field at a fairly low level, and things were normal until they got right over us. Then the Bofors crews opened up in full force, to our collective horror. We needn't have been that concerned, though, because only one plane showed evidence of having been hit. It faltered for a few seconds and then began to pull back into formation as the flight distanced itself from the guns. (It would have been very interesting to hear the verbal reactions of those B-25 crew members!)

Mon., Feb. 8, 1943 (Thelepte)--Photo-gunner Ed ("Junior") Tolle went on his second bombing mission today. It was a hot one. One piece of flak missed his head by about 3 inches. About three or four of our planes were hit. Lt. Brown's plane was shot up, but he did a beautiful job of landing it with one wheel not down all the way. He and Thurman and Evans were lucky boys.

Tues., Aug 10, 1943 (Malta)--I went on mission as bombardier over Randazzo, Sicily. Flak hit close all around us & one piece went through the pilot's cockpit and peppered Lt. Smith's arm with glass. Close enough for me! (Lt. Smith, pilot; Anderson & Thurman, gunners.)

I cite the two diary items above for a reason. As I recall, there were only two pairs of brothers in the 97th: Harold and Kenneth Salsbury and Edgar and Donald Tolle. Harold was a gunner and Ken an engineer. Ed ("Junior") was a photo-gunner for awhile but was transferred from that to Group Photo sometime after Thelepte ("First Time"). I (Donald) was in 97th Sq. Operations. As nice as it was for brothers to be together (and a comfort to parents back home), I came to believe that the so-called Sullivan Rule was a good one. (Five Sullivan brothers on the same Navy ship were killed when the ship was sunk in action; and this resulted in a policy against family members being in the same outfit.) I know that the greatest stress I faced overseas was when Junior flew on the few missions he did. I really "sweated him out." He and I both had (and have) poor vision and couldn't physically qualify for any combat crew position. But there was great desire to have photos taken over target, so he was put on as a combat crew member. (Elmer Garrison was the other photo-gunner and completed a full combat tour.) I went to Capt. McRae, our Sq. Medical Officer, and told him that Junior's eyes were as bad as mine and that he should either ground Jr. or approve me for combat crew status. He felt that he couldn't do that, but fortunately (from my viewpoint) he did ground Jr. a few weeks later because of sinus problems which gave him severe headaches while in the air. Then when

I flew on a few missions (which I was able to arrange in Operations without being officially on a combat crew), Junior gave me an ultimatum never to go on another mission or he would somehow get back on combat crew status. So we had an impasse: I opposed his flying, and he opposed mine; so neither of us flew on combat missions again.

My point in all this is that having brothers together in combat situations may tend to make them both less effective because of worrying over the other one. I can't speak for the Salisbury brothers, but I don't know how Ken stood the stress of seeing Harold fly a full combat tour (not to mention Harold's stress while doing so!).

Fri., Nov. 10, 1944 (Vada/Rosignano)--We moved upstairs above Operations on Nov. 8th--that is, all of us except Mac and C.B. It's much nicer living in a building (for the first time in a couple of years).

W.D. ("Mac") McLaughlin has reminded me that in this building at Vada I did one of the dumbest things anyone could possibly do. The second floor of the building had restroom facilities of a sort--"squat toilets" which were really just round openings in the concrete floor, part of a system of ceramic or concrete pipes about 8" in diameter, leading downward (I know not to what final resting place). Apparently, the user of the facility was expected to pour water down the hole after using it, but there was no water available in the room. The stench was as bad as from an outdoor privy, and I had the impression that the pipes were impacted with human waste. So I thought I would clear up the problem by pouring gasoline down the hole and lighting it. When I threw the lighted match in after the gasoline, there was a heavy explosion, the building shuddered, and I thought it was coming down on our heads. Fortunately, it didn't collapse, and I didn't even get busted (perhaps because no one else knew what had happened). But what I did is known as dumb.

Wed., Nov. 24, 1943--97th mistakenly bombed 8th Army troops today. I feel really sorry for today's lead bombardier; he really felt terrible about that. Just one of the fortunes of war.

"Axis Sally" picked up on this unhappy incident and made some propaganda hay out of it while twitting the 47th. Sometime before that Christmas she said in one of her radio broadcasts something to this effect: "The other bases around Foggia can expect German bombing raids for Christmas. But our old friends in the 47th needn't worry--we have too much in common: We both bomb the British!"

Tues., May 4, 1943--Going to see "Footlight Serenade" tonight (Betty Grable).

In reading my diary straight through after getting it ready for the 1987 Long Beach reunion, I was impressed with how many movies were available to us (usually at

night, in the open, with the side of a building serving as movie screen). John Adair reminded me that at least once there was sniper fire at one of these outside showings. I had forgotten that and had not made any note of it, and I do not remember where or when this took place.

Tues., Mar. 30, 1943 (Canrobert)--Dental appt. at 2 p.m. One tooth filled. . . Jr. & most of Sq. moved up to Thelepte again. The C.O. wouldn't let me go. . . Saw "Pride of the Yankees" tonight at hangar.

Wed., Mar. 31, 1943--Two more teeth filled. . . With Jr., Dave, & Tommy gone, I'm left alone. Shirk, Mercer, & Klum moved in with me.

Another thing that impressed me when I read my diary in its entirety was how many teeth I had filled while overseas. At Canrobert I had the interesting experience of going to an American field dentist who set up his tents just across the road from our camp. The dental drills were powered by an enlisted man who simply worked his foot up and down on a treadle which mechanically turned the drill while the dental officer did his work on the teeth. Later, the Group apparently got a full-time dentist, who traveled about with the 47th Hq. (He was the same fellow who pulled a tooth of mine when I thought it was abscessed, then held it up and said, "There's nothing the matter with this tooth!")

Mon., Oct. 16, 1944 (Vada/Rosignano)--Picked up the two drunkest men I've ever seen & brought them to camp to sleep it off. They were both passed out on the street across from Ops., and Sennette & I bundled them into a jeep and brought them back to camp.

I'm happy to report that these were not members of the 47th. As I recall, they were in the infantry. They were absolutely unconscious, and we were afraid they might roll into the road at some point and be hit by a truck. We put them in cots in a pyramidal tent which was a "ready" tent for those scheduled for guard duty and left them alone. The next morning they had disappeared, leaving nothing behind but urine-soaked cots and blankets. (Thanks a lot, fellows, wherever you are!)

Tues., May 11, 1943 (Souk el Arba)--Eddie Rickenbacker flew in and talked to us this evening. Very interesting.

Apparently Eddie Rickenbacker (the World War I ace) was flown in for the purpose of conveying to us the fact that our "tour abroad" would be extended beyond the six months we had been told it would probably last. (And it was extended to nearly six times six months.) At any rate, he did a pretty good job of making his case by telling us how much better we had it than the ones slugging it out in the Pacific. He himself and some others had just recently had the experience of

crash-landing in a B-17 in the Pacific Ocean and spending 22 days on life rafts before they were rescued. And he told of the bird (sea swallow) which landed on his head when they were starving and thus provided them with some food and the bait to catch fish so they could survive. In the face of such stories, the men of the 47th could not gracefully complain about being kept overseas longer than originally expected; so Rickenbacker's mission paid off (and we "paid" with another two years overseas!).

Feb. 13, 1942 (approx.) (en route from Fresno to Oklahoma City)--
 . . . At Sayre, Oklahoma, our train was wrecked by a loose rail. Sabotage was suspected, but there was no proof. We were lucky that no one was killed, although three were injured. All our trucks and airplane tugs on the flat cars were ruined. . . .

Ampless Moore wrote to tell me that this wreck was definitely no accident--that there were enemy agents known to be in the area. Thus, my statement that there was no proof of sabotage was in error.

April 25, 1942 (Will Rogers Field)--Lt. Sherman W. Long, our Assistant Supply Officer, from California, was killed in the crash of his A-20C while making a practice flight about 30 miles from Oklahoma City. I hated to see him go. He was a swell boy. . . .

Mon., Nov. 1, 1943 (Vicenzo/Foggia)--On mission today J.t. Bruce's plane blew up over target. Two men (Albers & Manzie) bailed out, but only one chute opened. Flak either exploded in a wing tank or hit the fuse of a bomb.

These two items from the diary are included here because Ted Kuhlman wrote me in reference to them shortly after the Long Beach reunion (he had read my diary on the way back home while his wife drove the car). I learned from him that "Wally" Long was a close personal friend and how hard his death had hit him. Ted accompanied his body back to California, tried to comfort the parents in their grief, and then stayed in touch with them until their deaths. (Incidentally, Eddie Boyajian told me in Long Beach that he had been scheduled to fly with Lt. Long on that fateful day, but Lt. Long wouldn't let him go because he was going to practice feathering engines that day. Another example of how seemingly-small things can have big effects upon the lives of people.)

Concerning Lt. William Bruce, Ted told me that after returning to the States he received a call one day from Bruce's mother asking if he would be willing to meet with her husband and her to tell what he knew about their son's death. Ted had been on that same mission and knew the details of the tragedy but found it very difficult to tell them enough without telling them too much. Knowing him, I am sure that he handled that task as well as humanly possible, although he called it "a heart-rending affair." (I do hope that Ted doesn't mind my putting these things here for dis-

tribution, as I didn't ask his permission. But he wrote me such a fine letter that I wanted to share a little with you.)

Sat., June 5, 1943 (Soliman/Grombalia)--Lovely fried steak for dinner! Also ice cold orange juice. Lovely! Lovely!

Although I hadn't forgotten where the steak came from, W.D. ("Mac") McLaughlin asked me why I hadn't included that bit of information in my diary. So . . . camped in an olive grove near Soliman (about 25 miles or so from Tunis), the war in North Africa over, we had a little time to take things a bit easier for awhile. (Except that the little islands of Pantelleria and Lampedusa were not bombed into giving up until a few days after the above date.) But on this particular day, out on our airfield there were some African cattle roving among the planes. Seizing the bull by the horns, so to speak, either our C.O. or our Operations Officer ordered that one of the animals be shot "to keep it from damaging our planes." This was done, the sacrificial beast was butchered, and the Squadron ate "high on the water buffalo." (I do hope that the owner of the bovine was compensated at some time by the U.S. government for his loss.) But we did enjoy that feast!

Sat., Sept. 9, 1944 (LaJasse Airfield, France)--We're not doing any bombing now. The planes are hauling rations, gas, & bombs because of transportation shortage. . . . Went into Eyguierés & ate supper tonight.

The nearly three weeks spent in France were generally very interesting, but I'll mention only a couple of events. When some of us went into the nearby little town for supper (9-9-44), we ate at a restaurant which listed rabbit stew on the menu. That seemed like a nice gastronomic change of pace, so that's what we ate. Later, walking through town, we met a G.I. who told us, "Whatever you do, don't eat at that restaurant across the street; they list rabbit but actually make that stew out of alley cats." It seems that he had learned that fact from a local acquaintance, but too late for us!

Fri., Sept 15, 1944 (LaJasse Airfield, France)--Went to Marseilles on pass. Met a nice lady and her daughter and another nice girl, and we had a drink together. Gen. DeGaulle is in town today.

Sat., Sept. 16, 1944--Saw General Charles DeGaulle this morning. Had dinner with Madame Mommens and her daughter. Got back to camp just before dark.

The dinner on 9-16-44 turned out to be a severe embarrassment to me. I had invited Madame Mommens and her daughter to dinner at a restaurant, but I had greatly underestimated the cost for three of us. When the bill came, it was for far more francs than I had (and far higher cost for meals than I had previously exper-

perienced anywhere). At any rate, Madame Mommens (Bless her!) stepped into the breach and paid the large difference between what I had in my wallet and what the meal tab was. (I hope she discovered that they were trying to "stick a rich American" and that she got some of her money back.) C'est la vie!

One other event of that day: There was a parade in honor of Gen. DeGaulle. I was on the second floor of a partially bombed-out building, along with several French civilians. French soldiers searched the whole group (except me) to make sure that no one attempted to assassinate DeGaulle while he was riding in the parade. A feature of the parade was a group of German P.O.W.s being marched along under guard, while a lot of the on-lookers shouted obscenities at them, with some running into the street to spit on them. I could understand their feelings, but I thought that aspect of the parade was a sort of sorry spectacle. But (and I end with this), I guess my only comment can be:

C'est la guerre!

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October 1988

C O R R E C T I O N S S H E E T

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Page 5 (Sun., Dec. 6, 1942)--. . . Two destroyers; . . .
~~" " (" " 13, ")--. . . Medouina (not Mediouna). (And the
same correction should be made in the Thurs., Dec. 24, 1942,
entry.)~~

Page 17 (Wed., Aug. 11, 1943)--. . . Valletta (not Valleta).

Page 21 (Thurs., Oct. 21, 1943--. . . Cassino (not Cassio). (At
least I think this mission was over Cassino; I don't remember
a Cassio.)

Page 28 (Wed., Mar. 29, 1944)--. . . Air raid alert tonight, . . .

~~Page 49 (MY "ITINERARY" AFTER LANDING IN AFRICA----4th line down). . .
Left Medouina (not Mediouna). . .~~

Page 50 (ITINERARY, continued)--Between the 4th and 5th lines, insert
the following:

The Group moved back to Vesuvius on
April 25, 1944.

Page 65 (Appendix, poetry section)--Although I didn't know it when
I wrote the poem I called "Spring Love" in June 1943, I
think that I included a section for which someone else should
have credit. That is the part having to do with passion ("For
passion, when too soon aborning, Makes me hate me in the morn-
ing,"). Although I have been unsuccessful in checking it out
thus far, I suspect that Dorothy Parker, or someone like her,
had put that turn of phrase in my mind but that I had for-
gotten about it. I would be relieved (and proud!) if I
could find that it was original with me, but I doubt it.
Perhaps someone reading this can help me find the source.
I don't want to take credit for something somebody else did.

Page 64 (Appendix, poetry section)--Replace the middle poem with this:

Here in the dark of night,
With neither moon- nor star-light
To break the gloom,
I stand on guard.

Not long ago this same dark night
Would have found me bathed in light
Of some bright party room.
Now I'm on guard.

A war has caused this change of life,
With all its stress and strain and strife.
In truth, I wish I had a wife
Instead of pulling guard.