

was used till the end of the war. At first 12 planes, three flights of four, would make up a squadron. These used an alternate weave pattern to maintain a decent airspeed and sky visibility yet not out run the bombers, particularly the B-17's. Late in 1943 the 16 plane box formation was developed still using the cross weave pattern. The four plane finger four formation was simply a doubling of the basic two ship element of leader and wingman, however too often this became a flight leader, wingman and element leader with a 'tail end Charlie' trying not to get left behind in a kind of crack-the-whip effect—and he often did get left behind.

The stay at Maison Blanche was short. After about a week the squadron pulled up what few stakes there were and moved once again, this time southeast to the desert for a somewhat longer stay.

BASE LATE 1942 - EARLY 1943
COR

BISKRA

Biskra was a prewar oasis resort in the Sahara. The oasis encompassed some 3000 acres and included what had been resort type hotels. Biskra is located southwest of Tebessa and well southeast of Algiers. At Biskra the airfield was a large area of hard packed sand. Life among the date palms was quite a change from the rains, mud and mountains further north in Algeria.

At Biskra the 1st Fighter Group once again assembled and functioned more as an intact fighter group, however the Group by no means enjoyed Biskra by themselves. Also operating out of the oasis were the 97th and 301st Bomb Groups flying B-17's and the 17th Bomb Group flying B-26's. All of which made for a very trafficky area, and as we shall see later, a tempting target for the German bomber crews.

P-38
FIGHTERS

At Biskra the 94th gave up troop support as a primary role and reverted to bomber escort work and longer range strafing attacks. The escort missions included escorting B-17's or B-26's to Tunis, Bizerte or ranging out over the Mediterranean to targets in Sardinia and Sicily. And the losses mounted. On a B-17 escort mission to Bizerte on Dec. 18th George Sutcliffe was hit and downed. He suffered some burns but made his way back via Algiers. Norman Widen was shot down and became a POW, Clark Jennings was shot down but returned aided by British Commandos and continued flying; Victor Giles was hit and killed.

BISKRA Home of the 97th, 301st bomb grp. First fighter grp and a b-26 bomb grp Middle 1942 late 1943.

The included mape shows the bases and our trip from England. Tafaroui was a mudhole deluxe. After two weeks there it set in raining and kept it up for a couple weeks. Our ground army was taking a beating and our Air Force ground- ed by mud. They took a catippler and towed each 17 to the short fighter strip and they got airborne for Biskra which was located of the edge Sahara desert. our base as the article states around an osais. The soil was hard packed sand and to dig a foxhole was a major and hand blistering task using picks. My bud- dy Jack and I finally finished an L shaped hole some four ft deep covered with armor plate from crashed aircraft and dirt on top of that. An opening big en- ough to crawl thru. As a result of bombings and paratroopers dropped on us we spent consisderable time in that hole. The attached article is basically about the P-38 boys but the very same thing applied to anyone stationed on Biskra.

I well recall our second night there jack and I were in the radio room of my bomber and about 9PM we heard the familer out of sink sound of German pl- nes and we both knew we were being attacked. We had dug no foxholes so we ran to center of the un lit runway and laid down all during the strafing raid. Be- lieve me foxholes went down next morning.

Just part of war time duty.

My buddy mentioned above Wadsworth Jackson from Wadsworth, Alabama. We shared same foxhole North Africa. Jack and I was sent back to states in late August 1944 and sent to Boeing factory Seattle on B-29s. From there we both were stationed Tucson, Az. I was discharged there . Went to work TWA Kansas City. Recalled to duty late 1948 and sent to Burtonwood, England overhual base, working the Berlin Airlift . Back overseas 1965 to Germany and a 3 year tour. Retired after 28 years as Chief master Sgt. in 1970. Lastfive years of my car- eer held position of Launch Officer B-52-KC-135 K.I.Sawyer, Miich. As Maint. officer in Germany and Otis AFB , Mass and retired from Otis.

TWO IOWANS IN RAID ON ROUEN

LONDON, ENGLAND (AP)—Two Iowans — Sergeants James N. Bracewell, Mapleton, and Chester Love Cummings, Oskaloosa—were among the United States flyers who took part in the attack on the rail yards of Rouen, France, Monday, it was announced Wednesday.

In announcing the names of the men who manned the 12 Flying Fortresses, U. S. army headquar- ters described the raid as "un- usually successful" and said photo- graphs showed a majority of the bombs fell within a radius of 300 yards of the freight yards.

Meantime, the air ministry an- nounced that Flensburg, the Nazi submarine and shipbuilding center almost at the Danish border, was the chief target of royal air force bombers Tuesday night. Four of the raiders were missing.

A few German bombers were over England during the night. Bombs dropped in East Anglia caused some damage and slight casualties.

SEE ATTACHED SHEETS INSIDE

TURN

DOER

which immediately opened fire. Amidst the turmoil on the sub the prisoners-or most of them, forced their way topside. The sub soon sank. Most of the crew and all but two of the prisoners were lost. The destroyer crew nearly went into shock when the first two survivors pulled from the sea turned out to be British and American. Lentz was eventually dropped off at Malta, outfitted with some British Army togs and flown back to the 94th. A part of the story which may be apocryphal has it that months later when Lentz was back in the States he received a bill for those British uniform items. In any event Bugs Lentz' adventure certainly has to rank with the most unusual even for wartime.

As January continued so also did our losses. On January 11th on an escort mission to Bizerte Lts. William Lovell and William Wilson were killed. On January 15th Lt. McWherter was killed in a taxiing-takeoff accident. The billowing dust at Biskra so obscured visibility that the two moving P-38's could not see each other and collided resulting in the death of McWherter, who was taking off. The other pilot (Kelly?) apparently survived with only minor injuries. The dust at Biskra, really blowing sand, became an increasingly severe problem. The so-called Siroccan winds off the Sahara, increasing at this time of year, made operations extremely difficult. Sand, grit and dust penetrated everywhere and wreaked havoc with visibility, fuel lines, machine gun mechanisms, food, in short it was everywhere. Only camels seemed to operate effectively under such conditions. Herb Green recalls getting a scoop of canned cherries in his mess kit for dessert. By the time he got to dessert the cherries were unrecognizable they were so dusted with sand. The mechanic's work at Biskra was somewhat easier in that gas was now available in 55 gallon drums equipped with a pump. No more tossing cans of gas up onto the wing. There were still no work stations however, so engine repair work had to be carried out standing on a 55 gallon drum while someone else patrolled the perimeter carrying a machine gun or carbine.

On first arrival at Biskra foxholes were the order of the day. Sleeping under the date palms was such a change from the mud at Youks that it even seemed romantic-maybe for a day or two. In time some of the resort hotels were taken over and assigned to the pilots-five to a room, just take your bedroll and find a spot on the floor. There were no beds. It was in the hotel Transatlantique that Ernie Pyle interviewed some of the pilots. In one of his columns he mentioned spending some time with five pilots. Within a week there were only

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GOOD
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WE LOST
ENGINEER ON
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three. The five pilots were Ilfrey, McWherter, Neale, Lentz and Shelton. -Ernie Pyle was everyone's favorite correspondent during the war. He was invariably where the action was, seemingly never in the rear echelon. He was killed on the island of Ie Shima just off Okinawa late in the war.-

STOOD CLOSE TO
HER IN CHOW
LINE

Margaret Bourke White, a photojournalist for Life Magazine also spent some time at Biskra early in January interviewing some of our people. Later in the month things were enlivened by the arrival of a USO troupe including Kay Francis, Martha Ray, Carol Landis and Mitzi Mayfair. The girls put on a terrific series of shows and pleased all hands.

SAW THIS
USO SHOW

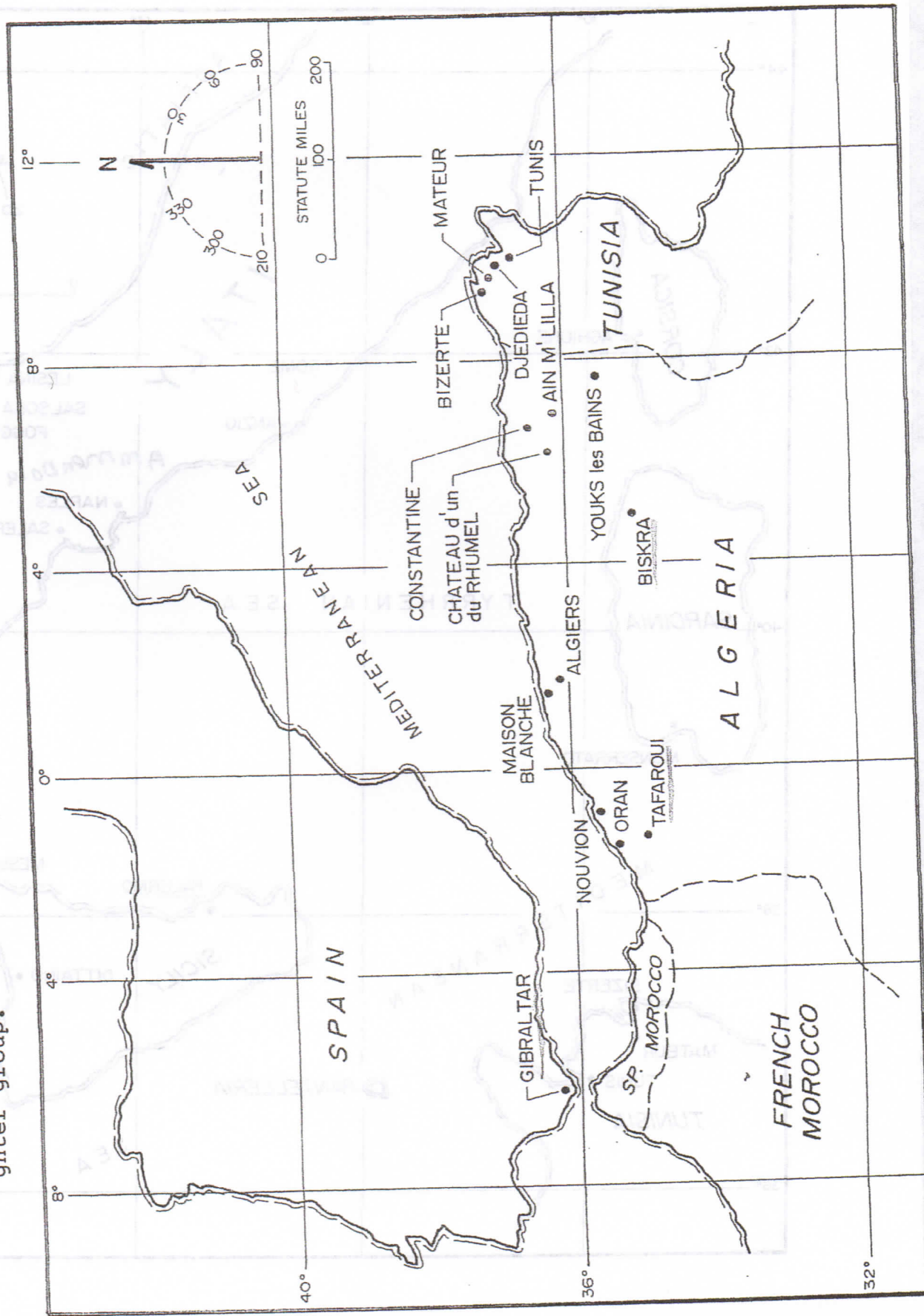
The ground crews at Biskra continued their ingenious ways. The 94th people built from spare bits and parts the only radar unit at Biskra. The original equipment sank off the Arzeu beaches back at Oran. Ground transportation was a hand-made motor scooter built by the engineering section using the wheels from an oxygen cart and a gas engine salvaged from an oil pump. The squadron antiaircraft gun was a 20 mm cannon salvaged from a wrecked P-38. The gun was mounted on a 55 gallon drum filled with sand (what else) for ballast.

Living conditions at Biskra were primitive; there's no other word for it. Aside from the pilots in their 5 to a room Hotel Transatlantique it was strictly tents and foxholes beneath the date palms. Dining was al fresco making use of long tables and benches. Rank had no privileges when it came to food. One grabbed a mess kit, stood in line then sat anywhere(or stood) to eat.

The Germans soon recognized the concentration of aircraft at Biskra and began some night raids usually by one or two Ju-88's. However, in early January a large force of Ju-88's really plastered the oasis. They hit B-17's, P-38's and also hit the squadron tent area and generally messed things up. At the hotel the pilots, showing an instinct for going in the wrong direction, rushed to the roof to see the show. One bomb could have taken out most of them-fortunately nothing came close. Carl McCool, one of the crew chiefs, says he was literally buried when a bomb hit the squadron tent area and nearly filled his foxhole with him in it. Some of his buddies had him nearly dug out when they were all scattered by machine gun fire from a strafing pass or from ammunition set off by the bombing. Hard to be certain which. Needless to say the foxholes got deeper after each raid.

WE LOST 3
17'S TO BOMBING

My outfit 97th Bomb Group of which my squadron the 414th was a ~~part~~ ^{part} of off landed in England June 1942. Operated from there until Nov. 9th when we departed for North Africa. Landed in Gibraltar for fuel. Next stop Tifariti, Algeria where we operated from for about a month was bombed and strafed here. Due to constant rain and mud moved to Biskra. All this time our escorts were the P-38 first fighter group.



Fall of 1943 our Bobb Grp moved to a base just out of Palermo and operated from there for a couple months and than moved to Madfradonia in early 1944. I returned to the states and Boeing factory in Late August 1944.

