HOW I GOT TO TORRETTA

Many air crews, including those of the 461st and 494th Bomb Groups, owe their lives to the existence of the emergency landing fields on several Yugoslavian islands in the Adriatic sea. Member Bill Kinyoun, 46th Service Squadron, sent in this report of his experiences travelling via military transport to Torretta.

While on detached service, Bill's duties took him to the island of Vis where he labored to restore battle damaged aircraft, that had landed or crashed on the Island, for ferrying back to Italian bases:

January 13, 1944 that was our day. No one slept much that night we just laid in our bunks and wondered what was in front of us. We knew we were poorly trained men with little experience. As for myself I graduated from Aviation Cadet training at Yale University on September 9, 1943 as a 2nd Lt. I had done 2 weeks training with the squadron in the field and then was on P-47 type aircraft. We were going overseas as a trained B-24 service squadron. While in Cadets at Yale, I had worked on a Liberator for a day and once during our two weeks training in Florida we worked on a B-24. We were to pick up a B-24 bomb group overseas, that we knew. Another thing, where are we going Europe, Mediterranean, Africa, India etc.?

We boarded a train and in an hour we were along side our ship. A little gray thing. How could that get across the water? Red Cross Gray Ladies were there to send us off with warm coffee as it was bitter cold and a GI orchestra was there to play a few march pieces.

I was platoon leader of the 1st platoon and consequently I was the first to lead the troops up the gang plank. We were carrying bed rolls, musette bags, overseas bags and besides I was carrying my flight bag. As I struggled up the gang plank under my load, Doc, Beck, Richardson and the enlisted men who were on the advance detachment met us with all kinds of remarks, joking and I quickly straightened up, looked around and snapped "where are the oars for this tub; they all laughed and 1st Lt. Bill Richardson took me to my quarters so I could get rid of my equipment and then we all placed the enlisted men in their quarters. When I saw what they had my heart bled for them. It was a shame to put men in a dirty hole like that. Approximately 500 men in bunks stacked 6 in a tier and a room not much bigger than 3 tennis courts put together. After we were all settled we went up on deck. Our first meal on the boat was good and while we were finishing it was dark and I was informed we were to pull out at dusk so dry. I was glad no one was hit but felt mad I almost got killed saving a pair of overalls. I crawled back and almost got under cover when shells started to hit the deck again, then I got up and ran to cover diving like a swimmer for cover and fell right on top of Beck and Doc Krajec. Nothing was said. (*Fragments of spent anti aircraft shells.*)

None of us could sleep that night as we expected other attacks to follow as the wiping out of a convoy the size of ours would greatly aid the Germans. The following morning at 7:00 as I looked toward the north I heard a rapid succession of flak batteries come from the corvettes and saw them shoot down a German observation plane.

As it came spinning down toward the water I looked to see if the pilot chuted out but saw no chute so I guess the pilot was killed by the flak barrage.

The following day was spent with one submarine scare after the other and a constant lookout for further attacks from the air. On February the fourth we passed past a couple of small rocks. Our ship started to turn around. We didn't know what to think. Four other ships dropped out of the convoy and proceeded with us into the Bay of Tunis. We dropped anchor about a mile off shore and could see a town with a lot of people. We saw several jeeps and war planes flying overhead. This was the first stop we made and we had now been on the boat 22 days. Looking around we could see beaches and sunken ships with stacks sticking over the water. The town turned out to be LaGoulette between Bizerte and Tunis. We stayed there for three days and were joined at anchor by 12 more ships on February 7 making 24 ships sitting here at anchor. The morale of our men was high and slowly slipping. At 2:30 p.m. on February 10th we hoisted anchor and sailed north toward Sicily. February 11 we passed about 2 miles off the west coast of Sicily and saw how rough and mountainous the terrain was. We all heartily agreed that the boys of the infantry had done a wonderful job capturing it as quick as they did, 18 days. That night as we were sailing north we could see a volcano glowing in the distance to the east of us. One of the sailors on board said it was near the Strait of Messina and in the Lipari group of islands. It was called Stromboli. On February 12 we sailed past the Isle of Capri and into the Naples harbor. It was here we first saw the destruction of war. Ships were sunk at the moorings and capsized in the bay. The buildings as far as we could see were in ruins. Mt. Vesuvius was directly in front of us and smoke was