The Cerignola Story and Torretta Tales

by Bruce W. Smith, 824 squadron

DOUBLE DUTY Our latrines are picturesque: They are oil barrels sunk halfway into the ground, with carved-for-comfort tops of wood. Their most picturesque characteristic is that they are set right out in the wheat fields and atop hills. This saves reading magazines, for there is so much landscape to see that reading material is unnecessary.

GUEST ARTIST Musical guest in Cerignola on July 3, 1944, was famed violinist Jascha Heifetz. The all-soldier audience was both quiet and responsive. When the Italian kids were raising holy hell rolling metal hoops on the brick street outside, Heifetz laughed the noise off by saying, "They're celebrating the Fourth of July a little early, whether they know it or not."

VARIETY SHOW Saw an excellent variety show at the Cerignola Opera House on both August 24 and August 25, 1944. The headliners were two former stage and movie stars, Bebe Daniels and Ben Lyon. She sang several songs ("When the Lights Go on Again," a British soldiers' favorite, drew heavy applause) and wore three elegant long dresses.

PIECE OF CAKE Our September 2, 1944, mission was pleasant as combat missions can be, although, of course, it was long and cold - but then, it's always that way. The targets were the Smedrevo ferry slips on the Sava River in Yugoslavia, where the Germans were attempting to evacuate troops. The enemy opposition wasn't much at all, which was all right with us.

THEY WERE HERE From Istres le Tube in the Southern France county of Provence, September 24, 1944: The Germans lived in the very building we are sleeping in, not many weeks ago. Many of their pin-up pictures, newspapers from Germany, and pages torn from their notebooks are lying around. Our group took over a vacant old-style apartment house. The food is not bad and the French bread is wonderful.

BRITISH STYLE On June 12, 1944, 12 of us went, by invitation, to a British tank corps camp west of Bari for a softball game and a little party. Most of the British soldiers were from South Africa. First, they hosted lunch at the British officers' club in Bari. Then, in borrowed shorts, we played seven innings on a diamond on the side of a hill. Afterwards, we had supper: Pea soup, salmon croquette, cold sausage, cold roast pork, and a cherry cream pudding. Also coffee, extremely hot, but, unfortunately, already creamed and sugared.

The End