



Flightline



Newsletter of the 780th Bombardment Squadron of WWII

June 2022

Move to Pantanella takes more than a month

Squadron survives attacks off Tunisian coast

This is part two of the official history of the 780th Bombardment Squadron, drawn from unclassified military records obtained from the Air Force Historical Research Agency at Maxwell-Gunter Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama, and online sources for additional context. - Editor

In our last issue we reached the end of 1943, with Squadron strength at 62 officers, 342 enlisted men and 18 combat crews which rated the 780th "as having the largest number of combat crews in a combat squadron up to this time." We now pick up the history of the squadron with a special event.

On December 1 the Squadron was honored to stand review while one of its members, S/Sgt. Lawrence H. Brouhard, received the Distinguished Flying Cross, Soldier's Medal and Air Medal from

465th Bomb Group commander Col. Elmer J. Rogers, for outstanding performance in a previous combat tour of duty. (Editor's note: Brouhard earned these awards while assigned to the 9th Air Force. He subsequently earned the Oak Leaf Cluster to his Distinguished Flying Cross, and another six Oak Leaf Clusters to his Air Medal, with the 780th. See sidebar story.)

The first phase of flying training was completed on 5 December 1943. To aid in the second phase the squadron secured the loan of four airplanes from various bases, bringing the total to nine the number of planes in commission. Cold weather and extreme difficulty in obtaining parts and supplies made it impossible to accomplish the maxi-

continued on page 2...



A map of the Mediterranean, showing the ports the 780th Squadron encountered, including Algiers, Philippeville, Bizerte and Naples.

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mum number of flying hours, however, the combined hours flown by these planes during the month reached 549.1 hours. Maintenance crews worked long hours to keep the planes in flight, including nine engine changes and five super-charger changes.

Outside of flying, the Squadron's engineering department created and designed a new device for disassembling tires from rims. The device saved on labor and eliminated the need for bulky equipment. In navigation, the Squadron ranked first in the bomb group. Due to the lack of Celestial Navigator Training facilities at McCook, five Squadron navigators were sent to Geiger Field in Spokane, Washington (ed.: now Spokane International Airport), to complete training.

The second phase of training progressed rapidly and was expected to be completed ahead of schedule. At the end of December 1943 Squadron strength was 93 officers and 393 enlisted men.

On 1 January 1944 Squadron commander Capt. Olen C. Cook was promoted to major. Training activity was maintained at a high level and inspections were numerous. High altitude formation flying was featured and the POM (Preparation for Overseas Movement) inspection flight was satisfactory in all respects.

New clothing was issued to all enlisted men at the end of January. All equipment was crated, packed and labeled for overseas shipment. The third and final phase of training was completed, thus ending the Squadron's stay at McCook Army Air Base. At the end of January 1944, the Squadron's total strength was 94 officers and 398 enlisted men.

At 1300 hours on 1 February 1944 the ground echelon, four combat crews and Group Head-

quarters personnel, boarded a train at McCook Railroad Depot destined for Staging Area Camp Patrick Henry in Newport News, Virginia, arriving there early in the morning of 4 February 1944. The Squadron remained at Camp Henry for eight days during which time final processing, final physical exams and clothing and equipment checkups were completed. For the first time in 780th Squadron history, mail censorship became effective.

Next, the Squadron was divided into two units for shipment overseas. One unit, in the charge of Capt. Martelle, was consigned to ship HR-925, a liberty ship otherwise known as the *SS Lambert Cadwalader*. The second unit was under Capt. Davis and consigned to ship HR-928, the liberty ship also known as the *SS John Hathorn*. (Editor's note: Liberty ships were retro-fitted cargo vessels of approximately 10,000 tons. They carried about



Scene from Awards and Decorations Ceremony at AAB McCook, Nebraska, 1 December 1943, honoring S/Sgt. Brouhard of our squadron.

550 troops, plus a crew of 44 and another 12-25 naval armed guards. The John Hathorn was likely armed with a four-inch stern gun, two 37mm bow guns and six 20mm machine guns. It was scrapped in 1972.)

The first unit left Camp Patrick Henry on 11 February 1944, and

the second unit the next day. Both ships departed from Hampton Roads on 12 February, pulling out into the stream to join the convoy for final departure on 13 February 1944.

For most of the personnel this was their first ocean voyage and with rough weather prevailing during part of the trip, many were seasick part of the time. The crossing was not uneventful. One ship was torpedoed, near Bizerte, Tunisia, and another struck a mine in the same area. The latter ship was able to make it to port but the torpedoed ship sunk.

After a one-day stop at Augusta, Sicily, the *SS Lambert Cadwalader* reached the port of Naples,

TAPS



Hilda Sioen Magness Larson passed away September 14, 2020, in Shelby Township, Michigan. She was born July 24, 1926, in Detroit, Michigan, to Belgian immigrants. She met her first husband, Harvey Magness, while working at the Detroit Arsenal in 1949. Harvey passed in 1978 after 28 years of marriage. Hilda remarried in 1984 to William Larson and shared another 35 years of enjoying life. Hilda was an avid bridge player for over 70 years.

She also was a fabulous homemaker, mother and wife. Hilda is survived by three children, three step-children, four grandchildren, five step-grandchildren, three great-grandchildren and one step-great-grandchild.

Italy and docked on 10 March 1944. Personnel were transferred to Staging Area No. 1 Camp, at the Peninsula Base Section, departing from there to their permanent base in Italy (Pantanella) on 14 March 1944. After a night stopover at Avellino, Italy, they arrived at their base the following day.

Meanwhile, the SS *John Hathorn*, with the balance of Squadron's ground echelon and some of the four combat crews, was withdrawn from the main convoy at Bizerte, Tunisia, docking there on 6 March 1944. Personnel were transferred to Stagedoor Camp, remaining there two days, when they were then conveyed to the town of Philippeville, Algeria, by truck, reaching Camp Jean Staging Area (British) that evening. This second unit remained at the camp four days when on 12 March they re-embarked on the SS *Illea*, reaching Naples, Italy, as part of another convoy on 14 March. Personnel then were conveyed by motor truck to the same Staging Area Camp being vacated that very same day by the first unit. While here, personnel received their first taste of actual combat conditions when Naples received a heavy air raid on the night of 14 March 1944.

On the morning of 18 March, 1944, 13 officers and 77 enlisted men left by motor convoy for Pantanella, Italy, arriving there late the same day. The balance of this unit - one officer and 79 enlisted men - remained at the Peninsula Base Section Staging Area Camp until 20 March, leaving by motor convoy for Pantanella and arriving there late the same day. Thus, finally, completed the movement of the ground echelon of the 780th Bombardment Squadron from the United States to their initial base overseas.

Squadron Honors Decorated Gunner

Aerial gunner S/Sgt. Lawrence H. Brouhard, of Greenfield, Indiana, was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, Soldier's Medal and Air Medal, for heroism during in the Middle East and Tunisian campaigns in 1942 and 1943. Brouhard

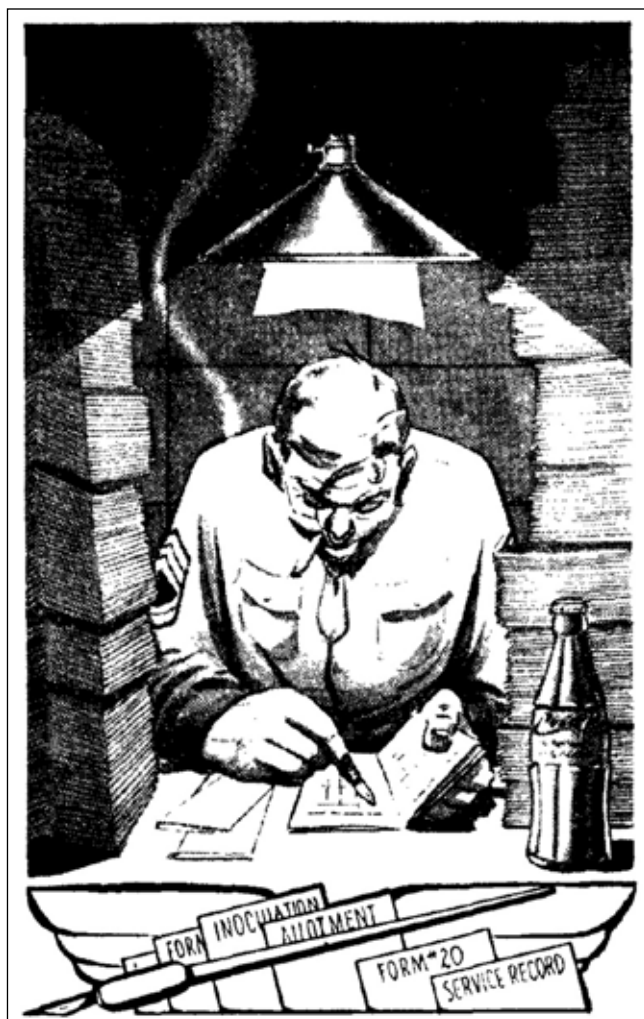


"entered a fire-swept area after an explosion had occurred at an ammunition dump, and helped remove a large supply of depth charges from the danger zone. His prompt action prevented great loss of life and equipment." He was presented the Air Medal (above) for "outstanding aerial achievement in operational flight in the Middle East war theater." He earned the honors while assigned to the 9th Air Force in Libya. He returned to the United States after flying 82 combat missions, took a couple weeks of "R&R" then was re-assigned to the 780th, still in training at McCook. In Italy with the 780th, he further was awarded six oak leaf clusters to the Air Medal and an oak leaf cluster to the Distinguished Flying Cross.

This article will continue in the next issue of Flightline, with a description of Pantanella and the 780th flight crews making their own journey across the Atlantic.

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This cartoon from *AIR FORCE*, the *Official Service Journal of the Army Air Forces*, January 1944 issue, really hits the mark with this issue's main article. Moving an entire squadron overseas was no small feat, and the unsung heroes were the squadron's clerks. Here's to those who served in the 780th personnel office. The caption:

Sergeant Smith of the unit personnel office has hung up more than 100,000 hours with a Dixon No. 2 (medium lead). A late POM order finds this veteran of the Pen and Pencil Corps on a night flight over mountains of service records to help prepare case histories which must be completed before a squadron can move overseas.