



# **The History of the 154<sup>th</sup> (Observation, Tactical, Reconnaissance) Weather Reconnaissance Squadron (Medium) 1940 – 1945**

Compiled by Francis S. Kalinowski, II

*Note: Most of this history is a condensation of text from “The Story of a Squadron,” written by Frederick W. Gillies. Published in 1946, the book served as a “yearbook” of sorts for the Squadron. Gillies had been an enlisted man with the 154<sup>th</sup> during its overseas deployment. Additional material was used from the personal records and wartime diary of Captain Francis S. Kalinowski, my father, who served as the Engineering Officer during the overseas assignment. Lastly, two articles were used: “Lead Out For Weather,” by Sgt. Allan Palmer, The Sunday Stars and Stripes Magazine, March 18, 1945; and, “Weather Or Not,” by Captain Eugene E. Churchill, Air Force magazine, December, 1944.*

*It was not my intention to include the name of every member, every individual award, or every event. Rather, my intent was to try to capture significant milestones in the Squadron’s history, provide the reader with information regarding the Squadron’s duties and accomplishments, and in general tell the tale of a group whose actions might otherwise be lost. The significance and impact of the operations of the 154<sup>th</sup> and other observation and reconnaissance squadrons in the victory against the Axis powers should never be forgotten. Francis S. Kalinowski*

The 154<sup>th</sup>, as it was briefly known to its members, had been an Observation, Reconnaissance, and Weather-Reconnaissance unit in its long and varied days of overseas service. First a peacetime National Guard Unit, this organization became a part of the Army Air Corps on September 16, 1940. From then on, training became more intensive. In the summer following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, this unit engaged in its last full scale maneuvers near Winston Salem, North Carolina. The unit was designated 154th Observation Squadron on 4 Jul 1942. Shortly thereafter, the word was given by Squadron Commanding Officer Captain Theodore H. Mayer – “get ready for overseas shipment.” On the afternoon of Monday, September 21<sup>st</sup>, 1942, Squadron members left their Morris Field, N.C. base, loaded aboard a train and headed northward.

## **1942**

22 Sept. 1942: Arrived in Fort Dix, New Jersey and settled into five-man tents. Over the next four days Squadron members dealt with the cold and rain as they were issued Springfield rifles,

helmets, uniforms, gas masks, and other equipment. The big questions on everyone's mind are, "when do we go," and "where are we going."

The next few days are spent doing calisthenics, having final medical exams, and being in formation.

26 Sept. 1942: Left Ft. Dix by train to an unknown port, disembarked and loaded onto a ferry during pelting rain. With New York City silhouetted against the night sky, the Squadron left the ferry and boarded a ship. Only after navigating the maze of halls and decks do the Enlisted Men find assigned cabins, eighteen men to a cabin in triple-decker bunks. Officers were assigned to staterooms on the main deck. Shortly later it is learned that the ship is the HMS Queen Mary. After undressing at two in the morning, the Squadron settled in with the 15,000 troops aboard.

Sunday, 27 Sept. 1942: After leaving port at 0800 the men are allowed on deck. The next few days are spent playing cards, reading, and taking part in both lifeboat and air raid drills. The PX line reaches almost the full length of the ship, as chocolate bars, cookies, sardines, oranges and apples are purchased. As more than one soldier put it, "If it weren't for these chocolate bars, I'd starve." Mealtime is spent in long lines leading up to rooms where food is on long tables, where the motto seems to be, "you either grab or starve." Minutes later the Mess Sergeants funnel the men out the opposite side of the room. The Queen Mary, sailing unescorted, proceeds in zig-zag patterns to ward off attack from enemy submarines.

2 Oct. 1942: While being escorted by two British cruisers about 20 miles off the coast of Ireland, the one on the starboard side (HMS Curacao) cut directly across the path of the Queen Mary. With crushing sound the Queen Mary sheared the cruiser cleanly in half amidships, with both halves sinking in about four minutes. With a gaping hole in the bow, the Queen Mary has to reduce its speed by half. It was later learned by the Squadron that 338 men perished aboard the Curacao.

3 Oct. 1942: Arrived in the Firth of Clyde and in a cold drizzle transferred to small boats to the port of Greenock, Scotland. Shortly thereafter the men boarded a train and headed south. Both sides of the track are spotted with men, women, and children waving flags, handkerchiefs, and aprons, smiling and gesturing wildly and creating in every one of us a warmth of feeling for the plucky Scotch people.

4 Oct. 1942: Sunday – Arrived by train in Needham, England on a frosty, foggy morning to load onto waiting trucks driven by Black U.S. soldiers, who speak of "tuppence" and "ha-penny" in a chuckling southern drawl. After about a thirty-mile trip the Squadron arrived at the Wattisham airdrome (RAF) and were billeted in two large, two-storied stone barracks buildings. Officers received a big shot of Scotch upon arrival.

9 Oct. 1942: Squadron members experience their first German bombing when a lone Dornier 17 made one sweep across the airfield and dropped four delayed-action bombs on two hangers. None of the bombs exploded, and were later hauled off by British bomb disposal units. RAF personnel assure them it won't be the last. Days are spent drilling, attending section classes, wondering what comes next, and discussing the strange manners and customs of the British.

20 Oct. 1942: Relief! The first mail is received from the U.S.

22 Oct. 1942: Pack up, board a train and it is north to Scotland once again.

23 Oct. 1942: Arriving in Greenock, Scotland, the Squadron again boards ship, this time the troop ship HMS Letitia. Assigned to quarters on the second level below decks, the men are informed that during the day the quarters will serve as a mess hall, at night as a sleeping place, with hammocks and tables used as beds. (Again, officers are assigned to cabins on “A” deck.) For the next four days the ship takes on additional troops. With hundreds of men together and the resulting stench, many choose a sleeping spot on deck.

27 Oct. 1942: The Letitia finally leaves the Firth of Clyde, and complaints of the quality and quantity of food increases – poor food and only two meals per day.

2 Nov. 1942: Started taking malaria pills, which were “yellow, powdery pills slightly larger than aspirin and they taste like Hell.”

4 Nov. 1942: Issued head nets and mosquito netting, desert goggles, sterilizing kits for water, along with a small, blue covered booklet, “North Africa.” With full packs practice begins climbing up and down rope nets. Officers meet with the men to talk about the landing – the beach at the Gulf of Arzew near Oran, Algeria. Small American flag patches are issued to each man to sew on the sleeve of their uniform, as it is hoped that the French will not fire on American troops.

6 Nov. 1942: At about 2325 hours the Letitia passes the Rock of Gibraltar into the Mediterranean Sea. Some men comment that it is smaller than they had imagined.

8 Nov. 1942 (Sunday): Shelling and the landing of troops begin as the Center Task Force of Operation Torch proceeds. At Noon the ship’s captain announces that Oran is in Allied hands.

From the diary of Warrant Officer Francis S. Kalinowski:

*Awakened by heavy gunfire at 4:00 A.M. At last we are here and the battle is ON. Went up to the top deck to watch the battle and the gun flashes. Ship dropped anchor a couple of miles off shore and the men started going over the sides down the scramble nets at 6:00 A.M. At daybreak, the mosquito boats layed smoke screens between ships and shore. The invasion barges are shuttling back and forth between the ships and beach as fast as they can load and unload. Now it’s a steady rumble of the big guns. Rifles & machine guns are keeping up a steady fire on shore. Can see two battleships in the distance shelling the port of Oran. Our troops are sending up smoke rockets and smoke pots are floating all over the water. Stayed up on deck all morning watching the fight. A few of our barges were sunk by gunfire from a fort on shore. Some were shot up and wrecked on the beach. Two barges collided in the smoke screen and sank. The battle went on all afternoon and troops kept pouring to shore.*

*The fight is now subsiding into the hills. Our troops have the shore pretty well in hand. God Bless America. Wrote few words to Bobbie after supper and went back upon deck to watch the lights and flashes of the battle. At times the sky towards Oran turned a bright red. Boy! They are catching HELL there. Can hear the cannons of our tanks off in the hills some-place. At about 10:15 P.M. a band of Arab guerillas came down out of the*

*hills and attacked some points on shore. It's midnight and in a minute it will be tomorrow. Cannoneering and cracks of rifles and rattle of machine guns still rumbling in the night. I have my battle dress on, my pack is here beside me, my gun is loaded, my knife is sharpened and my spirits are 100% stars and stripes. Fell asleep in my bunk shortly after midnight. May be over side anytime.*

9 Nov. 1942: The first parties of the 154<sup>th</sup> climb down the rope nets to barges in order to go in. The remainder of the 154<sup>th</sup> followed the next day. Although there are still snipers, the Squadron forms into two single file columns and march along the coast road leading eastward. Before nightfall they turn into the town of St. Leu.

From the diary of Warrant Officer Francis S. Kalinowski (9 Nov. 1942)

*Awakened at 5:00 A.M. for breakfast. Had eggs and bacon which will probably be the last for a long while. This is zero hour for our outfit. Swung equipment on my back and went over the ships rail at 6:15 A.M. still dark. Made the 40 feet of scrambled net straight down to the invasion barge bouncing up and down without a scratch. It was so much fun that I felt like doing it over again. Our ships let up a balloon barrage this morning. At dawn, two ME-109's attacked from the east but the ship and shore guns drove them back. Landed on beach near Arzew at 8:00 A.M. Got my feet wet a bit. Didn't even notice that our men were pouring off the barges all along the beach. After the last man landed we started out down the road to town, column of files down each side of the road about fifteen feet apart. Marched through Arzew hugging the walls on each side of the street. The going is slow because the hills and buildings are full of snipers taking pot shots at our troops. Stopped by snipers in church steeple. One of our tanks came up and put a 75 mm shell right in the steeple and knocked it clear off the map. Seventeen Frenchmen and Arabs were captured there and they had a stock of rifles and machine guns and ammunition. Out we go through town and down the road to the hills. Two ME-109's harassing and strafing roads every once in a while. We scrambled for cover and hit the dirt quite a few times. Halted for lunch at 1:00 P.M. I had a can of cold hash, dog biscuits and a chocolate bar. Marched on and off until 5:30 P.M. and halted for the night. Had cold G.I. iron ration for supper but brewed myself a hot cup of coffee. Went to sleep in a barn in a pile of hay.*

During the journey it is noted by Gillies that the Army "C" rations taste "pretty good" after the chow on the boat.

11 Nov. 1942: The Squadron enjoys an invigorating swim and much-needed bath in the crystal clear but cold waters of the Mediterranean.

13 Nov. 1942: It is noted by WO Kalinowski in his diary that, "Since we got off the boat we've been eating iron rations every meal, three times a day. It was either hash, meat and beans, plus the dog biscuits and coffee. .... Some of the water we were rationed looked like coffee before I even put the powder in."

15 Nov. 1942: Captain Mayer managed to "requisition" two large 250 gallon barrels of "real French wine" from a blown up winery, and each man is issued one canteen full.

16 Nov. 1942: In what will prove to be fairly regular for the next months, the men pack up their belongings and board trucks to move to Tafaraoui Airdrome, just south of Oran. It seems that no sooner are they set up that they get orders to take down and be ready to move.

18 Nov. 1942: After about an 11 mile ride to Oran, the Squadron loads into French “torture boxes,” the infamous French freight cars known as “40 by 8s” (40 troops or 8 horses).

21 Nov. 1942: After two torturous nights on the train, the men arrive at Bilda Airdrome, Algeria, a former French airfield, where they are able to sleep in the shelter of a hanger, albeit with their sleep interrupted by several air raids during the night.

27 Nov. 1942: Thanksgiving is celebrated one day late with chicken from the county-side, a welcome relief after having eaten British compo-rations (especially despised was ox-tail soup) for some time. *Note: The British compo-ration was based on feeding a group of people rather than an individual. A box of Compo would feed an infantry section (about 8-10 men) for a day or a tank crew (around 5 men) for two days. Compo was essentially a box of lots of cans of food. Its primary attraction was the great variety of food it had. Rather than a set menu, the British made sure each box had a balance of meat, vegetables, bread and condiments.* (Description used with permission of the 63rd Infantry Division Association.) Thanksgiving dinner consists of boiled chicken, dressing, boiled turnips and string beans, olives, oranges, scallions, tea, and real dark French bread.

2 Dec. 1942: After three days of scrubbing and cleaning out the barracks, members are able to move in. For the first time the 154<sup>th</sup> has a mess hall.

4 Dec. 1942: A red-letter day! Hot cakes and real American coffee for breakfast! The first real American breakfast in months. Later that day the first A-20 *Havocs* begin arriving from Oujda, Morocco, led by 1<sup>st</sup>. Lt. Robert Downie and S/Sgt. Gerrel “Ollie” O’Quin. The men learn that during the trip across the Atlantic Five men and two planes were lost.

7 Dec. 1942: The first overseas promotions come through.

8 Dec. 1942: PFC Frederick W. Gillies puts out the first Squadron newspaper, “154<sup>th</sup> News” (re-titled in March 1945 as the “*Tailpiece*”). Two copies are posted.

11 Dec. 1942: On the move again, the Squadron boards air transports to Oujda airbase, French Morocco, where they meet the remainder of the flight echelon, making the Squadron complete for the first time since leaving the States. Other pilots give accounts of the harrowing journey from Palm Beach, Florida past hurricanes, the Atlantic crossing, and dust storms. Out of 36 aircraft that began the journey, only 23 arrived in North Africa.

On base is the 111<sup>th</sup> Squadron, personnel of the parent 68<sup>th</sup> Observation Group, plus French Air Force Personnel.

*Note: At this time the 154<sup>th</sup> was part of the 68th Observation (later Reconnaissance; Tactical Reconnaissance) Group (motto: Victoria Per Observatiam [Victory Through Observation]).*

That evening the men are treated to a mess kit piled with wieners, canned tomatoes, bread and jam, and cupfuls of real American coffee.

16 Dec. 1942: At 0755 hours 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Fred Monthei and gunner Sgt. Gerrel O'Quin make the first operational combat flight for the 154<sup>th</sup>. They take their A-20 on combat sub patrol over the waters in the Oran area. The A-20 carries four 250 pound depth charges.

18 Dec. 1942: It's about time! First mail call in two months!

20 Dec 1942: Captain John R. Dyas assumes command as the C.O., replacing Captain Mayer, who has been injured in a motor accident.

21 Dec. 1942: Although the bitter cold and the sound quality leave something to be desired, the Squadron watches "Good-bye Mr. Chips," the first movie since leaving England.

23 Dec. 1942: Conditions at Oujda's airfield can be best explained in a poem written by WO Kalinowski in his diary (note change in spelling of Oujda):

*Now the mud in Oujji's pastures,  
is a sticky, clinging lump,  
it goes above your ankles,  
and it may contact your rump.  
Jesus, how the damn stuff gets you,  
how it clings to shoe and boot,  
how it soaks your damn dern breeches,  
how it messes up your suit.  
You get mud in every chow plate,  
you get mud in bed, it seems,  
you get mud in your best helmet,  
you get mud in your best dreams.  
Sure I know that this is wartime,  
sure I know it's sweat and blood,  
but good cripes must I perish,  
in this damned Oujji mud.*

24 Dec. 1942: The Christmas program in the hanger is interrupted by a rumor of an invasion of Spanish troops just ten miles away. Although the rumor later proves to be false, festivities are halted. Each Squadron plane has two men stationed with it to destroy the aircraft in case of a big ground attack. The muddy condition of the field would prevent any take off.

25 Dec. 1942: After four days of rain, mud, and gritty wind, Christmas day dawns. In a surprise to the Enlisted Men, the Squadron's Officers did all of the food preparation and KP duty that day. As WO Kalinowski described it, "We told them not to get excited because it was only a mirage." At Noon the mess hall doors open to a festive meal of chicken, gravy, stuffing, potatoes, vegetables, pickles, onions, jelly, deviled eggs and Cognac eggnog, all served by the volunteer Officer-KPs.

31 Dec. 1942: The year ends with SNOW! Snow fell all morning and covered the ground with the exception of the mud puddles.

## 1943

The year opens with a continuation of sub patrols by the Squadron's *Havocs*. Bell P-39 *Airacobras* start coming to the squadron, and by 14 January 1943 the third P-39 crashes in two days, leading many to believe the plane is a jinx.

7 Jan. 1943: The first combat casualties come when one of the A-20 *Havocs* fails to return and the crew, Capt. Clyde A. Knapp, Lt. John H. Gravestock, S/Sgt. William F. Pozzi, and Pfc. Edward H. Reynolds are listed as "missing in action. A search fails to find any trace of the ship or crew.

8 Jan. 1943: The A-20 planes and crews transfer to the 16<sup>th</sup> Observation Squadron while the 154<sup>th</sup> receives a new group of P-39 pilots and ground crew.

18 Jan. 1943: As described in WO Kalinowski's diary: "A dawn patrol A-20 took off right through our dispersal area in the dark this morning. It chopped one of our ships to shreds, got off the ground over another P-39 and then crashed and burned. All four of the crew got out but one of the gunners died of the injuries. The ship was burning right in our dispersal area so I had some men down untying and moving our ships away while the flares and ammunition were going off like fireworks. Two depth charges went off before we got down there and then after we got down to our closest ship the third depth charge went off and just about knocked us for a loop. The explosion threw flames and red hot A-20 parts about 400 feet in the air. We all dived under our ships while it rained red hot nuts, bolts, and rivets. Something went through the aileron of the ship I was under. After the fire we picked up small and big parts of A-20 and our P-39 for half an hour. By nine o'clock it was work and flying as usual for all day."

21 Jan 1943: The move begins to Youks-les-Bains, Algeria. From now until 24 Feb. the Squadron will be split between Oujda and Youks-les-Bains. The main field at Youks-les-Bains is on a large plateau area banked on one side by the well-named peak, "the Frenchman's Hat."

Shortly thereafter the P-39s are ordered to look for "targets of opportunity," i.e. Axis trucks, tanks, or the like.

26 Jan. 1943: The first Squadron reconnaissance mission over enemy territory is conducted at 1400 hours by Lts. Eugene P. Pitts and Robert M. Anstine. The area to be covered is Tebessa and Sened, Tunisia.

1 Feb. 1943: The food here is the best yet, and almost daily – steaming pancakes, jam, fried eggs, great slices of white bread and hot coffee. Officers and Enlisted Men sweat out the chow line regardless of rank or duty and the spirit here is uncommonly close.

2 Feb. 1943: Up on a dawn mission over the Kairouan area, Lts. Eugene F. Hilliker and William R. Yost are attacked by four FW-109's which swoop directly out of the sun. Lt. Yost, presumed to be hit and heading southeast of Kairouan, does not return to base by day's end.

5 Feb. 1943: Congratulations to C. O. Dyas who is now a Major. Ground attacks continue with the P-39s making good use of their 37 mm cannon.

6 Feb. 1943: Back at Oujda airbase, screen star Martha Raye steps from an A-20, and grins widely as she is greeted by the group of grimy soldiers who have heard of her coming. Later in the day she performs in the hanger, and later has supper in the mess hall with the men. All agree that she is “a good sport.”

17 Feb. 1943: An impressive claim total is amassed for the day from 10 pilots: destroyed – 2 tanks, 8 trucks, 25 personnel; damaged – 1 medium tank, 2 half tracks, and 8 trucks.

20 Feb. 1943: Word of the German success at Kasserine Pass cause preparation for evacuation, but heavy rains prevent any activity.

22 Feb. 1943: Pilots and planes take off to participate in an all out effort to drive Rommel from the Kasserine Pass. Seventeen sorties are flown, with one loss, Lt. Eugene Hilliker, “too eager,” shot down in a second pass over an Axis motor convoy.

24 Feb. 1943: Finally, the arrival of the last elements of the Squadron from Oujda.

26 Feb. 1943: Mud, mud, and more mud! As described by WO Kalinowski, “You walk ten steps and your feet are as big as bushel baskets and weight twenty five pounds apiece. The damn mud gets in your boots and just cakes up your socks and lumps up just enough to pee anybody off.”

6 March 1943: Days of hail and rain make the camp a “brown, gooey pudding of mud,” preventing flight and flooding out many tents during the night.

11 March 1943: By bumpy truck the Squadron moves to Thelepte Airfield, Tunisia, which had been recently occupied by the Germans. The entire Squadron settles into the evacuated dugouts. The base is a flat, scrub covered area set below a three-quarters ring of far away mountains.

For the next few weeks the photo-recon missions keep the photo section (in a trailer) busy, supplying reconnaissance photos to General Patton’s headquarters. In addition, attack missions continue against Axis ground troops and vehicles. Days are punctuated with occasional air raids from German aircraft, as well as overhead visits from “Foto Fritz,” the German reconnaissance aircraft.

At this time the Squadron is known as the 154<sup>th</sup> Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron.

13 March 1943: The Squadron now has 24 aircraft.

(by) 2 April 1943: Six new P-51 *Mustangs* have arrived. On the afternoon of 3 April one of the new P-51s spins in and “... really smashed up all over the field.” Lt. Howard Kenner is killed in the crash.

The P-51s have yellow stripes painted on their wings to keep them from being fired on by Allied gunners due to the plane’s resemblance to an ME-109.



6 April 1943: The Squadron is ordered to strike camp and the move begins to Sebeitla, landing ground, Tunisia. Along the way the roads are littered with the hulks of both Allied and Axis tanks in the bombed out countryside.

9 April 1943: Lt. Alfred C. Schwab, Jr., up on the first *Mustang* (F-6A, serial No. 41-37328) combat mission flown by any pilot in the United States Army, successfully photographs the enemy-held Kairouan Airdrome and returns without incident.

*Note: Although the first Mustangs to see operational service were with the 154<sup>th</sup>, after only a few weeks the aircraft were transferred to the 111<sup>th</sup> Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, part of the parent 68<sup>th</sup> Observation Group.*

10 April 1943: On the Move again. The Squadron packs up and loads onto trucks to go bumping northward.

10 April 1943: Arrive at Le Sers airfield, Tunisia. Here, photo-recon missions continue.

15 April 1943: Two new P-39Ns arrive, bringing the total number of aircraft for the Squadron to eighteen.

24 April 1943: Major Dyas is awarded the Silver Star “For exceptional valor and service during the Tunisian campaign.”

30 April 1943: The Engineering Section of the 154<sup>th</sup> is converting an F-4 *Lightning* (photo version of the P-38) into an R-1 recon ship. The nacelle of the ship has been modified with an observation window and is capable of carrying an observer, who sits with a .50 caliber machine gun over each shoulder. By 3 May it is completed, with several Generals visiting to see it, including Twelfth Air Force Commanding General Jimmy Doolittle.

1 May 1943: The days settle down to a casual pace. The fields around the base are splashed with masses of red poppies; large black “doodle bugs” are everywhere. The soldiers listen regularly to “Axis Sally,” and agree the music she plays is better than the English programs.

5 May 1943: Major Dyas departs and Captain Joseph E. Whitwell, Jr. assumes command of the Squadron.

9 May 1943: With the arrival of seven new P-39Ns and one P-40 the Squadron aircraft total is up to 29.

11 May 1943: Word is received that the Germans have surrendered in North Africa.

13 May 1943: Two more aircraft join the Squadron, giving them a total of 32:

5	P-51s
1	A-36
11	P-39Ls
3	P-39Ms
8	P-39Ns

1 P-38  
1 F-4  
1 R-1  
1 P-40

19 May 1943: Time to break camp and once again it is loading onto trucks headed northeastward to Korba on the Cape Bon peninsula. On the way the Squadron passed large POW camps and trucks full of POWs. Once they arrived in Korba a great deal of time was spent hunting and trading for souvenirs, hunting, rifle practice, and swimming.

30 May 1943: Moving again, this time in a combination of trucks and C-47s to Nouvion airfield, Algeria, which will be shared with the 111<sup>th</sup> Observation Squadron.

3, 4 June 1943: The big event of the day: ice cold lemonade!

13 June 1943: Learn today that the Squadron will be known as the 154<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Squadron (Fighter), as had been determined on 31 May 1943.

7 July 1943: Distinguished guests visit: General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Teeder, Captain Harry C. Butcher (Naval Aide to General Dwight D. Eisenhower), and Lt. General Mark Clark.

15 July 1943: It is now “Major” Whitwell as C. O.

Over the next few weeks, photo-recon missions continue in the morning, and the 154<sup>th</sup> participates in a “mock air-ground war,” with part of the Squadron based at Orleansville Airfield, some eighty miles distant. Training missions are also increased.

27 Sept. 1943: The one-year anniversary of leaving the states is marked as a “holiday” for all enlisted men, and the officers take over duties.

18 Oct. 1943: At odd moments between gunnery flights today, work progresses on the Officer’s Club-to-be. Standing off and viewing their handiwork and then pitching in again are Lts. Francis S. Kalinowski and James O. Glanville, working on voluptuous and novel character murals, and many other officers doing carpentry and other work.

22 Oct. 1943: It has been noted that a major activity is trading items, especially soap, to the local Arabs for fresh eggs, which are fried in the tents and eaten until one can eat no more.

25 Nov. 1943: The second Thanksgiving away from home is celebrated with turkey, sweet potatoes, turnips, onions, dressing, gravy, Jello, chocolate cake, and American coffee.

24 Dec. 1943: The second Christmas evening away from home is spent in the Chapel for a special service, followed by a radio broadcast by President Roosevelt, who reminds all of “the struggles yet to come.” All over camp and well into Christmas morning, small groups of men gather together in the Day Room, around the bar, in crowded barracks, or on the water mirrored streets. Barbershop quartets roam through the area, shadowy figures grouped arm-in-arm wail discordantly but happily into the crisp night air ... so comes Christmas morning, 1943.

25 Dec. 1943: Sleeping until the unheard-of Army hour of 0900 hours, we finally rise and go over for Christmas morning breakfast prepared and served by the officers. But the best was yet to come. At precisely 1600 hours, the doors open and the men are treated to mess kits piled high with turkey, potato, dressing, pickles, salad, tomatoes, cranberry sauce, cake and coffee.

26 Dec. 1943: With the rumor among the men about soon being out of the XII training Command (to which the Squadron had been assigned since 1 Sept. 1943), the question becomes, "Just what are we going to do?"

28 Dec. 1943: Remaining P-39s take off to go to the French for patrol duty. The Squadron now has the distinction of having no airplanes.

31 Dec. 1943: at the stroke of 2400 hours, the Squadron is no longer under the operational control of the XII training Command. Late into the night are heard the cries of "Happy New Year" as the Squadron celebrates, still unsure as to what the new year will bring.

## 1944

3 Jan. 1944: After many false alarms, word is given to begin packing.

5 Jan. 1944: After a two-hour ride the Squadron arrives at the Canestel Staging Area, Algeria, east of Oran and near the southern base of Lion Mountain. Here they wait for the next assignment.

16 Jan. 1944: A night ride takes the Squadron to Oran Harbor to board the Liberty Ship USNS George G. Meade.

20 Jan 1944: Arrive in Bone Harbor for repairs after having to leave the protection of the convoy. The good news is that troops are allowed leave into town (Bone).

24 Jan 1944: With repairs made, it is off to sea again, and the Meade joins another convoy.

31 Jan. 1944: After a stop in Bagnoli Harbor, Italy, today the Meade puts in to Naples Harbor.

1 Feb. 1944: The Squadron settles in to the Nesida Staging Area, Naples. Major Whitwell announces that the Squadron will be attached to the Fifteenth Air Force as a weather reconnaissance squadron. An attachment of Officers and Enlisted Men who have already been doing this work (the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force Weather Reconnaissance Squadron) will be integrated into the 154<sup>th</sup>.

2 Feb. 1944: On trucks again, this time heading for Bari, Italy.

12 Feb. 1944: After a week in Bari in temporary quarters at the 22<sup>nd</sup> Replacement Center, the Squadron moves to Bari Airdrome, where it will be stationed for the remainder of the war.

13 Feb. 1944: Operations commence as everyone looks at the four new P-38 *Lightnings* which arrive. Flying the first all-Squadron weather-reconnaissance mission in Italy, Lt. Walter Pittman

takes off from the mud-rutted airfield and returns less than three hours later after a flight over Rome.

Weather flights over the next year will be long – from 3 to 4 hours, and will be flown at 20,000 – 30,000 feet. Most flights will take off before 0600 hours. The Squadron will initially provide pre-bombing coverage in Italy, Germany, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Greece, and France. Later operations will include the Balkans and Romania.

3 March 1944: Three more P-38s are added to the Squadron, bringing the total of operational aircraft to “an unimpressive seven.”

12 March 1944: Major Joseph Whitwell transfers back to the States, and Captain Alfred C. Schwab, Jr., takes over as C. O.

21 March 1944: increased operational activity is the order of the day as six missions wing out over Budapest, Vienna, Genoa, Milan, Florence, Klagenfurt, Munich, Nice, Sofia, and Belgrade.

31 March 1944: On the last mission of the day, a weather-recon flight to Budapest, Lt. Walter Pittman obtains photo coverage along the route and directly over the target, thus inaugurates the use of the K-24 aerial camera which had been modified and installed by Squadron Photo and Engineering personnel.

Lt. Robert P. Zirkle scores a “destroyed” on an ME-109 while flying his P-38. As he described it, “... *one of these enemy planes ... attacked head on. Noting that the tracers from the ME were passing below me, I raised the nose of my plane to keep above his fire. As the ME approached, I stalled my ship and dropped down so that one of my belly tanks hit him. The enemy plane spun out of sight and I saw a parachute open.*”

It should be noted that in most instances the P-38s flying reconnaissance missions had three of the five machine guns removed to accommodate the cameras. In some cases there was no armament, and the greatest defensive weapon the pilot had at his disposal was speed.

5 April 1944: Outstanding in the day’s assignments successfully completed is that of supplying pre-attack reconnaissance for the first 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force, Italy-based bomber attack on the Ploesti, Rumania, oil refineries. Pilots are Lts Harry S. Cook, James W. Tipton, Dana C. Lovejoy, and Capt. Harold R. Slagle

8 April 1944: Another red-letter day – the first bottle of ice cold Coca Cola in 18 months is issued by the PX.

22 April 1944: All enjoy the USO show featuring Marlene Dietrich and comedian Danny Thomas.

12 & 13 June 1944: Experimenting in the Communications “Hut,” Captain Albert Adell and S/Sgt. Forrest Clark have brought forth an aircraft radio installation which should solve a problem confronting this Squadron for some time: the transfer from Very-High-Frequency radio equipment to “Long range” Very-High-Frequency equipment. By finagling parts, re-making old

ones, and modifying new ones, they have created a new transmitter. If a future test of equipment is successful, then some of our relay missions can be eliminated.

15 June 1944: Word is received that the Squadron has been re-designated the 154th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron (Medium) on 12 May 1944.

It should be noted that some published information about the Squadron states that effective with this designation, Squadron "operations were limited to weather reconnaissance." However, the record shows otherwise. From this time to the end of the war in Europe, weather missions preceded a group of bombers (typically B-24 *Liberators* and B-17 *Flying Fortresses* of the 15<sup>th</sup> AAF) by about 30 minutes, regularly reporting weather conditions to the bomb group(s). With this information, decisions were made as to whether to continue the mission. In many instances the P-38 reconnaissance aircraft remained over the target area and returned to base with photos of the bombing results.

It is noted around this time that many of the men are feeling "stuck" at Bari, not too surprising as this has been (and will be) the longest assignment in one location.

4 July 1944: The day of the "154<sup>th</sup> O' July Banquet" has arrived and from the morning until early evening, Number Nine Via di Rossi, the scene of the event, is a place of uninterrupted activity and feverish preparation. The evening is highlighted with a dinner, wine, songs, and testimonials.

26 July 1944: Up on a mission to Vienna, Austria, Lt. Russell W. Field, Jr. successfully tests a VHF radio set modified by Capt. Albert L. Adell and S/Sgt. Forrest B. Clark and now yielding an increased range of 300 to 400 miles. The range previous to the modification was only 100 to 200 miles.

28 July 1944: Major Schwab heads for home, and Captain James H. Fuller takes over as C.O.

17 Aug. 1944: Inaugurating the first phase of a "special assignment" over the Ploesti oil refineries, Squadron weather P-38s provide continuous cover over the five distinct targets in the specified area, radio information directly to the approaching bombers, and name the position of those targets not obscured by smoke screens.

30 Aug. 1944: Coming back from Wright Field (Dayton, OH) Testing Station with nineteen endorsements, the VHF radio modification (increasing radio range from 100 to 400 miles) which Capt. Albert Adell and T/Sgt. Forrest Clark recently worked out returns to Italy and is marked "Approved." Tacked on to the back of this approval is the memo – "the War Department is to be informed when all such modifications have been made in this Theatre."

12 Sept. 1944: M/Sgt. Dick Red is recognized for his work on the installation of the K-24 aerial camera in P-38 aircraft when Major General Nathan Twining, Commanding General, Fifteenth Air Force, pins a Legion of Merit medal on him. The award is for "*his exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding service rendered in the modification and installation of aerial camera equipment in weather-reconnaissance type aircraft.*" In October General Twining returns and awards another Legion of Merit to Captain Francis S. Kalinowski,

Engineering Officer, for *“his exceptional and untiring work for modification and installation of K-24 aerial cameras in weather-reconnaissance P-38 type aircraft.”*

Sept. 44: By this time 23 British and Canadian crewmen are assigned to the Squadron with “Mosquito” aircraft.

22 Sept. 1944: The “lead mission” becomes a Squadron-formulated operations procedure. Under this procedure weather-recon ships precede bombers by 50-75 miles to the target and/or on return from the target, all the time sending radio weather data to the trailing bombers.

During the later half of 1944 the Squadron is assigned increasing numbers of “Droop Snoop” (radar equipped) P-38 aircraft and the crews to maintain a radar shop.

7 Oct. 1944: 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force bombing (928 bombers, 1627 tons) is directly supported by ten 154<sup>th</sup> planes which precede the “heavies” over Vienna, Lake Balaton, and the Zagreb area at spaced intervals throughout the day.

25 Oct 1944: The first enlisted man to be so honored in the 154<sup>th</sup>, S/Sgt. William E. Roseberry, Photo Section, is awarded the Bronze Star, for *“meritorious achievement during March 1944 when his Squadron experienced crippling problems with newly installed aerial camera equipment – (at that time) he undertook the task of effecting a solution to the technical difficulties and perfected innovations of aerial camera usage which proved highly successful under combat conditions imposed upon them by operational activity of (high flying) weather aircraft.”*

28 Oct. 1944: Briefed for a mission to Klagenfurt, Austria, Lts. Blaine Murry, Jr. and Wesley B. Meeter are told that although the weather is known to be bad all along the way to the target, a comparatively small number of bombers is to take part in this operation and that their job (the weather aircraft) will **not** be, as in previous missions, to seek a route void of clouds, but this time to help the bombers **stay in** the clouds. A few hours later, the bombers, preceded by the 154<sup>th</sup>s P-38s, are brought over the Klagenfurt aircraft factory. Thus the planes and pilots inaugurate another technique – “180 degrees different” from all previous experience.

9 Nov. 1944: Another change in Commanding Officers as Major William R. Dinker takes over.

30 Nov. 1944: General Eisenhower’s Chief Air Deputy, Sir Arthur Teeder visits the base.

28 Nov. 1944: The radar section tests the addition of a tail-warning device (to warn of possible rear attacks). During a practice mission the installed device is deemed to “work O.K.”

20 Dec. 1944: For the fifth consecutive day, 154<sup>th</sup> planes lead the Fifteenth Air Forces “heavies” to and from the Brux, Germany oil refineries. As a result of these highly coordinated operations, an “all-units” message is received from General Eaker, Commander in Chief of the MAAF (Mediterranean Allied Air Force):

The past six days successive days operations of the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force against most distant, difficult, and important targets have been observed by me with great admiration. I appreciate the great strain such sustained operations place upon all elements, including servicing and maintenance

personnel, planning and operating staffs, and the combat crews. My congratulations to all of you.

25 Dec. 1944: The first radar equipped P-38 (“Droop Snoop”) is dispatched on an operational flight. Shortly after take off the delicate equipment becomes “ineffective.”

## 1945

25 Jan. 1945: The Squadron’s 1000<sup>th</sup> weather mission since beginning operations in Bari is completed by 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Robert V. Clifford.

21 Feb. 1945: For five days planes and pilots continue to fly in close coordination with 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force bombers attacking communications points just ahead of the onrushing Soviet armies.

22 Feb. 1945: 154<sup>th</sup> planes supply pre-raid and target reconnaissance for “the greatest mass bombing of the war.”

28 Feb. 1945: In recognition for the past 11 days (13-25 Feb. 1945) of concentrated effort the Commanding General of the Fifteenth Air Force, Major General Nathan Twining, writes to all 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force Units.

I have noted with feelings of pride and satisfaction that large scale effort of the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force during the last 11 days. Of particular note is the excellence of the maintenance organization which sustains our continued high rate of aircraft operational.

During February and months following there is much concern among enlisted personnel about being transferred to the infantry. As the next months pass those concerns also include the possibility of being sent to the Pacific Theatre.

12 March 1945: Flying ahead of and in general support of 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force bombers striking at the Florisdorf (Vienna) oil refineries, 154<sup>th</sup> planes take part in the heaviest single attack (1667 tons) by the Air Force on a single target.

15 March 1945: Lts. Albin R. Wenzel, Roy A. Herres, and Gordon E. Hackbarth fly 700 miles northwards to Dresden, Germany, thus completing the longest Squadron mission on record.

18 March 1945: *Stars and Stripes* magazine (“*Lead Out For Weather*,” by Sgt. Allan Palmer) says of the 154<sup>th</sup>s airplanes: “These P-38s have cut six months off the war by their snooping.”

11 April 1945: The 154<sup>th</sup> achieves the high strength of having 24 P-38s.

4 May 1945: Word is received that all Nazi troops have surrendered. There is increasing concern and rumors about being shipped to the Pacific Theatre.

23 May 1945: Major General Nathan Twining attaches a Distinguished Unit Citation Streamer (for operations over Ploesti, Rumania, on the days, 17-18-19 1944) to the Squadron standard held forth by T/Sgt. Gerrel O’Quin. The complete citation reads:

HEADQUARTERS

FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE

GENERAL ORDERS )  
NUMBER 2036)

2 April 1945

CITATION OF UNIT

Under the provisions of Circular No. 333, War Department, 1943, and Circular No 89, Headquarters NATOUSA, 10 July 1944, the following unit is cited for outstanding performance of duty in armed conflict with the enemy:

154<sup>th</sup> WEATHER RECONNAISSANCE SQUADRON. For outstanding performance of duty in support of strategic bombing operations against the enemy. On 17, 18, and 19 August 1944, during a period of concentrated bombing attacks against the huge Ploesti oil refinery in Rumania, the aircraft of the 154<sup>th</sup> Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, preceding the bombers over this vital target, conducted an extensive pre-attack reconnaissance of the target's defensive system. Prior to the attack the ground personnel worked tirelessly to have their aircraft at the peak of mechanical condition to insure the success of this maximum effort of the squadron. Facing defending enemy fighters and intense barrages of anti-aircraft fire with supreme courage and utter disregard of the extreme hazards confronting them, the pilots of these lightly armed, unescorted reconnaissance aircraft circled, crossed and re-crossed the heavily defended target area while procuring target defense data. The weather aircraft pilots, following the initial transmission of the assembled detailed data, continued to traverse the target area, photographing the progress and results of the attack and maintaining a flow of target information to the successive waves of bomber aircraft. Utilizing the vital data furnished by the 154<sup>th</sup> Weather Reconnaissance Squadron's pilots, the bomber forces carried out highly successful attacks, destroying large areas of vitally important refinery installations and supplies. The aggressiveness, daring and high tactical efficiency, together with the outstanding teamwork displayed in the execution of these missions, while inaugurating new tactics against heavily defended targets is an outstanding example of efficiency and versatility. By the untiring efforts and devotion to duty of the ground crews, together with the aggressiveness, courage and professional skill of the pilots, this mission, executed in keeping with the highest traditions of the Armed Forces of the United States of America, has contributed greatly to the hastening of the defeat of the enemy.

BY COMMAND OF MAJOR GENERAL TWINING

29 May 1945: Major Dinker reads a notice to the Squadron that they will be redeployed to the U. S. in June.

7 June 1945: The Squadron starts packing up, this time for good.

10 July 1945: Some of the Squadron leaves from Naples and arrives in Hampton Roads Virginia on 19 July 1945.

19 July 1945: The remainder of the squadron boards the USS Argentina, 30% over capacity, and heads out of Naples Harbor.

29 July 1945: The Argentina arrives in New York Harbor.



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**154th OVERSEAS COMBAT OPERATIONAL RECORD:**

**North Africa**

Submarine Patrol	25 Missions	27 Sorties
Attack, Photo, and Tactical Reconnaissance	144 Missions	342 Sorties
TOTAL (North Africa)	169 Missions	369 Sorties

**Italy**

Weather-reconnaissance	1326 Missions	2153 Sorties
GRAND TOTAL	1495 Missions	2153 Sorties

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**154th CAMPAIGN STREAMERS:**

Antisubmarine, American Theater; Antisubmarine, EAME Theater; Air Offensive, Europe; Algeria- French Morocco with Arrowhead; Tunisia; Anzio; Rome-Amo; Normandy; Northern France; Southern France; North Apennines; Rhineland; Central Europe; Po Valley; Air Combat, EAME Theater.

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**154th SQUADRON DECORATIONS:**

Distinguished Unit Citation: Rumania, 17, 18, 19 Aug 1944.