



strong hurled explosives into five Romanian cities today, slamming rail targets and an aircraft factory in a non-stop assault on the Balkans”, may have told what the other groups in the Fifteenth Air Force did and what our group was supposed to bomb, but this is what really happened. The group bombardier, upon whose shoulders rests the results of every mission, accidentally salvaged his bombs when he opened the bomb bay doors. All other ships are supposed to “toggle” on the lead ship and, as a result, bombs were strewn from the I. P. to the target. (My bombardier later said his exploded in a farmer’s yard). To take care of contingencies such as this, the group is supposed to drop with the deputy group leader who flies the group leader wing. A few of the planes held their bombs and dropped with the deputy leader on the target, the Ploesti railroad yards in Romania. Score? A farm, a few railroad yards in Romania, and a severe lecture from the Group Commander on the alertness of the bombardiers.

My co-pilot, the coolest man under fire on the crew, found, after this mission, that it was possible to light a cigarette at 20,000 feet. The air is very thin at 20,000 feet and the head of a match will scarcely burn. Immediately upon leaving the target area he would “light up”. This involved loosening his oxygen mask, taking a quick drag on the cigarette before the head of the match would burn out, and then replacing the mask in order to breathe the oxygen necessary to preserve life. It was also essential to keep a forced draft of air through the cigarette to keep it lit, and, as a result, he had to take a long drag on the cigarette, a few quick gasps

in the oxygen mask, another quick drag on the cigarette, and so on. The entire crew laughed, and relaxed, as the bombardier described how the co-pilot was “driving another nail.”

“100 American (Italy based) heavy bombers and fighters slammed approximately 1,200 tons of bombs on the railroad yards at Bucharest,” was the terse comment about our first well defended target. On every mission all planes in the group carried what we called window. This resembled the icicles you buy for Christmas trees and was made of tin foil. The window came in bundles and when over the target the bundles were torn open and the window scattered out the waist windows. Up to the present mission the anti aircraft defenses at the targets had not been too accurate and the window had been scattered in a rather languorous and desultory manner. I can still see how, after the flak started coming thick and close, the men began shoveling the window out the windows. The thicker the flak, the faster the spreading of the window. Some crews even started to throw out bundles of the stuff. This wasn’t funny at the time but we laughed about it after reaching home and many times thereafter.

The worst thing about these missions was the long period of time which had to be spent in the pilot’s seat immobilized by the tube of live preserving oxygen. “Top brass” thought up a new wrinkle for making our short missions long and our long missions longer. The missions inaugurating this new procedure, was described by the newspapers as being, “the greatest air armada ever mobilized over Italy”, and that the Fifteenth

Air Force, “is smashing this afternoon at German front and rear positions ahead of the Fifth and Eighth Armies battering towards Rome”. Italy missions were usually short and welcomed by everyone. The target for the day was a railroad yard at Via Reggio, but the route took us up the east coast side of Italy, then paralleled the front lines across Italy, out over the sea, up the coast, and into the target. We paralleled the front to boost the morale of the embattled infantry on their drive northward. If it raised their morale as much as it increased our discomfort, then we did a great deal of good and a major portion of the credit for the taking of Rome should be given to the Air Force. These out of the way trips didn’t hurt us, however, and I suppose the sight of 1000 planes flying overhead and the knowledge they were going to bomb the Germans, was a gratifying sight.

The newspapers at this time were condemning the Germans for their V-2 rocket and its inaccuracy and danger to civilians.

On radar missions our bombs were dropped in almost as inaccurate a manner. “U. S. heavy bombers struck into the Balkans today, bombing Ploesti in Romania and Belgrade and Nis in Yugoslavia,” makes no mention of our method of dropping bombs, but on this mission our target was Belgrade and cloud coverage over the target made it necessary to bomb by radar. For radar attempt, cities were chosen that suited the requirements of radar bombing. usually this meant one with a river flowing through the target area, because the rivers were well defined on the radar screen. It’s easy to