

The screams got louder the closer we came in toward the runway. Then we saw the men in the control vehicle jump out and run. Pete takes the B-24 down to about three feet over the runway, flies the whole length at that height and climbs away. No doubt leaving some pretty mad runway control people.'

Such escapades took place on what were test or cross-country training flights that should properly have been conducted at altitudes of several thousand feet. Buzzing was a practice that practically all junior officers indulged in at some time or other. Bomber pilots in the MTO were no less inhibited, as B-24 nose gunner Harland Little confirms: 'We enjoyed the days we flew "training" missions. One of our favorite tricks was to buzz the tents of a different group down on the road to see if we could blow them down with our prop wash.

'Another favorite was buzzing small sailboats in the Adriatic, which made things a little rough for the fishermen. Sometimes we'd do a little "splash" target practice nearby. I guess we were far from popular with Italian fishermen.' Although buzzing and aerial extravagance by fighter pilots were indulged, there were limits to official acceptance, as Jack Ilfrey discovered; 'In mid-December 1942 we (the 94th Fighter Squadron) had to leave the mud at Youkles-Bains and move to hot, dry and very dusty Biskra. It was common practice for pilots who scored a victory to do a roll over the field upon return, provided the plane wasn't damaged to let the ground men know of the success. Of course, it was in my nature to have to try and do something more spectacular, so I made a habit of diving down, buzzing across the field, pull up, do my roll and then pull up into a half loop, rolling out at the top. The group CO, Lt Col Ralph Garman, didn't like this exhibition too much, even though he knew it was good for the ground crews' morale. 'The day I got a double victory and feeling my P-38 was in good shape, I was going balls-out on the deck, pulled up and did a double roll and on into a half loop when an engine quit. I had the plane on its back and was just starting to roll out; no airspeed to speak of, ground not

far below me; and I looked to have lost it. Well, I survived a really close shave. Even though I had just become his first ace, Garman was livid. Restricted me to quarters and cut off my liquor allowance. After a good reprimand and my promise not to do it again I was

back hunting Jerries. But, of course, I had to think up some other trick. Returning from a mission soon afterwards, I buzzed the Colonel's headquarters tent which was near some palm trees on the edge of the field. I must have been a little too low for, as I pulled up, I saw Garman run out, shake his fist and jump in his Jeep. As I landed and taxied in to park, the Colonel's Jeep got behind me and collected a lot of the dust my props were throwing up. By the time I'd got out and was about to jump off the wing to meet the stern faced Garman, I was pretty sure I was going to be grounded or transferred. At that moment a command car drove up and out jumped General Pete Quesada from 12th Air Force HQ. He was laughing up a storm! Instead of being chewed out, I was presented with a

fifth of scotch by the General (in appreciation of my knocking down five Jerries) while I listened to him reminding my Colonel how he, Garman, had pulled various stunts when as a Lieutenant he flew under Quesada's command back in the thirties. Despite my "free spirit", Ralph Garman later gave me the best letter of recommendation I ever received in the service.'

This was just one more example of what one of the regular pranksters termed 'the fooling' around syndrome'; more truly defined as an uninhibited zest for non-conformity. Much was of a fairly harmless nature, or a show of youthful exuberance like that noted by Barky Hovsepian: 'The gunners on my crew were 18 and 19 years old. Craving youthful excitement and a desire to aid in the war effort, they scoured the land for empty bottles - any variety. When they had collected a sufficient number, they put them on board our plane before an operational mission and later dropped them through the camera hatch, commencing at the IP. This produced a screaming whistle when the bottles reached terminal velocity. It was psychological warfare! I doubt if the enemy below heard them over the sound of sirens, anti-aircraft guns or the drone of all the bombers, but it did help our gunners psychologically.

'Another prank they had concocted was to steal the 100-pound dummy bomb that was used to indicate our 787th Bomb Squadron Orderly Room. They smuggled it on board and it too was dropped through the camera hatch at "bombs away". On our return, we heard that inquiries were made as to the whereabouts of the bomb/sign. Of course, the search proved fruitless and a new sign was installed.'

Most pranks were played on fellow soldiers or airmen. Sometimes this horseplay would develop into a rivalry between friends, each intent on outsmarting the other. Whitmal Hill and a fellow mechanic in the 441st Sub Depot had such an ongoing exchange:

'My friend Bobby and I continually played tricks on each other to the point that whatever happened one would blame the

Regulations

were a challenge to many people who appear to have derived great satisfaction from flouting them in some manner or other. With an average age of 21, youthful nature undoubtedly had some bearing on this behavior. There was rarely any malice in this action, but if something was forbidden there was always a temptation to attempt it.