

## *Invasion of Corsica*

*Under air attack again, shortage of lorries again, stress telling, hard work and long hours, officer problem, technical solutions, innovative stuff, more attacks, more officers, another invasion planned, issues with the Americans, unarmed combat training, and they are off on August 14, 1944*

### **April 1944 to August 1944**

We have a dry landing at Ajaccio and all of the vehicles disembark with no problems and we make our way to the mountain road. As we get higher, we come to the 'snow line' and although it is April 1944, it is very cold at this altitude and care must be taken driving over the slippery surfaces. As we descended to a lower level, the temperature improved and we arrived at our new site that was situated in a zigzag valley about two miles long. The base of the valley was about 800 yards wide, scattered with trees, and when we obtained the assistance of the Americans with their graders, we had a very good road where all the transport could travel in comfort.

With all of the tents erected and the lorries in position, slit trenches dug, we all went for a meal in the mess. The next day, telephone lines were laid, lights fitted in the messes, all vehicles camouflaged and a 'dummy' site made at the end of the valley.

Oxygen was being produced and the nearby squadrons were coming for their spares. There were about 10 Spitfire Squadrons sited along the east coast and they were making themselves very unpopular with their continued strafing. The war was beginning to hot up again, and the Luftwaffe were making many sneak raids on the squadrons, they even had a go at our dummy site, but because of the zigzag valley, thermals made their bomb aiming difficult.

After about ten days, the Luftwaffe took revenge on the fighter bases. The raid started after midnight and our C.O. could see that severe damage was being caused and ordered all of our men out to prepare stores for the squadrons he knew would be coming in the next day at first light. The M.T. staffs were sent to the propeller Dept to assist with the assembly of the new propellers. The Sergeant and two 'prop' mechanics were showing our men how to do the basic assembly, the drivers were fetching and carrying and as soon as the 'props' were assembled, the team did the final adjustments and testing, and in the morning about twelve were ready for issue. The drivers were putting new tyres and tubes together.

While all of this was going on, the C.O. and the Stores Officer were signalling H.Q. in Italy to send as much material as possible by the first plane in the morning, and because of the urgency, this order was sent in 'plain language' and not in code. When the squadrons arrived in the morning, they were surprised to find so much equipment available for them. Out of one hundred and fifty planes amongst all of the squadrons there were only nine serviceable to fly. When the Luftwaffe came back at 4 pm for the 'kill', there were three full squadrons to meet them. By working thirty-six hours with only quick breaks for snacks and by cannibalising, most of the squadrons were up to strength and they stopped any further raids for a time.

The next day, a senior Officer from H.Q. criticised our C.O. for sending an order for spares in plain language during an air raid. This was so stupid because the Germans knew we were being bombed and if we had to wait for the order to be coded, and then decoded when the cipher Officer came on duty, the whole of squadrons would have been wiped out. A further case of B.B.B. (Bull baffles brains)!

## **Stress telling**

I had another nightmare last night and this time it was about another event at el Adem when the camp was blitzed. My friends were so worried that they reported it to the Medical Officer who sent for me and gave me a thorough check. He then said he would send me to a specialist for treatment. I went to the Military Hospital and saw the Psychiatrist who did all the things 'shrinks' do, and because this did not appear to affect me, he said to carry on and try not to think about it.

About a month after our arrival, the main unit joined up with us, but like all R.A.F. Stores Units, we only had enough drivers for about a third of our lorries. The other drivers were made up from the workshops staff, any one who said that they could drive. One of these drivers mechanically wrecked three lorries on the journey. We had just put a new engine into a 15 cwt four wheel drive pick-up and this man thought that he would try the four wheel drive before he set out and used it on the hard road. Because there is no 'slip' between the front and rear axles, it is possible to 'wind up' the drive between the two axles and make it impossible to disengage the drive. This man tried but only succeeded in breaking the selector lever in the gearbox, and instead of telling the workshop, he drove in the convoy. In four-wheel drive, it also engages a low auxiliary gear at the same time, and this man tried to keep up with the convoy, his engine racing until it seized up.

He was then given a new Canadian Ford, with a very quiet engine and before he had travelled a hundred miles, he had torn the teeth out of the gears in the gearbox. In desperation they gave him a Bedford Q.L four-wheel drive and when he was changing from 2<sup>nd</sup> gear to 3<sup>rd</sup> gear, he went too far across the 'gate' and forced the gear lever into reverse, stripping the teeth off the back axle. The lorry was lift towed backwards for the rest of the journey and the driver banned. This was one of many 'breakdowns' caused by the spare time drivers and our workshops were kept very busy for several weeks.

Three days later, we were advised that that a convoy of ships would be arriving at Ajaccio and that fifteen lorries and stores would be there for our unit. Other units would be sending staff to assist with the unloading, and once again I am detailed to take ten drivers and six Storekeepers along. We arrived at 5pm, and we met a Flying Officer who was in charge and a Sergeant who would oversee the unloading with me. A large Haulage premises had been commandeered to take the lorries and stores and having a high wall around the very large yard, Security would be no problem. And leaving two drivers and two Storekeepers at the yard to sort out the vehicles as they arrived at the yard, I went to the docks to arrange the shifts.

## **Hard work, little sleep**

Our dockside office was basically a large wooden hut with electric lighting, two large tables and some chairs. The Sergeant and I would take alternate shifts of six hours on and six hours off, twenty fours a day until completed. The drivers and storekeepers would take eight on and eight off. The eight drivers would drive the lorries to the park after the storekeepers had loaded them with any stores that had been unloaded from the ship.

We had a master list of all the lorries and the units who would be collecting them from the park. As the lorries came off the ship, they were checked against the list and a yellow chassis number was put on the windscreen in wax crayon as well as all of the stores crates were labelled. When eight lorries were assembled at the dock, they were taken to the park and the drivers were returned to the dock. The stores were then removed from the lorries and the lorries placed in a designated area for their unit. As the stores were sorted out, they were then placed in the appropriate vehicle. Forklift trucks were available at each end. I took the first shift, and the Officer was arranging with the Harbour Master, on the system for the ships to come in.

As soon as a lorry came off the ship, one of the clerks typed out several copies of the chassis number, together with the time and one copy was given to the man in charge of taking the lorries to the park. These lists were checked off the master shipping list and we were sure that none of the vehicles would be stolen. My shift over, I handed over to my colleague and I returned to the park for my sleep. About an hour before my shift started I heard some loud explosions from the dock area, and I quickly dressed and went to the docks to find that a sneak air raid had dropped some bombs on the dockside and damaged some of the installations, our own office included, and it had suffered severe damage.

The Officer had a broken leg and cuts and bruises, the Sergeant had a broken arm and severe cuts on his upper body, and two of the others had been taken to hospital with cuts and minor injuries. It is now left to me to get things organised so I used one of the storekeepers as a clerk and the harbour-master had arranged for a small wooden hut to be brought along for an office. Paraffin lamps were used for lighting and unloading was started again.

The shifts had to be re-arranged to six hours on and four hours off in order to have complete cover on the changeover of the shifts. I rang H.Q. for replacements and was told to carry on until they were available. With no one to relieve me, I carried on in the hope that I would have someone by the next shift. The Corporals doing the paper work were doing a splendid job, and I found I had little to do in that dept, the biggest problem was getting the lorries clear of the dock. We were allowed only one ship at a time at our part of the dock, and as it took about two hours to take an empty ship out and a loaded one back in and tied up, I tried to get a bit of sleep during these times. There were many ships being unloaded in the docks with all different cargoes and it was very difficult to know when your next ship would be in your area. A field kitchen had been set up nearby and we were able to get some food but fortunately, the Sally Ally came around and it was good to get a cup of tea that tasted like tea. Somehow, service cooks always seemed to 'burn' the water

At about ten pm, just as the last lorry was taken off the ship, I decided to walk away to the side of the harbour and sat on one of the bollards feeling home sick as I watched the reflection of the lights flickering across the still water, when a young Corsican girl walked by and said " Bonsoir, Monsieur, Cherchez la femme?"

I looked up and said, "Non. Je suis tres fatigue", she laughed and said " Trop fatigue pour l'amour?" I replied, "Oui. Je suis trop fatigue". She laughed as she walked away, "Au revoir, monsieur. Bon nuit." I then decided to go down the steps to the landing stage for the small fishing boats and taking off my clothes for the first time in three days, I dived into the water and swam around for about ten minutes. The temperature was still in the eighties at that time of night and it did not take long to dry off, but on reflection I was stupid, if someone had stolen my clothes I would have been in an embarrassing position because we had no other clothes to wear. I dressed and felt much better and I got back to the office in time to see the last ship just docking.

## **Officer problem**

This ship was unloaded and we were finishing the lists just as a Pilot Officer came in and asked who was in charge. I told him that I was and that I had been waiting for three days for someone to come to take over. By the look of his new uniform, the square fit of his cap, he was obviously

just out of O.T.U. (Officers Training Unit) and this was his first posting. I pointed out that on the first night, we had an air raid which resulted in the Officer, Sergeant and two others being taken off to hospital, and that I had been on duty for the whole of that time except for light snatches of sleep, and that as soon as the paperwork was checked, I was going back to my unit. He asked when the next ship was coming in and I said I did not know, so he went to see the harbour master.

On his return, he asked why I didn't tell him that the last ship had just gone, so I said that he had just asked when the next ship was coming in, and I did not know. All I knew was that the last ship of convoy No..... had just left and that was the end of my duty at the docks. I handed him the paper work and went to the park and checked that all of our lorries were loaded and ready, and then told the Officer that he should advise the other units that their lorries were ready and that would complete the job. I then got our convoy in line and we set off back to our unit. I was a passenger on the leading lorry and as soon as we left the town I dropped off to sleep through exhaustion and I woke up just as we were going into our camp.

I quickly washed and shaved, put on a clean uniform and reported to my C.O. and told him of the problems I had at the docks. After handing over all of the paper work I returned to my tent and slept until the following morning.

One of the American Sergeants who had 'graded' our roads came in to see if I could weld his C.O.'s jeep rear spring hanger that had broken. I got the crane out and we lifted the jeep to a working height and welded the hanger to the chassis. I was stripped to the waist at this time and my welding torch had a round handle, and because the long hoses had doubled over, with the torch alight I gave a tug to get more length and the torch turned around in my hand causing the flames to go across my chest. I had burns across my chest about an inch wide, fortunately not severe. I made sure that the hoses were never twisted again. The Sergeant also said that when he was at the docks unloading some equipment, a small R.A.F. 5 kva generating plant fell off the chains as it was being taken off the ship. They had repaired the broken parts on the Ford 1000cc car engine driving the generator, hoping to use it for their own use but they could not get it to run. It would fire, but kick back and everything had

been checked out o.k. but because they were moving to a new site, would I like it and perhaps I could get a new engine for it. They delivered it that afternoon.

On checking it over, I saw that it was a complete unit in a frame approximately five feet by two feet by three feet high, and gave out 24 volt and 50 volt direct current, and 110 volt and 220 volt alternating current. This engine is unusual in that the firing sequence for the cylinders for a normal four-cylinder engine is 1. 3. 4. 2. but on this engine it was 1. 2. 4. 3. and they had tried to run it the usual way. As soon as the plug leads were changed, the engine started and ran very well. I now had a generating plant for the advance party.

Once again, our 'magpie told me that there were several German mobile 'kitchens' mounted on small two wheel trailers in the enemy vehicle pool and if we got a damaged one and took the kitchen off, we could put the generator on that and be mobile. I went the next day and got one and reserved another one for the cookhouse. The kitchen comprised of a large copper open-topped boiler, two hot water tanks, two hot ovens to keep food hot and a hot plate compartment. The cooks were delighted because they could fill them with water and put the bully beef and tinned potatoes in the boiler, light the fire one hour before our destination and have a hot meal as soon we had stopped. The generator fitted on to the trailer with six bolts and nuts.

We now have a small mobile generator for use with the advance unit capable of charging the batteries on the lorries, electric welding and two voltages of alternating current.

We had been producing oxygen from the two plants every day and with the renewed activity of the Spitfires, we could just about keep pace with the demand. In order to service the injectors on the diesel plants, I had purchased an injector cleaning kit from a local tool firm. There were no tools supplied by the R.A.F. for this purpose. Servicing the diesel engines was simple compared to the old Crossleys because the injectors were the only item to be serviced on every service. Oil changes were longer and the same with oil and fuel filters.

## **More technical problems, and solutions**

As I was the only airman on the camp with any diesel experience, it was my job to carry out all of the technical servicing on these vehicles and I had another airman that I was training to do this job later on. I was called out of bed one night to go to the Oxygen dept because one of the engines had stopped for no apparent reason. When I checked the engine, I found that one of the injector pipes had split, and the fuel was dripping on to the synthetic rubber coupling on the drive to the main injector pump to the injectors. The diesel oil had softened the coupling and it had stripped the teeth, preventing any drive to the pump.

The coupling was about two and half inches in diameter by one inch thick, with twenty five teeth on the outer diameter and twelve teeth on the inner diameter. Having no spare parts, I told the staff to close the plant down until I could get a new coupling and pipe. As soon as the signals team arrived I notified stores to get the necessary spares and our V.O.R. report showed one A.E.C. plant unserviceable and waiting for spares and advising that the one plant would be unable to keep up with demand.

We were advised that there were no spare parts in Italy, and that they would try Tunis or Cairo, and in the meantime a D.C.3. (Dakota) would ferry fifteen cylinders of oxygen from Italy each day to our nearest landing strip. We had to meet the plane with fifteen discharged cylinders and this would continue until spares were available.

We were advised that there were no spares available any where in the Middle East, and that an urgent order had be requested from the main stores in the U.K. In the meantime, one lorry and trailer went to the landing strip every day and returned with the full cylinders. My C.O. asked if there was anything I could do as a temporary measure, so I decided to go to the enemy vehicle pool to see if the Fiat coupling was the same. The injector pump was of the same design by Bosch, but the firing order was different, and the coupling had two driving flanges driving a fibreglass centre.

I took the lot back with me to see if it was possible to make up something which would drive the pump. I found that the Italian coupling had a metric taper and the A.E.C. had the larger Imperial taper. I cut off the centre boss on each drive and then drilled holes in both couplings and bolted

them together, riveting the nuts to prevent them coming undone, and then trying the pump in position. I then found that the coupling is now one inch thicker and I had to remove the locating dowels under the pump to a new position. After drilling and tapping new threads to the new holes in the base of the injector pump, I set the timing and fitted the front securing clamp. The rear clamp now had nothing to secure to, so with a piece of one-eighth welding wire, I wound this between two of the pipes and twisted it tightly to secure the back of the pump.

I had brought the longest injector pipe from the Fiat but found that it was too long, so a quick coil wound around a piece round wood shortened it enough to fit and also gave a 'spring' to allow the pipe to vibrate and not split. The system was 'bled' and the engine started. After half an hour of running, the engine was stopped and all the fittings checked and found o.k. The engine was then started and the system allowed to thaw out. (Liquid Oxygen is very cold and will freeze water if they are poured together).

The first oxygen produced was for welding purposes only but after that, full production began. I checked the engine several times during the day but everything was working well. The V.O.R. Report stated that temporary repairs had been carried out on A.E.C. Oxygen Plant and there would be no further use for the D.C.3. to deliver oxygen from Italy. Because I wanted to be sure that there would be no trouble with this form of drive I returned to the 'Pool' and got another pair of drive flanges and took them to the aircraft machine shop, and asked them to machine them to the Imperial sizes. I gave an official order but I was told that because it was for transport it would be several weeks before they could start it.

### **Another officer..**

A day or so later I was told to report to the Oxygen dept because the engine had been stopped and when I arrived a found my C.O. and a Group Captain there. The 'Groupie' was furious and asked what did I think I was doing 'bodging' a very expensive vehicle in this manner. I was shocked and I just said that I though my job was to ensure that that the transport was to be kept serviceable at all times. He asked if I knew of the pressures involved and that it was necessary to have a rubber cushion drive to the pump, so I replied that I did know and quoted the actual pressures from the pump and because the pump took it's drive

from the air compressor for the brakes, there was a rubber cushion through the coupling.

I also pointed out that Fiat lorries had been using their type of coupling for many years and they were satisfied with it. I did say that I had taken another coupling to the aircraft engineering dept to get the flanges machined to an Imperial taper but I was told that because it was for transport, it would be weeks before it would be started. He asked for my order and I supplied him with the driver who knew where the machining was going to be carried out and he allowed the plant to be re-started.

After the Group Captain had left, my C.O. said he was glad that I was able to quote facts and figures to him, because he was the senior M.T. Engineer in this Command. Four hours later I was called back at the plant, to meet the Group Captain who now had two flanges in his hand and I was asked if these were the parts I had asked to be machined. I agreed, and he said that he wanted to see them being fitted. I had my small portable workbench brought to the plant and covering it with some cotton cloth, I removed the injector pump, removed the old flanges and tried the new ones for 'fit' and carefully checking, filed the two key ways, fitted the flanges to the injector pump and the air compressor, and then changed the dowels and re-fitted the pump. This time the pump fitted into the bracket correctly and I was able to fit the two clamps into their correct positions. The engine was restarted and production began once again.

The Group Captain did admit that he was unaware that I had moved the dowels and he thought that the pump was just resting on the bracket and I just said that I didn't think anyone would be silly enough to do that. He then asked why he could get this job done while he waited and I was unable to. I replied that it may have something to do with my stripes being on my upper sleeve and his four rings were at his wrist. He gave a queer look but left it at that. He then told me that because the R.A.F did not have any spares, a local purchase order was being made to A.E.C.'s at Langley and it would be sent direct to him at Command H.Q. It would then be sent to our unit, together with a certificate to say that I had fitted it and turning to my C.O. he said that he would be held responsible to see that it was done. I did say that just a short time ago, all of the squadrons had been bombed along the coast and had it not been for the initiative of our advanced party C.O. calling all of the staff out in the middle of the

night during the raid, and getting the spares out ready and the props made up, there would have been no oxygen plant to repair.

There were only nine planes available in the morning fit to fly but when the Luftwaffe returned in the afternoon for the kill, there were three full squadrons waiting for them. I also told him that I took pride in the fact that I was able to keep our transport available to move at all times within two hours, even if it was necessary to use a bit of wire to keep them together. We then had a tour of the transport section and I was glad to see that everything was running smoothly. He asked about the mobile generator and the C.O. told him that we got it from the Americans who could not get it to go and they gave it to us as favour for mending their jeep. He seemed to be impressed with our workshop lorry and the fact that we changed cylinder heads on the roadside. When the 'Groupie' had gone, I said to my C.O. that I thought that it was all a waste of time and loss of production, and that he didn't appreciate that we had saved a D.C.3 for more important duties. The C.O. smiled and said, "Well, he had to justify his salary somehow." I still thought that there was a war on and that we had just wasted another day of production.

### Another invasion planned

Our Armies are now marching onto Rome and we are advised that we would be going on another invasion. I didn't bother to ask if I would be going with the advance party, it seemed to be a foregone conclusion now. This time however, it is going to be a mainly American affair, and only the Spitfire squadrons and their supporting units and a small army communications unit would be going in. Rumour had it that we would be invading just south of the tunnels into France and about ten to fifteen miles north of the Gestapo and S.S. headquarters. The Navy had been 'shelling' the coast and the Air Forces had been bombing the coastal towns around this region so our invasion could be as 'soft' as possible and it would prevent the Germans leaving the area to get back to France, and it would also prevent supplies entering Italy. I was told that the advance party would be made with our best vehicles and that I would be in charge of transport once again.

We move the advance party to a new site in the North of Corsica and prepare the site for our main unit when they are ready. Once again the vehicles are water-proofed and we are lucky that we did not discard our

old equipment, because some of the vehicle models have been changed, some new exhaust pipes were required, which meant that the lengths of exhaust pipe needed only to be cut in half and fitted. Some extended beyond the five feet mark, but we felt it was better to have a surplus than a shortage. Our small generating plant was too low to be waterproofed, so we took the top three layers of oxygen cylinders off the trailer, fitted the generator on top, and arranged for the cylinders to be spread amongst the other lorries.

The Thorneycroft lorry I will be driving has vacuum assisted brakes, but the trailer I shall be taking has air pressure brakes, so I make up brackets and fit an air compressor to the engine, get three air pressure brake receivers and connect up the pipe-work. I have been able to get a pressure valve to connect to my brake pedal.

By connecting all three tanks to a pressure gauge on the dashboard, I am able to check that I have brake pressure for the trailer brakes. We have been told that we will only be able to take a spare uniform, shoes and toiletries. I decided that one of my three air receivers would be removed, the end cut off, an inner sleeve fitted and I would use it to house my tools and my camera. By using the connecting pipe adapter, fixed a long threaded rod to it, and drilled the end cap and the tank looked like the others. Some waterproof tape wound around the join would keep the water out and to make it look normal, I wound tape around the other two tanks as well. Two air receivers were ample for the trailer only.

## **Issues with the Americans**

The American Forces had decided that we should wear American uniforms and paint the Stars and Stripes on the cabs of our lorries. My C.O. was very angry and approached our Headquarters and said that if they wanted their uniforms and their flag, they had better use all of their own troops as well. We were only being used because our Spitfires could operate at thirty thousand feet while their Mustangs and Lightnings could only operate at twenty thousand feet.

He finally got his way and we painted the R.A.F. Roundel on the cabs and we wore our own uniform and as a further snub, he got the M.T. section to make three metal stencils of the union flag (the Union Jack) six inches by four inches and these were painted on the left hand corner of every

windscreen. All of our staff were delighted with this because several of them had received 'Dear John' letters telling them that their wives or girlfriends had met an American serviceman and they were now 'surplus to requirements'.

During the middle of July 1944, we were told to move to a new site next to the sea about four miles away in preparation for the invasion. When we arrived, we found that the army had barbed wired the complete camp, leaving just one opening to go in or out. Posts were put at intervals one hundred yards out to sea on each edge of the camp and barbed wire attached, making it very difficult for anyone to go in or out, except through the 'gap'. The final waterproofing was carried out, and all vehicles and drivers tested to four feet six inches. Kit and lorry inspections were carried out again, and we were given the usual 'pep talks'. Slit trenches were dug and all camouflaging completed. Three vehicles were kept until last for the final waterproofing in order to get rations etc, but it only meant sealing the dynamos and fitting the short fan belts. We were now on four days notice and everyone was wondering just where we were going to invade

The Landings in western France were slowing down, with the German army digging in and making life more difficult for them and it was hoped that our landing in northern Italy would draw them back to reinforce their troops in Italy.

We were advised that because of bad weather, our landing craft had been delayed and we would now be on ten days notice. With the recent inactivity, tempers were beginning to fray, until we heard that a team were coming from headquarters to give us un-armed combat practice. Ever since we started at el Alemein, we had regular sessions of P.T. etc and we all thought that there was not much we didn't know.

The following day, a Flight Lieutenant, a Sergeant and four Corporals came to give the unit the training. Our advance party comprised the C.O. and three Officers, we four senior N.C.O.'s and about eighty other ranks.

The Officer took our Officers, the Sergeant took us and the four Corporals split the other ranks into four teams of twenty. The days were split up to normal work in the morning, every afternoon with training and finishing work in the evening.

## Unarmed combat training

The first couple of days we learnt the holds and the falls, but after that the instructors picked out their 'volunteers' who were used as the guinea-pigs and then the training was in earnest. After two days, every bone in my body ached and it felt as if I was a new recruit. I suddenly realised that I was being used again after any one of the other Sergeants had been picked out. One of the Sergeants asked me if I had kicked the instructor, because they had noticed that I was getting more than my fair share. I now know just how little I knew before this training and it made me more determined to get good enough to get my own back.

By the end of the first week, I had learnt how to fall without hurting myself and to recover quickly and then attack, and also how to parry most of the blows. None of the moves were in accord with the Queensbury Rules and on the second week, the games became very vicious. We were now divided into two teams, attackers and defenders and it was for real. We had attacks with rifles and bayonets and on one occasion, the whole unit had to go out into the sea, and try to come ashore. The Instructors had fixed up a machine gun with a bar to prevent the angle of fire going below three feet and providing you did not raise your head above that level, you were safe. This was carried out with live ammunition and as we got ashore, one of the drivers waved his hand to a mate on the other side of the group and finished up with a bullet in his arm. That prevented him from going in on "D-Day" plus one, but he was one of our drivers and a substitute had to be found and checked to go into the water.

The last two days were spent showing us how to kill a man with our bare hands in two minutes. I was horrified and told the instructor that if I had wanted to that, I would have joined the Commandos. He replied that when we get ashore next time, we would probably wish that we were commandos and that it would be a case of survival. Just as we were finishing, he tricked me and he gave me a very rough handling, he just grinned and said it was part of the course.

After a 'pep talk', he said that the whole group had passed and responded well to the course and put out his hand to shake hands and I saw the chance and grabbed his wrist in the way that he had taught me and before he could respond, he was on the floor with my left instep in his right arm pit. He was unable to move and if he had struggled, he would

have probably dislocated his shoulder, so I asked him why he had picked me out for so much punishment. He said, " I am a commissioned Officer and I am ordering you to release me". I allowed him to get to his feet, but I still had his wrist in a firm grip and made him walk to the side of a nearby lorry where he put his left hand against the side, told him to step back two paces, and then let his right hand help support him. I then took his pay-book out of his pocket and sure enough it was Flight Lieutenant Barnes, and after checking his identity tags on his neck, I then let him get up from his uncomfortable position. I apologised and asked why the deception and he said the Officer training our Officers was two ranks above the C.O. and the 'Corporals' were all Flying Officers.. Had we known we were competing against Officers, would we be as aggressive and of course the answer was 'no'.

The reason I had been picked out was that usually the Officers are the first targets and being the most senior N.C.O. in the group, every one had seen that I was getting the most treatment and how I had handled it, and there would not be one of them who would not follow me if the Officers were disposed of. He reminded me that we would all be under American Command and we might find ourselves in an American unit doing anything other than our normal job. This time I shook his hand and thanked for being so frank. He also warned me to say nothing until after my C.O. had addressed everyone and we should remember that we are going on a one-way ticket and there would be no way back so don't waste your chances.

Our C.O. gave us the pep talk we had been waiting for, we had been trained to the peak of performance and any strange noise put us on guard immediately. No one would approach us from the rear, because they would be on the ground before they knew what had happened.

Our bombers and the navy had been targeting the coast on the north west of Italy, just below the tunnels going through the Alps. We all assumed that this was the site we would be invading which was about ten miles north of the Gestapo Headquarters and also the S.S. Headquarters.

All of the advance Officers and N.C.O.'s have been to a meeting with the C.O. concerning the move to our next destination. We are under direct American control and we will be supplied with American rations. Although

our main task is to service the R.A.F. Squadrons, we may be called on to assist the Americans if required.

We were also warned not to re-act about the "Dear John" incidents. We were told that as from that moment, the camp would be sealed and only the priority personnel would be allowed to leave or enter the camp.

## **And another officer dealt with**

I returned to the M.T. Section and I was surprised to see a strange Pilot Officer waiting for me. He was obviously very new and introduced himself and saying that he had come from Headquarters to inspect the vehicles. He then said "Have you read the orders concerning the waterproofing of your vehicles, Flight Sergeant?" I replied that I had and that all of my vehicles had passed the test. "Then every one of your vehicles is wrong". I was amazed, because Officers up to the rank of Flight Lieutenant never speak to senior N.C.O.'s like that.

I was angry and told him that everyone of my vehicles were waterproofed to a depth of five feet or more and that they had all been tested to four feet six inches.. "That is what I mean, Five feet is five feet, not four feet six inches or five feet six inches, but five feet". I laughed and said, "Would you tell me why it must not be over five feet ...Sir?". "Yes, if your driver is in the water and it comes up to his waist, he will be looking at the exhaust pipe and as the water rises, it is possible for the water to be over his nose and he would drown". "In that case it would be better if he did drown because he would be no good to me in an emergency.

No driver with any sense would allow that to happen, He would stand up in his seat and use his left foot on the accelerator until he reached a lower level of water." The Officers face was livid and said, " Flight Sergeant, I am giving you a direct order to get these vehicles corrected before I leave". It is my turn to be really angry now, so I asked him for his authority to give me that order. He said that he given his authority to the guard at the gate when he came in. I undid the flap on my revolver holster and said, "I am sorry sir, but I insist on seeing your authority before I take any action." Grudgingly he showed me his letter from Group Headquarters giving him the authority to check all of the vehicles. " In that case would you mark all of the vehicles to the correct height so that they can be cut off to your satisfaction?"

I gave him some yellow crayon and a wooden pole and he marked the pole and then went around every vehicle and marked the pipes. Some only needed an inch taken off but he insisted that it was cut. When it was completed, it dawned on me that he had not seen the C.O. or the adjutant when he arrived and protocol always insisted that visiting Officers reported to them when they arrived. I asked him if he had reported to the C.O. and he said that the C.O. was in a meeting and could not be disturbed. "In that case you had better come with me and report what has happened now...Sir."

When I told the C.O. what had happened, he dismissed me and as I stood outside the tent I heard this upstart get the biggest rocket of his life. Although it was getting late, the C.O ordered him off the site and refused to give him transport to take him back to H.Q. that was about four miles away.

## **August 14, 1944**

At mid-day on the fourteenth of August, our L.S.T. (Landing Ship, Tank) arrived and we set to loading lorries and trailers. This L.S.T. was different to others I had been on because it had two extending ramps that would extend one hundred feet from the bows and then drop down to the seabed. As I would be the last off the ship, I had to be the first one on and a turntable inside soon turned the trailer and my lorry around and it was then parked at the rear of the deck. It took about two hours to get all the vehicles on board and we went upstairs to get our selves settled in. We were told that our journey would probably take a day and half to reach our destination, and although the straight line top speed was eight miles an hour, we would be in a large convoy and we would be zigzagging at about four miles an hour. This meant that we would only be going ahead at two and half miles in every hour. We were warned not to go on the top deck in case of being strafed.

We picked up our convoy later that evening and set off in an easterly direction. We woke up next morning and after breakfast, were surprised to see that we were now travelling in a northerly direction. Knowing that we had air superiority, I guessed that the Captains all knew where they were going, so I settled down to enjoy the sunshine. This was short lived when my seasickness started again. It was early in the evening when the C.O. addressed us and told us that we were not going to Northern Italy

but that we would be landing in Southern France instead, somewhere between Marseilles and Nice.

The bombing and shelling of northern Italy was a diversion to keep the German forces there and make for an easier landing in France. The gliders and Paratroopers were landing at the present time at several parts of the coast and by the time we landed, a strong beachhead should have been secured. We were told to go to bed early because Reveille would be at 6 am, breakfast at 7 am, and we should be landing between eight and nine am in the morning.