

NOTES

from North Africa

North African bombing pattern.

Sidelights from an airman's report on living and fighting conditions in the desert theater of operations.

MUD AND MORE MUD. From Casablanca to the front is almost 700 miles and the road network—both motor and rail—is none too good. You are forever being impressed by the distance from one point to another, probably because there is nothing in between but—mud.

In America you can lead a not too sheltered life and in ten years not get stuck in the mud. In North Africa ten minutes is your limit. Everything gets stuck—trucks, planes, feet. Half the operational difficulties of the area can be traced to mud.

EATING AND SLEEPING. There is no answer to cover everyone. Plane crews sleep in their planes, ground crews sleep in tents at oases, in hotels, barracks, anywhere. You eat American rations as far east as Algiers, from there on, British. With the British you drink hot tea and wine. Water isn't always safe. British rations aren't bad; there's sure to be some kind of meat stew.

In the towns and cities—such as Algiers—the Air Force has taken over hotels. Some of them are fine, most not bad. The service is fair; occasionally there is hot water. When the word gets around that the taps are running warm, everybody dashes for the soap and towels. It is not unusual to see a colonel—who has an intelligence system in good working order—drop everything and run for home to get his first bath in a week.

There is nothing to complain of so far as the hotel food is concerned. You get a yen for a piece of red meat occasionally, and

green vegetables are scarce, but you get fed.

Breakfast costs thirty francs, lunch forty. A franc is worth $1\frac{1}{4}$ cents. You change your money into francs very easily, but American Export dollars are good anywhere. These are regular U. S. bills with a yellow seal stamped on them, to the right of the portrait.

THE FIGHTERS. The P-38s have come into their own in North Africa. They do everything. They are used on air defense patrols of Allied strong points, over areas of concentrations, for ground strafing against troop columns and armored equipment, for minimum altitude attacks against surface vessels, and for escorting heavy and medium bombers on missions.

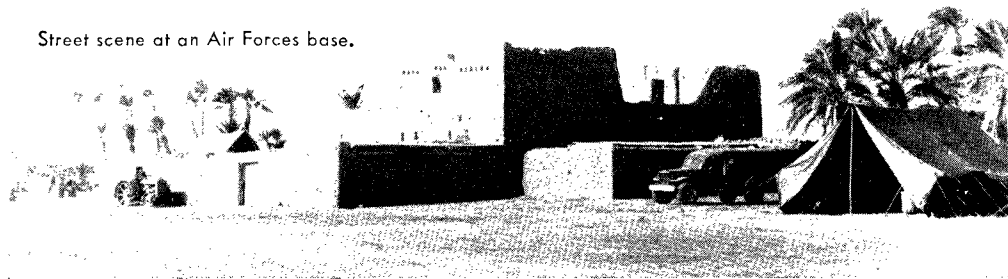
You can hardly find an assignment which P-38s cannot carry out. They escort our bombers 500 miles out and in—as far as the bombers go. They can carry two big bombs and drop them where they do the most good. They are also used for photographic reconnaissance and as weather ships.

The fighter pilots have tough work. Day after day they fly escort duty at 30,000 feet, using oxygen all the time, hour after hour. But they are sold on their ships.

The commanding officer of a heavy bombardment group in the North African theater said he would stake his tactical reputation on the fact that the P-38 is the greatest fighter ever built. "Other fighters are better at certain things, but the P-38 is the best all around ship," he said.

MONEY MEANS NOTHING—in the back country. There is the story of the Air Force corporal who wanted to buy some tangerines. He had the dough, and was willing to pay whatever was asked. But the natives would have none of his money. They kept pointing to his shirt and his pants. He caught on, of course, and went back to his tent to see what he could dig up. His supply of clothes was no more than adequate, and he knew everything he owned was precious. Finally he decided to part with his barracks bag. He brought it out. The

Street scene at an Air Forces base.



natives eyed it for a long time, fingered it, and then handed it back. It meant nothing to them. Then the corporal took his knife, cut a couple of holes in the bottom of the bag, slipped a native's legs through, pulled the bag up and tied it tight around the chest. The native was delighted.

The corporal got four bushels of tangerines.

Everybody eats tangerines all the time. You carry them in your pockets and bags and keep them in your room. In the cargo planes there is always a crate open for anyone to dip into.

THE BOMBERS are doing a great job. Morale is excellent among the crews. The fact that the crews were trained in England on combat missions accounts for the smoothness of operations.

The crews on both the light and medium bombers are developing a much more efficient degree of crew coordination. There seems now a strong possibility that crews will be returned here intact—with the same plane they flew in the wars—to instruct.

The Germans aren't taking anything lying down. Their defenses are excellent; plenty of ack-ack gets up to high altitudes. They're throwing a lot of 88 mm stuff at us. But nothing is interfering with our accuracy.

One fortress came home with an 88 mm hole in a wing between the motors. It was a clean hole—the shell had gone through and exploded above—and if you looked carefully you could see the shell rifling on the metal of the wing.

It has become general practice for crews in medium bombers to wear helmets and big goggles, so that if the windshield is shattered by flak or anything else they will not get hit by flying glass.

Of all the legends and cracks and mottos that are painted on planes the best seemed to be this: Over the rear gunner's compartment in a B-17 was a picture of a pair of dice, with a seven showing. And these words, "Shoot. You're faded."

AN INCIDENT occurred one day at a heavy bomber field which scared the boys a little. A Heinkel heavy bomber apparently got lost, and after circling the field, came in, made a normal approach up wind and landed. The ship, of course, was immediately taken over and the pilot was a very surprised fellow to find that he wasn't in German territory. What scared the boys was that all the enemy's maneuvers hadn't aroused any suspicion.

Flying low over the veldt, a young lieutenant-colonel, from the nose of a B-17, had his eyes wide open at a collection of zoo animals galloping under him—giraffes, zebras, deer, etc. Finally he spotted a buffalo, African variety, and could no longer resist. He let loose with a burst from his nose gun. The buffalo took off.

A general was sitting in the plane, soberly watching what had been going on. After the burst he nodded slowly and spoke

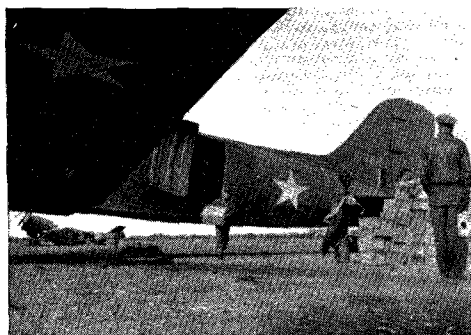
These are the notes of an Air Forces officer just back from an inspection tour with the Twelfth Air Force in North Africa.

to the hunter. "Colonel," he said, "the buffalo is a powerful animal. But the 17 is a good ship. I think you have about an even chance against him."

THE CARGO PLANES. Those boys of the Troop Carrier Command are doing a hell of a fine job. They are doing all the air transport in the area, moving, with their C-47s and C-53s, everything that gets moved—equipment, supplies, personnel. They fly—escorted by fighters—from Casablanca right up to the front line airdromes.

They can never rest. They must fly continually under all kinds of handicaps, in and out of small, bad fields. Nevertheless, they show a minimum of accidents and maintain their planes excellently under hard field conditions.

Example: For the Airborne Engineers the cargo boys carried personnel and equipment from Casablanca to a small field far in the interior. This was within a short distance of a drome which it was hoped could be used for heavy bombers. The Engineers—with their miniature bulldozers and their scrapers, jeeps, rollers and



Unloading emergency rations from a C-47.



graders—put the field in shape so that a B-17 landed *four days later*. The cargo planes got the bombers there.

WEATHER, NOT A CLIMATE, that's North Africa. It's good for a week, then bad for a week, which means that you fight hard for a week, then take it easy for a week. Of course, you don't really take it easy, you have no time off. You eat and sleep with the planes, and very often repair them as well.

It's cold. Algeria is in the same latitude as North Carolina but without benefit of the Gulf Stream. If you're moving into the area take winter uniforms—and a bedding roll. Take all the uniforms you are likely to need, for when a blouse wears out, you will have to keep on wearing it. Shoes are a big problem. Thin soles are no good at all; the thicker the soles the better. Galoshes will help.

THE ARAB is a quiet type. However, if you make an effort he will respond, and he seems pleased to talk. The Arabs have finally got the idea that we are temporary visitors and mean them no harm. On the whole, relations with the French and the natives are satisfactory. There is very little trouble.

The standard horror story of what the natives did to a couple of the boys who made passes at their women has been thoroughly spread around, so all is quiet on that front. And in any case, the native women don't bear what you would call a striking resemblance to Hedy Lamarr.

GETTING HOME doesn't take long. You can leave Africa one day and be in Washington the next. Good flying—7200 miles in 44 hours, or 164 miles an hour, including three stops. ☆

Tripoli Harbor during a daylight raid by B-24s.