

MAAF
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TRAINING DURING COMBAT

Foreword

Among personnel of the various branches of the Armed Forces including men in the Army Air Forces, and among the civilian public at large a misapprehension exists concerning combat-seasoned air crews and training. Many persons believe that when a replacement crew leaves its training base in the United States and is assigned to a combat unit at a forward operational field its training days are over. Everything there was to be learned has been assimilated, they believe, and now the flyers will be preoccupied solely with combat missions.

Actually, such a conception is quite false. Replacement crews must be thoroughly indoctrinated at the combat base with principles specifically applicable to their zone of operations. Procedures and techniques which may or may not have been practiced at the training bases in the United States, but which specifically apply to their particular operational area and operational equipment, have to be mastered by the new men. Accordingly, Air Force units in combat develop and pursue a "Training During Combat" program, in order to do their job more thoroughly, more safely, and more economically. Preparing while in combat for tomorrow's operational demands and emergencies - that is the training problem for today.

Based on the training program and combat experiences of the 340th Bombardment Group (M) AAF in the Mediterranean theater, this motion picture stresses the dynamic and continuous nature of air crew training.

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(Story)

Tightly joined formations of B-25 Mitchell bombers roar over Alesan airfield, Corsica, the base of the 340th Bombardment Group (M) AAF. As the planes peel off in echelon and form a landing pattern, it is evident another 340th mission has hit its target in northern Italy. Crews are streaming in to the operations-intelligence office to report the details of the attack as a G-47, just in from the mainland with a replacement crew, pulls up on a herdstand and cuts its engines.

As the new men pile out of the plane and throw their baggage into a waiting truck, they reflect the natural cockyness and eagerness of a brand-new combat team anxious to demonstrate its skill. The headquarters area is the first stop. They approach the operations building, gaping with interest at the veteran crewmen who have now reported to their intelligence officers and are streaming back to their trucks. At that moment they see a large sign posted on the front of the prefabricated building extolling the merits of their new group, and the next moment they encounter the Group Commander, who gives them a cordial welcome and introduces them to their squadron commander. Bombarded with questions as to when they will be allowed to "get into the scrap" the squadron commander leads them to the training bulletin board which is posted with notices of training sessions and lectures. For the pilots there are Link Trainer, formation flying, practice missions; the bombardiers, bomb trainer, navigation classes, practice bombing; the gunners, workouts on various gunnery trainers, aircraft identification lectures, and other subjects. All must "refresh" on ditching procedure and first aid, and they must be indoctrinated in escape and evasion procedure. At the bulletin board they encounter the Director of Training, an assistant operations officer, who explains why they have to train and what each man must do while he is actually flying combat. They're a little slowed down by all this. "There's more in this combat than we thought," they seem to say.

The next day the first pilot of the new crew, Bob, and his co-pilot attend the lecture on formation technique by the group operations officer, study his diagrams with interest. A couple of hours later both men are flying co-pilot in a practice formation flight. In the meantime the new bombardier, Steve, is getting a

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few pointers from the squadron navigator. This is a good idea because Pete is going to have to do most of his own navigation. At the moment they're devoting their attention to maps and photo strips revealing terrain features of areas their group will bomb in.

While the officers are getting their teeth into the training program, the enlisted men are trying out the gunnery devices. Trigger Thompson, the tail gunner, a likeable if blase chap, walks over to one of the devices with a veteran gunner and tolerantly agrees to a practice session. This device consists of a mocked-up tail turret that is powered by a generator and throws a jet of water from a spout under the guns. The gunner aims the jet at a model plane that "dives in" towards the gunner in a pursuit curve in much the same fashion that an enemy plane attacks. The model plane of course is mounted on the long arm of a standard, and attacks repeatedly, as long as the device is being operated. While the veteran gunner pumps up the water pressure in the tank, Trigger settles into the turret, only to learn he's not such a hot gunner after all. The target, he finds, is a bit tricky to hit. Elsewhere on the base other gunners are working out in upper and tail turrets of a B-25 that seems to be half surrounded by large concentric steel hoops. This is a cone of fire trainer and is employed to give gunners a graphic picture of the areas defined by the three standard cones of fire referred to in position firing. These gunners are doing okay, but Trigger, frankly, could stand improvement. Right now, he's out of water pressure and the philosophical instructor is pumping up some more.

It is on practice bombing missions that crews most quickly learn how their operations officer wants them to bomb. Our new crew goes on a mission, the first of many practice missions for them at this base. At the plane they watch the practice bombs being loaded, plan their part in the attack, and review the instructions given them. Over the target, a tiny island off Corsica, they make some good runs and get their bombs away nicely. That night when the photos of their practice mission are developed one of the older bombardiers sices up the pictures, pronounces the mission a creditable success. Pete is happy. With ~~the~~ the breaks and plenty of practice he's going to be a lead bombardier before he's much older.

First aid treatment of wounds sustained in combat is something all combat crew members must study. Though they've had these lectures and demonstrations in the United States, the fact that they are potential casualties every time they take off the runway makes it necessary for frequent reviews. Our new crew are front and center when the Flight Surgeon makes one of his first aid lectures. Somebody has to be the "victim" where practice bandaging is concerned, so of course all his friends nominate Trigger and greatly enjoy his discomfiture.

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The Flight Surgeon supervises the application of an eye bandage and a tourniquet, warns the men they may have to use this instruction on their very next mission.

A few days later the men of the 340th bombardment group are lolling around their squadron areas just after dinner when a phone rings in the office where the public address equipment is housed. "This is ops calling," says the voice over the telephone to the listening clerk. "Briefing for Plan "A" at 1330 hours. Got it?" In a second the clerk has alerted all crews and they drop whatever they have been doing and swing into action. As men report to the parachute tent to draw chutes and flak garments we notice Bob and Trigger and others of the crew. Judging from the seven or eight bombs painted on their jackets they've had their taste of combat. Out at the plane Bob climbs into the co-pilot's seat, the engines are revved up, and the plane taxis out to join the cluster of bombers at the end of the runway. Joined up quickly they proceed to the target and get strong opposition from enemy flak batteries. Flak bursts around them, holding several aircraft. One is seen to go down, badly damaged. Back at the field ground men and staff officers sweat in the formation as it appears in the distance, roars over the field in echelon. One box of six has only five planes in it. Then suddenly the other plane appears alone in the sky, turning in on his final approach. He's firing red flares, and that means an emergency, possibly wounded aboard. The plane lands, rolls up to the end of the runway to the waiting ambulances and a wounded gunner is carefully removed from the rear escape hatch. Badly wounded, he is given several bottles of plasma on the spot and driven off to the hospital. The first aid treatment he received in the air however, plainly visible in the form of bloody bandages on his thigh and shoulder, give him a good chance for survival, however, according to the Flight Surgeon.

Some time later a Link trainer buzzes and gyrates monotonously in the Link trainer building, as the technician gives orders over his microphone. Who's in there, anyway? Why, it's Bob, the semi-veteran, still busy with training. Evidently he can stand some more work, for the technician closes the hood. Now the canopy of the trainer dissolves into the cloth instrument flying hood used by pilots in the air. Yes, it's Bob, flying instruments while a co-pilot looks on. He comes out from under the hood, looks around with satisfaction and banks for landing.

The bomb trainer device is crawling over the cement floor behind the operations building now, as Bob and Pete, pilot and bombardier, practice the co-ordination technique of bomb runs. They can't get enough of this sort of thing, so they plug away and when the attendant finally hands them their "target chart" they smile broadly. They're making progress.

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Some weeks later the turret training devices are still humming along. The familiar scene of a man in the turret and a man pumping up water pressure is repeated, but when the pumper turns around this time, it turns out to be Trigger and he's got plenty of missions in now. They've promoted him to instructor and he's grandly explaining the device to a newcomer in his usual blase fashion. Nearby another gunner is firing at a moving model with a jet of water. His gun is a flexible .50 calibre model and it is mounted in a wooden frame the precise size of the waist gun window. This, therefore, is a training device for waist gunners. Not far away a mock-up of an upper turret can be seen, and a Y-shaped standard "flying" two scale models. This evidently gives the "water" gunner who flies the upper turret a chance to practice meeting attacks from different directions.

Certain targets are so situated that they are difficult to identify on the approach. When this problem is presented, navigators and bombardiers sometimes resort to building a model of it on the sand table for study of the salient terrain features. And one day we find the Group navigator and some bombardiers doing just this. A briefing follows, during which all crew members listen intently to the briefing officers. Then they stream out to their planes and as we see the crew climb into one ship we notice Bob sitting in the left hand seat and underneath his window the words: 1st Lt. Robert Pagh, Airplane Commander. Bob's made it! He's a first pilot. As the plane taxis out of the hard stand the tail turret catches our eye. In white paint are the letters: FW 190. Trigger, or some other gunner, has seen how training pays off.

Methods of escaping the enemy if a crew is shot down is the subject of frequent lectures. We next see the flyers of the group listening to a lecture on escape and evasion by an intelligence officer. He passes out the escape kits for their examination.

The ditching of aircraft at sea and use of the life raft are periodically reviewed by all air crews. One sunny afternoon we see several crew members watching a technician demonstrate the stowage chamber of the rubber dinghy. Then he takes it out, displays the provisions and accessories, and putting an oar together, invites one of the flyers to get in the rubber raft and see how it feels. In our next scene the rubber raft is in the water and the crew are trying to right it. As we look closer we discover they are not at sea, but in a small creek, and under the watchful eye of the Director of Training, who is shouting instructions from atop a truck. "Get this life raft procedure down pat," he hollers. "I can see you don't know the first thing about it."

Hydraulic failure can bring fatal results if the crew is not up on the emergency procedures relating to hydraulically-operated

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equipment. Our next scene shows enlisted and officer crewmen walking around a semi-wrecked B-25 that is used as a "demonstration model" for the emergency manual cranking procedures. As the men watch, hydraulic lines from an outside reservoir are hooked up to the lines in the engine nacelles, and outside power unit is activated, and an instructor cranks the wheels up and down manually. In an air emergency, however, in which the hydraulic lines are cut, a man can still crank down the wheels with a special emergency pump.

In combat the ability to fly a twin-engine bomber on only one engine is vitally important, for frequently combat damage destroys or damages to the point of uselessness one of the engines. Accordingly our combat pilots are checked out on single-engine operation, and one of our closing scenes shows this operations being performed in the air.

And so, training continues in combat - not only with Bob's crew but also every new crew that comes in, and every old crew still assigned. Bomb trainers roll across the cement floor, bomb fall plots rain into boxes labelled "Combat Missions" and "Training Missions," Link Trainers gyrate, bombs crash into the target areas, the charts of training and of mission efficiency animatedly reveal progress - and TRAINING CONTINUES.

End

