

The Rome Raid



One of the dates which stands out in the Group's history, as well as that of World War II, was July 19, 1943, when the first attack on the Italian capital, Rome, "The Eternal City", was made. Our bombers did not actually hit Rome itself, but instead were given targets at Ciampino, nine miles from the center of the metropolis.

The crews had no inkling of what the mission was to be. On the morning of the raid, which was accomplished by 500 bombers, they were given one of the most thorough briefings ever given for any mission. President Roosevelt earlier had assured Pope Pius XII that every effort would be made to spare religious institutions and churches in Italy, and stress was placed upon avoiding those in the city of Rome. Correspondents had arrived to accompany the bombers, and the raid was to all one of the most significant of the campaign. Needless to say, it was successful, so much so that it must certainly have upset the three-day conference which Hitler and Mussolini were then having in northern Italy. In this respect, the blow was psychologically well timed.

People of all faiths were aware of the repercussions which might result in the bombing of Rome. It can best be described, however, by what the 47th Wing Chaplain, Capt. Joseph P. Kenny, formerly a Catholic priest in Philadelphia, had to say about the matter.

When Tom Treaner, correspondent for the Los Angeles Times, returned from the raid, he sought Father Kenny for a statement. Father Kenny replied: "Roosevelt and Churchill said the Vatican would not be bombed. The Vatican is neutral territory, like Switzerland, and of course, should not be bombed. As to Rome, if a church is hit in Rome, it is the same as a church in Tunis. We must remember that Rome is the home of fascism."

The result of the raid is now history with not one religious site or building hit, but the railway yards and other military transportation facilities took a terrific pounding. All planes returned safely and the 98th "fiddled" wile Rome really burned.

Rome Raid Marked by Precision

**Photos Reveal Deadly Accuracy on Rail and Industrial Targets
Only lightest losses suffered by Raiders
Traffic Blocked by Damage at Vital Rail Trans-shipment Point.**

by
Reynolds Packard

ALLIED HEADQUARTERS, North Africa, July 20.---(UP)---American precision bombers smacked every ton of explosives squarely into the target area in the attack on Rome yesterday, severely damaging vital Axis rail hubs and hitting a steel works and chemical plant.

Pictures of the first raid on Mussolini's capital shoed today the accuracy of the aerial attack.

Suffering only the lightest losses against weak Italian defenses, the bombers scored so heavily on the San Lorenzo railroad yards that traffic was blocked through that vital rail trans-shipment point. Fifty hits in the Littorio yards caused a partial tie-up there.

The pictures, taken only an hour after the last of the 500 bombers and their escort of twin-engine Lightnings had flown over Rome, testified to the care used in the raid to avoid hitting religious or other cultural objects.

Axis announcements, admitting heavy damage in Rome, said that time bombs were still going off.

The aerial photographs showed direct hits wrecking the San Lorenzo roundhouses and the Littorio yards were gutted for their whole width of 400 yards and length of two miles, with locomotive and repair sheds shattered and the administrative building burned.

During the entire raid---carried out with an extreme degree of care---no more than 25 to 30 enemy fighters were seen. Only five of the Allied aircraft from the Middle East and Northwest African forces were lost.

Of the Middle East forces that participated, not a plane was lost and only one man was killed of the Ninth U.S. Air Force crews on the raid, Maj. Gen. Lewis H. Brereton's Middle East headquarters reported.

(An Italian communique broadcast by Radio Rome acknowledged "very great" damage and said 166 persons were killed and 1,659 injured. Naples was bombed last night, Rome said.)

The raid on Benito Mussolini's capital, designed primarily to cut the rail links connecting the Axis war machine supply routes to the south, was described by the Allied announcement as an "outstandingly successful operation."

The San Lorenzo and Littorio railway switchyards were hit the hardest, but the Tabonelli steel works, a chemical plant, and the Rome airdromes also were damaged.

Three enemy planes of the small force which tried to oppose the wave of bombing planes were shot down, two of them by escorting fighters, and three more were wrecked on the ground. Anti-aircraft fire was described officially as "slight."

A Middle East communique said an ammunition train exploded on the Littorio marshalling yards and that direct hits were scored on the hangars and administrative building at Littorio airfield, where at least 10 fires were seen.