

Historical Sources for the Events in Joseph Heller's Novel, *Catch-22*

By Daniel Setzer



The War Diary for the 488th Bomb Squadron for June 1944 had 18 photographs enclosed. One of those photos happened to capture Lt. Joseph Heller along with this crew. The names here match the flight manifest for Heller's June 7th mission to Cecina, Italy. (Also see page 43 for mention of Lt. Chrenko)

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Introduction

The men and the accomplishments of the 340th Bomb Group deserve to be remembered for many generations to come. The courage, commitment and skill of the men who made up that unit won decorations and citations for the group and made a significant contribution to victory over a massive threat to western civilization.

However, the same can also be said for the other groups in the 57th Bomb Wing as well as numerous other Air Force, infantry and Navy units. Over time the coming generations will lose sight of individual incidents that happened in these diverse units. Their admiration for the accomplishments of the US Army in general will remain, but individual histories will be lost except to historians and WWII enthusiasts.

I believe that the 340th BG is uniquely positioned to resist that trend. The reason will be its association with Joseph Heller's novel, "*Catch-22*."

War is the most intense of human activities. The proximity of death magnifies every emotion. Fear, hate, love, lust, compassion and aggression find their extreme expression during wartime. If not the emotions of the men directly involved in the conflict, then in the emotions of the parents, children, wives and lovers of the men who are in harm's way.

Novelists gravitate to wartime themes and settings. There are hundreds or thousands of novels that have touched upon the subject and used war as the background of their characters. However, when one takes a close look at truly first class world literature, we find that the number of really 'great' works of art which are also classified as war novels resolves to a relatively short list.

My list would look something like this:

<i>War and Peace,</i>	Leo Tolstoy
<i>The Red Badge of Courage,</i>	Steven Crane
<i>All Quiet on the Western Front,</i>	Erich Maria Remarque
<i>A Farewell to Arms,</i>	Ernest Hemingway
<i>For Whom the Bell Tolls,</i>	Ernest Hemingway

Tolstoy was writing in 1865 about events that occurred in 1805 – 1820. Steven Crane was born after the Civil War was over and published his novel in 1895. He relied upon interviews with war veterans to create the battle scenes. To his credit, after publication of the book, the vets all agreed that, "He got it right." They said that his depiction of Civil War battle scenes was as accurate as could be hoped for in a written narrative.

On the other hand both Remarque and Hemingway were veterans of the conflicts they portrayed.

This brings us to Joseph Heller and *Catch-22*. Heller's orders attaching him to the 340th Bomb Group, 488th Bomb Squadron at Alesan airfield in Corsica were dated May 21, 1944. He flew his last battle mission on October 15 of 1944. Most likely he left the island in January of 1945 after completing 60 combat missions as a bombardier.

In 1953 he began work on the novel that was to become *Catch-22*. It was published in 1961. It has remained in print since that time. The book is often found on the lists of required reading in colleges and it is the sort of book that an English major might base their dissertation upon.

The central theme of the book revolves around the plight of an ordinary man who is being pushed around and manipulated by an unfeeling and self-serving organization. This novel shows every indication of remaining a classic of literature for many generations to come. As long as there are governments, big corporations or military organizations, this novel will retain its currency. The theme of rebellion will continue to attract and capture the imagination of young people. Add to this the fact that the language and the events depicted in the novel are 'laugh out loud' hilarious, and I think one has the formula for a work of art that will retain its position as a classic of world literature.

Sometime in the late 1960's I got around to reading *Catch-22*. The irreverence and subversive nature of the book were irresistible. Every smart aleck high school senior fancies himself a world-weary cynic, and I was no exception. Quotes from the book like:

“She was able, prompt, strict and intelligent. She welcomed responsibility and kept her head in every crisis. She was adult and self-reliant, and there was nothing she needed from anyone. Yossarian took pity and decided to help her.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.293)

were right up my alley. I tried to mimic these inversions of social logic when I conversed with friends. In our adolescent social circle such affectations were greatly admired.

Since the book dealt with B-25 bombers and since my father was a veteran of the 340th Bomb Group, 487th Bomb Squadron, I pressed him to read the book. His tastes in reading did not normally go toward fiction. He was much more likely to read Civil War history or WWII history. Nevertheless, I pushed the book into his hands when we were on vacation visiting his in-laws in North Carolina and he read it.

All I really remember about his reaction was him repeating, “Some of these events seem really familiar, I wonder which (group? squadron?) he was in.” At the time the distinction between wing, group and squadron was totally lost on me and I can not remember how close he was able to narrow down the association with the events depicted in the novel. Sometime after Heller published “*Something Happened*” (1974) I went to hear him speak at Johns Hopkins University. He read from his latest novel and tried to redirect all of the audience questions away from *Catch-22* and back to *Something Happened* as much as he could. I did not get a chance to ask him about which unit he served in in WWII.

I also did not ask my father to go into more detail about his recollections of the events he found familiar in *Catch-22*. My teenage life was far too busy and important to bother with details about things that happened in the distant reaches of history.

Now, if we flash forward forty years, the discovery of a cache of letters that my father wrote during the war has sparked my interest in his wartime experience. I am reading the 57th Bomb Wing newsletter, multiple tribute web sites dedicated to the men who served in the 340th and I have read Dominique Taddei's book, the *U.S.S. Corsica*, which is a collection of recollections by the GI's who served on Corsica during the war.

Although I believed myself to have a very good recollection of *Catch-22*, I decided to go out and get a copy to reread after a forty year hiatus.

Now it was my turn to flip the pages muttering to myself, “These events *really* seem familiar.” I might also add that my recollections of the novel weren't all that good and I had totally forgotten how outrageously funny the language was in that book.

As I laughed out loud at the text I began to come to the realization that Joseph Heller **did not make anything up**. Nearly all of the events in the book and many of the characters can be traced back to actual historic events and to the men Heller served with during his tour of duty in Corsica.

In later years Joseph Heller admitted that his inspiration for the principal character, Yossarian, was based in part upon Francis Yohannan who Heller trained with stateside and who was also a bombardier in the 488th BS. Yohannan's family was Assyrian. Yossarian is described in the book as being of Assyrian extraction. The name, Yossarian, is an amalgam of the words 'Yohannan' and 'Assyrian.'



Francis
Yohannan

We do not know what traits of Francis Yohannan caused Heller to use him as a reference. Perhaps the unusual name was enough. Other than the name, Yohannan and Yossarian do not seem to have much in common. While Yossarian elected to opt out from what he saw as the cynical, unfeeling oppression of the military leadership, Francis Yohannan retired from the Air Force in 1971 as a lieutenant colonel.

Another example is the character, Major _____ de Coverly. Heller describes him thus:

“His duties as squadron executive officer did consist entirely, [...], of pitching horseshoes, kidnapping Italian laborers, and renting apartments for the enlisted men and officers to use on rest leaves, and he excelled at all three.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.131)

Compare to this to a comment Heller made in his book *Now and Then*:

The first American soldiers were in Rome on the morning of June 4 [1944], and close on their heels, perhaps even beating them into the city, sped our congenial executive officer, Major Cover, to rent two apartments there for use by the officers and enlisted men in our squadron...with cooks and maids, and with female friends of the cooks and maids who liked to hang out there.... (*Now and Then* 176)
(Quoted by Scoggins, *Joseph Heller's Combat Experiences in Catch-22*, p.12)

Physically, Heller describes Major _____ de Coverly in nearly mythic terms:

“Major _____ de Coverly was a splendid, awe-inspiring, grave old man with a massive leonine head and an angry shock of wild white hair that raged like a blizzard around his stern, patriarchal face.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.131)

Charles J. Cover was born in 1896 and would have been all of 48 years old in 1944 when the 19-year old Heller arrived on the island of Corsica. Photos from the time show Cover as a resolute, confident fellow who would be likely to impress the young newcomer to this theater of war.



Charles J.
Cover

This is not to say that Joseph Heller simply copied his diary entries into the manuscript for the novel. Take for example the fate of the character, Clevinger. Clevinger is the perfect foil to Yossarian. Whereas Yossarian is a bundle of nerves and emotions, Clevinger is an intellectual and the very personification of logic. Heller says of him:

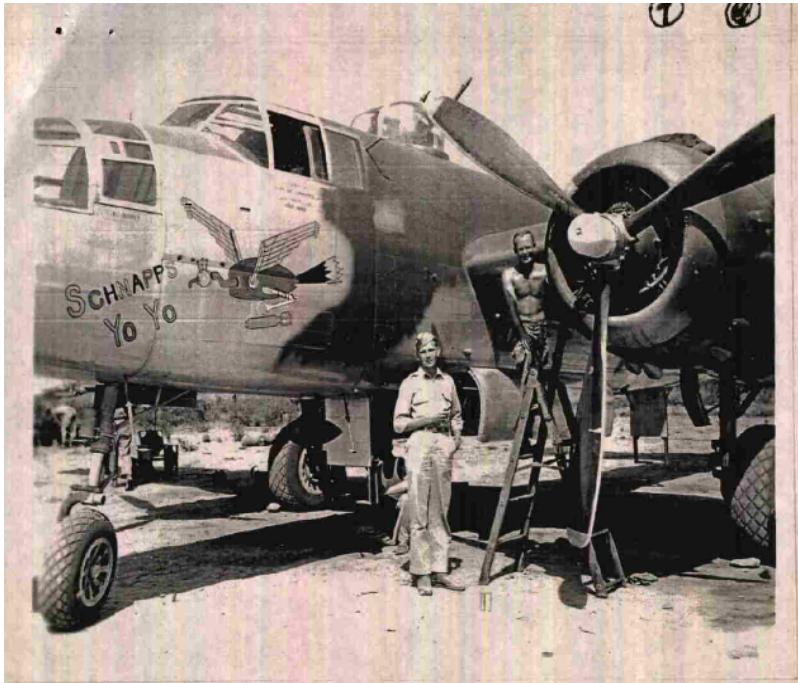
“Every one agreed that Clevinger was certain to go far in the academic world. In short, Clevinger was one of those people with lots of intelligence and no brains, and everyone knew it except those who soon found it out.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.68)

Clevinger and Yossarian engage in heated arguments wherein Clevinger attempts again and again to convince Yossarian that he is acting irrationally. Yossarian's responses lead us to agree with Yossarian that the only logical response to the absurd pressures befalling him *is* to act irrationally.

Clevinger does not survive the war. Heller describes his fate:

“Clevinger was dead. That was the basic flaw in his philosophy. Eighteen planes had let down through a beaming white cloud off the coast of Elba one afternoon on the way back from the weekly milk run to Parma; seventeen came out. No trace was ever found of the other, not in the air or on the smooth surface of the jade waters below. There was no debris. Helicopters circled the white cloud till sunset. During the night the cloud blew away, and in the morning there was no more Clevinger.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.104)

When I first read this passage all those years ago, I naturally assumed that this incident was a fanciful creation of the author's vivid and creative imagination. Rereading the passage 40 years later, I immediately recognized this as a well documented event that actually happened on November 5, 1944. The plane in question was the Schnapps Yo-yo carrying the tail fin I.D. of 6M. It was part of the 486th squadron, also stationed at the Alesani airfield. It was being piloted by Lt. Richard H. Brandle of Philadelphia. The Schnapps Yo-Yo was already in position in formation with other planes. The group was gaining altitude to link up with another formation en route to bomb targets in the Brenner Pass.



From the War Diary of the 486th BS October 1944. Pictured here are Capt. Herbert C. Nafe and T/Sgt J. Whipple. Neither were on board when the plane went missing.

In order to reach the second formation of planes, the Schnapps Yo-Yo's group had to pass through a layer of clouds as they climbed to match the altitude of the other aircraft. Passage through the cloud layer took only 45 seconds or less, but when the formation broke through the clouds, the Schnapps Yo-yo was gone!

There was no radio message calling for help or reporting trouble, no flare, no wreckage in the sea below.

Everyone expected 6M to show up back home at Alesani airbase, or perhaps at another neighboring airfield. Speculation about the fate of the crew of 6M continued for several days. Here are excerpts from the 486th squadron war diary:

11/5/1944

“Lt. Brandle's ship did not return and it was last seen entering a cloud bank en route to the target. We expect word that he landed at another field.”

11/6/1944

“Lt. Brandle and his crew have not returned—We are hoping fervently --!”

11/8/1944

“No word on 6M and it is feared Lt. Brandle's ship is definitely “missing”.

11/10/1944

“Lt. Brandle's ship is now considered lost and to the memory of the crew we say “Happy Valhalla.”

There were two additional sinister details associated with the disappearance of the Schnapps Yo-Yo that did not make it into text of *Catch-22*. The tail fin identifying number 6M had already been assigned to two other B-25 aircraft in the squadron. Both had been lost in combat. The Schnapps Yo-Yo was the third 6M lost. There is no doubt but that there would have been those who murmured about a jinx on the number 6M.

Another anecdote comes from Lt Walter Wooten and is reported in Taddei's book *USS Corsica* (Taddei, p.166). It was a superstition in the squadron that fliers would never clean their flight jackets. This type of custom is common among men in combat and can be traced back many many generations. Men who have survived battle do not want to wash their armor for fear of washing their 'luck' off. Lt. Wooten happens upon Lt. William C. Johnson, the co-pilot of 6M, while his is scrubbing down his flight jacket. Wooten tells him about the prohibition on cleaning flight jackets, but Johnson makes fun of Lt. Wooten and continues on with his cleaning. The next day he disappears with the other six crew members and the Schnapps Yo-Yo.

It is interesting to note how Heller changes details of the original story. In Heller's version the ship is returning from a 'milk run' rather than heading out to the dangerous and often well defended targets in the Brenner Pass. He also has the formation descending through the clouds rather than ascending up through the cloud bank. Why? Probably to enhance the mysteriousness of the event. En route to a target a nervous or spooked crew might be looking for excuses to return to base. Yossarian manages to find a flimsy excuse to turn back from what he expected would be a 'hot' bombing run on Bologna. This flight, however, was headed home. Everyone including Clevinger would be eager to stay on the heading back to their home base.

When a plane has mechanical trouble the natural tendency is to descend toward safety. As the formation including the Schnapps Yo-Yo was climbing, the other crews first assumed that she had broken away and descended looking for a safe landing place. Since they were now above the clouds they could not see the ground or any planes below them. When Heller changed the vertical direction of the flight, it would have been immediately evident to the other planes in the formation that something truly inexplicable had just happened when they dropped below the clouds and found their neighboring plane gone.

Changing the direction of the flight enhances the event, but that is not where the true genius of the narrative lies.

Heller shows his genius by taking this extraordinary true event and placing his character, Clevinger in the airplane. Clevinger is the ultimate personification of intellect and logic. What a sweet irony it is to have him simply vanish in the most mysterious and irrational fashion.

The Real People and Fictional Characters of *Catch-22*

Catch-22 is not a roman à clef, that is to say that one can not and should not try to make a one-to-one connection between each character in the novel to the soldiers who served on Corsica. However, Joseph Heller himself muddied the waters by admitting the connection between Francis Yohannan and Yossarian. The relationship of Major Cover to Major ____ de Coverly is very thinly disguised.

Other correspondences tempt one:

Bomb Wing Commander General Knapp vs General Dreedle. General Dreedle comes off as a rather sympathetic character in the novel, or if not sympathetic at least rather likable. He is a gruff old soldier who is very aware of the impression he makes when he enters a room, and he is used to giving commands:

“Who is this man?”

“M-major Danby, sir,” Colonel Cathcart stammered, “My group operations officer.”

“Take him out and shoot him,” ordered General Dreedle.

General Dreedle is not such a martinet that he can't be reasoned with:

Colonel Moodus [...] stepped out diffidently toward General Dreedle with a sickly air of self-sacrifice. “I think you'd better wait a minute, Dad.” he suggested hesitantly. “I don't think you *can* shoot him.”



[...]

“All right, let the insubordinate son of a bitch go,” General Dreedle snarled,.. (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.221)

General Dreedle's counterpart in the real world would have been General Knapp. I could find no entry in the official Army records indicating that General Knapp ever ordered one of his officers to be shot. However, when one reads Heller's description of Dreedle it is obvious that he had this visage in mind when he wrote:

“General Dreedle, the wing commander, was a blunt, chunky, barrel-chested man in his early fifties. His nose was squat and red, and he had lumpy white, bunched-up eyelids circling his small gray eyes like halos of bacon fat.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.215)

Brig. General R. D. Knapp

From the 340th BG 2nd Anniversary Book.

Original at: http://www.dansetzer.us/paper/340th_Anniversary.pdf

Colonel Cathcart is another matter. If Catch-22 has a villain it would be Cathcart. He is venal and self-serving.

“He was complacent and insecure, daring in the administrative stratagems he employed to bring himself to the attention of his superiors and craven in his concern that his schemes might all backfire.”(Heller, *Catch-22*, p.187)

Going back to the Roman Legions and before, every military man has held sacred the tradition of griping about his officers. They follow orders but dream of getting even. The 19-year old Heller, who wanted to go home after this 37th mission and couldn't because of orders from his Group Commander may have had enjoyed the ultimate triumph over authority. Here is how Heller describes Cathcart:

“Colonel Cathcart was a very large, pouting, broad-shouldered man with close-cropped curly dark hair that was graying at the tips and an ornate cigarette holder that he purchased the day before he arrived in Pianosa to take command of his group. He displayed the cigarette holder grandly on every occasion and had learned to manipulate it adroitly. Unwittingly, he had discovered deep within himself a fertile aptitude for smoking with a cigarette holder. As far as he could tell, his was the only cigarette holder in the whole Mediterranean theater of operations...” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.187)

The Group Commander for the 340th Bombardment Group was Colonel Willis F. Chapman.



Colonel Chapman

COLONEL WILLIS F. CHAPMAN—Born 15 November, 1912, at Jackson, Michigan. After graduating from Jackson High School, entered West Point, where he received his B.S. degree in 1935. Entered the Army flying school at Kelly Field, Texas, where he earned his wings in October, 1936.

Assigned to the 72nd Bombardment Squadron in Hawaii, where he served in the bombardment section for two years. Returned to Kelly Field on 21 December, 1938, where he rose to Bombardment Section Chief. On 28 February, 1942, he was transferred to the bombardment school at Midland, Texas, where he was director of flying and training.

On 10 November, 1942, he flew a B-25 Mitchell bomber overseas. Assigned to the 12th Air Force, he was Assistant A-3 on General James H. Doolittle's staff. On 18 February, 1943, N.A.A.F. was formed under General Carl A. Spatz, and Colonel Chapman was retained to fill the same position on his staff. On 10 December, 1943, M.A.A.F. formed under General Ira C. Eaker, and Colonel Chapman was assigned to the combat operations section, where he remained until 15 March, 1944, when he was assigned to the 340 as C.O.

Colonel Chapman flew 29 missions with the 340th in the Mediterranean theatre of operations. He holds a senior pilot rating and is a rated navigator, bombardier and observer.

Nineteen

Photo and bio from the 489th BS post-war souvenir booklet.

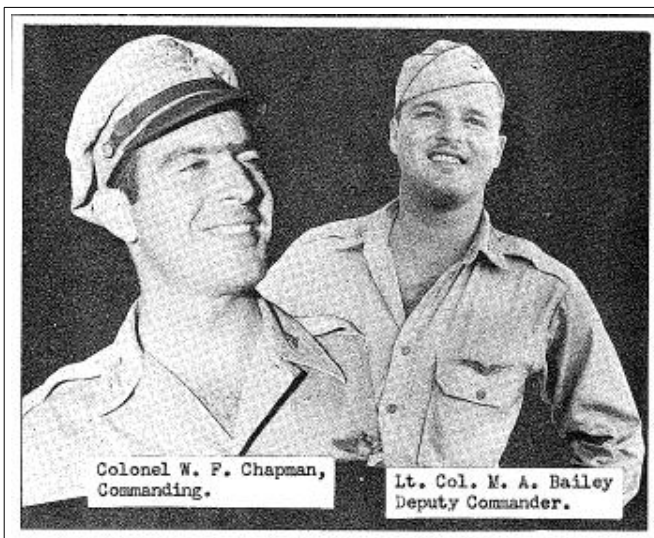
Colonel Cathcart's Deputy Commander is Colonel Korn. Cathcart depends heavily on Korn and hates him for being smarter and more competent. Korn knows how to play one individual against the other and how to get what he wants by cutting back-room deals. Heller describes him as:

“Colonel Korn, a stocky, dark, flaccid man with a shapeless paunch, sat completely relaxed on on of the benches in the front row, his hands clasped comfortably over the top of his bald and swarthy head. His eyes were amused behind his glinting rimless glasses.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.137)

and:

“Colonel Korn was an untidy disdainful man with an oily skin and deep, hard lines running almost straight down from his nose between his crepuscular jowls and his square, clefted chin.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.198)

The Deputy Commander of the 340th BG was Lt. Colonel M. A. Bailey.



From the 340th BG 2nd Anniversary Book. Original at: http://www.dansetzer.us/paper/340th_Anniversary.pdf



Bailey wearing glasses. from the 489th BS post-war souvenir booklet.

Then there are the fliers that Heller lived and worked with:

Half-Comanche Captain Vincent Myer (known as 'Chief') arrived on Corsica before Heller arrived. In the novel there is also a half-Indian character, Chief White Halfoat.

In fact the comparison between Vincent Myer and Chief White Halfoat might well serve as a warning about the risk of taking a too superficial look at the GI's that served with Heller and Heller's fictional characters.

Yes, both Myer and Halfoat are half American Indian, but Heller describes Halfoat in these words:

“Chief White Halfoat was a handsome, swarthy Indian from Oklahoma with a heavy, hard-boned face and tousled black hair, a half-blooded Creek from Enid who for occult reasons of his own had made up his mind to die of pneumonia.

[...]

He could barely read or write and had been assigned to Captain Black as assistant intelligence officer.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.43)

Captain Vincent Myer, on the other hand, was a graduate of the University of Cameron in Oklahoma and a Golden Gloves boxer. His friend, George Wells, describes him in Taddei's book *USS Corsica* (p.82), as a force of nature, a rock-solid bombardier who seemed to be fearless in the face of enemy flak or fighters.

This is definitely not a match, unless there was a private joke between Heller and Myer.

One of the most unforgettable characters in *Catch-22* is Doc Daneeka. His counterpart in the real world would have been Dr. Benjamin Marino. Marino was drafted into the service before the outbreak of the war and was attached to the 488th BS while they were still in Walterboro, SC prior to shipping out. He remained their flight surgeon for the duration of the war. As far as we know, Heller never made a public statement linking Daneeka to Marino. However, Heller places Daneeka's medical practice in New York on Staten Island. Marino lived in Brooklyn.

Comparing the physical description in *Catch-22* with the photographs of Dr. Marino, it seems clear to me that Heller at least had his physical characteristics in mind as he constructed the fictional Doc Daneeka:

“Doc Daneeka was a very neat, clean man whose idea of a good time was to sulk. He had a dark complexion and a small, wise saturnine face with mournful pouches under both eyes.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.32)

“He was a sad birdlike man with the spatulate face and scrubbed, tapering features of a well groomed rat.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.21)



Dr. Benjamin Marino is on the right in the first picture and on the left in the second picture.

The pivotal event in *Catch-22* and the pivotal event in Joseph Heller's tour of combat duty was the August 15, 1944 mission to Avignon. Yossarian's crew included Huple and Dobbs.

“Huple was a good pilot, Yossarian knew, but he was only a kid, and Dobbs had no confidence in him, either, and wrested the controls away without warning after they had dropped their bombs,...” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.225)

Elsewhere Heller tells us that Huple was only 15 years old and had lied about his age to get into the Army.

“Huple and Dobbs? Who were they? What preposterous madness to float in thin air two miles high on an inch or two of metal, sustained from death by the meager skill and intelligence of two vapid strangers, a beardless kid named Huple and a nervous nut like Dobbs,...” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.331)

When Heller's plane took off to bomb Avignon it was piloted by Lt. John B. Rome, a young man from Chicago. On July 6, 1944 Lt. Wilbur T. Blume photographed John Rome and wrote the following press release:

“Lt. Rome who is a first Pilot on a B-25 “Mitchell” has recently been promoted to the

rank of 1st Lieutenant. Lt. Rome is one of the youngest pilots in the group in combat.” (Burton Blume. Email to the author. November 16, 2008)

When this photo was taken, Lt. Rome would have been about 20 years old.



(Photograph taken by Lt. Wilbur T. Blume. Courtesy of his son, Burton Blume, from his collection.)

Another major character in the novel is Chaplain Albert Taylor Tappman. In a sense the entire novel sprang from the chaplain with Heller's flash of inspiration when a single sentence came into his mind:

“**Heller:** I was lying in bed in my four-room apartment on the West Side when suddenly this line came to me: “It was love at first sight. The first time he saw the chaplain, Someone fell madly in love with him.” I didn't have the name Yossarian. The chaplain wasn't necessarily an army chaplain – he could have been a *prison* chaplain. But as soon as the opening sentence was available, the book began to evolve clearly in my mind – even most of the particulars, the tone, the form, many of the characters, including some I eventually couldn't use. All of this took place within an hour and a half.” (Quoted by Sorkin, *Conversations with Joseph Heller*, p.106)

This line became the opening for *Catch-22*.

As Heller went about creating the chaplain in *Catch-22*, it is clear that he had Chaplain James H.

Cooper in mind. Captain Cooper was chaplain for the 340th Bombardment Group throughout its tour overseas. While on Corsica, Chaplain Cooper bivouacked in a tent by himself, located in the woods some distance from the squadron encampments.



Chaplain Cooper in front of his tent on Corsica.

(Photo courtesy Mark Laney. Email to the author 12/15/08)

Here is how Heller describes Chaplain Tappmann's accommodations:

“The chaplain lived in a clearing in the woods about four miles away between the officers' club and the first of the four squadron areas that stretched away from Group Headquarters in a distant line. The chaplain lived alone in a spacious, square tent that was also his office.”
(Heller, *Catch-22*, p.200)

Later, Heller again refers to the Chaplain's “...spacious, pointy-topped tent..”

With his customary sparseness, Heller only provides us with only a line or two that physically describes Chaplain Tappmann:

“He was a slight man of about thirty-two with tan hair and brown diffident eyes. His face was narrow and rather pale. An innocent nest of ancient pimple pricks lay in the basin of each cheek.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p. 13)

The photographs included here do not have sufficient resolution for us to detect pimple-pricks, but the rest of the description certainly fits.

Heller give us one more small detail that seals the connection between his chaplain and Chaplain Cooper:

“He would pass the time at Yossarian's and Dunbar's table with a shy, reticent smile, seldom speaking unless addressed, a glass of thick sweet wine almost untasted before him as he toyed unfamiliarly with the tiny corncob pipe that he affected self-consciously and occasionally stuffed with tobacco and smoked.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p. 270)

Note Chaplain Cooper's photograph as it appeared in the post-war souvenir book of the 489th Bomb Squadron:



Chaplain Cooper

CHAPLAIN

Chaplain Cooper

CHAPLAIN JAMES H. COOPER—Born 18 February, 1914, at Hannibal, Ohio. His father is a Methodist minister, and the chaplain grew up in Methodist parsonages in Ohio. In 1932 he was graduated from the Barnesville, Ohio, high school. The following year he entered Muskingum College at Muskingum, Ohio, where he majored in speech and English, receiving his A.B. degree in June, 1936. He entered Drew University at Madison, N. J., where he received his B.D. degree in 1939.

He was serving as associate pastor of the Trinity Methodist Church at Lima, Ohio, when he enlisted in the Army on the 14th of May, 1942. He was assigned to the 56th General Hospital at Ft. Jackson, S. C., later he was transferred to Scott Field, Ill., where he served as post chaplain until October, 1942, when he was assigned to the 340th at Columbia.



Chaplain Cooper with his corncob pipe.

Milo Minderbinder is one of Heller's most memorable characters. He is the epitome of blind capitalism and greed. Whenever he gets wind of a profit to be made he goes into a mystic's trance and fixates on pursuing that profit to the total disregard of anything or anyone else.

Milo is introduced as:

“This is Lieutenant Milo Minderbinder, sir,” said Corporal Snark with a derisive wink. “One of our new pilots. He became mess officer while you were in the hospital this last time.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.61)

The August war diary for the 488th notes:

“..2nd Lt Mauno A. Lindholm made Mess Officer.”

Lt. Lindholm is no slouch. The September Squadron History cites him:

- (18) 1st Lt. Mauno A. Lindholm
- (a) Cruiser Taranto in La Spezia Harbor, Italy, 23 September 1944.
- (b) Extraordinary Achievement.
- (c) Distinguished Flying Cross

But on September 16, 1944 the war diary records this interesting event:

“Lt Lindholm, the new mess officer, got caught by a British agent in Catania. He was trading coffee for fresh eggs.”

The consequences of being caught by British agents could not have been too dire since Lindholm was piloting 8C over La Spezia only a week later. This incident could well have been the germ of an idea that eventually transformed Mauno into Milo.

Heller describes Milo thus:

“Yossarian turned slowly to gaze at Milo with probing distrust He saw a simple, sincere face that was incapable of subtlety or guile, an honest, frank face with disunited large eyes, rusty hair, black eyebrows and an unfortunate reddish-brown mustache. Milo had a long, thin nose with sniffing, damp nostrils heading sharply off to the right, always pointing away from where the rest of him was looking.”



Mauno Lindholm

It is worth noting the Mr. Lindholm also saw himself in Milo Minderbinder. Shortly after his father's death in 2009 Mauno's son, Curt, recalled:

“Looking back, my father knew he was Milo from day one. He never sought out Heller for verification and I remember confronting him to seek out Heller after reading the interview in Playboy where Heller denied any correlation between real people and the book's characters. I always wondered why [Heller denied the correlations] and you answered that. I am a retired AF pilot and there is a real loyal bond between everyone involved in getting the mission done and I guess my father took exception to organizing a bombing raid to kill his own people. That would not happen in real life for any money. It's too bad that was in the book because it took away from the essence of who Milo was. He was a capitalist living on the edge but he was also a patriot fighting for his country. I'm sure there were times for him when going for eggs was more important than dropping bombs. The trading of eggs and coffee, yes, he said he did that. Getting arrested, yes, that happened. He had his own personal B-25 to get supplies for the mess hall. The bottom line and you said it, it was a novel. Dad was a 62 mission guy.” (Curt Lindholm, email to the author 2009)

In *Catch-22* Milo Minderbinder is a very valued member of the squadron. As mess officer he is responsible for provisioning the mess hall. He goes to Malta to buy fresh eggs for 7 cents a piece and sells them for 5 cents a piece in order to make a 2 cent profit on each egg. The squadron is very appreciative of his efforts. Meals could be the highlight of the day for soldiers in camp. The war diaries are often quite precise as to what is being served at any given time and very quick to complain if they have to resort to powdered eggs or C-rations.

As much as they enjoyed mealtime, they greatly disliked kitchen duty. While on the mainland of Italy, and Sicily they were usually able to hire locals to do the food preparation and dish washing afterwards. The US Army paid laborers \$0.25 per day. The British paid less. The Corsican population was too sparse and too occupied with their farms to be able to supply the 17 army airfields with kitchen help, so the army imported labor from Italy and later from Yugoslavia.

Norman Vance of the 379th Bomb Group recounts an anecdote (Taddei, *U.S.S. Corsica*, p.40) wherein a Yugoslav kitchen helper mistook white soap powder for flour and used it to cook pancakes for breakfast. After breakfast everyone had to take to the latrines. A few men were taken to the hospital and one evacuated to a military hospital in Naples. The combat missions had to be canceled for the day.

Heller has a lot of fun with incident, adapting it to his purposes. Milo has just informed Yossarian that he has selected Corporal Snark to be his head chef for the mess hall:

“Incidentally, do you happen to know why he was busted to private and is only a corporal now?”

“Yes,” said Yossarian. “He poisoned the squadron.”

Milo went pale again. “He did *what?*”

“He mashed hundreds of cakes of GI soap into the sweet potatoes. just to show that people have the taste of Philistines and don't know the difference between good and bad. Every man in the squadron was sick. Missions were canceled.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.64)

By far Milo's most notorious escapade was to sign a contract with the German government to mount an air raid on his own air base. To Milo such arrangements came naturally. His sharp business mind realized immediately that since he already had men and airplanes on site and at his disposal, he could pull off the operation at a much lower cost than the Germans who would have to spend a lot of money for gasoline and other transportation costs. There was an easy profit to be made and he simply could not pass up the opportunity.

Joseph Heller's orders place him on Corsica on May 21, 1944. In the early hours of the morning of May 13th the German Luftwaffe flew in with about 80 JU-88 medium bombers and spent 90 minutes dropping bombs in wave after wave, then circling around to strafe with machine gun fire. Hymie Setzer was on the ground at Alesani when the bombing began:

It was a year ago 3:30 AM this morning that the Germans raided us over in Corsica. We've had a few raids before, but never one like this. The first thing they did was to get the ack-ack batteries. Then they stayed over us for about an hour and a half. When it was all over they had destroyed 65 planes, killed 24, wounded about 115, blew up the gas dump and what not. (Setzer, Letter of May 14, 1945)

Given that the 340th Bombardment Group would have had about 80 to 90 planes total at full strength, the loss of 65 was devastating. Nevertheless, the very next day as a gesture of defiance, the 340th managed to muster up enough planes to fly a mission against the railroad tunnel at Itri in Northern Italy.

Heller would have arrived on Corsica only a few days after the air raid. He would have seen the devastation and the bomb craters. It would still have been the principal topic of conversation. In *Catch-22* we find:

“..that brought Hungry Joe bolting out at him barefoot, ranting at the top of his screechy voice and emptying his own .45 into Havermeyer's tent as he came charging down one side of the ditch and up the other and vanished all at once inside one of the slit trenches that had appeared like magic beside every tent the morning after Milo Minderbinder had bombed the squadron.”(Heller, *Catch-22*, p.31)

Everyone on the base was jittery. They all expected Jerry to return to finish the job. The May 13th entry in the war diary for the 487th reads:

Picks and shovel were at a premium throughout the area all during the daylight hours while those who didn't have a slit trench dug one and other improved upon theirs. If Jerry returns tonight as he's expected to, there won't be a soul unprepared.....No movie was shown tonight.....

Then on the 14th:

Jerry did not return tonight to fulfill our expectations and thereby enabled the boys to enjoy a good nights rest – something we all needed after yesterdays early morning episode.....Funeral services for our comrades who lost their lives in yesterdays raid on the field were held this afternoon in Bastia.

Two weeks later, (May 29th) after Heller arrived on the island, the boys were still on-edge:

A few practice shots from the field had everybody in their slit trenches for a while the other night. Some weren't aware that it was only practice and others were avoiding falling shrapnel.

Then the next night (May 30th):

Two air raid alerts got the boys out of bed twice during the evening.

Heller, as a newly arrived 19-year old in the war theater could not help but to be affected by what he saw around him and by the nervousness of even the experienced war-weary veterans in the camp.

Milo Minderbinder the arch-capitalist contracting to bomb his own airfield is one of the most brilliant of Heller's creative strokes. The unfettered greediness and insensibility to human suffering perfectly captures the essence of war profiteering:

M&M Enterprises verged on collapse. Milo cursed himself hourly for his monumental greed and stupidity in purchasing the entire Egyptian cotton crop, but a contract was a contract and had to be honored, and one night after a sumptuous evening meal, all Milo's fighters and bombers took off, joined information directly overhead and began dropping bombs on the group. He had landed another contract with the Germans, this time to bomb his own outfit.

[...]

The loud-speaker overhead began squawking. "Milo, this is Alvin Brown. I've finished dropping my bombs. What should I do now?"

"Strafe," said Milo.

"Strafe?" Alvin Brown was shocked.

"We have no choice," Milo informed him resignedly. "It's in the contract." (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.257)

While Milo Minderbinder has become the archetype for capitalism gone off the tracks, another character, Major Major has become the archetype for timid ineffectual leadership and extraordinary incompetence in office. Major Major got a bad start in life. As a cruel joke, his father gave him first and middle names to match his family name, Major. After the young man got drafted, an IBM computer in the War Department with a sense of humor suddenly and arbitrarily promoted him to the rank of Major. Thus, Major Major Major Major came to be the Squadron Commander. Major Major not only has to struggle through life dealing with a bizarre name, fortune has bestowed yet another calamity upon him. He bears an uncanny resemblance to the famous actor, Henry Fonda. People constantly mistake him for Fonda. When he tells them that he is not Henry Fonda, they will not believe him and reject him while expressing their scorn and disgust that such a famous actor would use a stupid ploy like that just to deny an autograph to his loyal fans.

During the time that Heller was on Corsica, the Squadron Commander was Randall C. Cassada.

Cassada was tall and lanky which helped invite comparisons to Henry Fonda.

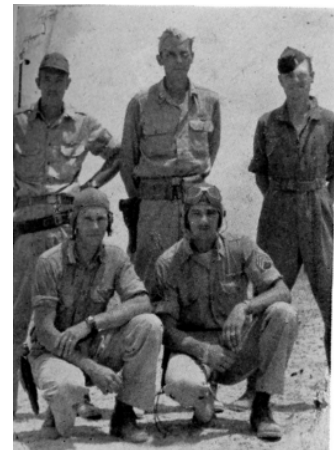
The contours of his hairline, the dark, deep-set eyes and half-smile added to the impression.



Cassada



Henry Fonda



*Randall Cassada
(Standing, Center)*



Cassada



Henry Fonda

There are some other real life soldiers who can be identified as characters in the novel, but with a little less certainty.

Major Major's First Sergeant was Sgt. Towser. Here is how Heller describes him:

“Sergeant Towser was lean and angular and had fine blond hair so light it was almost without color, sunken cheeks, and teeth like large white marshmallows.”

When Heller arrived on Corsica in May of 1944 Colonel Cassada's First Sergeant was Sgt. Robert M. Woodward. On June 22, 1944 Woodward rotated out of the Squadron and returned to the States. He was replaced by Sgt. Elmer R Berg on July 18th. Although Sgt. Woodward left the island only a month after Heller arrived, Woodward must have made more of an impression on Heller than Sgt. Berg.

From their photographs Sgt. Woodward seems to fit the description better than Sgt. Berg



Robert Woodward



Elmer Berg

The Intelligence Officer, Captain Black, gets a whole chapter to himself in Heller's novel. Heller tells us:

“He was a tall, narrow, disconsolate man who moved with a crabby listlessness. He shaved his pinched, pale face every third or fourth day, and most of the time he appeared to be growing a reddish-gold mustache over his skinny upper lip.”

Everett Thomas was the Intelligence Office for the 488th BS and the author of the Squadron's War

Diaries. Heller's description seems to fit his physical appearance very well:



Everett Thomas

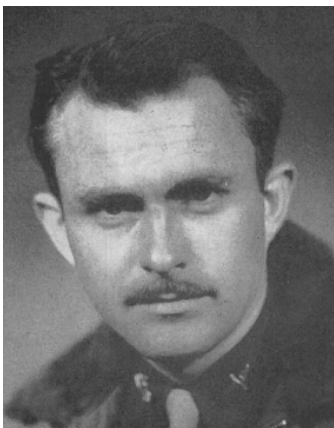
In Patricia Chapman Meder's book, "The True Story of Catch-22" (Casemate Publishers, Philadelphia and Oxford 2012) she identifies other soldiers who served as models for characters in Catch-22. Being the daughter of Colonel Chapman, she is in the perfect position to do so. Here are some of the men she identified:

The luckless Major Danby who General Dreedle ordered shot was based upon the Operations Officer, Joseph Ruebel.



Joseph Ruebel

Captain Wren and Captain Pilchard were based upon Captain George L. Wells and Captain Fred W. Dyer respectively.



red W Dyer



George L Wells

The Mitchell B-25 Medium Bomber

This aircraft was produced in great quantities during the War Years. Over 11,500 saw service in every theater of combat in the world. They were well made, reliable and easy to fly. Known as a medium bomber they were quite small and cramped, yet they carried a crew of six to seven men.

Heller describes it thus:

“The B25's they flew in were stable, dependable, dull-green ships with twin rudders and engines and wide wings.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.48)

The interior of the plane was not pressurized nor did it have any temperature controls. It was common for the temperature on board to be -20°F degrees. Gunners were instructed not to touch the metal surfaces of their 50 cal machine guns with their bare hands for fear that the hand would stick to the metal.

The bomb bay was an enclosed metal box in the center of the aircraft that filled the width of the fuselage and rose nearly to the top of the cabin. In order for a crewman to move from the front of the plane to the rear, he would have to climb to the top of the bomb bay, lay down on it and pull himself along using a metal bar installed for the purpose until he reached the other side and was able to drop down into the rear compartment where the side and rear gunners resided.



This aircraft, photographed in March of 1945, was flown by Heller on the mission to Ratenneau, France on Aug. 24, 1944 (Our thanks to Pavel Turk for confirming the serial number of 8H)

On page 436 of Chapter 41 we find Snowden, the waist gunner injured:

“...he thought of Snowden, who had never been his pal but was a vaguely familiar kid who was badly wounded and freezing to death in the puddle of harsh yellow sunlight splashing into his face through the side gunport...”

At -20°F exposed liquids, including blood, would quickly freeze. The bomb run is over so the bombardier, Yossarian, has less to do than the other crew members. It becomes his job to go to the back part of the plane to help the injured Snowden:

“...Yossarian crawled into the rear section of the plane over the bomb bay after Dobbs had beseeched him on the intercom to help the gunner, please help the gunner.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.436)

This event closely parallels an incident that Heller had during one of his most dangerous missions. In a 1992 interview in *Playboy* magazine Heller said, “People think it quite remarkable that I was in combat in an airplane and I flew sixty missions even though I tell them that the missions were largely milk runs.” Heller is being a bit modest here. Out of his 60 missions the reports indicated flak on 33 missions and 'accurate flak' on 13 of them.

Perhaps his most difficult mission was the attack on the Avignon railroad bridges on August 15, 1944. It was his second mission of the day. The morning mission against the Issambres Point gun positions had to return without dropping their bombs due to heavy cloud cover.

The report described the flak cover at Avignon as, “Heavy [caliber cannons], intense and accurate.”

One of the other planes in Heller's squadron, 8D was shot down. The crews watched it fall from the sky and only counted three parachutes exit the plane.

On the same mission the side gunner, Sgt. Carl Frankel, was wounded by flak. Heller climbed over the bomb bay and did his best to patch up Sgt. Frankel. Unlike Snowden, Sgt. Frankel survived his leg wound and on arrival back at Alesani was immediately carried to the hospital at Cervione for treatment and recovery.



Carl Frankel

Yossarian refers to Snowden as “.. a vaguely familiar kid..” This would not have been surprising. Crews did not stay together. Pilots and bombardiers would fly a different plane every mission. Heller flew in over 20 different B-25's during his tour. The 488th Bomb Squadron would have had about 100 officers and 350 enlisted men at any given time. There were four squadrons at Alesan Aerodrome making for a population on base of about 1,800 men. It would have been impossible to know everyone, and officers did not mix too much with enlisted men anyway. Furthermore, combat crews did not socialize as much with the ground

crews as they did with their own crews. There were no hard and fast rules and during wartime rank distinction was fairly relaxed, but the common interests of the various groups caused them to gravitate to others in their same situation.

The combat crews came in, completed their prescribed number of missions then went home to the States. On the other hand the ground personnel stayed for the duration. My father was with the 340th when they first debarked and set up camp in El Kabrit, Egypt in February of 1943. He was still overseas when the war ended in May of 1945.

Many airplanes carried colorful names like the Schnapps Yo-Yo mentioned above. That aircraft, like most others, was named by the chief of the ground crew that maintained that particular airplane. It was the ground maintenance crew that 'owned' the ship, not the pilot. Pilots came and went, but the maintenance crew patched the holes made by the flak, they tended the engines, and repaired any other systems that were found faulty. The armorers made sure that the long belts of 50 caliber machine gun bullets fed properly to the guns and loaded the bombs according to the needs of the mission.

Most of this work was done in the afternoon and night in order to prepare the planes for tomorrow's mission. Very often the flight crews would pitch their tents on the skirts of the runways where the planes were parked rather than in the areas designated as living quarters. This would allow them to be closer to their work.

When the German Luftwaffe bombed Alesani airbase in May of 1944, most of the casualties were ground crew members who were camped close to the planes which were the principal target of the air raid.

As a bombardier, Yossarian (and Joseph Heller) would have occupied the plexiglass nose cone of the B-25. It was known as the "hot house." The only way to enter the bombardier's compartment was to slide down a narrow tunnel that ran from the navigator's seat behind the cockpit, under the cockpit to the nose of the airplane.



This graphic is taken from the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum flight simulator of their B-25 aircraft, Briefing Time. Note the two pilot and co-pilot chairs on the flight deck and the bombardier's tunnel at the lower left.

Yossarian hated the crawlway. It was too narrow to allow a big man like him to slide through with a parachute harness. He had to leave his parachute in the navigator's area. In the event of an emergency the bombardier would lose precious seconds, sliding through the tunnel, then more seconds attaching his parachute before he could drop out of the plane through the escape hatch just behind the pilot's cockpit.

“The crawlway was Yossarin's lifeline to outside from a plane about to fall, but Yossarian swore at it with seething antagonism, reviled it as an obstacle put there by providence as part of the plot that would destroy him”

The crew of a B-25 consisted of six men. Most had a double role. The radio man was also a waist gunner, the navigator also manned the top turret gun. The bombardier's compartment was often equipped with a machine gun. Yossarian does not think much of the 50 cal:

“Actually, there was not much he could do with that powerful machine gun except load it and test-fire a few rounds. [...] He could really cut loose with it against attacking German fighters, but there were no German fighters any more,..” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.331)

During the six months that Heller was flying, enemy fighters were only engaged on two occasions. The primary threat to bombers on a mission was flak.

The bombardier's compartment was very small, more like a fighter plane's cockpit than a passenger

cabin. The bombardier has a single chair. If he was in the lead plane he had a bombsight, otherwise he had a machine gun. He was isolated in the nose cone and although he had a good view forward, to the sides and downward, he could not even see the pilot above and behind him. His only connection to what was happening in the rest of the plane was his headset intercom.

On Heller's mission over Avignon, the pilot's evasive actions put the plane into a steep dive. The g-forces caused Heller to be pinned helplessly to the roof of the nose cone. It also pulled the jack of his headset out. When he jacked back in he heard the pilot calling for someone to help the bombardier because he was not responding to the intercom. This incident is repeated very faithfully in the book. (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.50)

In *Catch-22* there is an important scene that takes place in the nose cone during the mission to Bologna. The scene involves the interaction between Aarfy and Yossarian during the bomb run while the aircraft is being rocked by bursts of intense flak and it is a masterpiece of drama and comedy.

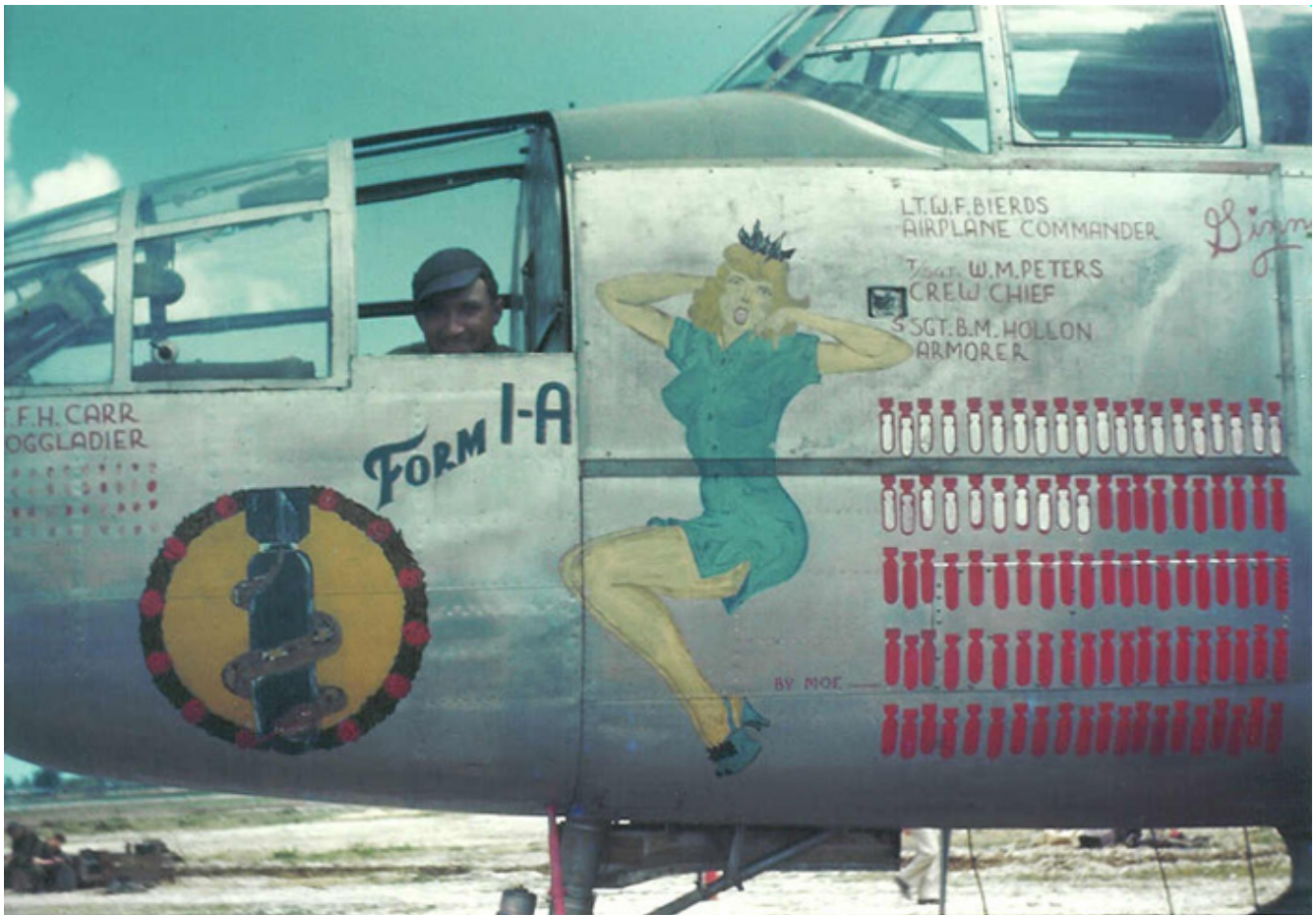
“The plane was slammed again suddenly with another loud, jarring explosion that almost rocked it over on its back, and the nose filled immediately with sweet clouds of blue smoke. *Something was on fire!* Yossarian whirled to escape and smacked into Aarfy, who had struck a match and was placidly lighting his pipe.

[...]

Aarfy crept up close behind Yossarian and jabbed him sharply in the ribs with the stem of his pipe. Yossarian flew up toward the ceiling with a whinnying cry, then jumped completely around on his knees, white as a sheet and quivering with rage.

[...]

He [Yossarian] seized Aarfy by the shirt front and, struggling to his feet for traction, dragged him to the rear of the nose compartment and flung him down like a bloated and unwieldy bag in the entrance of the crawlway.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.148)



This photo serves well to demonstrate the cramped space the bombardier had to work in. It clearly could not accommodate the action described above.

This is one case where Heller had to depart from the physical constraints of the B-25 in order to accommodate the range of movement and action that enhances this scene and adds to Yossarian's frenzy and frustration in dealing with the deadly flak on one hand and Aarfy's stupid insensitivity to danger on the other.

When one looks at the tiny area the bombardier worked in, perched in the delicate nose of the airplane it is easy to sympathize with Yossarian's lament:

“What preposterous madness to float in thin air two miles high on an inch or two of metal, sustained from death by the meager skill and intelligence of two vapid strangers, a beardless kid named Huple and a nervous nut like Dobbs,...” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.331)

Life in Camp

The 340th Bomb Group moved to Alesan Aerodrome in April of 1944. Both French, Italian and a native dialect are spoken on Corsica and many places there have two or more versions of their name. Thus, the name of the airfield is often written, Alesani. Both are correct. As are Alistro and Alsitru.

The island had recently been liberated by Free French forces in conjunction with the local partisans. The partisans were known as the Maquis. Maquis is a low lying scrub brush common on Corsica that gave cover to the partisans and gave them their nickname. The term was applied to all underground operatives of the Resistance even on the mainland of France during the occupation. Often the Maquis would wear a black Basque béret as a subtle mark of recognition.

When the US troops arrived, Corsica was actually considered to be behind the enemy lines. To the north, only a short hop by air was occupied France. To the west was Italy. The American troops had taken Sicily but the German army was offering stiff resistance and the battle line on the Italian mainland was well south of Corsica's longitude.

Their previous station had been Pompeii, Italy near Naples. This put the air and ground crews within easy reach of Naples and the surrounding towns and villages. The soldiers took advantage of the location to visit historic sights and to frequent local restaurants, bars and other places of amusement.

Corsica was quite different. There were no large towns or tourist sites to visit. Recreation and morale became significant problems. What Corsica did offer was gorgeous countrysides, towering snow-capped mountains and spectacular beaches for swimming and sunning. In the war diary for the 487th BG on May 5, 1944 we find this entry:

“Scheduled raid this morning was canceled in favor of a stand-down for the remainder of the day. Formerly on such occasions combat crews took off to the nearest town, where wine, women and song were abundant. However, in lieu of the limited activity on Corsica many are now spending stand-down days playing ball, reading, writing letters, sleeping or washing clothes.”

The threat to army morale was a real one and the army took it seriously. A bored, depressed service man is not an effective combatant. The army countered by utilizing their Special Services unit. This is not to be confused with Special Forces or Special Operations. Special Services, was charged with bringing in USO entertainers and movies. They organized baseball leagues and kept track of the bats and gloves. In *Catch-22* General Peckem headed Special Services. This makes his campaign to displace a combat general like Dreedle even more absurd, but well suited to purposes of the novel.



Photo of the S-2 tent taken from the War Diary of the 488th BS June 1944

S-2 handled military intelligence. Their tent had a large map of the Mediterranean Theater of Operations and the battle lines would be marked on the maps so that the soldiers could follow the progress of the ground troops as they pressed the attack against the Axis powers. Here is an incident reported in the 487th BS war diary on May 28, 1944:

“Morale took another descent today when it was learned the Allies were not as close to Rome as previously reported by S-2 section. It seems like someone screwed up the bomb lines – they can't do those things to us...”

In *Catch-22* Heller has Yossarian sneak into the S-2 tent and move the bomb line on purpose in an effort to avoid the dreaded mission to the Bologna marshaling yards:

First they hated the infantrymen on the mainland because they had failed to capture Bologna. Then they began to hate the bomb line itself. For hours they stared relentlessly at the scarlet ribbon on the map and hated it because it would not move up high enough to encompass the city.

[...]

“I really can't believe it,” Clevinger exclaimed to Yossarian in a voice rising and falling in protest and wonder. [...] They really believe that we wouldn't have to fly that mission tomorrow if someone would only tiptoe up to the map in the middle of the night and move the bomb line over Bologna [...].

In the middle of the night Yossarian [...] tiptoed out of his tent to move the bomb line up over Bologna. (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.119)

Of course the mission is canceled when the intelligence officer Captain Black informs Colonel Cathcart that Bologna had been captured by the infantry.

The US Army set up a total of 17 airfields on the long narrow plain on the eastern coast of the island. The elongated shape of the island and its position in the Mediterranean sea suggested an analogy to an aircraft carrier. The island was often referred to as the U.S.S. Corsica.

Much of the action of *Catch-22* takes place in the 488th BS camp at the Alesani airfield and Heller is quite faithful to the look and feel of the place. Nearly everyone was sheltered in tents. The tents came in an assortment of sizes and designs. In their free time many GI's would devote considerable time and effort to improving their surroundings. If they could scrounge lumber or other building materials, they would construct raised floors, build roofs for the slit trenches that served as their bomb shelters in case of air raids. At some point a single electric line was strung to the tents so that they could have some light, or perhaps power a small radio. Occasionally, the more enterprising men would devise clever ways to bring additional lines into their tents.

Since every one was sharing power from the same generator and electric usage had to be monitored. October 7, 1944 war diary of the 487th BS:

Capt. Winebrenner made a lite inspection of personnel tents this morning and clipped only one wire. Apparently it was the only tent honest enough to leave their high voltage bulb in. Other tents with two lights were smart enough to conceal one.

When the weather turned cool, the soldiers would turn their do-it-yourself skills to building small gasoline stoves to provide them with heat and comfort. It also provided them with explosions and fires on more than one occasion.

An example of the ingenuity of the average G.I. can be found in the October 2, 1944 war diary of the 486th BS:

Stand-down today...Stoves arrived for the officers. The army expects personnel to make their own stoves by ingenuity. Last winter there were plenty of 5 gallon gasoline drums which were easily converted in to gas stoves with frag box tin as a stove pipe. However there are none on the island this year and the ingenuity of the boys will be tested. Winterizing continues with surprising results. One tent has sides of ammunition boxes filled with dirt. It should be plenty warm. Another has a built-in shower with cement floor, etc. Doors are appearing whenever enough lumber is scrounged. Wood is as scarce as hen's teeth here. There are practically no decent boards and no new lumber. One enterprising tent boasts a good sized woodpile gleaned from the beach.

One of Heller's tent-mates, 2nd Lt. Edmund J. Ritter, Jr., was very handy and was constantly improving their living quarters and fiddling with tools and pipes and valves. Heller stated "...it was on these qualities of his, his patient genius for building and fixing things and thee recurring close calls in aerial combat..." (From *'Now and Then'*, Quoted by Scoggins, *Joseph Heller's Combat Experiences in Catch-22*, p.13) that he used this trait as a model for his character, Orr. He also made it clear that the similarity stopped at those two points.

The cover of Heller's autobiography that appeared in 1999 carried a photo of the author in uniform.

That photo was cropped out of this picture of Heller and his tentmates. It was taken around Christmas time in 1944:



(Photo courtesy of Erich Hetzel, 487th Bomb Squadron. Description courtesy of Jerry Rosenthal, 488th Bomb Squadron. From left to right: Bob Vortrees, Hy Tribble, Ed Ritter (the inspiration for Orr), Emmit "Bill" Hughes and Joseph Heller)

This was actually the interior of the six-man tent that Heller shared with Edmond Ritter and others. The elaborate mantel and fireplace were the handiwork of Ritter (Orr).



It is interesting to note on the front of Heller's bomber jacket the insignia of the 488th Bomb Squadron. Also, the bright metal object dangling from his collar is a popular good luck charm favored by many of the combat crews called, 'The Lucky Little Bell of San Michele.

The massive inundation of men and materials on this small island strained its resources. Many towns were declared off-limits to the G.I.'s, probably due to the difficulty of policing hoards of young men out looking for fun. The island was a natural paradise, but the soldiers were limited by the army in enjoying it. For example they were forbidden to fish in the mountain streams on the island. Most likely this was to prevent the depletion of an important food source for the local inhabitants.

The army was very generous in assisting the inhabitants who had just suffered through the Axis and German occupation. Dominique Taddei was a young boy on Corsica when the Americans came. His childhood memory is that, "That was the day when the hunger stopped."

The arrival of thousands of men and the huge stores of supplies to maintain them also had another unintended effect on the rodent population of Corsica. The easy availability of food stores, garbage and goodies stashed in soldier's tents surely engendered a sudden increase in the number of rats and mice on the island.

When their candy bars and hidden snacks come under attack, soldiers counter the threat as they have been trained to; by marshaling superior fire power:

“Havermeyer had grown very proficient at shoot field mice at night...”

“Havermeyer would wait until the eyes fell upon his own...and then pulled the trigger...showering the rank, furry body all over the tent with a reverberating crash...” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.30)

Dominique Taddei records a couple of instances of this practice. George Underwood's account is particularly amusing:

“Rats often came into our tents to eat our rations, Smitty and Farelli would pass their time shooting at them with their Colt 45. I don't know if you have ever had this experience, but the sound of a .45 discharging inside of a tent is ear-shattering. If their shots missed their targets, at least they succeeded in terrifying the rats, as well as the folks in the neighboring tents.” (Taddei, *U.S.S. Corsica*, p95)

In conversation, Hank Del Percio (487th BS) relates a similar story. Adding that the soldiers would use the 'shot load' bullets they had been issued as part of their survival kit for flying over the South American jungle on the initial flight overseas. It was great sport to fire at the mice scampering along the horizontal braces that supported the roof of the tent, but they came to regret the fun when the rains started and they got wet due to the multiple holes in the roof. (Del Percio, in conversation, 9/6/08)

The roads in Corsica were very bad and the American soldiers were very young. The war diaries of all squadrons complain about high-speed reckless driving on the mountain roads, and all carry descriptions of wrecked army trucks and jeeps as well as personal injuries.

Here is a typical entry taken from the August 10, 1944 entry in the unit history of the 489th BS:

“During the night or the early hours of the morning a tragic accident occurred. Cpl. John Bayne, a mechanic in the Motor Pool, was killed when his truck plunged off the road and crashed into the huge rocks many feet below. Just a second of carelessness resulted in his untimely death, the second of its kind within the last fortnight. the near-by military hospital has an appallingly high percentage of inmates who have been injured in auto accidents.”

Heller recounts a drunken ride and wreck:

“Hop in,” said Chief White Halfcoat, driving up drunk in a covered jeep. He waited until they had crowded inside and then spurred ahead with a suddenness that rolled them all over backward. He roared with laughter at their curses. He drove straight ahead when he left the parking lot and rammed the car into the embankment of the other side of the road. The others piled forward in a helpless heap and began cursing him again. “I forgot to turn,” he explained. [...]

Chief White Halfcoat missed the next turn in the road and ran the jeep all the way up to the crest of a steep embankment. Rolling back down, the jeep turned over on its side and settled softly in the mud. There was a frightened silence. (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.125)

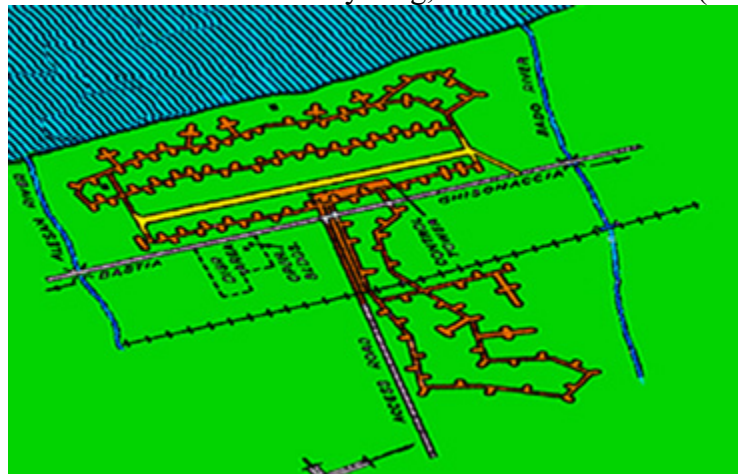
In this case no one was seriously hurt. They all just lay there in a pile, “..tangled up on top of each other..” and continued to drink.

When you did not have the opportunity to steal a jeep, you had to walk. It is interesting to see how Heller recalls fine detail about the layout of the 488th BG's camp at Alesani when he describes Major Major's escape from his office to his quarters in his trailer.

He managed the distance between the orderly room and his trailer by darting into the railroad ditch and dashing along with this head bowed until he attained the sanctuary of the forest. Abreast of his trailer, he left the underbrush, in which the only person he ever encountered was Captain Flume,..(Heller, *Catch-22*, p.100)

Major Major's real troubles began with an ominous announcement. Notice how casually Heller invokes the railroad ditch as though it were as familiar a feature of the landscape to us as it was to him:

“You're the new squadron commander,” Colonel Cathcart had shouted rudely across the railroad ditch to him. “But don't think it means anything, because it doesn't.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.88)



This is a schematic of the Air Force base at Alesani, Corsica. Note the rail line that runs parallel to the road and the runway (yellow)



Aerial view of the Alesani Aerodrome showing the location of the for squadron encampments. (From Dominique Taddei's collection.)

Major Major was fortunate to have a trailer. Most soldiers, officers and enlisted men alike had to make do with six-man tents. The tents were sweltering hot in the summer and cold and drafty in the winter. They afforded protection from the rain, but even that had its limitations.

Actually, officers were not housed in trailers until October of 1944, just about the time that Heller was looking to go home to the States. The arrival of trailers was noted in the October 20th entry of the 487th BS war diary:

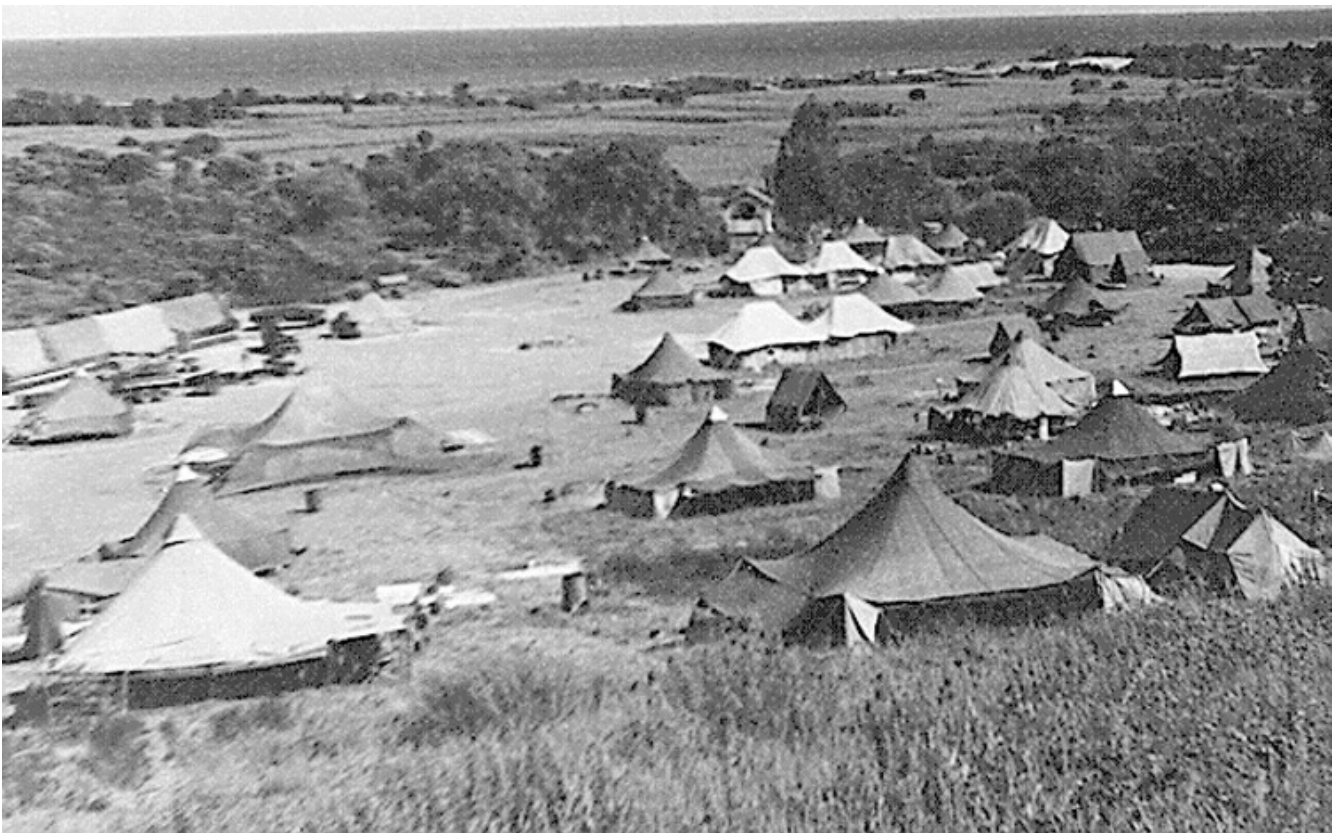
This week Maj. Parsons fell heir to a little trailer home which includes an inner spring sack, wash basin, cupboards and many other forgotten luxuries of civilian life. All Squadron C.O.'s received one so it's quite evident that they are being made comfortable for a long a miserable Corsican winter.

The tiny island of Corsica could be subject to very severe weather, mostly due to heavy rain storms and strong winds. The entries in the 487th BS war diary for October 25th & 26th 1944:

Heavy rains started in the morning and continued intermittently throughout the day until evening when it became a steady downpour. Many of the boys spent the early part of the night battling the water and from all indications if it persists some tents will be completely washed away. The Red Cross Club is already submerged under three or four feet of water.

[..]

Another stand-down day due to the heavy rains which continued steadily throughout the night and all morning. many of the boys spent an uncomfortable night due to leaking tents and several inches of water which tended to make a rowboat out of their happy homes. Just about half the Squadron was inundated and nothing could be done to relieve the situation until the rain ceased..



Living quarters for the 489th BS at Alesan Aerodrome. Note the proximity to the beach in the background.

Perhaps the most valued and utilized attraction of the Alesani camp was the beautiful beach on the Mediterranean. The war diaries of all the squadrons constantly refer to the beach as the place to go when a stand-down was called for the day. Many of the 340th Bomb Group's targets were situated in the Brenner Pass high in the Italian Alps. The climate there, of course, was very different than that on Corsica. Quite frequently a mission would have to be canceled due to fog or cloud cover in the mountains although the weather on Corsica would be perfectly clear and sunny; perfect for swimming and sunbathing.

Most all of the soldiers swam in the nude. The country boys would have already been used to skinny-dipping in the lakes and rivers at home, and the city boys would have been used to the nude swimming at the YMCA in town. Women were a rare sight in camp so there was generally no need to cover up.

Heller comes back to these scenes often in *Catch-22*.

Yossarian met Nurse Duckett almost every afternoon that both were free and came with her to the beach on the other side of the narrow swell of shoulder-high dunes separating them from the area in which the other officers and enlisted men went swimming nude. [...] No one but Aarfy ever made reference to the naked men sunbathing in full view farther down the beach or jumping and diving from the enormous white-washed raft that bobbed on empty oil drums out beyond the silt sand bar. (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.334)

The most gruesome and dramatic event of the book takes place at this beach and involves the young hot-dogging pilot McWatt and the soldier known as Kid Sampson.

One of Colonel Chapman's innovations was to continue crew training even after the pilots and bombardiers had arrived in the combat zone. If the weather over the enemy target was bad, the planes might still be able to make training flights when the local weather conditions permitted. This extra practice is often credited for the bomb group's exceptionally high bombing accuracy rates.

The war diaries and recollections of the fliers frequently mention dare-devil flying stunts pulled by these young hot-shot pilots. An example of these stunts comes from an account by John Jones as cited in Dominique Taddei's book, *The U.S.S. Corsica* (Taddei, *U.S.S. Corsica*, p.90). The crews of the 310th Bomb Group stationed south of Alesani were in the habit of frequenting what was at one time a luxury resort hotel located on a tiny island off the coast of Corsica. A B-25 would fly in loaded with soldiers due for a few days of R&R. The tiny landing strip was a mile or two from the hotel. The crew would drive back to the hotel and the plane would fly back to their base on Corsica. When the plane returned a few days later to bring in more troops and take the others back, there was a problem in communicating to the hotel that the plane had arrived. There was only one truck for ground transport, and that would be parked at the hotel. The solution was for the incoming plane to swoop in directly above the hotel and fly between the two flag poles that topped the building. The roar of the medium bomber coming in 20 feet above the roof would rattle windows and shake the wine glasses off of the table. It would also make it clear to everyone in the hotel that the plane had arrived and it was time to drive out to the airfield to meet it.

The character, McWatt, has Yossarian on board along with a new bombardier on a training mission to break in the new bombardier:

The practice bomb range was on the other side of Pianosa, and, flying back, McWatt edged the belly of the lazing, slow-cruising plane just over the crest of mountains in the middle and then, instead of maintaining altitude, jolted both engines open all the way, lurched up on one side and, to Yossarian's astonishment, began following the falling land down as fast as the plane would go, wagging his wings gaily and skimming with a massive, grinding, hammering roar over each rocky rise and dip of the rolling terrain like a dizzy gull over wild brown waves. (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.332)

Surprisingly, this sort of hot-shot flying seemed to be tolerated. Perhaps it was thought that it helped improve the skills and morale of the pilots.



A C-47 buzzes the beach at Alesan. Note the blurred images of the soldiers on the beach.

There are numerous photographs showing B-25 bombers and the even larger C-47 cargo planes overflying the beaches of Corsica at alarmingly low altitudes. These events must have generated an enormous adrenaline-rush in the people who witnessed the fly-bys and the instinct to duck even when the huge plane was a full 50 feet above may have given Heller the impetus for the scene involving Kid Sampson's tragic death. Everyone must have feared that something like this could happen, and Heller gave voice to that fear.

He [Yossarian] studied every floating object fearfully for some gruesome sign of Clevinger and Orr, prepared for any morbid shock but the shock McWatt gave him one day with the plane that came blasting suddenly into sight out of the distant stillness and hurtled mercilessly along the shore line with a great growling, clattering roar over the bobbing raft on which blond, pale Kid Sampson, his naked sides scrawny even from so far sway, leaped clownishly up to touch it at the exact moment some arbitrary gust of wind or minor miscalculation of McWatt's senses dropped the speeding plane down just low enough for a propeller to slice him half away. (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.337)

Fortunately, no event like this ever occurred during the 340th BG's stay on Corsica. However, it did come close. Here is the entry in the War Diary of the Headquarters Squadron for August 31, 1944:

“To many the afternoon at the beach involved a hair raising experience to Colonel Malcolm Bailey, Major Joseph Reubel and remainder of Headquarters Staff, Miss Davis Red Cross girl and a host of other beach mongers. A reconnaissance Piper Cub flying low thought it great fun to buzz the length of the beach. Coming to a height of no more than two or three feet, the plane forced each and every person to lay flat. Many unsuspecting the quietly approaching plane and

who were not able to take cover till the last minute nearly had their head cut off. The plane then decided to take after Miss Davis chasing her over sand dunes into the water and on two occasions coming too close for comfort or desirable fun. The young lady with proper provocation was frightened well out of her wits. Colonel Bailey was talking of writing a letter asking for severest disciplinary action to be taken. Moral: Don't buzz beach or bathers when high ranking staff officers are around.....”

The small aircraft was probably an L-4A “Grasshopper.



Restored Piper L-4A "Grasshopper"

Although we do not know for sure, it is very possible that Heller was at the beach that day and witnessed the scary and dangerous event. Even if he were not there in person, he certainly would have heard graphic accounts from those who were.

McWatt's reaction to the tragedy does have an echo in a real incident.

On that fateful and tragic day McWatt was on a training mission with two new pilots. After Kid Sampson is accidentally killed, McWatt gains altitude. Two parachutes appear, then:

But Yossarian understood suddenly why McWatt wouldn't jump, [...] “..McWatt turned again, dipped his wings once in salute, decided oh, well, what the hell, and flew into a mountain. (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.339)

The 488th BS war diary for May 6th 1944 carries this entry:

“Ship on test hop crashed into mountain, Lts. Kelly and Gregory and T/Sgt Hanlan, the test crew, all killed. This it should be noted is the first time that the 488th since its inception, through all the training in the States and right up to date, has lost a plane or any personnel in anything but combat.”

It is always difficult being away from home on the holidays, but especially so when your days are filled with danger and the loss of friends and acquaintances during wartime. The Army always did what it could to mark special occasions and provide the G.I.'s with a pleasant holiday experience. In November of 1943, one year before the action in *Catch-22* takes place, the 340th BG was stationed on the Italian mainland at Foggia. The War Diary reports a very nice Thanksgiving celebration:

“A good stage show was presented in Foggia as a part of a special Thanksgiving program....At Number 3, Thanksgiving dinner was a superb meal. Lt. Gellman said he honestly didn't believe he had ever had a better meal. It wound up with blueberry pie and cigars.” (War Diary, 487th Bomb Squadron, November 25, 1943)

A year later in 1944 the Thanksgiving celebration was quite a different affair at the 487th:

“Thanksgiving Day. [...] It consisted of a huge portion of turkey, fine dressing, potatoes, vegetables, fresh salad, fruity salad, cranberry sauce, fresh bread and butter, coffee and apple pie. Two bottles of beer were also distributed to each man. All ground officers were invited and accepted the invitation to dine at the Enlisted Men's mess-hall. They say the Officer's Mess was really a MESS with everyone full of Thanksgiving cheer although the same menu predominated up there...Where all the liquor came from is a mystery but there must have been plenty available judging from the number who were really feeling their oats...

[...]

There was a Thanksgiving Dance held at the Officers Club tonite which caused no end of furor in the wee hours of the morning. Light sleepers spent a very restless nite as a result of this dance.” (War Diary, 487th Bomb Squadron, November 23, 1944)

Effects from the revelry were still being felt the next day:

“As the combat men prepared to depart for the line the mission was called off and a stand-down declared. No one was very sad about the turn of events because there were many big heads from the night before and secondly the scheduled target was a hot one.....Many of the boys, particularly the officers, were nursing terrific hang-overs today. According to reports on the fights that took place, there must have been plenty of liquor available which automatically made the officer's dance a success.” (War Diary, 487th Bomb Squadron, November 24, 1944)

The 486th squadron was also getting a head start on the celebration:

“After a night of revelry Thanksgiving dawned with a stand-down for this squadron. [...] A visit by the colonel at breakfast for a taste of fresh eggs recently brought from Cairo. The dinner was very well prepared by the cooks who did a laudatory job. It consisted of turkey, dressing, cranberries, fresh potatoes and lettuce; pineapple salad with dressing, peas gravy coffee and apple pie. It was a wonderful meal! The evening entertained a dance (and combined pugilistics) at the Officer's Club and a party at the enlisted men's Club and of course the usual cinemas. So during the late hours the noise finally died down and almost everyone dropped off to sleep it off.” (War Diary, 486th Bomb Squadron, November 23, 1944)

Heller notes the heightened air of celebration:

“...after everyone in the squadron had given humble thanks to Milo for providing the fantastically opulent meal on which the officers and enlisted men had gorged themselves insatiably all afternoon and for dispensing like inexhaustible largess the unopened bottles of cheap whiskey he handed out unsparingly to every man who asked. Even before dark, young soldiers with pasty white faces were throwing up everywhere and passing out drunkenly on the ground. [...] It was a raw, violent, guzzling Saturnalia that spilled obstreperously through the

woods to the officers' club and spread up into the hills toward the hospital and the anti-aircraft-gun emplacements. There were fist fights in the squadron and one stabbing.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.360)

The Bomb Run

The most dramatic moments in *Catch-22* take place during the bombing missions. Even when the characters are not airborne, their thoughts continually go back to memories of the events that happened during the flights over enemy territory.

The day before the mission the flight assignments would be posted. At that point the pilots knew which aircraft they would be flying the next day. A mission began with the pilot and bombardier briefings. The target would be revealed and maps provided. Any known anti-aircraft positions would be indicated on the maps so that flight paths could be planned to avoid them.

The crews would get their flak suits and parachutes issued. The flak suits were aprons containing metal plates. They were intended to afford a certain amount of protection to the crew. The pilot's compartment was equipped with metal plates on three sides of the pilot and co-pilot. In the rear the side gunners might also have a metal plate installed up against the bulkhead to stop flak or enemy fighter machine gun fire.

Otherwise the aluminum skin of the B-25 was quite thin and frequently flak would enter the plane from one side of the fuselage, pass through the plane and exit through the other side. The war diaries refer to this as the plane being 'holed.'

Due to the extreme cold at high altitude the flight suits were thick fleece-lined leather.

Once the crews were suited up they would pile into trucks to be driven to the flight line where the planes were parked. The ground crews would have loaded the guns and the bomb bays, fixed the flak holes from the last mission and refueled the plane.

Here is how Heller describes the scene:

“..the men were rushed into trucks before a decent breakfast could be prepared, and they were driven at top speed to the briefing room and then out to the airfield, where the clitter-clattering fuel trucks were still pumping gasoline into the tanks of the planes and the scampering crews of armorers were toiling as swiftly as they could at hoisting the thousand-pound demolition bombs into the bomb bays. Everybody was running, and the engines were turned on and warmed up as soon as the fuel trucks had finished.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.375)

There were no bathroom facilities on the aircraft, so all crew members would have a last pee by the side of the runway before boarding. In order to board one would use the fore or aft belly hatches. One had to hoist oneself through the hatch. There were no stairs or ladders. The bombardier would slide himself down the narrow tunnel crawlway to the nose cone. The tail gunner would not be in the tail gun turret but farther back in the waist area so that the extra weight did not affect the aerodynamics during take-off.

The exhaust on a B-25 is a straight pipe. No muffler. The engine noise is very loud. Most communication would be done via the intercom. Usually, there was very little chatter upon take-off. The crew would be a little tense and apprehensive. Shortly after getting airborne the gunners would fire a short burst of machine gun fire into an empty part of the sky to test the guns. Everyone would settle down for the flight into enemy airspace.

When a big mission was ordered for a particular day, dozens of B-25's would be churning their engines and in motion on the aprons and runways at the same time. The sight never failed to move the ground crews and they would gather to watch and admire the spectacle. The planes would take off one after the other in very short intervals. The first planes would either circle the air base waiting for the others to join them or they would start flying toward their target at very low speed to give the followers a chance to catch up.

Once the planes caught up with the leader, they would fall into a formation known as a 'box.' It consisted of a group of six bombers. They were stacked vertically and also arranged horizontally. The box consisted of six planes and was designed to give the best possible range of fire to the gunners. The gunners would be able to protect the neighboring ship as well as their own. The second function of the box was to maintain a tight pattern for the bombs they would drop. Generally only the lead aircraft carried a bomb sight. The bomb sights, especially the Norden bomb sight, were expensive and not very plentiful. The lead bombardier would sight the target and release his bombs when directed by the bomb sight. The bombardiers in the other formation planes would watch the lead plane's bomb bay and hit the release button when they saw the lead plane make the drop.

By the time that Heller arrived in the Mediterranean Theater of Operation (MTO), the Luftwaffe fighters had been all but eliminated by the Allies. Flak, on the other hand, was a different matter.

Knocking an airplane out of the sky is a very difficult task for a flak gunner. Making a direct hit on an aircraft one or two miles high in the sky while it is moving 200 mph is not an easy task. The solution was to develop a shell that would explode and send hundreds of sharp metal shards at high velocity in a deadly sphere of destruction. You had to fire your shell in front of the formation of planes, timing it to arrive at the same moment as the planes reached that spot. It was called, 'leading the target.' However, in order to make the hit, you also had to make a good guess as to the altitude of the formation. The cannon shells were equipped with a variable timer that would allow the artillery man to set them to go off at 5,000 feet or 5,500 feet and so on.



German 88's. Flak guns mounted on railroad cars.
Original photo at: <http://www.geschichte-mitteldeutschland.de/16.html>

Of course the pilots were aware of the flak gunner's capabilities and they did their best to confound them. The formations would take evasive action as they approached a target. They would change direction and change altitude to keep the gunners on the ground guessing where to send their next volley and to guess how high to send their shells before they exploded.

The most terrifying moment for the bomber crew was the arrival at the I.P.

At the Initial Point (I.P.) of the bomb run the pilot and co-pilot took their hands off of the flight controls and sat back in their chairs. For the next one minute or so the bombardier flew the plane. He had to make sure that the plane flew straight and steady to the target and to the exact point where the bombs would be released. During that minute all evasive action ceased. They were sitting ducks. If the flak gunners on the ground had them in range, there was nothing the air crews could do about it but pray and take whatever hits came their way. Heller gives a chilling and accurate description of the bomb run in one of the early chapters:

“Havermeyer *was* the best damned bombardier they had, but he flew straight and level all the way from the I.P. to the target, and even far beyond the target until he saw the falling bombs strike ground and explode...” [...] Havermeyer held mortal men rigid in six planes as steady and still as sitting ducks [...] and gave the German gunners below all the time they needed to set their sights and take their aim and pull their triggers or lanyards or switches or whatever the hell they did pull when they wanted to kill people they didn't know.

[...]

Havermeyer was a lead bombardier who never missed. Yossarian was a lead bombardier who had been demoted because he no longer gave a damn whether he missed or not.

[...]

The men loved flying behind Yossarian, who used to come barreling in over the target from all directions and every height, climbing and diving and twisting and turning so steeply and sharply that it was all the pilots of the other five planes could do to stay in formation with him, leveling out only for the two or three seconds it took for the bombs to drop and then zooming off again with an aching howl of engines...” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.29)

Once the bombs were away, the formation was free again to take evasive action. Often the tail gunner in the trailing plane of the formation would have a camera to take photos of the results of the bombing. The tightness of the bomb pattern takes on its own significance in the novel.

Heller has General Peckem say:

“A bomb pattern is a term I dreamed up just several weeks ago. It means nothing, but you'd be surprised at how rapidly it's caught on. Why, I've got all sorts of people convinced I think it's important for the bombs to explode close together and make a neat aerial photograph.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.325)

It is somewhat puzzling as to why Heller seized on this detail to make a point about the military coming up with mindless procedures then giving them a great deal of attention so as to make them

seem significant. In fact the bomb pattern was extremely important. More than that, it was the whole stock and trade of the Bomb Wing. Maintaining a tight bomb pattern meant that the planes were delivering the maximum bomb load to the target. As Harry George (487th BS) put it:

“Tight bomb formations and bomb patterns? Yeah, those became a religion in the 340th Group. Were they something to be mocked? Absolutely not! What everyone understood was that hitting targets was what would end the war as soon as possible. The principle is simple – the tighter the formation, the tighter the bomb pattern and the more targets that get destroyed and the shorter the war would be. And then we could all go home.” (George, *Georgio Italiano*, p.73)

If there were no obvious losses on the mission, the crew would be much more relaxed and talkative on the return trip home. If other ships were shot down or damaged, the mood would be more sombre.

At the estimated return time for the flight, the ground crews and HQ staff would be out on the edge runway to 'sweat them in.' They would count the returning planes as they landed hoping that none would be missing.

If a plane had flak damage or an injured flier aboard, the pilot would fire a colored flare out of his window to alert the air controllers. They would clear the crippled craft for immediate landing and dispatch ambulances to meet the plane.

At Alesani airbase the 340th BG was lucky to have a military field hospital located in nearby Cervione. Often airplanes from any one of the other 17 airfields would land at Alesani if they had injured crewmen aboard that needed urgent medical attention due to their proximity to the field hospital.

After the mission the trucks would go out to the planes to pick up the crews and bring them back for debriefing. Estimates of bomb damage would be collected and recorded. Intelligence officers would also ask about sightings of enemy troop movements, airplane activity or enemy naval ships.

The crews would collect their shot of whiskey, flak suits and parachutes would be checked back in and they were done for the day.

Intimate Moments

A great number of important events in Catch-22 take place in the bordellos of Rome or in other very private settings.

Not surprisingly, the official US Army records and documents have very little to say about these activities. Nor are the veterans, who write their memoirs for the benefit of their families and posterity, likely to spend much time describing their sex adventures in the cat houses of the foreign lands they served in.

This will be a very short chapter.

Dealing with the sexual urges of young men, alone in foreign countries for the first time and regularly facing the reality of death, has always been a difficult task for the army.

Female companionship was in very short supply on Corsica. Many women in big cities like Naples and Catania in Italy and Sicily had their lives turned upside down when the men they loved were taken by the war, or when the bombing and shelling destroyed their homes and shops. Desperation, poverty and fear caused many to sell the only thing they had left to sell in order to survive. They could cross town and lose themselves in the faceless crowd, do shameful things and, perhaps, return to the neighborhood where they grew up and where everybody knew them without losing the respect of their friends.

There were no really big cities in Corsica and everybody knew everybody. To lose one's honor there would bring only ruin and exile. Also, the country had not been so devastated by war. The farms were intact and provided work and food for all.

The US Army's approach was rather puritanical, mostly consisting of sex lectures and training films warning about VD and counseling abstinence. These were often given in conjunction with the nightly movies in order to assure good attendance.

In a clumsy attempt to provide the boys with female companionship the army sometimes sanctioned social events and invited local girls, but under very controlled circumstances. The army efforts, though well meaning, were laughably inadequate.

On May 30, 1944 the war diary of the 487th reports one such event. The writers of the 487th diaries, Sgt. James P. Shanley and Cpl. Richard C. Hurley are keenly aware of the humorous overtones of the engagement:

Our first dance since Sfax [Tunisia] was held tonight in Cervione, a small village about five miles from the base. No one anticipated very much and they weren't disappointed. There were at least 200 G.I.'s in a stuffed unattractive hall with approximately twenty French girls and Peggy of the Red Cross brigade who sponsored the affair. A fine colored band made up for a lot that was lacking although the girls had quite a time trying to keep up with all the American jitter-bugs. The main event for the girls was the Spam sandwiches and coffee served following the dance.. Mid-night saw the girls home with their mothers."

Peggy of the Red Cross Brigade was one of the very few American woman on the island. She was there very often to meet crews returning from missions with a smile, hot coffee and donuts. The men looked forward to her visits and she made everyone feel special:

“Peggy” was on hand this afternoon with hot coffee and donuts for all the men in the squadron area. Apparently she has a soft spot in her heart for the 487th or at least some of its members as her visits are becoming more frequent than has been the custom in the past. (487th War Diary entry of May 25, 1944)

Joseph Heller was always very guarded when speaking about *Catch-22* and the characters that populate the novel. In a 1975 interview in *Playboy* magazine the interviewer, Sam Merrill, asks the following question:

Playboy: Aside from Yossarian, some of the other characters in *Catch-22* have become cult figures in their own right. Are any of them based on people you knew?.

Heller: Just Hungry Joe. His real name is Joe Chrenko [See also photo on cover] and he's now an insurance agent in New Jersey. (Quoted by Sorkin, *Conversations with Joseph Heller*, p.149)

So, Heller has just made a categorical statement that only one character in the entire book is based upon a real person. Only six questions later we have this exchange:

Playboy: Getting back to Yossarian, are any other of his experiences like yours?

Heller: His encounter with Luciana, the Roman whore, corresponds exactly with an experience I had. He sleeps with her, she refuses money and suggests that he keep her address on a slip of paper. When he agrees, she sneers, “Why? So you can tear it up?” He says of course he won't and tears it up the minute she's gone---then regrets it bitterly. That's just what happened to me in Rome. Luciana was Yossarian's vision of a perfect relationship. That is why he saw her only once, and perhaps that's why *I* saw her only once. If he examined perfection too closely, imperfections would show up. (Quoted by Sorkin, *Conversations with Joseph Heller*, p.151)



Joe Chrenko

Luciana, then, has a real counterpart in the Rome of 1944. She saw something in this 19-year old kid that touched her. It became something more than a commercial transaction for her and she refused the money. Yet, the hardships of war and occupation had made her a realist. She offers the young soldier her phone number. It could have been her passport out to a normal, happy life with a bright, intelligent and sensitive American boy, but as she predicted, he was more full of bravado than of need for a tender relationship.

In later years Heller gradually revealed more real people who served as a model for characteristics of several characters in *Catch-22*. He even revealed the true identity of Huple's cat. (Scoggins. *Joseph Heller's Combat Experiences in Catch-22*. p.11)

Given what we have seen regarding the close relationship between the people and events that transpired on Corsica during the last half of 1944, I think that it is reasonable to assume that the events depicted as having occurred in Rome would bare the same close correspondence to actual events that transpired at the same time.

The delicate and intimate nature of those events makes it is unlikely that confirmation will be forthcoming.

The Combat Missions

The novel mentions several specific missions and target sights. All of them are accurate, however Heller did take artistic liberties with many details.

In a 1970 interview Heller revealed his plan for the novel:

“..nine-tenths of *Catch-22* is organized around three combat missions: the mission to Avignon, the mission to Bologna, and the mission to Ferrara. The first mission is the main one. [...] Now of course I was aware of this pattern; I had planned it at least a year before I began writing the novel.” (Sorkin, *Conversations with Joseph Heller*, 1970 interview with Richard Sale, p.80)

In addition to these three missions that form the backbone of the novel, Heller mentions other missions. Significant are the mission to La Spezia Harbor on September 23, 1944 that earned the 340th Bombardment Group the Presidential Citation Award, and Operation Glassknob to San Ambrogio de Valpolicella on February 13, 1945 that ended up being a futile and costly day for the 340th.

The three major missions have occurred before the narrative of the novel begins. Yossarian was deeply affected by the events that happened on these missions and throughout the book he keeps going back to them again and again in his mind. Each time he reveals more to us about what happened and its significance to him. When *Catch-22* was first published some reviewers criticized it for being a formless hodgepodge. However, Heller was a meticulous craftsman. He took over six years to produce only 450 pages of text.

“I was very much aware that I was creating in the first, oh, four-fifths of the novel the effect of something being chaotic and anarchistic, and yet have the pieces come together [...] toward the end of the book and give the whole picture.

[...]

It took me about five years of planning and making notes and cogitating to get the effect that the book was unplanned, that the narration was spontaneous, just being spilled out on the pages as they approach. It takes a lot of care; it takes a lot of planning to make things seem unplanned.” (Sorkin, *Conversations with Joseph Heller*, 1970 interview with Richard Sale, p.81)

In reconstructing the missions in the novel we have to examine the character's recollections of the events as they are found in several places in the text. Each time the event is mentioned, we learn a little more about the event. Similarly, in reconstructing the historic event we have to examine entries in the war diaries of all of the four bomb squadrons that made up the 340th Bombardment Group. Each of the squadrons were required to keep a war diary. Although, there is a basic required structure to them, within that structure there was a great deal of room for variation. Some of the diaries were very terse and perfunctory, almost as if it were regarded as a chore to be dispensed with along with the mountain of other paperwork each month. Other writers charged with the duty seemed to relish the task. The diary of the 487th Bomb Squadron, in particular, written by Sgt. James P. Shanley and Cpl. Richard C. Hurley is to my mind one of the treasures of the 340th Bombardment Group. Their daily entries are expansive and detailed. They recount not only the mission for the day, often include commentary on the results and how the crews felt about the outcome. The accounts are rich in details about life in camp and include funny incidents, baseball scores and a complete list of every movie title shown in the evening. Their one-line reviews of the film are often hilarious.

On many of the group's larger raids on important targets the attack force would be made up of elements of more than one squadron. On some occasions, a squadron might lend one or more planes to another squadron in order to fill in a formation. Thus, we can look to the war diaries of multiple squadrons to get a slightly different view of each mission.

Ferrara Highway Bridge

In the novel Heller speaks about having to revisit the target:

“...when the bridge spanning the Po was still standing undamaged seven days after Colonel Cathcart had volunteered to destroy it. Nine missions his men had flown there in six days, and the bridge was not demolished until the tenth mission on the seventh day...” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.136)

The 340th BG did return to Ferrara several times, but the time frame was not as compressed as in the novel. During July of 1944 the 488th BS flew five missions to Ferrara. On July 3rd the mission was against a fuel dump north of the city. There were two missions on the 13th and missions on the 15th and 30th targeting the bridges over the Po river.

Heller, himself, flew on the last three missions. The target was 'hot.' Accurate flak was reported on each mission. On the 15th seven planes were hit by flak and one crewman was killed.



A 'box' of B-25's flying into a flak barrage.

The mission at the beginning of the month, on the 3rd, ended tragically. One plane belonging to the 488th, 8L, was shot down. It is interesting to note that Heller did not fly on this mission.

Here is how the war diaries reported the July 3rd mission:

“Flak: Heavy, Moderate and Accurate. Barrage over target. Tracked from target. 8L went down at M1198. 3 to 5 parachutes were seen.” (History, 488th BS, July 1944)

“Mission to Ferrara fuel dump, Italy. Hot target, lost 8L with Cooper, pilot, Wahlstrom, co-pilot, Pinkard, bombardier, Pettyjohn, radio-gunner, Krause, gunner, Wynn, tail-gunner and Capt. Crossman, Brithis ALO [Allied Liaison Officer] for the Group. It was the captain's first mission.” (War Diary, 488th BS, July 1944)

“Big event of the day was the rough mission – another oil dump. [...] Lt Mattinson, who was cut by flying plexiglass came back on one engine with Capt. Shealy as bombardier...[...] Flak also hit Sgt Housken, with Sgt. Slocum and Sgt Smitz in the hospital with moderate injuries. [...] Lt Fischer was cut by flak and is in the hospital.” (War Diary, 486th BS, July 1944)

“Six planes of the 487th participated in the Group formation attacking a fuel dump at Ferrara, Italy. [...] Anti-aircraft fire was heavy, moderate & accurate, holing four of our planes, but all planes and crews returned safely to the base..” (War Diary 487th BS, July 1944)

“Today we struck at a fuel dump four miles north of Ferrara, Italy. the target was well covered with demolition and incendiary bombs, but the Group paid dearly for the attack. The 488th Squadron lost a plane to flak. Captain Crossman, the Group's English ALO [Allied Liaison Officer], went down with the plane. Every one of our planes were holed, and T/Sgt. Hunt, radio-gunner, was seriously injured in the leg.” (War Diary 489th BS, July 1944)

The 488th Bomb Squadron, along with the other bomb squadrons flew two missions on the 13th, one on the 15th and another on the 30th. Here is the entry for the mission on the 15th:

“One [mission] to Ferrara again. 100%. Seven planes and one man seriously wounded. Stere got it in the hand and Vandermuelen got it through the side.” (War Diary, 488th BS, July 1944)

and the 16th:

“Stand-down. Vandermuelen died at 0200 hours. The Ferrara bridges getting to be a jinx for us.” (War Diary, 488th BS, July 1944)

The other squadrons shared the same sentiment. Here is what the 487th had to say about the stand-down on the 16th:

“Stand-down was in effect all day which really was a break for combat men who have been seeing more of Ferraro railroad bridge lately than they have of Corsica. Too much sweating isn't good for anyone and the boys are really entitled to a day off after sweating out the flak and enemy fighters protecting Ferrara. As usual ninety-five percent of the squadron spent the day sunning themselves at the beach...” (War Diary 487th BS, July 1944)

The squadrons made another trip to Ferrara on July 30th. It was marred by a screw-up among the bombardiers:

“Bombs Jettisoned or returned: 3 X 1000# GP bombardier failure 24 X 1000# GP returned due to collision course over target.
Flak: Heavy, Moderate and accurate. One plane holed. Coming from known positions.

Results: Pattern of first box lain across the south central portion of the bridge with probable hits thereon. Second box did not drop because it was at a collision course with the preceding box just as the target was reached.” (Unit History, 488th BS, July 1944)

Here is the account of the attack on Ferrara as recounted by Heller in the novel:

“Yossarian came in carefully on his second bomb run because he was still brave then. He buried his head in the bombsight until his bombs were away; [...] Then he spied the plane with the burning wing directly above him and screamed to McWatt through the intercom to turn left hard. A second later, the wing of Kraft's plane blew off. The flaming wreck dropped, first the fuselage, then the spinning wing, while a shower of tiny metal fragments began tap dancing on the roof of Yossarian's own plane and the incessant *cachung! cachung! cachung!* of the flak was still thumping all around him. (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.136)

Heller has used all of the historic details of the campaign against Ferrara although he has combined the action into a single mission. A plane was lost, flak was intense and accurate and the squadrons had to return multiple times without taking out the bridges. There was a foul-up among the bombardiers. Although it was not unheard of for bombardiers to call for a second run on a target if intermittent clouds obscured the target or if the flight path was not aligned properly, there is no record of this having occurred at Ferrara.

The second bomb run is an important event in the novel, because it was Yossarian who called for it. The first run was flawed, the other bombardiers missed the target, and Yossarian knew that he would miss it too. He did not want to return to this very hot target again, so he ordered his formation of six planes to break away from the other formations and to make a second pass. Colonel Korn says,

“After all, I suppose it did take a lot of courage to go over that target a second time with no other planes around to divert the anti-aircraft fire. And he did hit the bridge.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.139)

Although Yossarian managed to destroy the bridge, Kraft's plane and crew were lost on that second run. Colonel Cathcart and Colonel Korn are embarrassed that all of their bombardiers failed to hit the target and they are dismayed at the loss of an aircraft and crew. They do not know how to present this tragedy to HQ without having it reflect badly on them. Finally, they decide to get out of the embarrassing situation by giving Yossarian a medal and promoting him to Captain. Once again, Colonel Korn:

“You know, that might be the answer---to act boastfully about something we ought to be ashamed of. That's a trick that never seems to fail.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.139)

Avignon Highway Bridge

The mission to Avignon is the pivotal climax of the entire novel. It was also the pivotal climatic moment of Joseph Heller's tour of duty overseas.

“**Heller:** At first, I was *sorry* when nobody shot at us. I wanted to see a sky full of flak

and dogfights and billowing parachutes. It was like a movie to me until, on my 37th mission, we bombed Avignon and a guy in my plane was wounded. I suddenly realized, "Good God! They're trying to kill me, too!" War wasn't much fun after that.

Playboy: That sounds like the Avignon mission in *Catch-22*, when Snowden, the gunner, is killed.

Heller: It is, and it's described pretty accurately in the book. Our copilot went berserk at the controls and threw us into a dive. Then one of our gunners was hit by flak and the pilot kept yelling into the intercom, "Help him. Help the bombardier." And I was yelling back, "I'm the bombardier. I'm OK." the gunner's leg was blown open and I took care of him. After Avignon, all I wanted to do was go home." (Sorkin, *Conversations with Joseph Heller*, 1975 Playboy Interview with Sam Merrill, p.148)

The 488th Bomb Squadron flew against Avignon twice in August of 1944. The first mission was on the 8th and the second was on the 15th. Unfortunately, the War Diary of the 488th for August 1944 is missing from the Army records. Also, the mission report for the August 8th mission is missing from the Unit History although the flight manifest does exist. The casualty list from the Unit History tells us that on August 8th Lt. James C Burrhus and Lt. Alvin H. Yellon, the pilot and co-pilot of 8F were killed. Two other crew members, S/Sgt James F. Wheeler, James D. Reynolds, were listed as 'missing.' Furthermore, Lt. Bennie H. Coe in 8P and Lt. Frederick C. Koerner in 8Z were wounded.

Clearly, Avignon was being strongly defended by the Axis and it was a very dangerous target.

On August 15th the 488th BS returned to Avignon and again lost an aircraft and crew:

"Flak: Heavy, intense and accurate coming from the A/D south of town. - Red hanging puffs. New guns at S-9380, to 9980. Northern approach of both bridges in target area.

Observations: 8P returned early due to gas fumes in radio compt. 8M returned early due to excessive fuel pressure. At Y-7875 8D was seen to crash at 1700 Hrs. 2 chutes at Y-7075. 5 chutes seen coming from plane, 1 failed to open properly. Left engine was on fire and right engine was out." (Unit History, 488th Bomb Squadron, August 1944)

The 486th Bomb Squadron also flew on that mission and they, too, suffered losses:

"In the afternoon bridges at Avignon were selected as targets. This indicated the B-25s could be taken off ground support work and put back on semi strategic work. [...] The mission was rough – three ships did not return and most were holed. Two went down over the target and one over the sea. Our ship, piloted by Lt Hoschar was struck in the right wing flew apart and set the ship into a flat spin. No one was seen chuting out but chutes may have been overlooked because of the excited state of the crews due to the intense, and accurate flak. Some are inclined to believe several men may have gotten out safely and the writer is one who believes. On the return trip, pilots J D Smith and Morrison spotted a 488th ship going down and when the crew landed in the water they each dropped spare dingies and radioed fixes for air-sea rescue. The squadron was not happy and groups of men could be seen about the area in discussion, quiet and soberly talking about the mission. The Sqdn's turn for stand-down will serve tomorrow and so to help forget about the mission." (War Diary, 486th Bomb Squadron, August

1944)

The 489th Bomb Squadron also took a hit:

“In the afternoon we sent out eighteen more planes to blast at a road bridge in the Avignon area.

The second mission cost us one plane and one crew. After dropping the bombs and starting for home, it fell out of the formation, but it remained under control. This was the last that was ever seen of it.” (War Diary, 489th Bomb Squadron, August 1944)

On August 23rd elements of the 340th Bombardment Group were called upon again to fly over Avignon. We can only imagine the trepidation with which the crews greeted the news when they learned of the target. The 488th was not assigned to this target, but the 486th and the 487th were.

“Sqdn stand-down today was unexpectedly canceled when a mission was called for Avignon, a dreaded target! After great apprehension the combat crews discovered all flak at Avignon was silent! It may have been removed – no one seems to know.” (War Diary, 486th Bomb Squadron, August 1944)

Bologna Marshaling Yards

Bologna was and is a transportation nexus for all of north central Italy. Highways and rail lines radiate out from the city pointing to all parts of Italy. This was an important target and there was every expectation that it would be heavily defended.

The 486th, 487th, and 488th were assigned the target on September 14th, 1944, but bad weather over the target grounded the missions.

On September 15th they were briefed again, but a stand-down was called.

They finally got off the ground on September the 16th. Here is what the War Diaries had to say.

September 14th:

“Had second mission scheduled to Bologna called off. [due to weather at target] Everyone felt better.” (War Diary, 488th Bomb Squadron, September 1944)

September 15th:

“Stand-down after 0645 briefing, but going to have a try at it again tomorrow with a 0630 briefing. Hope they make it.” (War Diary, 488th Bomb Squadron, September 1944)

“Very early morning mission canceled after all crews had been pre-briefed. Groans and curses were noticeable because of early rising to no avail. This is the second cancellation of a “hot” target and the men are now apprehensive.” (War Diary, 486th Bomb Squadron, September 1944)

September 16th:

“Twelve planes off to Bologna M/T repair shops, Italy. Got 100%. Bologna is the hub of all the transportation facilities for the Germans. Contrary to all expectations the ack-ack was very inaccurate.” (War Diary, 488th Bomb Squadron, September 1944)

“Early morning mission finally ameliorated exacerbated nerves. The Bologna M/T depot was well plastered as were gun positions. Flak was moderate and the returning crews were quite amazed.” (War Diary, 486th Bomb Squadron, September 1944)

“It was slightly hazy over the target, but bombardiers took advantage of the good visibility to inflict a severe blow on the enemy. [...] Crews were happy to have this target behind them as they had anticipated heavy flak although their worry was in vain as it was considered a perfect “milk run.” (War Diary, 487th Bomb Squadron, September 1944)

It is interesting to note that Joseph Heller was not scheduled to fly on any of the above dates. However, he was clearly affected by the anxiety in camp and the tension among the flight crews. Heller's attitude toward the war changed dramatically following the mission to Avignon. Yossarian totally lost his nerve there. He tries everything he can think of to avoid flying to Bologna. He has the cook put soap in the mashed potatoes to poison the crews, he sneaks out at night and moves the bomb line on the map and he even sabotages his own intercom and uses it as a flimsy excuse to turn back from the mission that turned out to be a 'milk run.'

After the 'milk run' on September 16th, the 340th BG did not have another occasion to go back to Bologna. However, in the novel Heller does have them return one more time to great comedic effect. The Squadron operations officers, Captains Piltchard and Wren, scold Yossarian for turning back from a mission simply because his intercom was out. They give him a chance to fix things by going on the next day's mission back to Bologna as lead bombardier. Now that he knows that Bologna is a 'milk run' Yossarian flies to the target straight and steady and...into an intense flak barrage! The pages that follow are some of the best in the book.

La Spezia Harbor, Cruiser Taranto

Early on the morning of September 23, 1944 crews from the 488th and the 489th Squadrons were awakened early and rushed to briefings. The Germans were pulling out of La Spezia and would be forced to abandon the harbor there. They wanted to deny use of the shipping facilities to the Allies and had begun to tow a light cruiser named, “Taranto” into the mouth of the harbor to scuttle it in the channel.

Heller described the mission in his autobiography:

“The assignment that morning was a hurried one. the destination was the large Italian seaport of La Spezia. The target was an Italian cruiser reportedly being towed out into a deep channel of the harbor by the Germans, to be scuttled there as an obstacle to approaching Allied ground forces pressing steadily north....When I looked behind us after we had flown through the flak at La Spezia and turned off, I was greatly satisfied with myself and all that I saw, and with all the others as well. We were unharmed; the turbulent oceans of dozens and dozens of smutty black

clouds from the countless flak bursts were diffused all over the sky at different heights. The other flights were coming though without apparent damage. And down below I could watch the bombs from one cascade after another exploding directly on the ship that was our target.” (Quoted by Scoggins, *Joseph Heller's Combat Experiences in Catch-22*, p.9)

As mentioned above, the War Diary for the 489th Squadron for September is missing, but there are entries in the 488th BS documents:

“The 488th lead a mission over the Cruiser Taranto in La Spezia Harbor, Italy. Each plane carried 6 X 1000# semi-armor piercing bombs. The first box laid its bombs right through the middle of the ship, the second box right across the bow and the third box (489th) crossed the stern.” (War Diary, 488th Bomb Squadron, September 1944)

“Flak: Scant, heavy and inaccurate coming from the east shore. One plane holed. (Tail-Gunner broke his thumb throwing out chaff.)

Results: 1st box 100 feet short and went across middle of the boat. 2nd box dropped its bombs 3 to 500 feet west of the boat. Ship seemed to have disappeared after bombing.” (History 488th Bomb Squadron, September 1944)

This was a great day for the 340th Bombardment Group. Their quick action and precise bombing earned them the Presidential Unit Citation. Although, the flak was considerable everyone came through unharmed, with the exception of the tail-gunner who broke his thumb.

In the novel, however, Heller uses this mission to take the plot-line in a more tragic direction. After bombs are away a fierce barrage of flak engulfs the formations and all the planes take wild evasive action:

“..Dobbs, at the pilot's controls in his formation, zigged when he should have zagged, skidded his plane into the plane alongside, and chewed off its tail. His wing broke off at the base, and his plane dropped like a rock and was almost out of sight in an instant. [...] It was over in a matter of seconds. There were no parachutes. And Nately, in the other plane, was killed too.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.376)

Sant'Ambrosio di Valpolicella, Operation Glassknob

Sant'Ambrosio is situated at the southern edge of the Italian Alps just at the point where the Brenner Pass exits the mountains. The Brenner Pass was the primary route for men and supplies coming from Austria and Germany supporting the German troops in southern Italy. The Pass was an obvious choke point and all four squadrons of the 340th Bombardment Group went back to targets all along the Brenner again and again to take out bridges, roads and railroad tunnels. Targets were fiercely defended by German flak batteries and this prolonged campaign became known as, “The Battle of the Brenner.”

On February 13, 1945 a formation of six aircraft from the 486th BS were given an unusual assignment.

They were charged with trying a new bombing technique. Rather than targeting railroad tracks directly, they were ordered to drop semi-armor piercing bombs onto the side of a steep mountain cliff. The idea was to cause a massive landslide that would bury the rail line under tons of rock. They figured that it would take the German crews weeks to clear the rubble and rebuild the tracks.

The lieutenant-colonel who conceived of the plan flew along in the lead plane of the formation. The mission did not go well.

The War Diary of the 486th does not go into much detail about the mission except to note the loss of two aircraft:

“By coincidence the thirteenth accompanied a double misfortune over the Brenner Pass on today's mission. Two ships were seen to go on single engine, but we are very optimistic about the crew's safety. The two ships retained controlled level flight and it is felt they may have landed at an emergency strip in Italy or bailed out.” (War Diary, 486th Bomb Squadron, February 1945)

Fortunately, Dominique Taddei collected a detailed account of the mission by Lt. Walter Wooten (Taddei, *U.S.S. Corsica*, p.134)

Lt. Wooten reports that the mission was fairly straightforward until they completed the bomb run. Flak was heavy and accurate. Once bombs were away, they expected to take immediate evasive action, but the lieutenant-colonel in the lead plane held the formation on a steady course so that he could view the results of his pet project after the bombs struck. This gave the flak gunners time to find their targets and two planes took heavy damage. Neither made it back to the Allied lines. The crews bailed out and were taken prisoner.

The mountain shrugged off the bombs without collapsing. The mission was a total failure.

Heller uses all of the details of this mission but he adds a significant detail that was not a factor in the actual mission. He introduces a village in the target area.

“They'll be bombing a tiny undefended village, reducing the whole community to rubble. [...] Why, this tiny mountain village is so insignificant that it isn't even there.”

“The purpose of the mission is to knock the whole village sliding down the side of the mountain and create a roadblock that the Germans will have to clear.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.325)

In Operation Glassknob no civilian populations were at risk, however it is likely that Heller was making artistic use of another mission that he was on a few days after the disastrous Avignon mission on August 15, 1944. Just eight days later on August 23rd the 488th Bomb Squadron was called upon to destroy the bridges in Pont-Saint-Martin in Northwest Italy near the French border. The Army records refer to the target as the Settimo River Bridge.

Roger Juglair, a resident of the village, has written two books regarding the air attacks on his town and kindly pointed out to me Joseph Heller's relationship to the village. He has also offered the following two photographs depicting the damage inflicted by Heller's squadron:



(Photograph courtesy of Roger Juglair author of *Ponte San Martino. Martirio di un paese valdostano*)



(Photograph courtesy of Roger Juglair author of *Ponte San Martino. Martirio di un paese valdostano*)

The civilian casualties numbered 130 dead and about 300 injured.

The men of the 340th Bombardment Group were lucky in a way. They were tactical bombers as opposed to strategic. This meant that their primary task was to bomb infrastructure such as bridges, tunnels, crossroads, airport runways, etc. Only on very rare occasions were they called upon to bomb civilian populations or even troop concentrations.

In November of 1943, well before Heller arrived on his tour of duty, the 340th was ordered to bomb Sofia Bulgaria. They knew that civilian populations were at risk and that this would be the first time Sofia was bombed during the war. It was sure to be a surprise and the civilian population would not be prepared. It was the source of considerable angst. Here is what the war diary of the 487th Bomb Squadron had to say about it:

"It was the first raid which impressed us with the horror of bombing, because it was on a bunch of civilians who must have been surprised by the approach of the planes. Many of the crews have heretofore expressed a dislike of bombing little towns to create road blocks, but most everyone realizes that the citizens should have got out into the hills, and probably had a chance to do so. But this raid was different, and must have cost a lot of lives...."

Although this quote predates Heller's arrival, it is unlikely that the crew's distaste for this type of

assignment would have changed much in the intervening months.

In *Catch-22* Dunbar and the crews in the briefing room balk at dropping bombs on unsuspecting villagers that they believe will come out of their homes to wave at the American planes as they fly over, but Colonel Korn puts a quick end to their objections:

“Would you rather go back to Bologna?” The question, asked quietly, rang out like a shot and created a silence in the room that was awkward and menacing. [...] Colonel Korn knew that he had won. [...] If you'd sooner fly missions to Bologna, Spezia and Ferrara, we can get those targets with no trouble at all.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.327)

The Mission Limit

The great internal mechanism that drives all of the action in *Catch-22* is the combat mission, and in particular the limit on the number of missions required to qualify to rotate off of combat duty and return home.

“Hungry Joe had finished flying his first combat tour of duty when twenty-five missions were all that were necessary ...” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.52)

In August of 1942 USAAF heavy, long range, bombers, B-17 Flying Fortresses and B-24 Liberators, made their first sorties against targets deep in France. These missions were extremely dangerous. Their fighter escorts had very limited fuel capacity and were not able to accompany them very far into enemy territory, especially when the target lay in Germany. As the bomber formations made their way across France, they would have to pass close to German airfields where the fighters would come up to meet them. As the bombers continued their flight, fighters from the next airfield would come up, and so forth. The long-range bombers had to fight back multiple waves of aerial attacks, then face the flak guns once they reached their target. On the return flight, the same fighters would come up in waves to attack the formations, and especially seek out the aircraft that had been crippled by flak or previous fighter attacks and had fallen behind the formations.

Bomber formations could regularly lose 10% of the planes or more. From the point of view of the crew, flying 10 missions where the losses were 10% per mission really pushed the statistical odds very unfavorably. In those early days the limit on missions was twenty-five. The average lifespan of a crewman was fifteen missions.

When the B-25 medium bombers began flying in North Africa the mission limit was also set at twenty-five. However, it quickly became clear that the characteristics of a mission for a medium-range bomber were quite different from those of a long-range bomber. A mission deep into Germany might mean six hours flight time. During most of that time the crews were exposed to threat from fighters and flak. On the other hand the B-25 missions were much shorter, sometimes lasting only two or three hours or less. Since the distances were shorter, their fighter escorts were able to stay with them for a greater percentage of the flight time. The B-25 crews often flew two missions in one day. As a result it was recognized that the number of missions needed to be increased for medium-range planes in order to maintain a fair correlation with the level of danger the long-range crews had to endure before they qualified to go home.

By the time Joseph Heller arrived on Corsica in May of 1944, the 12th Air Force had set the number of missions at fifty.

Exactly one month later on June 22, 1944 orders came down from General Knapp at Wing Headquarters raising the limit to seventy missions.

“Word is going around that any combat crew member who has not put in one year of overseas duty will fly 70 missions before returning to the Z of I [Zone of the Interior, i.e. back to the US] which is quite a leap from the prescribed fifty missions to a tour. Quite naturally isn't going over too big with the boys although anything new and more difficult is never accepted with enthusiasm.” (War Diary 487th BS, June 22, 1944)

Why the big jump in the number of required missions? The official line was that there was a shortage of flight crews. However, I suspect that this rationale was only part of the decision. In part the shortage of flight crews was due to the practice of sending crews home after completing only 50 missions. By the summer of 1944 Mussolini was gone and Italy had joined the Allies. Rome had fallen. The Germans were being pushed back by the Russians on the Eastern Front. The US successfully invaded France in early June. The invasion of Southern France was being planned for August.

It was clear to everyone that, barring a miracle, Germany could not win and that its army would soon lose the will to continue fighting what was quickly becoming a futile war. Our army planners must have felt that one more concerted push using experienced flight crews would do more to insure victory than to continue to train fresh troops and bring them into the European theater. Many military planners were already turning their thoughts to the defeat of Japan. Surely, they were thinking in terms of training the new recruits for that theater rather than the European theater. In the summer of 1944 very few military people thought that the war would go on for another whole year.

Also, the threat of enemy fighters had been virtually eliminated. Heller would have seen enemy fighters on only two missions. Even the risk from flak was reduced. Out of Heller's sixty missions, forty reported the flak as 'nil' or 'scant.'

Thus, the danger level was somewhat reduced, giving another justification for holding crews on the battle line a while longer.

It is interesting to note that the whole idea of a limit on missions is a uniquely American idea. It was a luxury that a big, populous country could afford. It also made good psychological sense.

The situation was quite different for the Luftwaffe. In the first place the army was locked into the Nazi ideology and mythology that viewed the German people as a master race of warriors. The German soldier was expected to live only for the glory of conquest and the concept of quitting the battlefield after flying a set number of missions did not fit that picture. Combat fatigue was another concept that did not fit the mold.

Joachim Helbig was the commander of the German squadron that bombed Borgo-Poretta and Alesani airfields on Corsica when the 57th Bomb Wing squadrons were stationed there. By the end of the war Helbig had racked up 350 combat missions. Actually, the German practice was to award double credit to missions that were long-range and more dangerous. Helbig's official mission count is 450 due to the double credit on his long-range flights. Many of the crewmen in his squadron amassed similar numbers. Helbig's squadron flew Junker-88's. They were medium bombers comparable to the Mitchell B-25's.

In *Catch-22* it is Colonel Cathcart, the group commander, who continually raised the number of missions. He does this to curry favor with his superiors and to distinguish himself in their eyes. Since he does not fly, he is able to demonstrate his bravery and dedication by volunteering his troops to fly more missions than any other group in the wing and to fly more dangerous missions than the others.

This practice on Cathcart's part is essential to the mechanics of the novel. Every time Yossarian gets close to hitting the number of missions he needs to go home, Cathcart raises it. Yossarian's level of frustration increases each time his hope of going home is dashed. His fear of going on missions

increases because he sees no end to it until the war ends or he is eventually killed in battle. The worst part is that Yossarian is very much aware that his bomb group is flying more missions than anyone else and doing so for no good reason except to satisfy the ambitions of a single individual.

Although *Catch-22* takes place during WWII and, as we have seen, is faithful to many of the events he experienced during WWII, Heller always insisted that *Catch-22* was not *about* WWII. Heller wrote the first notes for the novel in 1953. The first chapter, "The Texan," was published in a magazine called , *New World Writing* in 1955. The finished book itself came out in 1961.

"My interest was more on the Cold War and the Korean War. The effect they had on the domestic political climate was frightening. And that's the spirit of revolt that went into *Catch-22*. I've been criticized for the ending, for my not being a pacifist and for Yossarian's failures to condemn that war.

But these readers wanted something far beyond anything I was willing to say or feel about World War II..." (Sorkin, *Conversations with Joseph Heller*, 1981 interview with Chet Flippo p.232)

As he made his initial sketches for the novel, Heller was thinking about Joe McCarthy and how it affected individuals and the social climate in the US. Also on his mind was the Korean War:

"But what I have to say about the military in *Catch-22*: I don't recall it being characteristic of the military in World War II. It *was* characteristic of the military during the Korean War, during the Cold War, and became manifest during the Vietnam War. It was just a perversion of all codes of honor that are being taught at Annapolis or in American military justice." (Sorkin, *Conversations with Joseph Heller*, 1974 interview in *Harvard Crimson*, p.119)

Chapter 11 of *Catch-22* deals with Captain Black, the intelligence officer, and the 'Glorious Loyalty Oath Crusade.' (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.112) Of course nothing like this ever took place on Corsica. This is a cutting satire of the McCarthy Era. Heller also consciously made use of other anachronisms such as the IBM machine that promoted private Major Major to the rank of major, the farm subsidies cultivated by Major Major's father and the helicopters that he has searching for Clevinger's lost plane.

In actuality a mere Group Commander like Colonel Cathcart would not have had the authority to increase the number of bomb missions needed for rotation out of combat duty. That decision would have had to come from the Wing or higher. However, this conceit is necessary to illustrate the point Heller wants to make about how large organizations dehumanize the members of the group and how they can impose themselves on people's rights and needs. It is also needed to justify Yossarian's rebellion against an unfair system.

From Yossarian's point of view, he has done his duty to his country. He signed on to do a set number of combat missions. He completed that set number, but while he was doing so, management changed the rules. If the rule had been the same for all of the Groups, Yossarian would have had less to complain about, but his Group was being ordered to fly more than everyone else.

As noted above in the post of June 22, 1944 in the 487th BS War Diary, the order increasing the mission limit from 50 missions to 70 missions was not popular. This is understandable and G.I.'s have a tradition and a right to gripe about pretty much anything. After the initial entry remarking the increase in the mission limit, three squadrons seem to drop the subject and get on with the business of winning a

war. However, there is this November 7, 1944 entry in the 487th War Diary that suggests that things were still simmering:

“It's quite evident that combat men who up to now thought they were finished will have to fly at least ten more missions. After being threatened with court-martial and the prospect of losing their rank the boys have decided to give in. Thus the quota of a combat tour has increased to seventy missions which is probably exactly what was strived for when the fracas started.”

There is also this entry on the following day:

“Maj. Parsons called a meeting of all combat men to impart the latest news on the length of a combat tour. The minimum effort is now seventy missions and needless to say the change has caused quite a bit of dissension, particularly among those who have completed sixty missions and have been waiting around for three or four weeks for their departure papers.”

Things were somewhat different in the 488th Bomb Squadron. The undercurrent of discontent bubbles up into the War Diary on several occasions. In October and November of 1944 things still seem tense and disquieting as shown by this series of entries:

October 3, 1944

Many of the crews, 44, have reached 60 missions and consider themselves done, but we have only 14 crews available and no new crews in sight.

October 5, 1944

Morale is none too high, everyone seems restless. Food isn't up to par either. No mail – maybe that's the trouble.

October 24, 1944

Stand-down. Maj. Cassada told crews that they would have to fly more than 60 missions and the crews didn't take it too bad.

November 23, 1944 (Thanksgiving)

Maj. Brussels, Group Flight Surgeon, spoke at noon in the dispensary to the crews who are sweating out rotation. All of them have between 60 and 70 missions.

November 24, 1944

A major heard any complaints other than rotation or transfers at noon in the Orderly room.

December 3, 1944

NEWS HIGHLIGHT OF THE DAY is Orders to proceed to the US for sixteen enlisted men and ten officers came through late in the afternoon. (War Diary, 488th Bomb Squadron 1944)

After watching Nately and Dobbs planes go down during the La Spezia mission, Yossarian has had enough. At that point he simply refuses to fly any more missions. His refusal gets reported to Group HQ:

“He has to fly more missions. He has no choice. Go back and tell him you'll report the matter to us if he doesn't change his mind.”

“We already did tell him that, sir. It made no difference.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.392)

After Yossarian's refusal to fly becomes known, people begin to avoid him during the day, but at night:

“All the next evening, people kept popping up at him out of the darkness to ask him how he was doing, appealing to him for confidential information with weary, troubled faces on the basis of some morbid and clandestine kinship he had not guessed existed.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.402)

To quell the rising discontent HQ staff resort to trying to make deals with Yossarian to get him to back down from his stance. Captain Pilchard and Captain Wren offer to assign him only to known 'milk runs.' Yossarian refuses because it would mean that others would have to fly his dangerous missions.

In a wonderfully cynical scene it falls to Colonel Korn to negotiate a resolution:

“Yossarian, the war is over for you. We're going to send you home. [...] We've worked out this little deal to----”

“What kind of deal?” Yossarian demanded with defiant mistrust.

Colonel Korn tossed his head back and laughed. “Oh, a thoroughly despicable deal, make no mistake about that. It's absolutely revolting. But you will accept it quickly enough.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.422)

In the end Yossarian does not accept the 'despicable deal' and finds his own solution to the dilemma.

Yossarian chooses to rebel. What he is being asked to do is unreasonable because it exceeds the limits of what everyone else is being asked to do. He is only a captain being pushed around by colonels, there is only one recourse:

“If I were to give up my life now, it wouldn't be for my country. It would be for Cathcart and Korn, so I'm turning my bombsight in for the duration. From now on I'm thinking only of me.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.446)

Yossarian tells Major Danby that he is going to run away. As Danby debates the issue with Yossarian, trying to convince him that escape is impossible, the Chaplain runs in with extraordinary news. Orr, whose plane was shot up and forced down into the sea has suddenly turned up:

“Sweden!” cried the chaplain...[...] “Washed ashore in Sweden after so many weeks at sea! It's a miracle.” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.448)

But, Yossarian catches on immediately:

“Washed ashore, hell!” Yossarian declared, [...] “He didn't *wash* ashore in Sweden. He *rowed* there! He *rowed* there, Chaplain, he *rowed* there.”

“Can't you just picture him in that yellow raft, paddling through the Straits of Gibraltar at night with that tiny little blue oar---” (Heller, *Catch-22*, p.449)

Orr, who was taken for a simpleton by everyone, turned out to be smarter and more accomplished than

all the rest. He caught on to the game before everybody else and carefully planned his escape. The image that Heller paints of Orr alone in his life raft making his way across the vast sea is very captivating. In the 1971 film version of *Catch-22* the director, Mike Nichols, placed Yossarian in a life raft in the final scene of the movie paddling out to sea.

How did Heller come up with this image? There might be a hint in a story told by Paul R. Gale (489th BS). During the war he was a Celestial Navigator. This was a highly skilled position and not as easy to train and replace as a bombardier. Navigators were 'essential to the war effort' and not as quickly rotated out. By the Summer of 1944 Gale had already served over a year in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations (MTO). After only 90 days in the MTO Heller was already longing to go home. On this day it all got to be a little too much for Paul Gale. Here is his story in his own words:

“I was a navigator in the 489th and had 14 combat missions when I was assigned to the squadron. Missions that the Wing refused to recognize. I was told that, nevertheless, I would have to fly 50 missions. There was a paucity of Celestial Navigators, as a result I flew the 50 in five months -- 43 as lead.

When I finished the 50, I was told that -- Catch 22 -- the limit had been raised to 55. I told the Squadron CO, Major Kaufman, that I had 64 and to send me a postcard when they raised it to 65, I had 64 and I was through!

The next morning I broke out a raft, in front of the mess tent, and started rowing. Eventually Kaufman came and asked what the did I think I was doing! I told him he knew what he could do with his orders, I didn't need them; I was going home!

I hadn't thought about the incident until the conversation at the Kansas City reunion.” (Gale, Private email, July 25, 2008)

When Joseph Heller signed on he expected to fly 50 missions. The limit was raised to 70. He flew 60 and was rotated home.

We can infer that Wing HQ was having some difficulty dealing with the order raising the mission limit and they were having to make some accommodations. This is reflected in this entry in the War Diary of the 487th BS:

“The rules governing the disposition of combat crews changes so frequently that it's difficult to determine who will and who won't go home after completing a combat tour.” (War Diary, 487th Bomb Squadron, October 21, 1944)

In 2016 author Thomas Cleaver discovered some additional information about Joseph Heller's time on Corsica and published it in his book *The Bridgebusters: The True Story of the Catch-22 Bomb Wing*.

Heller flew his last combat mission on October 14, 1944. It was his 60th mission. Most of the other combat crews continued to fly until they reached their 70th mission. Yet Heller did not leave Corsica until January of 1945.

So, what was Heller doing on the island while his comrades were flying into combat?

It turns out that Heller was busy making a movie! The movie, which was never completed, was to be titled “Training During Combat,” and was the brainchild of Colonel Chapman.

Here is a photo of Heller on the set:



The filming was done by the 9th Combat Camera Unit under the direction of Lt. Wilbur Blume. Blume was not particularly impressed by the project which he referred to in his personal diary as “...a boondoggle for the Colonel.”

Here we have Heller working a cushy job while the rest of the squadron is braving flak and fighters. Is it possible that this assignment was part of a “despicable deal” to keep Heller out of combat?

We find it curious that Heller never mentioned this experience to his family or friends, even after going to Hollywood to write scripts for the “*McHale’s Navy*” TV show and “*Sex and the Single Girl*” movie.

Given Heller’s expansive personality, one would have expected him to have bragged about being selected to star in the film, and touted his movie making experience to his new coworkers in Hollywood.

Was there something about this project that he was not terribly proud of?

Heller and the Boys of the 340th

Throughout his life, in interview after interview, Heller insisted that *Catch-22* was a work of fiction and that the characters in the book, with only one or two minor exceptions, had no direct relation to the soldiers he served with during the War.

Right from the beginning, the veterans of the 340th who lived through those days on Corsica saw it differently. They immediately saw the parallels to the officers who commanded the units, and they did not like what they saw.

Harry D. George, a co-pilot in the 487th Bomb Squadron, takes time out of the detailed account of his war experiences to comment on *Catch-22*:

“If you believe that there really was a *Catch-22* or Milo Minderbinder's syndicate, or guys who ditched planes on purpose, or C/O's who were irrationally obsessed with tight formations and bomb patterns, or that the Air Corps raised the number of missions one had to fly before completing a tour of duty just to mess with soldiers' minds, or that it's fine to whine incessantly about going into combat, or that it's humorous to mock those who served with you and who risked their lives for you every day,...you deserve whatever comes your way and to be forced to fly every goddamned mission and then some – because it just wasn't so...” (George, *Giorgio Italiano*, p.71)

In a conversation with Paul Gale (489th Bomb Squadron) during the 40th reunion of the 57th Bomb Wing in 2008, the subject of *Catch-22* came up. Gale shook his head and said, “...there was a real sense of dedication in everyone during that time.” Although he did not finish the sentence the meaning was immediately clear. This is what Heller missed. This is what he left out of *Catch-22*. And this is what the Boys of the 340th will never forgive him for.

During the Vietnam War that sense of dedication was more difficult to discern. The ranks of the common soldiers, the 'grunts,' were filled with draftees who were not sure what they were doing there. Loud voices at home told them the whole conflict was a horrible mistake. Avoiding the draft and desertion were praised by large segments of the population in the States. This was the cultural wave that lifted *Catch-22* to the forefront of our consciousness and garnered its huge popularity. The dedicated professional soldiers who truly believed in the mission, must have been terribly frustrated at having to deal with the confused conscripts sent to fight that war.

Heller claimed that much of his inspiration came from what he read about the Korean War and the McCarthy era. These were the originating forces, according to Heller, that made the Vietnam War the absurd debacle that it became. Although *Catch-22* was published in 1961, before Vietnam really became a major flash-point of American politics and society, Heller wanted to claim that he foresaw what was to come. All that may be true, but we are still left asking why the novel was set in such different times and linked so closely to real-life events. If the Korean War was the model for the spirit behind *Catch-22*, why not set the novel in that milieu and populate it with purely fictional characters?

I contend that *Catch-22* is an enduring classic whose theme of rebellion against big organizations will continue to find an audience. It is written artfully and with great craftsmanship. Add to all of that the

fact that the situations and language of the book are incredibly funny and the result is a recipe for lasting greatness.

My hope is that the young people reading *Catch-22* for the first time will develop a curiosity about the events and the men who formed the basis of the novel, and that this curiosity will lead them to discover the grit, determination and dedication that got the Boys of the 340th through those dark times.

If that does transpire, then, perhaps, it will be some recompense for the betrayal that the Boys of the 340th feel Heller was responsible for.

“Heller flew his 60 missions and went home. For that he gets the respect that every combat veteran gets – every bit of it. But beyond that, I have no respect for him whatsoever. Catch – 22? No, there was no Catch – 22, just someone who turned on his comrades – and who did so long after the war was over when there was no one around to beat the living shit out of him.”
(George, *Georgio Italiano*, p.79)

Conclusions

The opening page of the novel that precedes the narrative itself states:

“This island of Pianosa lies in the Mediterranean Sea eight miles south of Elba. It is very small and obviously could not accommodate all of the actions described. Like the setting of this novel, the characters, too, are fictitious.” (Heller, *Catch-22*)

The tiny island of Pianosa where *Catch-22* is supposed to take place lies between Corsica and Elba. As Heller says, it is far too small to accommodate the world presented to us in the novel. But Corsica is not too small nor are the characters in *Catch-22* quite as fictitious as Heller originally wanted us to believe. This disclaimer was written in 1961 before Heller could have known how incredibly popular the book would be. As time went by and it became clear that the fame and admiration for the novel would endure, Heller revealed more and more about the origins of his inspiration. First in the combat missions and his attitudes at the time and later in identifying a few of the individuals who lent their characteristics to some of his characters.

Heller himself drew the relationships between Capt. Francis Yohannan and Yossarian; Major Cover and Major ___de Coverly; Lt. Edmund J. Ritter, Jr. and Orr; Joe Chrenko and Hungry Joe and the young Roman prostitute and Luciana.

It does not take a huge leap for us to see Dr. Benjamin Marino's physical features in Dr. Daneeka, or how Lt Mauno A. Lindholm's market dealings in Sicily exploded into Milo Minderbinder's vast conglomerate. Captain Vincent Myer certainly lent his ethnic background and nickname to Chief White Halfoat. Photos from the war years of Colonel Chapman, Colonel Bailey and Lt. John Rome match perfectly Heller's descriptions of Cathcart, Black and Huple perfectly. As do the photos of Randall Cassada, Charles Cover, Chaplain Cooper, etc.

We have seen that Heller's description of camp life was extremely true and accurate.

His accounts of the combat missions were also vivid recreations of real events. But *Catch-22* is a novel not a history, and events had to be manipulated creatively in order to fit the artistic needs of the book. In nearly every case where Heller touched on the combat missions his changes were ones of additions rather than subtractions. He began with a straightforward account of the mission, then either compressed events or added to the original events.

To read *Catch-22* is, in a very real sense, to read the history of the 340th Bombardment Group. It is true to the nine months that Heller spent on Corsica. No other classic of world literature has such a close relationship with real events and real people. It is because of that that the memory of the men and the missions of the 340th will endure as long as the novel is read.

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Individual Authors of the War Diaries:

- 486th 1st Lt. Glenn L Pierre
- 487th Sgt. James P. Shanley & Cpl. Richard C. Hurley
- 488th Capt. Everett B. Thomas
- 489th Sgt. Walter F. Greve

Appendix A – Joseph Heller's Combat Missions

Date	Plane	Target	Mission Notes
May 24	8A	Poggibonsi, Italy RR BR	AA nil No bombs dropped due to overcast on target and alts. AA heavy, scant inaccurate
May 24	8N	Orvieto RD BR	AA nil
May 25	8N	Orvieto RD BR	AA nil
May 26	8_	Tivoli RD JCT	AA nil
May 26	8A	Cartone RR BR	AA nil
May 27	8A	Piettasanto RR BR	AA nil
May 28	8L	Bucine Viaduct	AA nil
May 29	8_	Bucine Viaduct	AA heavy, meager innac.
May 30	8_	Grizzana RR BR	AA heavy, meager innac.
Jun 01	8L	Narni RD BR	AA light & heavy, scant, inacc.
Jun 02	8C	Foligno RD BR	AA heavy, scant, inacc
Jun 03	8S	Civita Castellana RD BR	AA nil
Jun 04	8C	Vernio RR BR	AA nil
Jun 05	8W	Narni RD BR	AA heavy, scant, inacc
Jun 06	8Q	Montefiacone RD Block	AA nil
Jun 07	8_	Cecina RD BR	AA heavy, intense, accurate
Jun 09	8L	Orvieto RD BR	AA heavy, moderate, accurate
Jun 10	8V	Fano MY	AA heavy, intense, accurate
Jun 12	8X	Bucine Viaduct	AA nil
Jun 13	8M	Perugia RD BR	AA heavy, scant, inacc
Jun 16	8M	Pietrasanta RR BR	AA nil
Jul 13	8X	Ferrara RR BR	AA heavy, moderate, accurate
Jul 14	8G	Colbola RR BR	AA heavy, scant, inacc; 487 Hist reports 10 E/A attacking other squadrons; 488 reports 8 E/A driven off by gunners
Jul 15	8W	Villafranca RR BR	AA heavy, intense, accurate
Jul 15	8X	Ferrara HWY BR	AA heavy, intense, accurate; 7 Planes holed, 1 man killed
Jul 23	8P	Borgoforte RR BR	AA nil
Jul 27	8M	Carisasco RD BR	AA inacc
Jul 30	8J	Ferrara RD BR	AA heavy, moderate, accurate; one box did not drop due to bombardier error, collision course over target

Aug 03	8Q	Var River RD BR France	AA heavy, moderate, inacc
Aug 06	8E	Var River RD BR France	AA heavy, moderate, inacc
Aug 08	8W	Avignon RR BR France	No Record
Aug 11	8Q	St Raphael GP France	AA nil
Aug 12	8W	La Ciotat GP France	AA nil
Aug 13	8C	La Ciotat GP France	AA nil
Aug 15	8F	Issambres Point GP	AA nil; no bombs dropped due to cloud cover
Aug 15	8U	Avignon RR BR France	AA heavy, intense, accurate; 8D seen to crash, 3 chutes
Aug 20	8Z	Valence A/D France	AA heavy, intense, inacc
Aug 21	8J	Parma RR BR Italy	AA nil
Aug 23	8P	Settimo RD BR Italy	AA heavy, scant, inacc
Aug 24	8H	Ratenneau, PG France	AA nil
Aug 29	8Q	Busche RR BR Italy	AA fired on p-47 escorts
Aug 31	8J	Cittadella RR BR Italy	AA heavy, intense, accurate
Sep 02	8F	Cassano D'Adda RR BR Italy	AA heavy, scant, inacc
Sep 03	8B	Casale Montferrato RD BR Italy	AA nil
Sep 04	8J	Pontevico RR BR Italy	AA nil
Sep 05	8U	Palazzolo RR BR Italy	AA nil
Sep 13	8K	Peschiera RR BR Italy	AA heavy, scant, inacc
Sep 14	8H	Rimini Fuel/Ammo dump Italy	AA heavy, moderate, inacc
Sep 17	8J	Rimini GP & Troops Italy	AA heavy, scant, acc. (Diary says: AA heavy, intense, acc; 5 of 12 planes holed)
Sep 18	8M	Rimini GP & Troops Italy	AA light, scant, inacc
Sep 23	8W	La Spezia Harbor	AA heavy, scant, inacc; Cruiser Taranto
Sep 24	8C	Piazzola RR BR Italy	No bombs dropped due to overcast on target; AA nil
Sep 26	8M	Piazzola RR BR Italy	AA nil
Sep 30	8W	Trecata/Magenta RR BR Italy	AA nil
Oct 01	8W	Piacenza RR BR Italy	AA heavy, intense, accurate, two planes holed
Oct 03	8F	Magenta RD/RR BR Italy	AA heavy, intense, accurate; 8 planes holed
Oct 04	8U	Magenta RD/RR BR Italy	Mission recalled due to bad weather
Oct 11	8V	Canneto RD/RR BR Italy	AA nil
Oct 12	8C	Casaleaccio Biv & Stores Italy	AA heavy, scant, acc; 2 planes holed
Oct 15	8Q	Ronco Scriva RR BR Italy	AA heavy, scant, inacc

Appendix B – Map of Joseph Heller's Combat Targets

Map of Joseph Heller's Bombing Missions (Part I)

(Courtesy of Roger Juglair, author of *Ponte San Martino. Martirio di un Paese Valdostano*, Musumeci, Italy 2008)



Map of Joseph Heller's Bombing Missions (Part II)
(Courtesy of Roger Juglair, author of *Ponte San Martino. Martirio di un Paese Valdostano*, Musumeci, Italy 2008)

