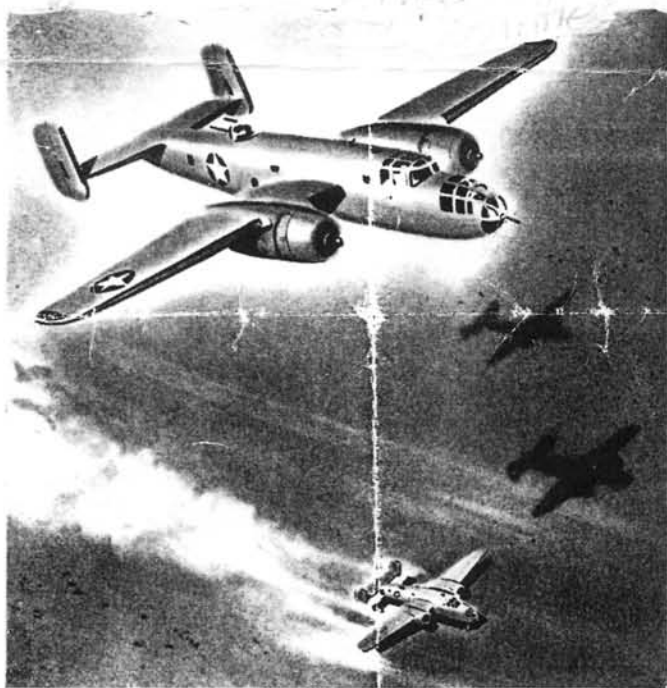


OF BOMBIGATOR LT. J. J. ZEREGA



Zerega, now instructing cadets at San Marcos Navigation School, has returned from the European theater of war with many thrilling adventures in combat. He holds the Silver Star and the Purple Heart. While navigating a B-25 over enemy lines in North Africa he experienced the amazing story that is told on the following pages.

STORY BY ROBERT WHITEHAND
DRAWINGS BY JOHN PEMBERTON COWAN



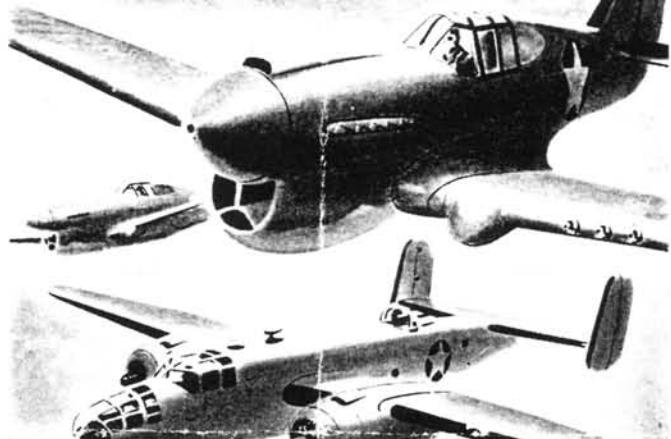
It all starts when our B-25s take off from Sfax at 0540 on an "annihilation mission" to soften the German lines east of Medjez el Bab. A few minutes after our raid the British 8th will drive to the sea and isolate a part of the Afrika Korps below Tunis. We carry a bombardier, so my job is navigating.



Map in hand, I kneel beside the pilot. The mission is so important that Colonel William C. Mills, Group Commander, rides in the co-pilot's seat. We go out at 500 feet to keep from being picked up by enemy radar. There is a rumor that this will be our last African raid. Rommel is just about knocked out.



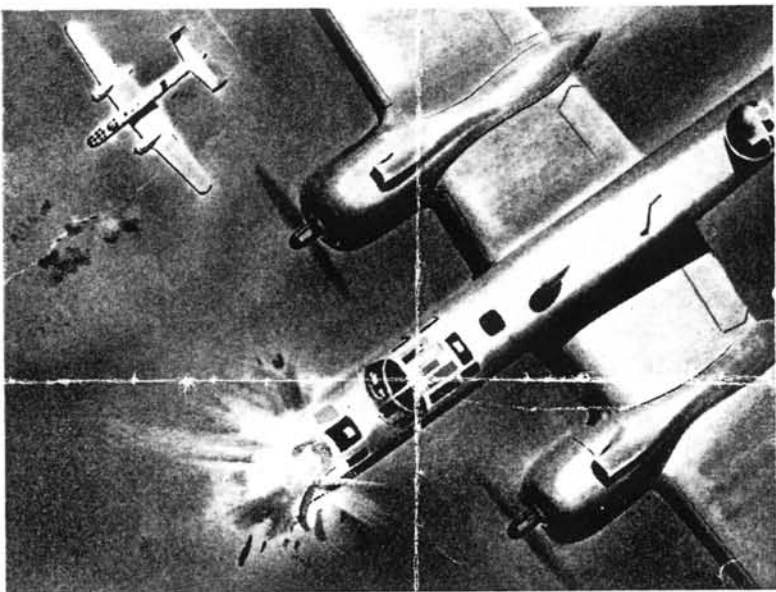
Our "assembly point" is a "waidi" (swamp). We begin to circle and take our time getting into formation so that we won't be early on our "rendezvous" ETA. The 36 planes fly in six boxes. Each box has three-plane elements. Planes within a box stagger their altitude slightly to increase the amount of sky their guns can control. The boxes also stagger their altitude.



From the "waidi" it's about 65 miles to the "rendezvous point" where our fighters appear and form above us. There are three layers today: P-40s at our level, Spits 5000 feet above us, and a strato-layer of Spits still higher. We will keep "on the deck" (at 500 feet) until time to start climbing. It's safer to get as near the target as possible before climbing to your approach.



At 11,000 feet we turn near Medjez el Bab and start weaving down the road toward Tunis. We see the target—ground emplacements and infantry concentrations that have been withstanding frontal attacks for days. Our formation is spread out laterally but tightens up fore and aft until we're almost flying along nose to tail.



The bombs haven't even hit and our bomb bay doors are just closing when an 88-mm. shell demolishes our nose at 10,000 feet. There is a great rush of wind, I am sprawled against the pilot's seat. Fires break out. The plane rolls on its back and plunges downward. All six of us are trapped in a flaming metal cylinder. Then the wing tanks explode. I see a flash but feel no pain and hear nothing before the blackness closes in all around me.



The next thing I remember is plummeting through the air with bits of burning wreckage falling beside me. Realization returns. I yank the rip-cord and feel the chute drag me into a floating descent—only a few hundred feet above the barren coastal hills. There is a rocky pinnacle so close that I have to tug the shrouds and maneuver around it to keep from being bashed against it.



I land on the grassy hill thereabouts. The ground never felt so good. If the Colonel hadn't ordered a special bombardier for this mission I would have been in the nose when the flak hit. My pilot is the only other survivor. We are in German hands for several days before being recaptured.