

African Missions

The 301st flew its first mission from Africa and as part of the Twelfth Air Force on 28 November 1942. It, as well as many future missions, was against Bizerte some six hundred miles from Taffaraoui. Led by Colonel Walker, nineteen B-17s took off at 0745 hours, two aborted due to mechanical problems and the remainder dropped 122 300-pound bombs on the Bizerte docks from fifteen thousand feet. The Americans ran into stiff resistance, moderate flak, and twenty-five single-engine and two multi-engine German fighters, described as "very aggressive." The 301st claimed ten Luftwaffe fighters destroyed and lost two bombers.



A group of 352nd Bomb Squadron personnel (E. Dobson)

Lieutenant Robert Maher (353d) made his bomb run on three engines. After releasing his bombs, Maher's aircraft descended rapidly while under attack by six Me 109s. With its guns still firing, the bomber crashed into the sea and exploded. No chutes were seen and the entire crew was presumed to have perished. At about the same time, a second Fort went down. Captain John Bruce (32d) had completed his bomb run in "The Bad Penny" when several enemy aircraft attacked. Four or five chutes were seen before the B-17 exploded.²²