

After two uneventful missions against an airfield on the seventeenth and a highway junction on the twentieth, the Group completed the month with two more missions flown against the Bolzano Railroad Bridge. On 25 September the 301st launched twenty-six B-17s. Of these, fourteen dropped seventy 1,000-pound bombs on the bridge, while six dropped thirty 1,000-pound bombs on the rail yards in Verona. Bombing was not considered very successful. The bombers met accurate, intense, and heavy flak both to and from the target, with practically all of it bursting in and around the formation, which inflicted major damage to six bombers and minor damage to nine, wounding five crewmembers. As the formation was flying along the East Coast of Corsica, a tail gunner remarked: "Look at those seagulls." The top gunner replied, "Those seagulls are shooting at us."¹¹⁷ Four Ar 196s attacked the Forts and one was claimed destroyed. Lieutenant Edward Stapleton's (419th) aircraft and crew were lost on this mission, a loss attributed to flak. The B-17 was last seen streaming gasoline as it peeled off south of Verona, apparently in good condition and under control, and then it disappeared into the clouds.¹¹⁸